

Facebook Ramblings – February 2021

Monday 1 February

Today is the Feast of St Brigid. She was a contemporary of Patrick and founded a religious community at Kildare in Ireland. Little is known about her, but she is described as "a remarkable person and through the grace of God gave unique leadership in her own troubled times." The wonderfully useful book *Exciting Holiness* comments "The list of the saints of the Celtic church in Ireland is so male-dominated that the revered place given to Brigid of Kildare is itself a testimony to her leadership and holiness."

He's gone religious on us say my Rambling followers, we were expecting a train ride from Inverness. Well, if you travel south down the West Coast route, you have to cross Glasgow. While in Glasgow, go and visit St Andrew's Catholic Cathedral. It is one of Betjeman's Best Churches, and is beautiful.

On the south side is the Lady Aisle. The traditional statue, from the C19 altar, now surmounts the new sacristy door. The angels either side, and the figures of the door, were designed by Jack Sloan and worked in steel by Hector McGarva. On the doors we have Saints Ninian, Brigid, Andrew, Mungo, Margaret of Scotland and Columba, each identified by the symbols proper to them. Lots of candle lighting opportunities too!

I knew my blog would find me a picture of Brigid if I asked it nicely - have a read at <http://www.northernvicar.co.uk/2016/08/21/glasgow-st-andrews-catholic-cathedral/>

If you're good I might take you to the basement of Glasgow Central station tomorrow.



Tuesday 2 February

Glasgow Central is one my favourite stations. Intercity trains from London and the south, links through to Dumfries, Stranraer and other beautiful rural lines, and a whole network of Glasgow suburban services that need to be explored. Some of those suburban routes end up in romantic places - Wemyss Bay for example.

There are the normal selection of shops and eateries - you know you're in Scotland when there's a Millie's Cookies as you step off the train. That was always Gareth's first stop. I have spent many a comfortable hour in the little Italian cafe down by the suburban platforms - stunning cakes.

On my visit in 2014 I went on a tour down beneath the station. Paul was our guide, and we went down under the platforms. Coal and grain were stored here, you can see where the horses were tied, gas mantles and lots of rivets. We were told many stories, including about the War dead when they were still brought back from France in 1914. The bodies would be taken off the train, and laid out in the vault below. Wives, mothers, girlfriends and sisters would come to see if they could identify their loved ones – imagine the state of the corpses. If they found them, then they had the responsibility of getting his body home (the army's responsibility finished when they arrived in Glasgow). Upstairs to find a couple of men hanging round the station, and hope they would carry for you if you paid them a couple of shillings. Can you imagine their pain? Looking at the website -

<https://www.glasgowcentraltours.co.uk/>

- Network Rail have done a lot of work since I visited. I want to go back for another explore.

For now I will settle into my Pendolino seat for the ride south. Have a photo of one when Virgin were in charge. Next stop Carlisle.



Wednesday 3 February

We were going to explore Carlisle today, but I've been reminded it is the Feast of St Werburgh, thanks Julian Hollywell. There's a couple of local churches dedicated to her and I have blogged the Parish Church of St Werburgh Spondon -

<http://www.northernvicar.co.uk/.../spondon-derby-st-werburgh/>.

Reading my blog I see I wrote nothing about the good lady herself.

In depth research (i.e. I've read Wikipedia) says Werburgh was born at Stone (now in Staffordshire) and was the daughter of King Wulfhere of Mercia (himself the Christian son of the pagan King Penda of Mercia) and his wife St Ermenilda, herself daughter of the King of Kent. ("May I introduce you to my wife, St Ermenilda?"). Werburgh entered the Abbey of Ely, which had been founded by her great aunt Etheldreda, and became a nun. During some of her life she was resident in Weedon Bec, Northamptonshire - one of those places you drive through. She eventually became the fourth Abbess of Ely. She died on 3 February 700 and was buried at Hanbury in Staffordshire.

In the Ninth Century her body was moved to Chester. I like this line in Wikipedia "A miracle attributed to her was the unexpected withdrawal of the Welsh king Gruffudd ap Llywelyn from besieging the city." Being married to a Welsh wife, I honour anyone who can keep the Welsh out! Her shrine was destroyed at the Dissolution, although parts of the stonework that survive were reconstructed by the Victorians and can still be seen in Chester Cathedral today.

