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Focal Point

May 2020

Cover photograph of spring blossom in Bitton by Evie Heavens

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A special message from the Vicar



Dear friends,

Writing this on the second Sunday of Easter I have noticed over this weekend a mixture of national feeling and mood. There continues to be fear in all its manifestations, a genuine concern for wellbeing, many are beginning to realise the novelty of staying at home is beginning to wear off, but perhaps uppermost now is the sense of thanksgiving. I too am thankful, thankful to all those who in spite of these difficult and life-threatening circumstances are continuing to work to keep us safe. I am grateful for those in our own communities who have been shopping, phoning and supporting each other in different ways. The outpouring of gratitude is entirely right on the national stage and even more appropriate for those locally to be shown our appreciation.

The frustration of being in lockdown may have caused you to feel that you want or even need to do something practical to help, but for various reasons are not able to be out and about. You can of course stay in touch and make a few phone calls to others as a way of community support and in doing so keep your own wellbeing in

good shape. But we can also engage in prayer. Prayer is a ministry in itself as we hold others before God. The prophet Ezekiel explains that we stand in the breach between heaven and earth, between God and others to plead their case. The common word used in church for this type of prayer is "intercede", a word that literally means go between. Far from being an easy task, a prayer method, it involves entering into relationship; a disciplined relationship with God and a costly relationship with the world around us. The former archbishop Michael Ramsey suggested that intercession was, "standing before God with the people on your heart". This is really getting involved in others' lives, in the pain and frustration, in the suffering and sense of loss, but also in the joy and celebration and thanksgiving. Because it is to do with our heart it often produces tears and emotions in us that costs us. This is hard work, but it is vital work in our everyday and especially during these difficult times. If you feel you want or need to do something to help and have to remain indoors then I urge you to pray. Make a list of people you know or think of a hospital, care home or frontline service near you and hold them in your heart before God, it is such important work.

With my thoughts and prayers especially at this time.

Jeremy

Stay in, stay safe, protect the NHS and pray!

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Flowers on the Boyd Bridge responded well to the warm weather.

*Photo; Bryan Garlick**

After so many months of rain, the weather in April was glorious and the most sunny April ever recorded. But it was a very different April to any before as the whole country, indeed most of the world, locked down and restricted the movements of its citizens to reduce the spread of coronavirus. The direction was simple: stay at home and when you go out, which should only be for work, exercise, to get food, or other essential reason, you need to maintain a distance from others.

There have been benefits. The air is cleaner, there are fewer cars on the road and people out walking and exercising, (while keeping a safe distance) have been remarkably cheerful and polite. Dogs have been very well exercised.

Yet, no one should be in any doubt about the seriousness of the disease or the danger that it holds. Some of us will know of people, even loved ones, who have contracted the virus and either been very seriously ill or died.

Had there not been the lockdown it is almost certain that the casualty list would have been much higher and we can only applaud the efforts of the NHS and all of the professionals who have worked unstintingly and often without the full equipment they need to care for those affected. Many people are off work, and while some are furloughed and will be able to go back to work once this emergency is over, the fear is that many others will have no job to go back to.

Nevertheless, it is remarkable how far we have all been able to make changes in our lives and the way in which we operate. Many people, who just a couple of months ago had never heard of Zoom are now using it to contact friends and relatives. While our places of worship have been closed for Easter (something that has not happened since the 13th century), services have been recorded and placed online. Who ever thought that the Archbishop of Canterbury would broadcast an Easter Day Communion service from his own kitchen? Closer to home and the BVRA has rallied round providing book and jigsaw swaps for those needing some light relief and local traders have moved to home delivery.

This edition of Focal Point is the first, in 43 years, not have been printed and distributed. We apologise to those who did not receive a copy last month, but it proved impossible to reach every house in the village that subscribes. Consequently, we decided not to try again this month and make the magazine available as a pdf version on line. It has meant that we can be more generous in the use of colour, but in spite of the fact that many people now take a newspaper solely on line, it is never as good as a printed copy.

Ironically, this edition of Focal Point was originally planned to focus on a very different unique moment in our history for the 75th anniversary of VE Day in 1945. The pandemic has put a stop to much of the commemoration of the event, including the Church Road Street Party, which may be held later in the year; but we have manged to provide some commemoration in this edition, not least through the personal reminiscences of Ken Gibson.

