

### Monday 15 February

Yesterday a new railway station opened - Bow Street. It's not the one in London, it's in deepest Wales, between Borth and Aberystwyth, and will act as a park and ride for Aberystwyth itself.

I first visited that part of Wales on a Sixth form geology trip in 1979. The following year there was a spare space in the minibus, so I went again. While those in the lower Sixth climbed mountains and hit rocks, I explored the lines to Abeystwyth and Pwllheli, and had a ride on the narrow gauge line from Aberystwyth to Devil's Bridge (in those days it was British Rail's only steam line).

The line from Shrewsbury crosses mid-Wales to Machynlleth, then the next stop is Dovey Junction where the lines to Aberystwyth and Pwllheli diverge. Dovey Junction is one of those stations with no road access, it is in the middle of nowhere. In the old days it had signals in three different counties - Cardiganshire, Montgomeryshire and Merionethshire. Now it is an unstaffed halt and there's no signalbox.

Many years ago we had had a day on the Talyllyn Railway and were on the train back to Shrewsbury. It was the last week of December, so the sun had set. We needed to change trains at Machynlleth and had time for a trip to Aberystwyth and back. Alternatively we could change at Dovey Junction. I checked with the guard and she phoned Control to confirm the Aberystwyth train was running.

We got off at Dovey in the pitch black. The wind whistled across the river estuary. The unit disappeared into the darkness. "If our train does not arrive in ten minutes I am going to kill you" said Gareth in a tone that meant he wasn't joking. Eight minutes later I was glad to see the lights of the Aberystwyth train coming across the marshes.

Anyone want a day out to Bow Street, via Dovey Junction? We'll have a meal of pysgodyn a sglodion on the front at Aberystwyth.



### Shrove Tuesday 16 February

I had forgotten that last year I was on BBC Radio Derby talking about why we celebrate Pancake Day. Sally and I had a good chat, and I said I'd go back when Lent was over to see how she'd done - I can't remember now whether it was wine or chocolate she was giving up! Lent last year defied all our expectations, so need to feel guilty if anyone failed.

We then had Pancake Lite at St Edmund's - about fifty of us had a very enjoyable pancake supper. I do enjoy the fact that other people cook - over the years we have had some wonderful pancake parties. Here it is in the Church Hall with a system developed over the

years that runs like a well-oiled machine (or should that be a well-greased pan?) thanks to a lot of hard work. In previous parishes we have had some good times in the Vicarage kitchen. I do miss pancake parties/coffee mornings/whatever - I always think such an event has been a success if we have ended up with a cleaner kitchen and with more cake than we started with.

My pancakes today were not worth photographing, especially when you compare them with the amazing ones from Southwell Minster. I hope they don't me sharing them with you. What a brilliant piece of PR Helen Louise Bates

Ash Wednesday tomorrow - a service on zoom at 7.30 pm. The link is on the church website. Other churches are being dynamic with "make your own ashes" and all sort of cleverness. I am using the Book of Common Prayer! My wife has said it won't be very cheerful - and she's probably right - but with two hymns, some gorgeous music, and words which have been prayed in our churches for centuries, I am not going to apologise.

From lightning and tempest; from plague, pestilence, and famine; from battle and murder,  
and from sudden death,  
Good Lord, deliver us.

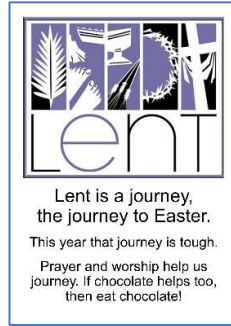


### Ash Wednesday 17 February

Lovely to share Evensong for Ash Wednesday with 24 screens this evening - that's a sentence I've never written before! One of the beautiful pieces of music was what my son once described as a "cheerful little ditty" - "Lord, let me know mine end, and the number of my days." It was written by Maurice Greene (1696 - 1755) organist of St Paul's, later Professor of Music at Cambridge and Master of the King's Music.