I was a little sad to find no mention of Werburgh on the Cathedral's website, but I did find this - <https://chestercathedral.com/.../making-tracks-trains.../>

Pete Waterman's model railway is in the Cathedral from 12 July to 3 September. It is open from 10 to 4 Monday to Saturday, there are obviously no trains running during the hours of divine worship. It will also stop during organ recitals. I hope that the Director of Music has at least one recital of railway themed organ music planned. David Redfern I need you to record Coronation Scott by Vivian Ellis. I have an illustrated talk on why Vicars like railways if anyone is interested!

On my imaginary journey home from Inverness, I will stay on at Carlisle and change at Crewe for Chester. In reality, I will be going to Chester this summer.

Thursday 4 February

We'll delay our return from Scotland for another day, as we should celebrate Gilbert of Sempringham who died on this day in 1189. This means a quick trip to Lincolnshire - there's a blog post at <http://www.northernvicar.co.uk/2018/10/12/sempringham-lincolnshire-st-andrew-sempringham-abbey/>

Sempringham is a small village south of Sleaford in Lincolnshire. There was a Saxon church, but it was rebuilt after the Norman Conquest by the new lord, a man called Jocelin. He was married to a Saxon lady. She had a vision of the moon coming down and settling in her lap – she interpreted this as the belief her son would be special. The son was born in 1083 and was named Gilbert. His childhood was difficult, only his mother had time for him, and eventually he was sent to France to train as a clerk (these are the European links we are currently trying

to destroy). When he returned – now with a profession – he began schooling the local children, boys and girls, and some of them started living according to a Rule.

In 1122 he became a clerk in the household of Robert Bloet, Bishop of Lincoln, then served his successor Alexander. He was ordained, and returned to Sempringham in 1131. His father was dead and he was the owner of a large estate. He searched for men to live according to the Rule, but ended up forming a community of seven maidens. He built accommodation for them on the north side of the church, and others joined, including lay brothers and sisters. In 1139 a Priory was built on the land to the south of the church – there isn't a lot to see of it now.

In 1149 Gilbert went to Citreaux to ask the Cistercians to take control. They didn't – not happy about the women! – but international friendships were made. He was a friend of Thomas Becket, and managed to hang on to the friendship of Henry II. By the time he died on 4 February 1189 there were thirteen houses, the only English religious foundation.

We visited on Heritage Open Day in 2018 and found a church full of people, full of displays, abseiling teddy bears from the tower, and there was superb cake. Those times will return!



Friday 5 February

Another delay to our departure from Scotland, because on 5 February 1941 the SS Politician went aground off the island of Eriskay in the Outer Hebrides. She was carrying 28,000 cases of whisky. Hundreds of cases were rescued by the locals, who went to great lengths to hide them from Customs and Excise. The story was the basis of Compton Mackenzie's 1947 novel.

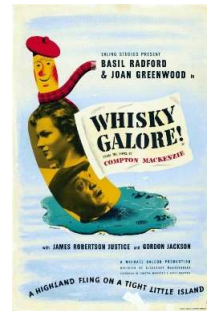
It was then the basis of the 1949 Ealing film starring Basil Radford, Bruce Seton, Joan Greenwood and Gordon Jackson. I love the line "It is the Sabbath" and everything stops for twenty four hours. Lovely shots of the boat, the ferry and the telephone exchange - with the two sisters Peggy and Catriona Macroon as the daughters of the Post Office (Catriona is played by Gabrielle Blunt). Basil Radford was a wonderful Captain Waggett, the Englishman who really cannot understand the locals.

In 1949 Ealing made three wonderful films - Whisky Galore, Passport to Pimlico and Kind Hearts and Coronets. I feel a weekend of black and white films is in order.

They remade the film in 2016, and I wondered why. Why remake a classic? We sat and watched it last December, and I enjoyed it more than I expected. Eddie Izzard is Captain

Waggett, with just a nod to Captain Mainwaring, Naomi Battrick and Ellie Kendrick play the Macroon sisters. A pleasant couple of hours, but I doubt it will last as long as the original.

I had a gorgeous day on Eriskay in July 2014. It was another transport odyssey. Bus to ferry from Barra, walk, bus, postbus, and ferry back to Barra. Throw in a stunning beach, lovely church, friendly village hall, then museum and hotel bar on Uist. For some reason my blog doesn't mention the film while I was on Eriskay, though it does in the previous post on Barra. I will have to go back. Have a read of <http://www.northernvicar.co.uk/2014/07/27/eriskay-st-michaels-catholic-church/>



Saturday 6 February

It's no good. I really must get home. I left Glasgow on a Pendolino several days ago, and I'm still at Carlisle. In normal times I love a day out in this City, usually with Clare (we worked together many years ago). Tullie House has some beautiful art, an amazing Roman collection, and a good cafe. I probably shouldn't admit that most of the times Julie and I meet Clare in the cafe, and that's it for the afternoon. Cafe afternoons will return.

