

Saturday 16 January

Yesterday I got everything done for Sunday - Zoom service at 11.30, link on the church website - www.stedsandstmatts.co.uk - and on video later in the day.

Today I have read "Hamnet", by Maggie O'Farrell. It tells a story of William Shakespeare's family, his wife (called Agnes in this book), daughter Susannah and twins Hamnet and Judith). Julie has reviewed the book at <https://northernreader.wordpress.com/2020/04/04/hamnet-by-maggie-ofarrell-a-story-of-a-family-in-the-tudor-period/>

Hamnet died at the age of 11. There were some points where I had to stop and make a mug of tea. It's a little close to home, she writes well about grief and what it is like to lose a child. Julie and I were able to grieve together, William had to go back to London, back to work, while Agnes and the girls remained in Stratford.

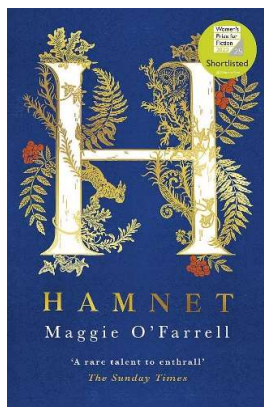
It cannot have been easy for Agnes (Anne) and the girls to mourn in the house and town where there were so many memories, to walk into the churchyard and stand by his grave. Nor would it have been easy as William mourned through his work, coping with his guilt, his feelings, and the need to earn money. Agnes arrives in London and watches a performance of Hamlet, perhaps that brings some healing.

A couple of years ago we watched the film "All is true". Kenneth Branagh and Judi Dench play William and Anne when he has retired back to Stratford. They have to pick up their relationship and work through the grief that never goes away. Another film to watch over the next few weeks.

In 2019 we made a couple of visits to Anne Hathaway's Cottage and to New Place. Both of them were fascinating houses, with knowledgeable guides, and beautiful gardens. We will get back to Stratford in 2021.

Sonnet 116 helps me

"Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass come;
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom."



Sunday 17 January

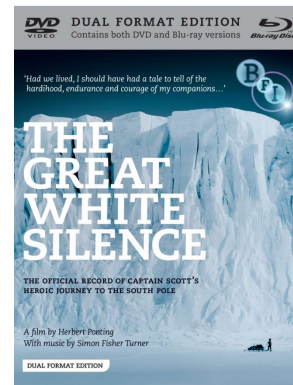
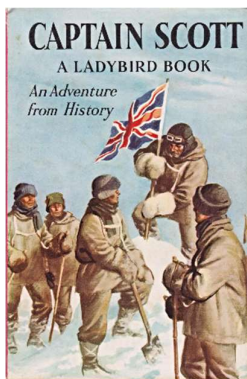
Today is the 109th anniversary of Captain Scott and his party reaching the South Pole (17 January 1912). Having sat through the Shackleton film last week, Northern Reader was not too excited about watching "The Great White Silence", which is the original silent film shot by Herbert Ponting. I have it on a splendid DVD issued by the BFI when they restored the film a few years ago. The DVD includes several original newsreels and other documentaries. I enjoyed watching it all again.

Living in Cambridge I often visited the Scott Polar Research Museum as a youngster. They have Oates' sleeping bag and other material from the expedition. I remember being fascinated by his bravery - "I am going outside, I may be some time". The Ladybird book fired my imagination.

Later in life, in the days I was a Cambridge geographer, I read more about the expedition and that of Roald Amundsen. The Norwegians had reached the Pole of 14 December 1911. It is difficult not to come to the conclusion that they were better equipped, prepared and used their dog teams with more skill. They were back at their ship on 25 January and returned to Australia on 7 March. Scott and his companions died in a blizzard on 29 March, just twelve miles away from a supply depot.

Yet Scott's story is incredible, there is no doubting their bravery.

"Had we lived, I should have had a tale to tell of the hardihood, endurance, and courage of my companions which would have stirred the heart of every Englishman. These rough notes and our dead bodies must tell the tale, but surely, surely, a great rich country like ours will see that those who are dependent on us are properly provided for."



Monday 18 January

Blue Monday may not be the best thing to be marking - yes, the Monday in January when the credit card bill arrives can be very depressing - but so can any other day. I like the way Samaritans have made it #BrewMonday.

