

Facebook Ramblings - January 2021

Friday 1 January

The first day of the new year should be a day for chasing trains. Jeremy Hunns and the family would usually come and stay - or we would go to them - so four adults and (as they grew up) five children would see the new year in. Some of us would start asking "can I go to bed yet?" at about 9 pm, but we would eventually fall to sleep before 1 am.

In the old days, before Pops Barham had discovered alcohol, five children would then be awake early the following morning, so we needed to go somewhere. I remember one trip, a good 20 years ago, when we were the only people on the first train of the day down the branch from Sudbury to Mark's Tey, and at the London Transport Museum not long after it opened. That kept the boys happy - and the girls enjoyed Covent Garden Shops.

We saw 2005 in with Gareth on an ordinary ward at Great Ormond Street, ten days after his heart transplant. Julie and I had remained in London with him, and the three of us were together in his cubicle as midnight was about to arrive. He was the only patient on the ward who was awake, so we were joined by the nursing staff to see the new year in with mugs of tea. We always said we would go back to London and celebrate new year properly, but never managed it with him.

The Hunns family spent that new year in Bury St Edmund's with Hannah and Harry Barham, and all came down to London on 1 January to see us. There are some people in your lives who are always there when you need them - and "thank you" is never enough.

Two years ago Julie and I were alone for the new year, but we had arranged to meet the Hunns family at Haworth for the 11.30 steam train on 1 January. That meant we needed to leave Derby at 9.30. At 10 am I woke up. You can imagine the derision I received when I phoned the others, who were half way along the M62.

This morning I lay in a nice warm bed and read my copy of "Modern Railways" until about 11 am. Perhaps 2021 won't be so bad after all. Happy New Year!



Saturday 2 January

Every year I try and jiggle the calendar so we celebrate the coming of the Wise Men on Twelfth Night 6 January, but this year I have failed and we will celebrate their arrival

tomorrow (the camels must have trotted faster). We have a Zoom service at 11.30 am - the link is at www.stedsandstmatts.co.uk, and that is all complete and ready to roll. (It was pointed out to me when I sent the service out that we still had the reading about the shepherds and angels - the joys of cut and paste!). There is also an Order of service, sermon and prayers on the website - and the video of the Zoom will be up later in the day.

There are 10 am services in both churches. We are in "Tier 4 Stay at Home", which - looking at the Covid situation - is the best advice I can give you. Someone sent me this cartoon, and I hope the artist won't mind if I share it.

We collect for the Food Bank tomorrow at both services, and items can always be left in Primrose's Book Shed at the Vicarage. There is something profound (profoundly worrying?) about how, on the day when we remember gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh, we need to ask people to bring the basics of life to church so the hungry can be fed.



Sunday 3 January

It was good to celebrate the Epiphany this morning. We managed music in both churches, and plenty of music in the Zoom service - which is now available to watch through the church website. Good to have a lovely mixture of people on Zoom, good to welcome new ones, and good not to be the youngest person at a service!

It was a surprise when looking through the pictures of those present as we were admitted from the waiting room, to see that Duncan and Dorothy had joined us from north of Hadrian's Wall. Pillars of Milbourne Church and together we had a lot of fun with trains on the South Tynedale Railway (I was going to write "playing trains" but it is much more serious than that). I love the way Zoom brings people together - and as the Wise Men travelled across the world, how nice to have people from afar travelling through the power of the internet.

In honour of Northumberland friends, here are the Magi from Alnham, a very remote Northumberland church which is only about 10 miles from the Scottish border. Julie and I had a Sunday afternoon drive on 13 March 2016 and my blog - <http://www.northernvicar.co.uk/2016/03/16/alnham-northumberland-st-michael-all-angels/> - says I stopped several time to look at the map. (Obviously, being a man, stopping and looking at a map is not a normal occurrence - so you can imagine how narrow and obscure the roads are in this part of the world).

The church has Saxon foundations, a twelfth century chancel arch, and was restored by the Victorians in 1870. It was quiet, peaceful, a real Holy Place.

I want to be able to get out and explore again - but let's all be patient for now.



Monday 4 January

We had one set of Magi yesterday from north Northumberland. Today we'll go even further north, to the village of Kirknewton. We came here last week on 30 December to remember Josephine Butler, today we will enjoy another set of Magi. You can have a read of the blog - <http://www.northernvicar.co.uk/2013/05/31/kirknewton-st-gregory-the-great/>

This stone carving is early twelfth century - the Wise Men presenting gifts to the Virgin and Child. I love the feet of Mary and Jesus. Interesting that the Wise Men are wearing kilts - we're always told that was Highland dress. If it was, why are they carved on a Lowlands sculpture?

