

Facebook Ramblings – 1 to 15 September 2020

Tuesday 1 September

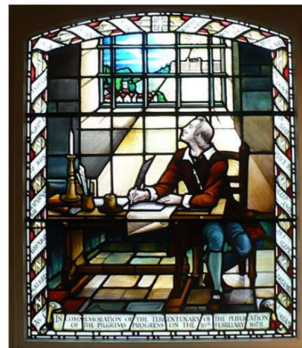
It was lovely today to welcome the Friends of St Matthew's back. We always start the new year with a service and an AGM - so 20 people gathered in church (with masks, social distancing, etc) for worship and the shortest AGM I've ever been too. Thank you Carol and Barbara, Dorothy and Peter, for your hard work.

I talked a little about John Bunyan, who the Church celebrated on Monday. I remember going to [John Bunyan Museum](#) as a child. Bunyan was a tinker, and made himself a metal violin. Mum told the curator she was a violin teacher and somehow the case was unlocked, and I got to play his violin.

In our days as Baptist lay preachers we sometimes preached [Gamlingay Baptist Church](#) in Cambridgeshire. They had a huge portrait of Bunyan hanging in the vestry - he was their first Pastor in 1671. As a young preacher in my early 20s, I didn't always feel comforted by Bunyan looking down at me as I prepared to lead worship.

In the early 1980s I don't remember the church as particularly (how do I put this politely?) lively - but I have just been on line and found a church which looks rather more dynamic than it was then. That's good to see - and a reminder that churches which seem pretty dead, may well have a future - God takes the long-term view!

One nice Bunyan quote I found - "I have often thought that the best Christians are found in the worst of times." Thank you to the members of FOSM (and the members of Lunch Club in Allestree, and the members of the choirs, etc etc) for doing so much to love and support, being the best of people in the worst of times.



Wednesday 2 September

In order to keep the old brain cell going as long as possible I have signed up to [Centre for Lifelong Learning, York](#) course on the History of London's Transport. I already have an excellent selection of books and DVDs on the topic - so I can now tell Julie that any London railway/bus/tram/trolley bus DVD I am watching is "research".

I want extra marks for having travelled the Central Line when it went as far as Ongar. I first did it while at school with my friend Phil - we got off at Blake Hall and walked to North Weald, calling in at the Saxon church at Greensted. A bit worrying that I was combining trains and churches over 40 years ago. That was the three days when we covered the whole of the Underground - we'd get the Underground to the end of the line, then bus across to the next terminus and back into the centre from there. In those days you had to write to "London Transport, 55 Broadway" to try and get the bus timetable.

I went again not long before they closed the Ongar branch, this time with **Jeremy Hunns**. I was dressed as a Vicar, and as we were driving down the A11 the car in front of us had a roof box that was open and losing stuff. We were sounding the horn and flashing the headlights to try and attract his attention. As we overtook, he gave us the V sign, then realised he was giving "a rude Churchillian gesture" to a Vicar. I gave him a blessing.

At the station, one of the drivers offered to move his train so it was better positioned for our photos - "that should be better for you, Padre". (The attached photo is not one of mine - my filing system is not good enough to find it).

Next year I hope I will have the pleasure of doing the new bit of Underground they are currently building - the Northern Line extension to Battersea, and one day they will finish The Elizabeth Line. I miss my London jaunts.

If you want to read about the Saxon church at Greensted, have a look at <http://www.northernvicar.co.uk/2014/02/01/greensted-st-andrew/>



Thursday 3 September

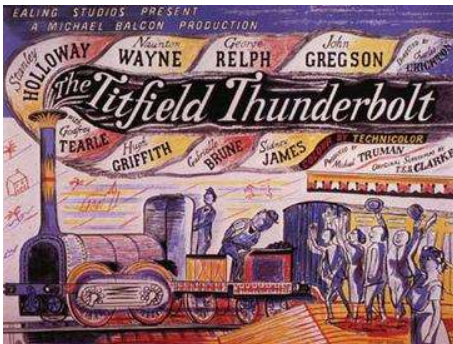
A ride on [The Ecclesbourne Valley Railway](#) today. A compartment per family/group, though we had the Guard's Van with a comfy seat and space for the wheelchair and Bessie the dog.