Carlisle also has some excellent bookshops, including a Waterstone's that keeps Northern Reader occupied for hours (fortunately it too has a cafe). Most special of all is the Cathedral. Clare's son is Head Chorister, or would be if their choir was singing - so there is huge frustration that I can't listen to him and the others sing Evensong. I fear his voice will have broken by the time this is over.

The normal route home from Carlisle to Derby takes you down the West Coast Main Line to Crewe, then across to Derby. On several occasions in the last four years when I've had a day with Clare my post-Evensong train has arrived late into Crewe and the connection to Derby has already gone. O for one integrated network.

The best way south would be the Midland Railway - over the hills to Leeds, then home from there. The Midland knew it wasn't the fastest way from London to Scotland, but they had confidence. Look at their posters.

Tomorrow we have Zoom worship at 11.30 am - link from the church website. Thanks to the power of the web I will take you to the Metropolitan Museum in New York. If you can't join us at 11.30, why not watch later on youtube? Last week's service video has been watched 40 times, in addition to the 44 screens (65 people) who watched at 11.30.



Sunday 7 February

We have just enjoyed the BBC evening of musicals. They had done an incredible job of filling the Palladium and recording a Covid safe production. Excellent singing, with [Sheridan Smith](#), the wonderful BBC Concert Orchestra and the technical team must have been brilliant. I'd love to have seen something about how you manage to make a production like that work in these horrible times. Well done everyone! More please.

I don't recall musicals as part of my childhood. Mum was quite a serious musician and I don't remember anything lighter than Gilbert and Sullivan (although both her and dad went misty eyed over "Salad Days").

One of our first proper days out was a trip to London to see "Joseph" in the afternoon and "Evita" in the evening - 40 years ago. We saw "Evita" again in the middle of the Falklands War, that was an experience. Hannah played Gretel in "The Sound of Music" when she was five - proud dad. Sad to read of Christopher Plummer's death last week, and a reminder that even a sweet musical like this has a deep political message.

In the children's teenage and University years there were splendid shows. "Fiddler on the Roof" with Gareth as Motel the tailor ("Wonder of wonders, miracle of miracles, God took a tailor by the hand"), and both boys doing the bottle dance. Hannah appeared in several, "Assassins" on the Edinburgh Fringe back in 2008, and a performance in Durham in "Anything goes".

We saw London shows when Gareth was up and down to hospital. We went to "Spamalot" which includes the leper's song "I am not dead yet". During the interval Gareth bought himself the t-shirt, and turned up to see the Transplant Consultant for clinic the following morning proudly wearing it!

Last summer we were supposed to be going to Sheffield Theatres to see "Six" the new musical about the wives of Henry VIII. They phoned to say it had been postponed to mid February 2021 as Covid will be over by then! I remember making a joke about how we'll have to wait to see how it ends. Now we will wait until 2022, and enjoy it then. Watching the six young ladies perform a song on tonight's Palladium show, it will be worth waiting for. Julie says she knows why I want to go - obviously because it is a show about the wives of the man who founded the Church of England. Why else?



Monday 8 February

Four years ago today I was writing a blog about St Mary and All Saints church at Fotheringhay in Northamptonshire - <http://www.northernvicar.co.uk/2017/02/08/fotheringhay-northamptonshire-st-mary-and-all-saints/>. I commented it was the 430th anniversary of the execution of Mary Queen of Scots, in 1587. So today is the 434th anniversary of her execution at Fotheringhay castle.

In 1467 Mary had been forced to abdicate and had fled south in the hope that Elizabeth would protect her. For twenty years she was kept in custody. Much of the time she was in the care of the Earl of Shrewsbury and Bess of Hardwick. She was moved regularly between their properties - including Tutbury, Sheffield Castle, Sheffield Manor Lodge, Wingfield Manor, and Chatsworth House. Being in charge of Mary put a huge strain on their marriage - indeed he is buried in (what is now) Sheffield Cathedral and she is buried in (what is now) Derby Cathedral. I have blogged Sheffield, not Derby, so here is a (bad) photo of the tomb of George, 6th Earl.

There were various plots against Elizabeth that Mary seems to have been involved in. We enjoyed the film they made about their relationship in 2018, though the history in that film was somewhat dubious. Julie says we have the DVD - I'll watch it again in the name of research.