There's also a lovely window by the designer Leonard Evetts. It's based on Psalm 104. As we await yet another Prime Ministerial pronouncement, this might put everything into perspective:

Bless the Lord, O my soul.
O Lord my God, you are very great.
You are clothed with honour and majesty,
wrapped in light as with a garment.
You stretch out the heavens like a tent,
you set the beams of your chambers on the waters, you make the clouds your chariot,
you ride on the wings of the wind, you make the winds your messengers,
fire and flame your ministers.



Tuesday 5 January

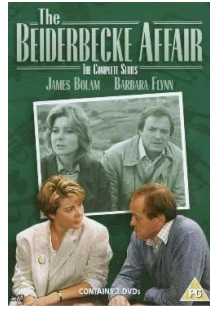
The Eve of Epiphany - here is a lovely Wise Men window at Tadcaster in North Yorkshire.
Have a read of my blog at <http://www.northernvicar.co.uk/2020/02/01/tadcaster-north-yorkshire-st-mary/>

I could write something profound about Wise Men - though the world seems a bit short of them at the moment. Which brainbox thought it was wise to open the schools for a day?

Instead I shall remember "The Beiderbecke Affair" - Trevor was played by James Bolam and Jill by Barbara Flynn. A wonderful TV series by Alan Plater. Trevor's old fiancée was Helen of Tadcaster - one of those phrases that sticks in my mind. In one of the series there was a Russian spy called Ivan. He needed taking to the border - and was seen walking across the Humber Bridge.

It is frightening that it was aired 35 years ago, not long after we were married. On the bright side, something else to watch during lockdown. Keep smiling.





Wednesday 6 January

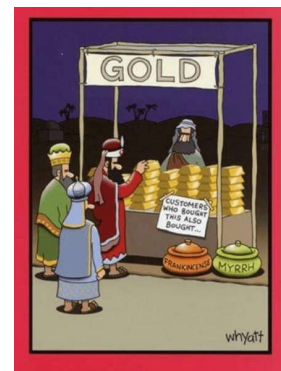
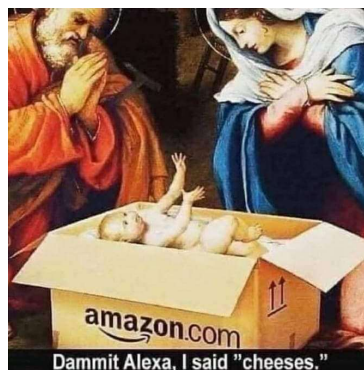
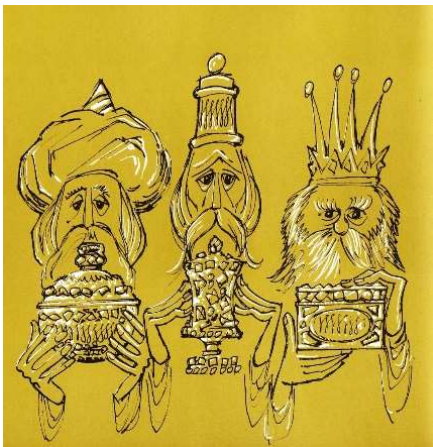
I could write "Happy Epiphany" but having just seen the Covid statistics it does not feel happy. More like the massacre of the innocents, caused by a virus, plus NHS underfunding for over a decade, plus inequalities in our Society, plus people ignoring the rules, plus track and trace that has never worked (where is Dido Harding?), and I could add to the list. However we're being encouraged to go outside and clap, so that'll make all the difference.

Here we have decided to stop physical services at St Edmund's, and I expect we'll make the same decision for St Matthew's tomorrow. Sorry - I know Zoom is not as good, but it is safer. The link will be on the church website, and you can watch the video of last week's service there. www.stedsandstmatts.co.uk

Caroline has stopped working in the Office, and is at home juggling kids and everything else. She's checking the answermachine and responding to emails - but please be patient.

Thinking about Three Wise Men - I love this line drawing by David Kossoff. I bet they had Carolines too. Someone had to go and buy the gold, then buy the box to put it in, hire the camels, sort out the accommodation, and keep the place running while the boss went off on a jolly. She probably had to make excuses when he couldn't be found, and make sure the job still got done.

We celebrate the Three Wise Men, but don't forget the team with them and behind them.