The bacon butties were as good as ever, and thanks to the guard for delaying departure until we had been served. It's a shame we can't get on or off at other stations, or start our journey at Duffield, but these things will come. Apparently they have a steam loco coming in a few weeks - I look forward to that.

The Bishop of Derby lives in Duffield and her garden runs down to the railway. When I was offered the job here, I came south to see +Alastair (her predecessor). He had read my CV, so we ended up talking trains. He commented that on a few occasions they had set fire to the garden, but he was sorry that for a couple of years they had had no steam. One of my jobs was to get steam back!

I commented that if they did, we should re-enact the end of the Titfield Thunderbolt. Sam Weech, the Vicar (played by George Relph) has been driving the loco. He is told the Bishop is arriving, and is expecting to be told off. However Ollie Matthews, the Bishop of Welchester (Godfrey Tearle) was at Theological College with him, and is only too happy to be fireman. Wonderful film!

A late lunch at The Black Swan at Idridgehay. Excellent food, and the sound of a class 31 throbbing down the Valley.



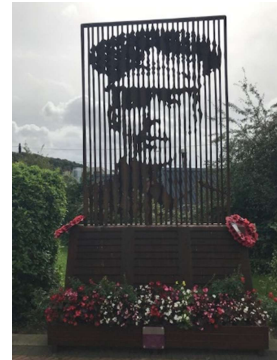
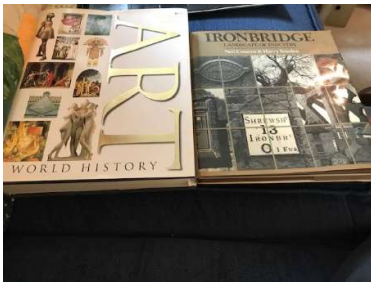
Friday 4 September

A pop to Belper and the Oxfam bookshop was open. As I was by myself I came out with only two books - but I got some weight for my £5.98. Then I went for a 4 mile walk (memo to self: next time you buy heavy books from Oxfam, walk back to the car first).

The War Memorial Gardens are beautiful - the sculpture is of Jim Green, who died on the Somme - <http://belperinwartime.org/sacrifice.html>.

Then I followed the Derwent Valley Heritage Way along to Milford. Some lovely views across the valley, and lots of blackberries to keep me going. On the way back I found an original Midland Railway boundary marker still in place.

Remember, tomorrow we have scarecrows. Friar Tuck is in St Edmund's churchyard. Come and say Hello.



Saturday 5 September

Today is the first day of Allestree Scarecrow Festival. Captain Hook welcomes you Red Cow Allestree, and they'll give you a map. Friar Tuck and other Merry Men are next door at St Edmund's. Then Julie and I went for a walk. Here's a few of the others (I think there are 25 in all).

It was lovely to see folk out exploring - and chat to various people I've baptised, or kids I know through the schools. St Nicholas' Church have George and the Dragon and a stall

selling sweets (thank you). We had lunch at Park Farm, and Julie explored some of the charity shops. We wouldn't normally head to Park Farm on a Saturday, so the Scarecrow Festival meant we put about £20 into the local economy (the Government will be pleased with me).

Back via Devonshire Avenue to admire the Disney film "One of our dinosaurs is missing" - Amy, Colin and their children made this one as well as Friar Tuck (thank you). I've walked 5 miles, so scarecrows are keeping me fit.

When I've had my post-walk sleep, I will get the church website up to date with everything for tomorrow. There'll be a service, sermons and prayers on line. I'm leading 10 am at St Matthew's and Julie is at 10 am at St Edmund's.



Sunday 6 September

Typical! I go and do my eighth service since we reopened - and have 29 at St Matthew's. Julie swans over to St Edmund's to do her first - and 40 people turn up. I shall take the huff!!

Thank you everyone - and thanks for Food donations for the Hope Centre. Mike and Shirley had a full car boot.

I then drove to **Great Central Railway** at Rothley. Had a 3 mile walk, then a ride in their diesel multiple unit (which took me back to my youth). Leicester North then the Mountsorrel branch to Nunckley Hill. I'd never been here before, and they have a lovely little heritage centre and cafe. Worth a visit even if you're not particularly into trains.