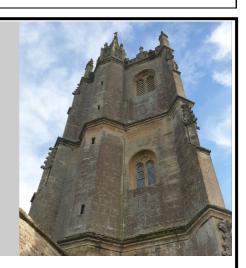
Finally, may word be said for Christian Aid? This month would have seen *Christian Aid Week* and an annual door to door collection that cannot now take place. Please give as generously as you can following the directions given in this edition.

Jim Heavens—Editor

- Churches & Services -



ST MARY'S CHURCH, BITTON



Vicar:

Rev Jeremy Andrew The Vicarage, Warmley **0117 967 2724** Ordained ministers: Rev Richard Humphrey Splinters, Kenilworth Drive Willsbridge 0117 949 0502

Rev Susie Bishop revsusiebishop.uk@gmail.com 07415 831488

Lay ministers:

Ken Gibson, 8 Church Road, Bitton 0117 932 2122

David Bailey, Westover, Bath Road, Bitton **0117 932 8949**

Churchwardens:

Pete Midgley 30 Kenilworth Drive, Willsbridge **0117 932 6898**

Jacqui Harris 29 St Anne's Drive, Wick 0117 937 4706

Services in May

Public services will not be held at St Mary's until restrictions due to the COVID 19 Pandemic have been lifted. Services will be advertised on our website when churches re-open.

This month's church calendar

Sunday 3 May FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Sunday 10 May FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Sunday 17 May SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Thursday 21 May ASCENSION DAY

Sunday 24 May SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Sunday after Ascension Day

Sunday 31 May PENTECOST (Whit Sunday)

From the Register

Funeral

7th April 2020 Elizabeth Nina McCarthy RIP





UPTON CHEYNEY United Reformed Church



There are no planned services during May

News from Upton Cheyney URC

The sun is shining, there are no clouds in the sky, we can hear the many and varied bird songs, the spring flowers are blooming. People are helping each other. People are listening, acting and caring. We are as one fighting this horrible threat. Pulling together we will get through this and soon be back together celebrating our love for one another, not taking for granted our many blessings. Stay strong and let this be our prayer.



Stuart Turner

When we lose our way lead us to a place
Guide us with your grace
To a place where we'll be safe
Don't count the days, make the days count.
Keep safe -from all of us in Upton Cheyney, Beach and Golden Valley

St Mary's Matters

When I wrote for the April magazine I suggested that things would have changed substantially by the time the magazine was delivered. I don't think I could really predicted the remarkable unprecedented changes which have in fact taken place. It is a matter of great regret that St Mary's, along with every church in the land, has had to close it's doors for the time being. Plans for a community archaeological dig down the side of the church have also had to be put on hold as "non-essential activity". This was to be carried out as part of the preparation for development of the church building. Let's



Pete Midgley

look forward to this exciting development happening once lockdown comes to an end.

St Mary's doors may be closed but that does not mean that St Mary's church is no longer in existence. The church family continues to worship and support one another and the surrounding community. Jeremy as been providing a short service and reflection each Sunday. The music group has been playing together and sharing video clips on WhatApp. Updates and links to services are available on the church website and Focal Point is available through the website as well. The house group communities and other groups are keeping in touch using Zoom. (I'd never heard of Zoom until all this happened!). Even age-old technology like the telephone is keeping people in touch with one another.

I know we will celebrate hugely once this is all over but in the meantime lets continue to keep safe and support one another in every way we can.



Services and Church Community move on line



Public acts of worship in churches may have been suspended, due to COVID 19, but that hasn't stopped services completely as our Ministry Team has moved services online, with the congregation being able to tune in on YouTube.

Our wonderful music group has also been experimenting with Zoom and producing music together collectively online.

Meanwhile David Harris has been maintaining morale and improving brain cells with his regular set of quiz questions.





Christian Aid Week

Staying at home, social distancing, WhatsApping, Zooming, Skyping, FaceTiming, washing your hands. Sounds familiar?

Covid—19 is a world-wide problem and we are globally interconnected. In the world's poorest countries the virus has the potential to be truly catastrophic, with knock-on effects that go way beyond national borders and boomerang back to the First World.