Thursday 7 January

I could comment on the situation in the USA but, as I have said before, I don't understand American politics. I was impressed with Jo Biden last night, so let's hope and pray that he (and many others) can heal that divided country. Let's hope our politicians might be more careful about who they support.

I could comment on this tweet from a teacher friend: "the DfE reminder to avoid unmanageable workload burdens comes in a 61-page document about schooling in the new lockdown, delivered 3 days after we started doing it!"

I could comment on clap for carers, but my daughter has done it so much better than me. Have a read of https://metro.co.uk/2021/01/07/clapping-is-nice-but-heres-how-you-can-better-help-us-in-the-nhs-13855458/?fbclid=IwAR16Auxb_xFblvXDBxjR_SZKZ4wWdH-YQqsW2pK6Caj1GMj_xRh_rlwQz5o

I will tell you that tomorrow evening I am doing an illustrated talk about John Wilson Carmichael, the Newcastle maritime artist who also did a series of etchings of the Newcastle-Carlisle railway line as it was being built. The illustration is Hexham station. It is for the Railway and Canal Historical Society, but all are welcome. If you want to come and see my etchings, the link is here <https://rchs.org.uk/events/em-group-talk-5/>

The best thing about today is that "Death in Paradise" comes back at 9 pm this evening with Series 10. As a geographer I am very interested in Caribbean islands - the fact that Josephine Jobert plays Detective Sergeant Florence Cassell is purely coincidental.



Friday 8 January

This Friday evening last year was the Office Christmas Party. Caroline Audley and I went for our Christmas Meal - and my wife and her husband came too! A good evening was had by all - and, once again, thanks to Caroline, Julie and Dave for all their help and support.

We went to The Hanging Gate which is always a good place for a meal and a welcome. We have missed them last year - and hope we will be back and celebrating later this year.

Many years ago I was librarian for a solicitors firm in Cambridge while also looking after a church - my colleagues knew about my double life. Every department had a Christmas meal, but I was by myself. One year I went with the Companies Department. We left the office at 12.30, had a very expensive lunch at a local restaurant, and were back at our desks by 3.

The following year I went with the Litigation Department. We left at 12, went to the pub, and didn't bother to go back to work. Late in the day I shared a taxi back to the station with one of the younger secretaries who lived nearby. She was a little worse for wear.

"Peter", she said, "I told my boyfriend I'd be a good girl. Have I been a good girl?"

"Tell him you came home with the Vicar", I said.

"I will" she said, and fell asleep on my shoulder.

Hideous thought that that young lady must now be in her late 50s!



Saturday 9 January

One of the "On this day" tweets reminded me that on 9 January 1909, Ernest Shackleton's Nimrod Expedition got to within 111 miles of the South Pole.

Shackleton's first journey south had been with Scott in 1901-4 aboard "Discovery". The ship is now on display in Dundee, and well worth a visit. It is several years since I have been - it will be added to my ever-lengthening list of places to visit.

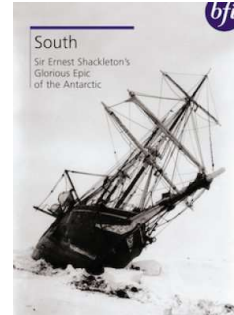
He went back in 1907, aiming to be the first to the Pole. They landed in McMurdo Sound on 29 January 1908, over-wintered there, then set off south on 29 October - hoping to get to the Pole and back in 91 days. By Christmas Day they were still 287 miles from the Pole, and had to cut back on their rations if they were going to succeed. They struggled on, on the borders of survival, but on 9 January Shackleton admitted that "we had shot our bolt", 111 miles from the Pole. He later wrote to his wife, "better a live donkey than a dead lion." It was an incredible achievement to get all his comrades back safely. He became lodged in the national consciousness as a popular hero and was awarded a knighthood by King Edward VII.

When Scott went south in 1910, several of Shackleton's crew were with him. Scott made it to the South Pole on 17 January 1911, 33 days after Amundsen, and died at the end of March.

I have the DVD of the silent film of Shackleton's Endurance expedition.. It left in 1914 with the plan to land on one side of Antarctica and cross the Continent. But their ship, the Endurance, was trapped in ice, sank, and Shackleton had to get his men to safety. They journeyed across the ice, then sailed as far as Elephant Island, then six of them sailed 800

miles in an open boat to South Georgia to get help. It is an amazing story, which puts our deprivations into perspective.

Julie commented that on one of the coldest days of the year, only her husband would suggest we watched a film about Antarctica.