I am fortunate. A family who buoy me up, a wife who keeps me going, a job that is supportive, a warm house, etc., etc. Life for many is not always that easy. Listening to the news that MPs are debating whether the universal credit uplift of £20 a week should be

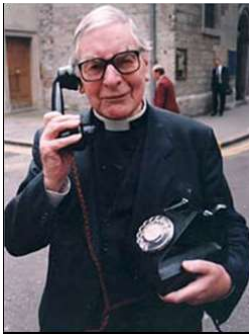
continued after March - I suggest the majority of them have no comprehension what twenty pound means when you're struggling. It will be the difference between food and hunger.

I have always had a steady income, but there were times when finances were tight. I can remember sitting outside Great Ormond Street on one occasion when Gareth was waiting for his transplant, and answering my phone to someone from the bank telling me all my direct debits for the monthly bills were being frozen as my account was too overdrawn. Fortunately one of the clergy charities came to our rescue, but I felt so useless, not being able to cope and having to ask for help.

Like me, Chad Varah was a student at Lincoln Theological College. He served his curacy at St Giles in Lincoln and, in his first year, had to take the funeral of a 14 year old girl who had committed suicide. Her periods had started, she did not know what was happening to her, thought she had some dreadful disease, had no one to talk to, so ended her life. Through his ministry Varah worked to improve sex education and, in 1953, founded the Samaritans, which started in the crypt of his church of St Edmund, Walbrook, in London.

Three things from today's Facebook Rambling. (1) ask for help if you need it - we're at the end of a phone, as are many other organisations and individuals who will do their best to listen and to help. (2) be aware of others, how can you support? (3) ensure that community, people, charities, are supported as we move into 2021.

And one other thing. The chapel of Lincoln Theological College had a stained glass window of Melchizedek. He is the Old Testament reading for Sunday, and I want a photo of the window. Can anyone help?



Tuesday 19 January

Back in 2013 I did a Certificate in Railway Studies at the University of York and wrote a long essay about an artist called John Wilson Carmichael. Born in Newcastle upon Tyne he went to sea as a lad - one story says he was press-ganged - and on his return started work as an apprentice shipwright. He could draw, and his talent was noted. His first commission was for a portrait which still hangs in Trinity House on the Quayside.

He became a full-time artist in 1825 and established a reputation as an accurate painter of nautical scenes. Some of his work hangs in the Laing Art Gallery in Newcastle, others are in the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich, and Chatsworth has some of his paintings.

In 1835 he was commissioned by the directors of the Newcastle and Carlisle Railway Company to sketch their new line. The book he produced was dedicated "To the Chairman and Directors of the Newcastle-upon-Tyne and Carlisle Railway Company, to whom the proprietors and the public are much indebted for their zeal and perseverance in forwarding that Great National and Local Object, the following views connected with the scenes of their labours, and undertaken at their suggestion, are with permission respectfully dedicated...".

I am doing a Zoom talk about him at 7.30 pm on Wednesday 20 January for the Nottingham Society of Model and Experimental Engineers. If anyone would like to join us I'm sure they wouldn't mind - drop me a message for the Zoom link.

What better way of spending a January evening? (Julie says she's washing her hair).



Wednesday 20 January

I have such different emotions today. I watched some of the US Inauguration this afternoon, and was moved to tears. The wheelchair users in my life suggested that Lady Gaga could have fitted a wheelchair under that incredible dress. I want to know the name of the man whose job it was to cleanse the lectern after every speaker. The fire-officer who spoke and signed the pledge was amazing - I can't find her name or a picture. The musicians are amazing, the young poet spoke such wisdom - although doing the whole thing outside in the snow did not seem the most sensible idea.

I am encouraged by the President, V-P and the messages they gave. Let's hope and pray that they can fight the pandemic, bring the country together, and lead the world community.

Here are two paragraphs from Joe Biden's speech

"Many centuries ago, St Augustine - the saint of my church - wrote that a people was a multitude defined by the common objects of their love. Defined by the common objects of their love. What are the common objects we as Americans love, that define us as Americans? I think we know. Opportunity, security, liberty, dignity, respect, honour, and yes, the truth.

Recent weeks and months have taught us a painful lesson. There is truth and there are lies. Lies told for power and for profit. And each of us has a duty and a responsibility as citizens as Americans and especially as leaders. Leaders who are pledged to honour our Constitution to protect our nation. To defend the truth and defeat the lies."

In Britain we need to hear this too.