Amazingly we can do our bit on a global scale. How? By giving to Christian Aid who are working to prevent the spread of the virus by providing hygiene items and sanitation improvements for the poorest and most marginalised groups.

Christian Aid Week will be different this year. No-one will be delivering a donation envelope to your door but you can still give online

https://www.christianaid.org.uk/give-money/make-donation or by telephone 020 7523 2269

Meanwhile you can take a break from books, jigsaws and DVDs by tackling the weekly Christian Aid quiz which will be on their website https://www.christianaid.org.uk/christian-aid-week/daily-quiz from 10th to 16th May. AND there will be a SUPER SPECIAL BITTON QUIZ available if you email me on bennettsupton@gmail.com

Please give generously to protect the world's poorest people.

Nicola Bennetts



Social Distancing across the centuries?

The identity of the beautifully dressed lady from Willsbridge in who appeared in Church Road on Easter Sunday is unknown, but it was a fine spring day and just right for a stroll. Dressed in eighteenth century fashions for her walk she correctly observed this years' requirements for proper social distancing were in place for her conversation with Pam Booth. It turned out she was out celebrating Easter. Her next stop was the churchyard—hopefully no one taking their hour's exercise mistook her for the famous ghost of the *Grey Lady!*



Street Party 1945 in Bristol

Photo Alamy

Times like none other—VE Day 1945

This month was planned to be one of national commemoration of VE Day, Victory in Europe Day, in 1945, which saw the end of the Second World War in Europe. There were to be national events and the day of the May Day Bank holiday was moved to Friday 8th May – VE Day itself. In Bitton, plans were well advanced for a special street party in Church Road. Much of this has had to either be abandoned or postponed due to the restrictions in place to address the COVID 19 pandemic.

On page 22 of this month's edition, Ken Gibson gives a personal account of his memories of that day as a 10 year old schoolboy in Bath . For anyone who can remember that day, it must stand out in their memories as a day like no other.

It had been expected, of course, but not for long. It is often assumed that from D-Day nearly a year earlier, there was an inevitably of victory and peace soon afterwards, but that is not the

case. While it is difficult imagine how over a sustained period the Nazis could have held out against the weight and resources of the Allies, the last months of the war saw some of the bitterest fighting, some significant setbacks, and at home, no let-up in civilian casualties as the first unmanned missiles nicknamed "doodlebugs" hit southern England. The war in Europe could well have continued for many more months. Only in the last weeks did it become clear that the Nazis were beaten and the end of the war in Europe was coming. Churchill himself told the British people that they could enjoy at least a "brief moment of rejoicing", but the overwhelming feeling reported at the time was one of relief.

It is sad that so many of the celebrations have had to be postponed, but it still worth taking time on 8 May to commemorate and remember. Not just to recall a day of justified rejoicing but to remember too what that day symbolises. A day not just of victory, but one of peace and the prospect of a more peaceful Europe.



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The moment of victory and peace recalled

75 YEARS ON BOYHOOD MEMORIES OF VE DAY by Ken Gibson



Sadly the VE 75 Street Party in Church Road has to be postponed. But it has taken my thoughts back to 1945. With my parents, sister and brother I spent the war years in Bath. We lived on Wellsway just where Entry Hill forks left.

On Monday 7th May there was a buzz of excitement — could the war in Europe which had broken out just before my 4th birthday really be coming to an end? Just a year earlier I stood for hours at our gate watching an unending convoy of military vehicles heading up Wellsway for the south coast. And in September 1944 the sky was filled with a mass of planes towing gliders heading for Arnhem though of course no civilian knew their destination at the time.

Bedtime arrived and I wondered what the next day would bring. In earlier years on going to bed Christine and I had hoped that the sirens would sound an air raid warning because that meant the excitement of going down to the basement and crowding into the Anderson steel table shelter. It also signalled the production as if by magic of our favourite siren sweets.