He is the gentleman seated in this portrait that's in the National Portrait Gallery. The standing gentleman is John Hoadley (Chaplain to Frederick, Prince of Wales) and it was painted by Francis Hayman, 1747. They look like they knew how to have a good party. I wonder what they would think about people in Derby looking at their portrait, and listening to his music, on Zoom. I can safely say that generations of priests will have prayed the Litany in our churches, but I am the first to do with a computer. I've also done a new poster for Lent.

The other highpoint of the day is that I am guest blogger on [www.northernreader.wordpress.com](http://www.northernreader.wordpress.com) reviewing a novel set on Orkney. If Lent has started this well, perhaps I should just stop now. I am giving up everything for Lent. Wake me up on Easter Sunday.



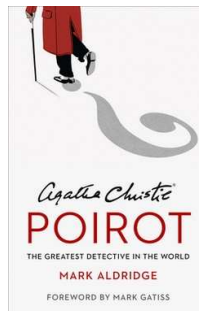
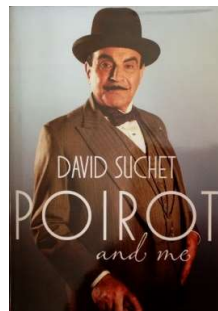
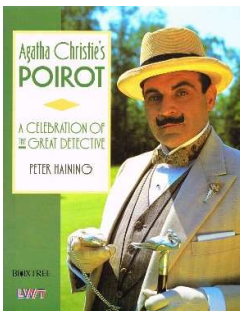
### Thursday 18 February

A very enjoyable hour earlier thanks to the Tuberous Sclerosis Association. A fund-raising event for a charity I hadn't heard about, but who obviously do good work. Thank you!

An hour with David Suchet - well chaired, and fascinating. I had forgotten that David did several years with the RSC - he told some lovely stories about his time with them. His first appearance was as Tybalt, and he had to start the season running across the stage, waving dagger and rapier, spoiling for a fight. Unfortunately he tripped over, and the rapier snapped in half. Thinking quickly he shouted "a sword, a sword" and an audience member replied "my kingdom for a sword". It was not a good start!

It was fascinating to hear about some film work, and we enjoyed seeing him in "The Importance of Being Ernest" a few years ago. Some lovely Poirot stories too, including the one about the mango I used a few days ago.

Julie has found me a collection of her Suchet and Poirot books - plenty to read. Trouble is, it is 9 pm and "Death in Paradise" is about to start. So many detectives, so little time!



### Friday 19 February

I was seven when man landed on the moon in 1969. Isn't it odd that, although Pops Barham has trained her father well, I automatically type "man". Neil Armstrong, "one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind". Then Buzz Aldrin, who was a bit smaller, said "it may be a small step for Neil, but it's a hell of a jump for the rest of us".

Please don't tell me that is wrong - my dad told me that's what he said, so it must be right. I remember the excitement and the hope for the future.

One day a woman will land on the moon. It was good to see the news earlier this week that the European Space Agency are recruiting for women and for people with disabilities to train as astronauts. No doubt my daughter has already applied. One of her friends commented that if the moon is made "access for all" before the Northern Line, she will be very angry (and rightly so).

Yesterday NASA's rover landed on Mars. I must admit I have not been following the mission, but I now follow Perseverance on twitter. In my lifetime we have gone from grainy TV pictures to a Martian rover that tweets - it's a funny old world (universe).

Would it be churlish of me to point out that the NASA Mars mission has cost a small percentage of our government's scheme for Track and Trace? I think there was also a moonshot mentioned there at some point. The difference is that one of them has worked.



### Saturday 20 February

For my day off today I have had a trip to Stirling (in my dreams). We have had a couple of holidays here - one when we hired a large student house with the Hunns when the kids were tiny, another when we had a bungalow on a farm and a variety of children and others came and went. Some lovely days out too.