In 1586 Mary was tried at Fotheringhay Castle and sentenced to death. Executed on the morning of 8 February 1587, before Elizabeth could change her mind. She was buried at Peterborough Cathedral - the gravedigger was Robert Scarlett, who had buried Katherine of Aragon fifty years earlier - there's a blog about him at <https://tudor2016.wordpress.com/2016/11/02/old-scarlett-the-tudor-gravedigger/>

So I need another trip to Fotheringhay and a walk up to the Castle. I need to blog Derby and Peterborough Cathedrals, and have another explore of Sheffield. I've never been to Tutbury Castle or Wingfield Manor. I want a proper trip back to Scotland - so that should keep me quiet for a while.



Tuesday 9 February

I read that today is the Feast of St Teilo. I think I know that name. Apparently he was born near Tenby in Pembrokeshire, and went to school near Llandovery. David, as in "St David's", was a fellow pupil. Legend has it that Teilo, David and Padarn went on pilgrimage to Jerusalem. I have heard of Padarn - there was a slate railway with that name. On return to Wales Teilo had episcopal oversight of various monasteries. In 547 the Yellow Plague came to that part of Wales, and Teilo fled to Brittany where he stayed for seven years. (I wonder if "fled" is the right term - if it is, perhaps I should stop feeling guilty about the way I am coping with the current plague). When he died his body came to Llandaff, and he is one of their patron saints.

I had a vague idea I had heard of Teilo, but I couldn't think why. I did a blog search and found that in 2014 Julie and I had been to a lecture by John Harper of Bangor University on "Experiencing Late Medieval Liturgy: Sound, Silence, Space and the Senses". As "Research Professor of Music and Liturgy, and Director for the International Centre for Sacred Music Studies, University of Bangor" (I want his job title) he had got some funding to reconstruct some medieval services – in Salisbury Cathedral and in St Teilo's chapel at the Welsh Museum at St Fagan's. I knew the old brain cell was working!

I've never been to St Fagan's, nor to Llandaff. We have had some interesting days in Cardiff - Gareth and I went to see "The Producers" at the Wales Millennium Centre on one memorable evening. I last had a night in the city back in 2009 when I spent a couple of days doing all the Valley railway lines. I took Sian Tuson for supper - and after supper that bright young student went off to a nightclub, while I went back to the Premier Inn (I felt my age!!). I did the new line to Ebbw Vale Parkway, then caught the bus across to Pontypool to catch the train home. (The bus went through Abertillery, where my mother-in-law came from - they all sounded like her, it was frightening!).

In 2015 they extended the line another mile to Ebbw Vale Town station. I need to go back and do that last mile! If I call it a Teilo pilgrimage, that sounds better. I search "Teilo Ebbw Vale". Google has directed me to "Tesco Ebbw Vale".



Wednesday 10 February

There are a lot of detective series being watched in the Vicarage at the moment. We have worked our way through "A Touch of Frost". It wasn't a series I'd ever really watched, just caught the odd episode here and there. It turns out the series lasted 17 years - we have been watching it since November. An interesting mix of gruesome stories with some gorgeous bits of humour. David Jason is excellent.

There seems to be at least one "Midsommer Murder" on every day. I lay in bed this morning enjoying my morning cuppa and wondered out loud what "Cully" is short for, as in Cully Barnaby. That was a mistake, Julie demanded to know why I was thinking of Cully Barnaby (played by Laura Howard). Google told me it is not short for anything, but the place in Switzerland where her parents went on honeymoon. One of these days I was go and explore!

"Poirot's Christmas" is on as I type. It includes the wonderful scene where Hercule Poirot shows people how to eat a mango - "a Duke showed me", he says. In his biography David Suchet says he went to a luncheon at Buckingham Palace and sat next to Prince Philip. Mango was served and he wondered how to eat it. The Duke showed him!





Thursday 11 February

Another day of Zoom, phone and all the other delights of these Covid times. But supper of Scottish salmon and the new season's rhubarb makes a cold day slightly warmer.

The Boss has decided we are going to watch "Monarch of the Glen". It first screened 21 years ago - yes, really. Richard Briers and Susanne Hampshire are a wonderful couple, and I have already fallen back in love with Lexie (played by Dawn Steele). She has just used the line "Anyone for another slice of Bambi?"

Archie has come north from London on the Highland Sleeper. Then he jumped on a 158, and jumped off an old diesel unit at Glenbogle station (why do people producing railway programmes on the telly think you can get on one train and off something different? When I do my railway series we will get it right).

Glenbogle station is on the Strathspey Railway. We have had some good trips along that line - it's a steam railway running north from Aviemore to Broomhill. Many years ago we were in Inverness over my birthday. I picked up a leaflet for the dining trains on the line and thought "why not, it's my birthday". I phoned the railway - "have you a table for dinner tonight?" "Yes Sir, but I'm afraid it is a heritage diesel this evening."