Sunday 10 January

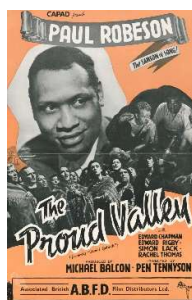
A remarkably profitable day. About 60 people on our Zoom service, and you can now watch it on the church website - www.stedsandstmatts.co.uk. Followed by session in the kitchen. Bacon and cheese scones and Dorset Apple Cake.

Then a 2 mile walk round the garden while listening to an English Heritage podcast all about blue plaques in London. One person whose life they discussed was Paul Robeson. I knew a bit about his musical talents and I knew a little about his support for Welsh miners in the days of the depression before the last War. I have now purchased the 1940 film "Proud Valley" in which he starred.

I had forgotten how much he was part of the fight against racism in the States during the War and in the decades that followed. He was also charged with "anti-American activities" during the McCarthy era, and was very politically active in the fight against fascism.

The story that made me smile was that "in 1957, still unable to accept invitations to perform abroad, Paul Robeson sang for audiences in London, where 1,000 concert tickets for his telephone concert at St Pancras Town Hall sold out within an hour." Here's a short film about the event - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qL-ul0A_z3Q

The precursor of Zoom. Robeson is supposed to have said "We have to learn the hard way that there is another way to sing." The same can also be said for worship.



Monday 11 January

I watched two minutes of the Six O'clock news before turning it off. I wish I could believe that those who have failed to sort out lockdown, PPE, tiers, tracking and testing, masks and almost everything else, will actually manage to make process of vaccination work.

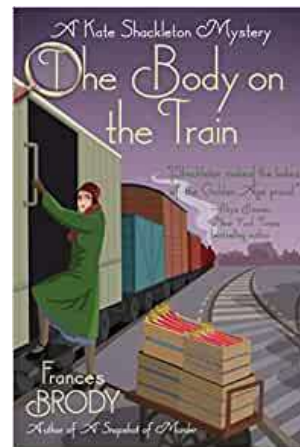
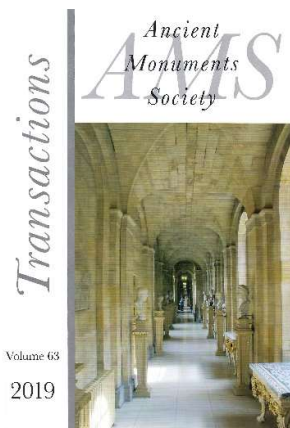
However Hannah is on the case, and has spent the last two days sticking needles into people. I think she lines them up and drives towards them at speed. Thank you wonderful daughter and other marvellous NHS workers.

Sorry if I sound glum - it's another grey, damp week. I curled up with the Journal of the Ancient Monument Society (I know how to find excitement).

My beloved has been reading a detective story "The Body on the Train" by Frances Brody. It gives some good advice on page 222 for a man trying to find a wife:

"You'd better try the chapels first. Don't go for some soppy flower arranger. Choose a woman who turns her hand to mopping the floor and polishing pews. Many a good widow would be glad of a fresh start. Smarten yourself up. Try not to look pathetic."

I could make a comment on wives and ancient monuments - but, bearing in mind the number of murder stories my wife reads, she knows exactly how to do away with me. Now she also knows how to make a fresh start ... and so do I.



Tuesday 12 January

Today the church remembers Benedict Biscop. Born a Northumbrian nobleman in 628 he served at the court of King Oswiu. In 653 he left for Rome, and spent eleven years in monasteries in Italy and Gaul. He joined the monastic community at Lérins in France and, becoming a monk, took the name of Benedict.

In 667, while on his third visit to Rome, he was appointed as interpreter and guide to accompany Theodore of Tarsus to England when he took up his appointment as Archbishop of Canterbury. On his return he became temporary abbot of St Peter's and St Paul's abbey in Canterbury.

He made a fourth trip to Rome in 671 to collect books, manuscripts, paintings and holy relics. On his return to England he went to Northumbria, and King Ecgrith gave him land to form the monastery at Monkwearmouth. Building work on St Peter's church began in 674. Benedict made a fifth trip to Rome in 678-9, and another in 682. His travels make me jealous.

682 was the year the monastery at Jarrow was founded, and it was united with Monkwearmouth in 688. (I find it incredible that they can unite two monasteries – these days it takes years of discussion and argument before anyone can unite two parishes). Benedict Biscop died on this day in 689.