All that was 2 or 3 years in the past but tonight before I got off to sleep there was a pounding on the stairs and Dad said 'Get your dressing gowns and slippers. It's on the news. The Germans have surrendered. We are lighting the Victory in Europe bonfire now'. Up Wellsway we headed to the Bloomfield Sports Club where for a week or more a bonfire had been growing in size. Crowds of cheering and clapping people surrounded the

fire as it went up in flames complete with a straw filled Adolf Hitler on top. Soon it was home to bed but with the promise of more celebrations the next day.

On Tuesday 8th May the streets of Bath were filled with street parties. Long tables down the middle were loaded with good things hoarded in store cupboards through the years of rationing. Now was the time to enjoy them.

But even in 1945 Wellsway, as the route for the frequent number 3 and 4 routes, was not ideal for a street party so our family went down into Bath and found our way to Queen Square. Not only the centre of the square (accessible thanks to its metal railings having been requisitioned for the war



Ken Gibson with his sister, Christine, in 1942

effort 6 years before) but all the surrounding streets were packed with people many in uniform of every description.

Loudspeakers protruded from a first floor window and at each invitation to cheer the Royal Family, Mr Churchill, Field Marshal Montgomery and our soldiers, sailors and airmen there came a mighty roar.

Music for dancing was dedicated to every hero including at one point 'This next number is for our gallant Russian allies'. Everyone joined in singing 'Pack up your troubles' and 'The white cliffs of Dover'. And the dance of the evening was the Hokey Cokey 'You'll put your left leg in etc etc'.

It was a night to remember – many thanks for sharing it with me. I look forward to another equally great celebration as we emerge from lock down when, as Vera Lynn and more recently the Queen have said, 'We'll meet again'.

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Graham Downing CBE South Gloucestershire and the First World War



Graham at the St Mary's Fete in 2018 welcoming visitors to the First World War Display in the church Photo—Becky Feather

Many readers of Focal point will be sorry to hear that Graham Downing died on 1 April at his home in Longwell Green. Graham had not been in good health for the past couple of years but he had come home from hospital earlier in the month. The death was not linked to Covid-19 and he passed away peacefully during that afternoon while watching TV. Our sympathy goes to Nancy, who is now alone in the house at this difficult time, and to their family.

Graham Downing served for many years in the British Army with the Royal Warwickshire Regiment. On his retirement he joined the Royal British Legion and became the National Chairman; for which service he was appointed CBE.

After that on retiring to Longwell Green Graham joined the Bitton and Oldland Branch of the Legion becoming Treasurer and the Poppy Appeal Organiser.

Continued overleaf



Graham with Dame Janet Trotter, the former Lord Lieutenant of Gloucestershire. *Picture courtesy of The Week In*

Over many years he assembled a large team of volunteers including many from Bitton who raised around £25,000 each year much of which flowed in through the Poppy table at ASDA which was manned 12 hours a day for 16 days each November. Graham's contribution will be hard to match but we are determined come November not to let him down. Meanwhile on behalf of all Graham's Legion friends we send our sympathy to Nancy and the family at this sad time.

Ken Gibson President

Family Café Church

The March Family Café Church was to have focussed on 'staying in touch'. Well, we're trying to and, thanks to the Music Group's mini podcasts, we've been able to remind FCC families of the songs we enjoy

Everyone in the FCC team looks forward to meeting again as soon as we can. Meanwhile the rainbow has taken on a new significance and we invite all the children to bring to that first restored service their

drawings and paintings as well as photos of their more inventive rainbows. (I've seen some made from ribbons and some from coloured stones. What else? How about a Lego rainbow?

Good wishes from the FCC team

St Mary's Annual Parish Meeting Postponed

St Mary's Annual Parish Meeting due to be held on 9 April has been postponed, as have elections to the Parochial Church Council (PCC). PCC Secretary, Alison Wride, has pencilled in 28 September for the meeting to be held in the hope that it will be safe to do so by then.

The last meeting of the PCC took place on 17 February. Some committees have continued to sit using Zoom to keep in touch.

















Profile—Barbara Merritt

In the fabric of Bitton

It is difficult to think of Bitton life as a community or the church community without thinking of Barbara Merritt. If you want to know why something is as it is, or what happened when, Barbara is the person to ask. Her recall of people and events is extensive and her craftsmanship particularly in textiles is second to none. Her knowledge of Bitton life comes as result of both living in Bitton herself and her family's long association with the village which now dates back to the early twentieth century when her great grandfather came to work at the Mill.