It was fun to watch the shunting required at Swithland Sidings. Points being scotched. Flags being waved. Traditional railway signalling at its best. Peter was a happy bunny.

I came home to the news that Friar Tuck has won "Best Community Group entry" - it's been a good weekend.



Monday 7 September

I thought we had the dvd of Disney's "Robin Hood", but couldn't find it. Julie pointed out that our children had the video - and wore that out. I said I'd keep an eye on charity shops and find a dvd, Julie had other ideas. We are now watching the brand new dvd (wonder if I can claim it on expenses?).

I hadn't realised that the film dates to 1973. I may only have been 11, but I don't remember being taken to see it. Apparently Walt Disney wanted to make a cartoon Robin Hood film as early as 1938 (the year after Snow White), so it took a long time to come to fruition. Filming

the project was also delayed, so in order to meet deadlines, the animators had no other choice but to recycle several dance sequences from previous Disney animated films, including Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1937), The Jungle Book (1967), and The Aristocats (1970). That's the next three evenings viewing sorted!

Andy Devine is the voice of Friar Tuck - an American character actor I have never heard of. Indeed, I have only heard of two of the voices - Peter Ustinov and Terry-Thomas. When I visited my dad in hospital for the final time, he was asleep much of the time. A very attractive young lady arrived, and introduced herself to me as "Hermione, the physiotherapist". She said she really needed to wake dad as he hadn't had any physio the previous day. She gently said "Hello Jeffrey" and he opened his eyes. "Hello Jeffrey, I'm Hermione, the physiotherapist". Dad gave her a winning smile, said "Hello" in his best Terry-Thomas voice, and fell straight back off to sleep.

For you youngsters out there, watch <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AqS8ks9op8>



Tuesday 8 September

I had a bad night due to a painful shoulder, so have had a quiet day with a book. I am currently reading "The Puritan Princess" by Miranda Malins - <https://mirandamalins.com/>. We listened to Miranda being interviewed on the [#versushistory](#) podcast, and then purchased the book via Cogito Books in Hexham - our favourite bookshop.

It is about Frances, the youngest daughter of Oliver Cromwell, and how her life changed when her father was made Lord Protector. I know a bit about the Civil War, and a bit about the Restoration, but realise I know nothing about the Interregnum.

The story moves between Whitehall Palace and Hampton Court. They are both in the care of [Historic Royal Palaces](#) and we have enjoyed them both (though the wheelchair access to the Banqueting Hall at Whitehall is a bit hit and miss). In the podcast Miranda pointed out that there is no mention of Cromwell at Hampton Court, even though he and his family were part of the life of the palace for a few years. It's a Royal Palace, and he wasn't Royal - and that matters, even 360 years later.

One of the characters in the story is John Hingston, Master of Music at the Court. Born in 1612, he was a pupil of Orlando Gibbons, and some sources say he served Charles I as a viol player and member of the court band. He taught the composer and organist John Blow. He remained in his job under Cromwell, and was music teacher to Frances and her sister. At the Restoration he remained in the court, playing the viol and keeping the organs. Henry Purcell was his apprentice for a while. He died in 1683. Time for a PhD, I think.

This evening another piece of normality returns - our first Parochial Church Council Meeting since March. Probably slightly less fractious than anything chaired by Oliver Cromwell.



Wednesday 9 September

A morning in the Office, and an evening working. In between we went up to Cromford.

The Morgan owners were meeting at the Mills. I don't really understand cars and can't get too excited by petrol, but it was good to introduce Morgan the powerchair to Morgan the cars.

Then a walk along the Canal to High Peak Junction and back - it was lovely.

There used to be a book called something like "Miles without stiles, wheelchair walks in the Peaks", which I would like to get, but the Mill bookshop has not seen it for a while. However we found a kiddiwalks book - if pushchairs can do it, so can Morgan!

The book will also come in useful if we ever get grandchildren!



Thursday 10 September

We have just had the pleasure of socially distanced fish and chips in our garden with 9 of our fellow MA students. George's in Allestree do click and collect - so I ordered a selection of fish, chips, scampi, pies, gravy, beans, mushy peas, fish cake, curry sauce, salt and vinegar. 11 people seem to have got what they expected to eat (or they were too polite not to tell me it was wrong) - so I will now start a new career in events management.