We had a wonderful birthday meal cruising along the valley. The food was superb. The only thing that took the gloss off the evening was that the heritage diesel was a loco that had regularly taken Julie and I to and fro between Cambridge and Coventry when we were young and in love. Old I may be, but I wasn't "heritage" then (or now!).



Friday 12 February

Today is an historic day. Northern Reader has just posted her 1,000th blog - have a look at www.northernreader.wordpress.com. **Congratulations!**

She started blogging on 8 July 2010 with a post about "The House of Orphans" by Helen Dunmore. During the six months of 2010 she posted 40 times, in 2020 she posted 300 times. Most days she blogs about a book she has read, and seems to find something new to say every time. I have occasionally been invited to be a guest blogger, which is a real honour!

Her most popular post is "The Stranger from the Sea, Winston Graham – Poldark 8" which has been viewed 1574 times (excuse for photo of Demelza, played by Eleanor Tomlinson). Second most popular is "The Reformation in Fiction" - as I was the one who organised that series of talks in 2017, I will take the credit for that success.

It is a rare day when the post-person does not deliver some books, or a parcel arrives from a publisher, book distributor or bookshop. Julie is photoed opening a box from Fox Lane Books - and a huge thanks to the lovely Cogito Books as well.

My role in life is to provide her with a Vicarage big enough to store the collection. I attach a photo of her corner of the sitting room and the state of our dining room.



Saturday 13 February

On a trip to Wick in 2001 I purchased a new magazine called History Scotland and read the first issue on the train back to Inverness. I then subscribed.

Today the post arrived (at twenty past three in the afternoon). Northern Reader had four parcels of books (that's a surprise), I had my copy of the new History Scotland magazine.

I will enjoy reading about lost medieval bridges - the article makes the point that "Today, in our cars, we cross bridges in a blink of an eye, with hardly a passing thought. In those days crossing a bridge was event" - a community project on the Antonine Wall and Karl Hundason, Scotland's Viking king? And much more!

While I'm at it, I subscribe to their email newsletter and podcasts (I just typed podcats, which is an interesting image). Then I start reading the website, and find a story about The Marchmont organ, <https://www.historyscotland.com/exclusive-content/the-marchmont-organ/>. In 1914 Norman & Beard, of Norwich and London, provided an estimate for a magnificent organ to grace a new music room Marchmont House in the Scottish Borders. The organ has recently been restored, and Simon Leach, the Director of Music at Edinburgh's Canongate Kirk is now to be the House Organist.

Charles Villiers Stanford was a regular visitor, and I have enjoyed a lot of his music over the years. Have a search on youtube and enjoy. He was Professor of Music at Cambridge, based Trinity College, Cambridge. My mind went back to the regular visits we used to make there with the confirmation candidates from St Edmundsbury Cathedral. Many of them would be choristers, and they enjoyed discovering the musical links. We had a lovely friend called Selene who was Chapel Clerk there, a superb musician herself. A friend who joined the heavenly choir several years ago. Fond memories. I wrote about the chapel on my blog - <http://www.northernvicar.co.uk/2015/09/01/trinity-college-cambridge/>

I will put Trinity on my list of places to visit again, and now add Marchmont House. David Redfern, one of my current church organists, features in a newly released youtube film from the Astoria Centre in Barnsley - enjoy!
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jC2t0Bxb2PQ&t=20s>

David's playing finishes tomorrow's church Zoom service at 11.30. Details on the website.

Sunday 14 February

This wonderful cartoon sums up Valentine's Day 2021. Lovely to have 46 connections on Zoom - well done to Melonie for preaching - and the video is now on youtube.

For lunch we got the full works from Red Cow Allestree, and very nice it was too. Please note the romantic place mats showing a map of Cambridge - so we can dine off the place of my birth and the place Selwyn College Cambridge where we fell in love. I am an old romantic! You can also see how serious my wife is when faced with a jar of mint sauce.

We then watched the marvellous film "A Matter of Life and Death". Kim Hunter and David Niven as the couple who fall in love, Roger Livesey as Dr Reeves. Directed by Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger in 1946. If you haven't seen it, remedy that now.

This is the piece of Walter Scott quoted towards the end of the film:

"In peace, Love tunes the shepherd's reed; In war, he mounts the warrior's steed; In halls, in gay attire is seen; In hamlets, dances on the green. Love rules the court, the camp, the grove, and men below, and saints above; For Love is heaven, and heaven is Love."