Early Life

Barbara herself has lived in Bitton since she was 14 when she and her immediate family moved from Bridge Farm in Carson's Road, Mangotsfield (her grandfather had fancied being a famer but the farm was "ugly" as she described it) and her father managed to escape. By then the family home was at 131 High Street. Her Great Aunt Alice

Merritt lived in the house, and as well as being a pillar of the community and running the Sunday School, she looked after her elderly parents. It was a family tradition then, that the youngest daughter stayed at home and looked after her parents and then was left the house. Barbara's Uncle George rented the house out to the family until her Aunt died. They then purchased the house for £2500.

Barbara went to school in Mangotsfield, she was driven to school but then had to walk home across Rodway Hill Common, which had a bad reputation, but she was strangely never told why.

She left school at 16 and went to work in an office, which did not suit her. She then got a job in Home Accessories on Park Street where her creative talents were put to good use, making silk lampshades and fitting out restaurants, such as the Berni Inn chain. Her boss had an interesting way with language and was known for the odd word. She particularly remembers demonstrating sewing machines and his advice to not use black thread on white fabric as it never looks straight, but to use pink thread 'an optical delusion'. He also one day told her that he 'was very worried because everyone was living under the threat of the nuclear detergent!'

Barbara spent two summers in Germany in Rudesheim working in a café and learning German. She picked up the language quickly and many Germans thought she was Dutch. She really enjoyed herself there but decided to come back to live in Bitton.

Changes in Bitton

Barbara has noticed many changes in Bitton over the years. There used to be three factories in the village. The mill, originally a paper mill in 1930's made car seats and suitcases in 1960's and 1970's. Two or three hundred people worked there day and night, and on Friday afternoon at 4pm used to go and parp their car horns on the way home. Stothert and Pitt had a factory in Harrington Close and there was an engineering factory in Baron's Close, making castings for aeroplanes. As a result, the area was much more working class than it is now.

She also remembers that there were many more shops in the High Street. These included: the post office run by Mrs Powell and Mrs Bolsom who had a delicious delicatessen, the newsagents which became the post office, a butchers, a hardware store which became 'Bitton As Nu'

after the flood in 1968, where people could sell their clothes on commission, run by Hazel Richards. The White Hart and the Kings Arms Stores were very popular.

Bitton Celebrities

The Bitton celebrity was the writer Dick King Smith who lived at Bitton Hill House. His father Captain Ronald King Smith, who received DSO twice, was the church secretary. She also remembers the succession of vicars during her life in Bitton. The first was Mr Jenkins who came to Bitton in the 1940s and stayed for nearly 20 years. He was, as she remembers quite susceptible to the odd glass and with the congregation assembled once had to be fetched from the Swan for a christening. On another notable occasion he even fell out of the pulpit. However, his successor but two, David Holloway who was appointed in the 1970's she remembers with particular affection. He was, she recalls, extremely popular, a good organiser who set up the many committees which are still used by the church today and made the decision to establish Focal Point as a joint venture between the three Bitton Churches. Barbara remembers using the Gestetner machine to reproduce Focal Point magazine, which was immaculately typed out by Sybil Watts, who used to be a legal secretary.

Pillar of the Community

Barbara has followed her family tradition in supporting St Mary's, making sure things happen particularly at the less popular services. She was churchwarden for six years and today has a continuing role as a deputy churchwarden. Before that she followed in the footsteps of her great Aunt and ran the Sunday School for many years in its various forms ending in the Sunday Funday. She is still much involved in its successor, Family Café Church, and one of the reasons it is so popular is that she is so inventive and clever in designing the arts and crafts that the children take part in. Barbara is modest – pointing to the team effort and that many of the ideas are not hers but Sarah Craddock's. No-one, however, who has seen Barbara's stall at the Church Fete each summer could be in any doubt about her talents and her flair at turning fabrics into useful and beautiful creations

Sadly, in the lockdown Barbara has not been seen around St Mary's – no one has. Let's hope things return to normal soon and Barbara will be back playing a key role both at St Mary's and in Bitton.