By 716 the Wearmouth-Jarrow monastery had 600 monks – that is an incredible story, and we haven't mentioned Bede. Have a read of

<http://www.northernvicar.co.uk/2016/01/01/monkwearmouth-tyne-wear-st-peter/>

The window is by Leonard Evetts, and I like his fish too.



Wednesday 13 January

Today [Souter Lighthouse and the Leas](#) is 150 years old. Designed by Sir James Douglas, Engineer-in-chief to Trinity House, it is now owned by the National Trust. One of the cottages is a holiday cottage and in April 1992 we were the first people to holiday there. We used it as a base to discover Northumberland, and I have enjoyed looking through the photos. We had a ride on Tanfield Railway, explore Aydon Castle and journeyed over into Cumbria for a trip as far as Birdoswald Roman Fort. It amazes me how far we drove - and we certainly managed to tire the kids out.

We took them on the Metro - 29 years later, Harry still enjoys that. We had a gateau in the cafe at Belsay House - Gareth spent a while working in that cafe. My diary comments that Hannah never stopped talking to the elderly gentleman who took us up the stairs to see the light.

The cottage slept four plus cot, and in August 1993 Harry could still be fitted into the cot, so we went back. The NT publicity machine swung into action, and we were on the front page of Shields Gazette.

Happy memories. Happy Birthday Souter.



Thursday 14 January

Snow. There are certain benefits to working from home. I spent the morning making phone calls to check everyone is OK. Many people are using Zoom or watching the video of the

service, including one 80 year old who has been talking to her daughter in New Zealand and now has the Zoom app on her phone. But everyone is missing being together, missing worship in our churches. We have today received the official paperwork from the bishop's office allowing us to suspend public worship in our churches the current crisis - I promise we will reopen as soon as it is safe to do so (and that decision also has to be signed off by the powers-that-be). I also promise we will continue to Zoom while people continue to watch.

At lunchtime I enjoyed The Churches Conservation Trust lecture about Blythburgh church Holy Trinity Church, Blythburgh. It is a stunning church in Suffolk which I haven't visited for a couple of decades - I really must go back. In 1881 the church was closed as the building was unsafe, and a committee was formed. The story was fascinating - marvellous clashes of views and clashes of people. The Patron publicly showed his contempt of the Vicar, saying "the bishop appointed him by mistake." The Vicar was not happy that the Patron had the habit of sitting in his pew and reading his copy of The Times during the service!

There were long arguments about whether the church needed repairing or restoration. How much do you replace? Do you try to repair medieval glass and tracery, or go for the cheaper option, which is probably to replace the lot with new stone and factory-made glass? In the end, shortage of money meant it was a long, slow process of repair rather than a major restoration which would have transformed the character of the building.

It was interesting to compare their story with St Edmund's in Allestree. Here the church was rebuilt 1865-67 by the local architect Henry Stevens. It would be fascinating to know what state the building was in, why it needed a major restoration which replaced almost everything, rather than simply some repairs. I also wonder what the reaction was of the villagers when their church was so completely modernised.

A couple of years ago myself and Lizzie Maher wrote a short guide and a history page for St Matthew's in Darley Abbey - <https://www.stedsandstmatts.co.uk/history-or-st-matthew-s>

The most recent leaflet for St Edmund's was produced by Enid Clarke in 1990 and updated by John Warman in 2000. A useful job for lockdown will be to get a similar job done for St Edmund's. I promise we'll have a party when we've completed it!

Enjoy a couple of pictures of Blythburgh.



Friday 15 January

I left the house today! Went and took a funeral at the Crem. We had a bagpipe player to serenade us in and out. Before Pops Barham gets stressed about the exhalation value of bagpipes, I assure you he kept his distance.

We had bagpipes at a funeral in Suffolk, many years ago. The deceased had been a Colonel in one of the Scottish regiments and they sent the regimental piper to play for him. James Thomas was playing the organ for me - I only told him after he'd agreed that he would have to listen to the pipes as well!

The churchyard had been closed a couple of decades earlier, so I assumed we were burying in the village cemetery. "No" said his widow, "we reserved a plot before they closed the churchyard." So my churchwarden and I went through the paperwork in the safe, found the reservation and went to see where the hole was to be dug.

We were just coming to the end of a church roof restoration project and there was a builders' site hut and toilet in an empty part of the churchyard. Guess what needed moving before we could do the burial!

The builders thought it was hilarious, and organised for the hut and loo to be taken away. A local garden company came and tidied everything up. The family never realised there had been a problem. It's 25 years ago, but I'm still not telling you the name of the church!

Things they don't teach you at Theological College. Ken Howcroft and Neil Burgess please take note!