The idea came from Danielle Burton, one of our fellow MA students, who reminded me that on 19 February 1594 Prince Henry Frederick was born in Stirling Castle. It was for his baptism that his father James VI had the Chapel Royal built at the castle. When James came to London as James I of England, his sons came with him. Henry died on 6 November 1612 and is buried in Westminster Abbey. His brother Charles succeeded to the throne. Danielle has written a blog about him -

<https://voyagerofhistory.wordpress.com/2019/10/27/henry-frederick-stuart-the-lost-prince/>

I started my youtube visits with ten minutes train spotting at the station in 1989, then climbed the hill to the Castle. Historic Scotland have done some good films about the Castle and the people who lived there. About ten years ago they re-opened after a major project to redecorate the Palace, with the wonderful Stirling Heads and amazing tapestries.

I have also fought the Battle of Stirling Bridge and visited the new Visitor Centre for the Battle of Bannockburn. It is full of all the digital whizzie technology that I failed to get my head round while doing our MA - when I visit I will need to be in the right frame of mind! A quick trip up the Wallace Monument, then I went down the Forth. Video of steam trains



crossing the railway swing bridge at Alloa, and video of the Kincardine bridge swinging as well. I ended my day at the gorgeous National Trust for Scotland village of Culross.

I have to work at 11.30 tomorrow morning - come and join us on Zoom or watch it later on youtube. Then I might have a trip across the Forth Bridges in the afternoon.



### Sunday 21 February

The Forth Bridges will have to wait as today is the 217th anniversary of the the world's first locomotive-hauled railway journey, which took place on 21 February 1804. Since it is a Sunday we had better have a biblical quote - Isaiah 6 "his train filled the temple ... and the house was filled with smoke."

Richard Trevithick was born in Cornwall in 1771 and was involved in the engineering of the mining industry from an early age. Trevithick's father was a mine captain (I spent ages trying to find a photo of Demelza Poldark and their mine), his father-in-law founded a firm which built the large pumping engines, starting with the low-pressure engines of the type invented by Thomas Newcomen. Matthew Boulton and James Watt, working in the Midlands, had patented high-pressure engines, and there was competition (and arguments) between them. This is about the limit of my steam-engine knowledge, so I will stop here!

In 1801 he built a high-pressure road carriage, the Puffing Devil, which came to dramatic end one day when they had left it outside while they were in the pub. The water boiled away, the engine overheated and the boiler exploded. In 1802 the Coalbrookdale Company in Shropshire built a railway engine for him, but little is known about it. Two years later he built an engine which ran on the Penydarren tramway in South Wales. It pulled 10 tons of iron, 5 wagons and 70 men the 9 miles distance of the tramway in 4 hours and 5 minutes, an average speed of approximately 2.4 mph. This picture is by Terence Cuneo.

Later the same year a similar loco was built for Wylam Colliery up in the North East, and in 1808 Trevithick demonstrated his own loco "Catch-me-who-can" on a circular track near Euston. Other people had more success with his engineering achievements than he did, and sadly he died penniless in 1833. He is buried in an unmarked grave in St Edmund's Burial Ground, East Hill, Dartford.

We have enjoyed his engines at the Ironbridge Museum in Shropshire, the Black Country Museum in Dudley, and I must have a pilgrimage to St Edmund's Burial Ground - I can justify the Edmund link! A replica of today's loco is in a museum on Swansea, so we'll add that to the list too.



### Monday 22 February

I'm not sure what to say about today's announcement. I said on our Zoom service yesterday that we will continue to Zoom as long as there are people wanting to watch. We also want to get the churches open as soon as possible, but we want to gather as safely as possible. It is not an easy balancing act.

I expect we will get more guidance later this week. Will the numbers allowed in church still be the same, will masks still be obligatory, when might we be able to sing? - there are lots of questions to be answered. PCC Standing Committees will be meeting next week. When we think re-opening is wise, we must get the churches clean (although as we have funerals in both of them this week/next week that will not be as hard as it was last time) and get Risk Assessments signed off by the Archdeacon. I'll keep you posted.