When Julie and I had our first house together in Huntingdon, there was one round the corner. In Bury St Edmunds there was one near the house of Elizabeth our piano teacher, so they became a Friday treat after piano lessons.

When we moved to Northumberland the nearby chippy wasn't up to my standards, but there was a lovely one a couple of miles away in Throckley. When Gareth bought his house he was sensible enough to buy one just down the road - so that was very useful. The chippie was on the north side of the road which is on the line of Hadrian's Wall, Gareth's house was south of the Vallum - so I always felt I was leaving the Roman Empire when I went to shop.

In Allestree we have good chippies nearby. George's are good with big orders, and we have used them for Church Suppers. Before Covid they were doing a loyalty card, so I got a lot of points on my card through buying orders for 60 or 70 people at a time. I then made the mistake of going to the chippie with Dr Hannah in tow. She was not amused at the number of points, making the assumption her parents had eaten their way to all these points by ourselves.

In Cheshire we have eaten from "The Codfather", but the best name of all must be the one in Repton, just south of Derby. A famous film starring Robert Donat was filmed at the school in 1939. The chippy bears the wonderful name of "Good Buy Mr Chips".



Friday 11 September

Today's escape was to Bletchley Park, the home of the code breakers of WW2. Entrance time booked, then we could stay all day. Easy to drive to, and it would have been even easier by train. Everything Covid safe - many, many hand sanitisers - and all Julie accessible (which makes a pleasant change).

A fascinating place. I still struggle to understand how all the machines worked, and how you crack a cryptogram - I doubt that when they scoured the two Universities to find code-breakers they would have looked at me.

The people stories were interesting - though the listening posts are not switched on at the

moment, which meant we couldn't listen to as much personal testimony as I would have liked. It is incredible how many young women were employed here, and how little they spoke about what they did. Churchill described them as his 'geese that laid the golden eggs but never cackled'.

There was a variety of offices - some very posh ones. The Hall itself is a late Victorian house, with a rather nice library and ballroom. The huts have some very barren offices. During the long wartime winters, it must have been awful to work long shifts here. The displays use AV to bring a boring office alive - and the film shows are superb (especially one about the way code-breaking enabled D Day).

Julie already had four books on her shelves about Bletchley Park, but still spent quite a lot in the bookshop. We have sat this evening and watched "The Imitation Game", the film about Alan Turing and his work here. I didn't watch it in French, but I wanted a picture of the DVD box which includes Benedict Cumberbatch AND Kiera Knightley.



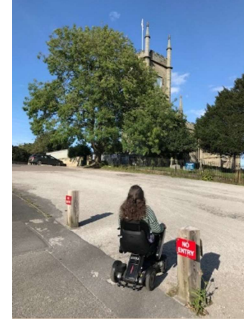
Saturday 12 September

A full day of work - you'll find a service, sermon and prayers on the church website, as well as some good photos from last month. Julie came with me to St Matthew's and we had a spin round Darley Park. The new footpath is excellent for Morgan, and it was a gorgeous afternoon.

We came past the cricket match. How English! My literary wife was reminding me of the cricket team in "Morse" (amazing what you can hide in a wheelchair) and matches in "Midsomer Murders" (note Peter Davison who was Tristan in the first series of "All Creatures Great and Small").

I responded with the cricket match in "Downton" - and she immediately told me off for thinking of Lady Mary (Michelle Dockery). How does she know?

As we went back to church - not helped by people who park on the pavement - my wife showed as little respect for the Law as our leaders seem to be doing.



Sunday 13 September

Sunday evening. We had good morning services, and I had the pleasure of a baptism at 2. Harper was gorgeous, and we had a good celebration (despite masks, distancing, the fact I'm not allowed to hold the baby, etc, etc). Lovely that the family still wanted their child baptised, despite a pandemic and everything else that goes with it. Baptisms are one of the greatest pleasures of my ministry - and I wish all the Church of England would start encouraging them, welcoming them, and enjoying them. More fool us for not doing so!