Thursday 21 January

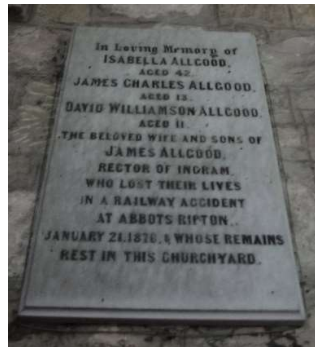
Abbot's Ripton is a small village north of Huntingdon. Back in the mid 80s we used to go to The Three Horseshoes pub when we lived nearby. Today is the anniversary of the Abbot's Ripton Railway Disaster of 21 January 1876. My thanks to Dawn Knight of St Nicholas church for promoting an excellent blog by her son Aidan at

<https://huntshistoryfest.com/2021/01/20/the-abbots-ripton-railway-disaster-friday-21st-january-1876/?fbclid=IwAR0PcD0h20ua577JinxJCIIaoCDRnrHUnA2q0PvQvBGRh-B4qYmHKpDow>

It was a snowy day and the coal train heading south along the main East Coast line was running late. The Scotch Express (running south) was coming up fast behind it. and the instructions were that the coal should be shunted into a siding so the Express could come past. The weight of snow on the signal arms meant the signals showed clear (in those days showed a white light) rather than red for danger, and the Express ran into the back of the coal train. Both tracks were blocked, and a northbound express to Leeds ran into the wreckage. 13 people were killed.

The village of Ingram is in the far north of Northumberland. We visited in 2012 and found the church was restored between 1877-79. It was restored by the Reverend James Allgood III and his sister in memory of his wife Isabella and their sons James and David. Isabella, James and David died in the Abbot's Ripton crash. Mother was taking the boys to boarding school in the south of England, and they were on the Scotch Express. I wondered who broke the news to their father - did the telegraph operator in nearby Wooler get the message, and then have to cycle to the next village to tell the Vicar the dreadful news?

James Allgood later moved to the village of Simonburn, and was Vicar there for several decades. He is remember, along with Isabella, on a memorial plaque in the Chancel. He died in 1910 at the age of 84, and was taken back to Ingram to be buried with those who died 44 years earlier. May they all rest in peace.



Friday 22 January

Friday night telly, in front of Channel 5. Susan Calman on a road tour of Yorkshire. She drove an interesting route - Whitby to Knaresborough to York to Haworth to Malham Tarn. It's an annoying programme - one of those ones where they spend so much time telling you what they told you last week, then telling you where they are going, then telling you where they've been. They waste so much time! But Susan is a pleasure to watch, always so friendly, and she visits some lovely places.

In Knaresborough she took us to Mother Shipton's Cave. If anyone would like to employ me to do a similar programme I would introduce you to other delights in Knaresborough. The signal box, the North Eastern Railway benches, the statue of Blind Jack the road builder, and a huge slice of cake in the Old Ticket Office cafe. Have a read of <http://www.northernvicar.co.uk/2016/01/23/knaresborough-north-yorkshire-st-john/> if you want to know more.

Then a ride round Yorkshire on the Northern Belle steam train. Preston, Carlisle, south along the Settle-Carlisle line, and back to Preston. Nice shots of the train, the journey (though the shots were all in the wrong order), and the Yorkshire countryside. Luxury train travel. I could do a TV programme about that too. Me, me, choose me.





Saturday 23 January

Everything sorted by lunchtime - Zoom service details and printed material on the church website. Time to settle down with a book. I need to get a new talk sorted and I want to look at the history of the line from Derby to York. It's a very early railway, so I thought I'd start with a nice Victorian book. "Williams's Midland Railway: its rise and progress, a narrative of Modern Enterprise", was originally published in 1876 (reprinted in 1968).

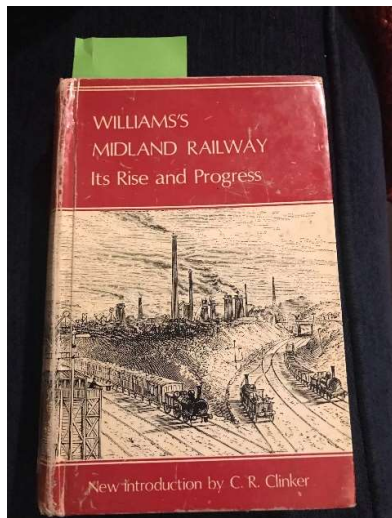
I love Victorian prose. It tells me that on an autumn morning in 1835 "a yellow post-chaise might be seen emerging from the New Inn at Derby, and taking its way up the Duffield Road into the country. It contained two gentlemen: George Stephenson the engineer, who had come over from his residence at Alton Grange in Leicestershire, and his secretary Mr. Charles Binns. They had started on an enterprise of no common importance – to find the best route for a new line 72 miles in length, from Derby to Leeds" (page 53).