Today's "roadmap" has given some congregation numbers for weddings, and I will be in contact with all wedding couples over the next couple of days. One of them has already been in touch to move their wedding again - my 2022 diary is starting to fill up. There will be space for all - we will get there.

We decided to spend the evening watching "Romeo and Juliet", and went for the Baz Luhrmann version. I will blog about it tomorrow - [northernvicar.co.uk](http://northernvicar.co.uk).

I have decided that, however much I get wrong in the next six months, I will probably be more successful than Friar Lawrence. He marries Romeo and Juliet (two very young people) as part of a plan to end the civil strife in Verona, he spirits Romeo into Juliet's room and then out of Verona; and he devises the plan to reunite Romeo and Juliet through the deceptive ruse of a sleeping potion - basically he causes the death of both of them. BBC Bitesize describes him as "trustworthy, wise and compassionate" - obviously their political commentators learned their trade writing for Bitesize.

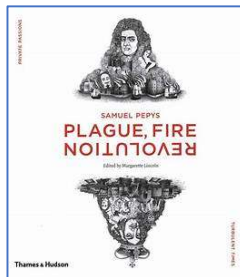


## Tuesday 23 February

Today is the 388th birthday of Samuel Pepys. I went to a fascinating exhibition about him at Greenwich five years ago - worth looking at [rmg.co.uk](http://rmg.co.uk). He lived through an amazing time - from the execution of Charles I to the Glorious Revolution. Through the Great Plague and the Fire of London.

The only thing missing from the Greenwich exhibition were copies of his diaries. If I remember correctly, it was part of his will that no book should ever leave his library (which you can visit at Magdalene College Cambridge). I also remember it says that they can never add to his library - which was a problem when a missing volume of diaries was discovered a few years ago. The librarian's answer was to buy the volume for a different section of the College library, then lend it to the Pepys Library on permanent loan.

Two appropriate quotes from his Diaries. For my beloved wife: "I know not how to abstain from reading." For the couples I have spoken to this morning as we try to re-arrange their weddings (again): "Strange to say what delight we married people have to see these poor fools decoyed into our condition."



## Wednesday 24 February

A funeral at St Matthew's gave me the opportunity to get the Broomstick Nativity figures back home. They have a corner in the garage, but it would be easier if I could get rid of the old mobility scooter. Surely someone ought to recycle those.

The poem by Howard Thurman seems appropriate, even if it doesn't include the line "When the broomsticks are back in the shed"

When the song of the angels is stilled,  
When the star in the sky is gone,  
When the kings and the princes are home,  
When the shepherds are back with their flocks,

The work of Christmas begins:  
To find the lost,  
To heal the broken,  
To feed the hungry,  
To release the prisoner,  
To rebuild the nations,  
To bring peace among people,  
To make music in the heart.

Meanwhile Selwyn prepares for Holy Week.



#### Thursday 24 February

Memo to self. If you arrange a Zoom Lent Group for 7.30 pm, do not log Julie onto a Zoom lecture at 7 pm on your account. If you do that, you will find that everyone trying to log into the Lent Group will not be able to. O well, we got there in the end! Thanks to those who joined us, and thanks for your patience.

An interesting discussion as to what faith means to us all. Why we enjoy our church going, why (sometimes) we don't enjoy our church going, why faith matters to us. Most of us find a fulfilment, as well as finding friendship and support. We talked about the story of which we are part. The Bible story, the story of Jesus, the story of the church, our own story.

One of the great pleasures of my life is taking funerals, and listening to the stories of those we are saying farewell to. I enjoy listening to stories as couples prepare for their weddings - how did they met, what they do, what hopes and plans have they for the future. There is huge pleasure as well when I visit a family before a Christening, at the start of a new story! One day all those pleasures will come back - organising a funeral on Zoom is not much fun. If you enjoy Facebook stories, share them. If you enjoy Zoom services, invite others to log on. When we open church buildings again, come and be part of the story. It is lovely when people contact me and tell me how their stories continue. Let's share our stories with each other. We are part of God's continuing story.