We've also started planning for October, and I've even got the diary and the posters on the church website - <https://www.stedsandstmatts.co.uk/>. I suppose it is an act of faith. I hope we will celebrate Harvest, St Luke and All Saints together.

I've also produced a Daily Prayer leaflet which will go into each magazine next month. We did something similar back in March when all this first started, but it is probably time to do another. If anyone wants it, it will be on the website soon. Praying together is important - and if I can't find the words to say, I'll take use some that are already written.

I'm trying to be positive - but it is very difficult. I have lots of twitter contacts who are medics and teachers. So many of them are struggling to get Covid tests for themselves or their kids. Without those tests, they are unable to work. How many months has this government had to get tests up and running? All we get is what my old dad would have described as "piss and wind".

We are being told it is the fault of NHS Track and Trace - without being reminded that it is all run by SERCO. I love the NHS, it has saved the life of my eldest son, and has been with me, caring for us in the darkest times in my life. It is not perfect - but I care for it. I am extremely angry that it is being used and abused.

I might get told I shouldn't write this on church facebook pages. But it is members of our congregations who have died, members of our community who are in residential homes unable to be visited, people I care for awaiting delayed operations, faithful Christians unable to worship with others because of a nasty virus ... and an incompetent response.

Monday 14 September

A tweet this morning from the marvellous folk [Orkney Library & Archive](#) took me back to my youth. They are informing their readers that Booky McBookface, their mobile library, is out of its garage and back on the road (and the ferries to the outer islands). Safe travels!

I spent the summer of 1984 working on the mobile library out of Ely in Cambridgeshire. The only photo I can find of a wonderful yellow mobile is dated 1991 and shows a very sad looking vehicle. Ours' was always clean.

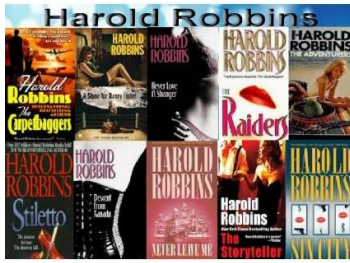
It was a splendid summer. We travelled round the Fens, buying ice lollies from village shops and sitting in the sun while our lovely users chose their books and videos. I remember one lady coming with a pile of Harold Robbins books and asking if we had anything "stronger". My colleague told her she shouldn't talk about such things in front of a tender young man (I think he meant me).

One of our stops was Shippea Hill - where the county boundary between Cambridgeshire and Norfolk runs down the railway line. In those days we ran fortnightly - now Shippea Hill is no longer served, and all the Fen routes only run monthly.

One of our routes started at Ely, but our first stop was in the village of Manea. I was catching the train from home to Ely so arranged to have an extra half an hour in bed and catch the later train which stopped at Manea. Of course that was the day when the mobile refused to start, and in those days we had no mobile phones. I had a cup of tea with the signalman until it finally arrived. Life was easier then!

Libraries were part of the fabric of our community - another part of that fabric we have lost.





Tuesday 15 September 2020

Today is the 80th anniversary of the Battle of Britain. By June 1940 the Wehrmacht had conquered most of Western Europe and Scandinavia, and turned their attention to us. They attacked merchant shipping and then the airfields. In the first week of September they turned their attentions to major cities. On Sunday 15 September 1940, the Luftwaffe launched its largest and most concentrated attack against London in the hope of drawing out the RAF into a battle of annihilation. Around 1,500 aircraft took part in the air battles which lasted until dusk.

It is one of those bits of British History that I have always known about. I've watched the films, read the books, watched the DVDs. I highly recommend the Panamint Cinema collection - <https://www.panamint.co.uk/documentaries> - they have released lots of WW2 film, and it helps us understand a little of what our parents and grandparents lived through.

Back in January, on my last escape day in London, I photoed the Memorial on the Victoria Embankment which commemorates "the few" and the many. Have a look at <http://bbm.org.uk/the-monument/>. The sculptor was Paul Day. He writes "The Battle of Britain is an epic moment in History, but one of modernity where new technology was vital. The Monument is not the representation of a tomb where hundreds of thousands lie dead. It is the celebration of excellent organisation, youthful enthusiasm, devotion to duty, and National unity."