I wonder if they looked to the right and saw the new church of St Matthew's, open sixteen years earlier, or noted the old church of St Edmund's as they went past. It always amazes me how hidden St Edmund's is - you can't see it as you travel along the railway line.

I'd never heard of Charles Binns - he's probably worth researching too.

<https://forgottenvictorians.com/tag/charles-binns>

I found the book in a charity shop a while ago. It used to be in the stock of Shrewsbury Borough Library. The date label and bar code took me back to my youth. I started in libraries just as we were being computerised. Plessey made the systems - we always commented that if their missiles were as unreliable as their barcode readers, we were safe from World War III.



Sunday 24 January

Today is the Emperor Hadrian's birthday. He was born in what is now Southern Spain on the 24 January 76 AD. If you'd like to read a piece about Roman calendars, have a look at this blog <https://www.vindolanda.com/blog/hadrians-birthday>

Seven years living north of Hadrian's Wall were a treat, and I enjoyed walking from Bowness to Wallsend in 2016. If you're bored - and what else would you want to do in lockdown? - have a look at my blog - www.northernvicar.co.uk - and search for "Hadrian".

The blog started as a church crawling blog, then I threw in a few trains, then walked the Wall, then added other Roman sites. Now I'm putting up a monthly walking (or excuses-why-I-haven't-walked) diary, and we've started watching Shakespeare. Yesterday evening we enjoyed "The Merry Wives of Windsor". It was a play we'd never seen, and a lovely evening of escapism. I enjoyed writing it up as well.

On the church website - www.stedsandstmatts.co.uk - for the next week I can offer you a videoed service with a sermon that includes the nephew of a poet, a stained glass window from a Scottish church, and wine jars from a museum in Israel - but I didn't mention trains. There is also some wonderful music.



Monday 25 January

This Wednesday (see comment below, I thought it was today) is Holocaust Memorial Day, and I was pleased to see St Edmundsbury Cathedral involved in a service in the Abbey Gardens. I had the privilege of leading that for several years.

Dale and Ida were always with us, as Dale's brother Brian had been a German POW. Brian had been bought up in Boulogne, so was bilingual. A talented artist, he worked for Vogue in the 1930s, then joined up at the start of WW2. In spring 1941 he went to an officer cadet training unit at Alton Towers where the Special Operations Executive picked him up, and he went through SOE's paramilitary training schools in Surrey and in the Western Highlands before doing his parachute training at Ringway, near Manchester. He then had three months' intensive training as a wireless operator at Thame Park, near Oxford; and parachuted into France on the last day of June 1942.

Four months later he was arrested, then sent off to Germany. He was in Saarbrücken for a few weeks, then at Mauthausen; with a few more weeks on forced labour in a Luftwaffe factory in a Vienna suburb, and then back to the infamous Mauthausen quarry. He was moved across to Natzweiler concentration camp in Alsace, and then taken to Dachau. He survived, partly by using his skills as an artist, and was liberated by the US Army's Rainbow Division on 29 April 1945. None of us can imagine his suffering or the suffering he witnessed.

After the War he was a witness at several war crimes trials, including the main Dachau trial, before he was demobilised in mid-1946. Vogue then gave him back his job and from October 1946 to the spring of 1979 he worked in Washington and New York. Then he returned to London and was a portrait painter of note - the Queen Mother sat for him. He died on 2 December 1998. There is a lot more about him at <https://www.abbottandholder-thelist.co.uk/brian-stonehouse-vogue/?fbclid=IwAR2beopX8kTyp8slyopp9tt9tZ4JxOPk4AxNxDxsE9bRXXVkgFGpdA0nD5IDale>

Dale and Ida came to remember Brian, and remember all those who did not survive. May God forgive us, and strengthen us to work for peace and justice.

Tuesday 26 January

Today is the 11th anniversary of Theo's death. So we've had a quiet day. Time heals, but only a bit. It's harder this year as we can't go north to spend some time where the boys are buried. Our little lad, who was in this world for less than two years - and he spent a lot of those asleep! We were fortunate - he got superb medical care, at birth, for the months he was in hospital, when he was well enough to be at home, when his condition worsened, and for the last few weeks of his life. I will never forget the love of all the staff, especially at the old Newcastle General Hospital.