Friday 25 February

Our shields are activated. Thanks everyone at Babbington Hospital. My only complaint is that I am used to getting tea and biscuits in return for someone sticking a needle in my arm!

Both Church Magazines are out and are being/will be delivered. There are copies in Primrose's Book Shed next to the garage at the Vicarage if you don't subscribe. If you don't subscribe, why not? At £10 a year it is a bargain (plus another £10 if we have to post it). Get in touch if you'd like us to organise it.

Tomorrow I'll get copies onto the front page of the website [www.stedsandstmatts.co.uk](http://www.stedsandstmatts.co.uk) where you can read it for nothing - but you can, of course, make a donation via the big yellow buttons. If you always read the magazine from one church, you can also read the magazine from the other church (and see how much gets shared). We have produced them every month through the pandemic, although two or three have only been on the website - a huge thanks to John, Geoff, Fiona, Chris and the teams.

This month's magazine contains an 8 page leaflet with prayers and readings for Lent. You can also find that on the website - see Worship > Worship while closed. I hope it's useful. Church Magazines have been around for years - I wonder if anyone has researched their history. My dad used to edit the magazine for Arbury Road Baptist Church in the 1960s. He had a minister who never got his letter in on time, every month dad was on the phone as copydate came and went. One month he gave up, and printed the magazine with a blank front page. The letter arrived on time after that.



## Saturday 27 February

A morning in the garden. The front is looking pretty good, but the back still needs some work. A happy four hours cutting down lots and lots of brambles, and weeding the rhubarb and strawberry patch. Why is it that the rhubarb that has been here for years is happily sprouting, but the two extra plants I have put in over the last four years have disappeared without trace?

Now I've cut the brambles down I need to clear the roots out, then find things to plant. Today was the sort of beautiful morning when I would have loved to wander round a garden centre, or (even better) find a village hall plant sale (ideally a village hall where they do plants, coffee and cake).

The afternoon saw final preparations for tomorrow - we zoom at 11.30 - and then we settled down with some Shakespeare. I got the BBC versions of The Comedies. Let's watch "The Winter's Tale" says the Boss. Interesting definition of "comedy" - rather a lot of death ("Exit, pursued by a bear"). Bit worrying it is 40 years since they produced it - as the Bard wrote:

"I do feel it gone,  
But know not how it went"

On a happier thought, perhaps I could plant a Shakespeare garden

"Here's flowers for you; hot lavender, mints, savory, marjoram; The marigold."  
The Winter's Tale, Act 4, Scene 4. Anyone got any seeds or spare plants?



## Sunday 28 February

We get everything set up for a Zoom service. Julie's on one computer in the dining room, I'm on another in the study. Matt, our technical supremo, presses the right button, and Selwyn the Cat takes up his position on screen. The people watching the 44 other screens are far more interested in the cat than they are in the Vicar.

It didn't take long before Selwyn got bored - if anyone makes any comment that the cat wasn't the only one, there will be trouble. I always appreciate it when there are at least the same number of people at the end of a Zoom service as there were at the beginning. At least in real life you can see who is asleep, but the worse they can do now is turn me off.

My dad used to say the definition of "a preacher not to be missed" was "when you throw your hymn book at them, aim to kill". Dad used to enjoy his hymn book, he said it gave him something to read. That is why Anglicans love the Book of Common Prayer. When the

sermon is boring, you can read the Table of Kindred and Affinity - if you're not sure what I'm on about, please google it.

We ended the service with our tribute to NASA's Mars Mission. David Redfern played us out with "Life on Mars". I bet we were the only service in Diocese of Derby, even in The Church of England, that ended today's worship with David Bowie played on a Compton cinema organ. If you want theological justification, we had thought about Abraham looking up, counting the stars, and being assured that his descendants would be as many. No doubt he watched Mars as it circled overhead.

The service is at <https://youtu.be/RbGeYVaZlf0>