He got a lot of help in the community as well. Carers who came in to support him, and us. Money found to send him to Ponteland Private Nursery several days a week. If he had been born in 2018 rather than 2008, I suspect that a decade of austerity would have removed much of that.

I almost feel guilty focussing on one little lad on the day when 100,000 people have died in our country of Covid - and that's only the official figures. I have no doubt that a decade of austerity before Covid arrived is one of the reasons our death toll has been so high and while our Prime Minister may say that he and his government did "everything they could", I beg to differ.



Wednesday 27 January

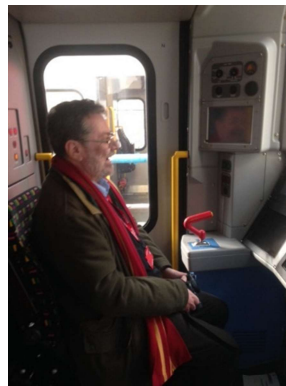
There were many highlights of my days at Selwyn College Cambridge. Falling in love with a beautiful young lady was number one, learning from incredible teachers comes a close second, and Cambridge University Railway Club is third. (I should probably put faith and worship as number 3, but you know me better than that).

Dinner at High Table with the speaker, then a group of us in a hidden room somewhere in the depths of one of the colleges. We had superb speakers, many of whom had studied at Oxbridge before they started their railway careers.

We had the annual Quiz - the only time I ever got a First at Cambridge was after a treasure hunt round East Anglia. The work of a British Rail Liaison Officer, with free passes as payment - journeys to Penzance, Fishguard, Holyhead, Stanraer, Mallaig, Kyle and Thurso. They never clipped the tickets so you could use them again and again. Some wonderful visits. I walked over the Forth Bridge, rode in the cab from Inverness, explored signal boxes - we even operated the box of Broad Street, still a London terminus - and even walked across 4 rail electric lines on the London Underground.

I have remained a member ever since and in March 2016, just before we moved, I joined a CURC trip to the Bombardier works, here in Derby. They were building the new trains for Crossrail in London, but we were not allowed to photo them. Instead we photoed new Underground stock, and I was allowed a drive.

This evening I have been to a CURC meeting when the Chief Executive of Crossrail, the new Elizabeth line in London, talked about the project. He has even offered some visits when Covid is over! He described their trains as "a grand job by Bombardier", so the Derbyian in me is very proud.



Thursday 28 January

If I wasn't staying at home to protect the NHS and save lives, I would love a trip to Scotland. I would jump on a plane at East Midlands Airport and come in to land at Inverness, final approach along the Cromarty Firth. It is many years since I have done that.

Perhaps I'd drive up the A9, a beautiful road. It follows the Highland Main Line, so it's difficult to concentrate on driving when you want to see what's on the Findhorn Viaduct. Then you come down through Daviot and the city lies ahead of you. The Kessock Bridge, the Castle and the River Ness.

If I go by train, I have to choose - day or night? Day gives you the crossing of the Forth, then the city of Perth, the Pass of Drumochter, wave at a steam engine as we pass through Aviemore, and over Slochd summit. Round through Culloden and into the busy station.

If it's by night, even Euston station (dump though it is) is exciting when you're catching the sleeper. Last time we did it I think it had 16 coaches, and our berth was in the front one. Julie said she had walked half way to the Highlands by the time she got to bed. You are likely to

wake at Edinburgh where the train divides (a third to Fort William, a third to Aberdeen, and your third to Inverness). Back to sleep, to be woken by the attendant with tea and shortbread. Lie in bed and enjoy the view. Out into the crisp Highland air, with the promise of a cooked breakfast in the Royal Highland Hotel.

While in Inverness, pay a visit to St Andrew's Cathedral - <http://www.northernvicar.co.uk/2017/07/22/inverness-highlands-st-andrews-cathedral/>. Very Victorian, with a wonderful font. I want one like this! It has a Candlemas window too.

Which is a simple way for me to remind my readers that we are celebrating Candlemas - the Feast of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple - on Sunday. Zoom service at 11.30 am, link on the front page of the church website. Candles, images and music. It's already complete - thanks to The Church of England for the musical resources on A Church Near You.

As it's complete I'll have a couple of days holiday. In reality I couldn't escape to the Highlands for two days, but virtually we can. See you tomorrow. If we're travelling to Scotland in January, you might want to pack an extra jumper (but at least you won't need the midge repellent!).



Friday 29 January

A Scottish short break in Inverness must include a train ride to the Kyle or the Far North. To my amazement I couldn't find a DVD of a ride to Kyle (it's now been ordered), so I have been to Wick and Thurso. You always need cake on a train ride (it's four hours each way if you're going right up to Wick), and (2019s) Christmas cake needs eating before Candlemas.

At Dingwall station there is a very special War Memorial. Packed trains running through from London and ports in the South up to Thurso for the sailors stationed in Scapa Flow and the other Northern bases. The logistics and timetabling challenges of these on the long stretches of single-tracked lines were quite mind-blowing. No doubt tea would have been a Godsend. Thank you people of Dingwall.

There are lovely museums and heritage centres in this part of the world. In 2006 we visited Tarbat Heritage Centre at Portmahomack. I'm sure the dressing up box was not supposed to be used by Julie and Gareth, but my diary says we had a good couple of hours there - and reading the diary brings back happy memories. Local museums - we'll be back.

I am old enough to remember the days when proper trains ran to Wick - locomotives (class 37s) and coaches. The train would split at Georgemas Junction, and half would run to Thurso and half to Wick. The Scotrail website tells me that the normal four trains a day are currently reduced to two. It is a ride beside the sea, and through the deserted flow country where no one in their right mind would ever have built a railway. I'm very glad they did, and I will have a ride again before too long. After a long day of train travel, I will sleep in front of the TV tonight.



Saturday 30 January

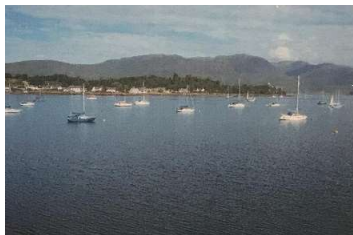
My silliest Scottish jaunt - so silly that even Gareth wouldn't come - was with Alex in August 2006. We were staying in Inverness, and a Highland Rover ticket covers all rail lines north of Glasgow and Aberdeen, plus Skye ferries and buses. We left Inverness at 0853 for the run to the Kyle (arrive 1120). One of the most beautiful train rides in the world, over by Garve and Achnasheen, and down to the sea at Plockton.

Then the hour's bus ride over the Skye Bridge and up to Portree. Two and a half hours break, then bus south to Armadale. A full ferry at 1705 back to the mainland at Mallaig. Fish and chips purchased, and we settled down to supper on the 1815 to Fort William. The most beautiful train ride in the world, over Glenfinnan Viaduct, terminating in the shadow of Ben Nevis.

At Fort William the London sleeper was waiting, departure at 1950. It has a seating coach all the way to Edinburgh, so we crossed Rannoch Moor, ran down beside Loch Lomond and through Glasgow. It is the only train of the day (night) that does the curve from Cowlares West to Cowlares North Junctions, so we could tick that off. We arrived into Edinburgh at 0100, and crashed on a friend's floor for four hours.

We left again at 0518 on the first train of the day. Stirling, then up the coast to Aberdeen - breakfast in the Granite City at 0838. Finally the 0925 to Inverness, and we were back in the Highland Capital for lunch.

Tonight I shall virtually catch the Sleeper south so I'm at home for Candlemas at 11.30 am. (Or I might stay up north and Zoom from there!). All welcome!



Sunday 31 January

We zoomed for Candlemas this morning (and I didn't pretend I was in Inverness). 44 screens at the end of the service, which was 7 more than at the beginning! The video can be watched through the church website - www.stedsandstmatts.co.uk - it is rather quiet and peaceful, which is what we all need as January comes to an end.

If I've got to travel south from Inverness I'll do it by train. Down the Highland Mainline to Perth, then - today - we'll turn left on the East Coast route. The journey is best done on the Highland Chieftain through train to London. Many years ago we upgraded to First and the free coffee meant Julie was high on caffeine when we got off at Peterborough eight hours after leaving Inverness.

Crossing the Forth is stunning, then Edinburgh and south along the Northumberland coast is gorgeous. When I left Ponteland, the lovely people Richard Coates CE School gave me a beautiful photo of the Flying Scotsman passing Lindisfarne - it has pride of place in my study.

We'd wave at Harry and Sarah in Newcastle. Today's problem is that I need to get a computer to them - anyone in Derby got a box 45cm x 48cm x 20cm? Unless I can find an essential reason to travel north - and I don't think delivering a computer (or having a photo op) is an essential reason. Anyone got any ideas? You can't transport a computer by Zoom!