Online fundraiser seeks to raise money for Dorothy House

Saskia Hawking, of Manor Farm, Upton Cheyney has launched a special fundraiser for Dorothy House hospice. Like many charities that rely on shops and other outlets the charity has been hit hard by the Coronavirus lockdown as its shops have remained closed.

The charity has a special place for Saskia who is raising money in memory of Lynda Warren and has amassed some exciting prizes for the raffle which is to be drawn at Manor Farm on 20 May and live-streamed as it takes place on Instagram.

Prizes include a Weekend Glamping in Bell Tent, a Balloon Ride across Bath, a Magnum of Cannonball Cabernet Sauvignon, Fussells' Goody bag, Marshfield Ice Cream and some online yoga sessions. A strip of tickets cost £5.

Further details below.



Online Charity Raffle

THERE ARE 16 AMAZING PRIZES TO BE WON!

Here's How to Win

- 1) Head to our charity page:
 - http://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/dorothyhouseonlineraffle
- 2) Donate £5 to buy a strip of raffle tickets, each donation is worth 5 tickets. Buy as many as you like.
- 3) Make sure you leave your full email address with your donation so that we can contact you if you win a prize!

100% of your money will go to the Dorothy House Charity. The raffle will be drawn on 20th May. This will be live streamed from @MANORFARMUPTONCHEYNEY Instagram

GOOD LUCK!!

News from Bitton WI

This month my news from Bitton WI is very different. I usually write about the previous month's meeting, recalling the talk given by the guest speaker, but as everyone is aware we are not allowed to gather for meetings and the WI is no exception.

It is very strange that most of us are confined in our homes for our own safety, and for the safety of our families and friends.

I know that I could not cope without the help of modern technology. I am lucky, as I expect most of you are, to have the help of family, friends and neighbours.

I know that in the words of the song We Will Meet Again, that when the isolation period ends, we will all meet together again, hopefully in the church hall, unfortunately I do not know when, but I am sure one day we will meet again.

Please stay indoors and keep safe, until we are together again.

Lyn Coles





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Message from the South Gloucestershire Community Engagement Team

The police have stopped all Beat Surgeries and external forums, we are still conducting hi-visibility patrols, we have reduced the number of stations we have open and would encourage members of the public to contact us by email when it isn't urgent.

For the most up-to-date information please refer to this website:

https://www.avonandsomerset.police.uk/coronavirus-covid-19-policing-response/?utm_source=short-url&utm_medium=url&utm_campaign=covid19

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April's quiz answers

Last month's quiz was on Spanish words adapted into the English language. The correct answers are:

1. Alligator; 2. Armadillo; 3. Canyon; 4. Cargo; 5. Cockroach; 6. Fiesta; 7. Guerrilla; 8. Mojito; 9. Mosquito; 10. Oregano; 11. Paella; 12. Patio; 13. Renegade; 14.Rodeo; 15. Salsa; 16. Siesta; 17. Vanilla; 18. Vigilante; 19. Yucca; 20. Zapateado.

20 Correct answers were received from Sue & Rod Nethercote so they are this month's winners

19 correct answers from: Sue & Alan Murtagh, Frank FitzGibbon and team, and Mary Younie.

Apologies to Sue & Alan Murtagh who I missed from last month's list of correct answers.

The May Quiz

The answers in this month's quiz are all colours or shades

No. Clue

- 1. First name of Ms Heard who was married to Johnny Depp for 2 years (A)
- 2. A liquid that runs through veins (B)
- 3. Low feeling or genre of music (B)
- 4. Becoming red in the face as a result of shame or embarrassment (B)
- 5. An area of east-central France, a wine (B)
- 6. Metallic element discovered in 1739 by Georg Brandt (C)
- 7. You can buy Single, Double or Clotted in most supermarkets (C)
- 8. Jeans are traditionally this colour (D)
- 9. Tall, wading bird often stands on one leg (F)
- 10. Flowering shrubs and trees in the evening primrose family (F)
- 11. Plants of the pea family, having pinnate leaves and clusters of flowers (I)
- 12. Battle between France and Austria that began in 1859 (M)
- 13. A herb or a soft or hard confection often eaten after a meal (M)
- 14. A condiment made from seeds from a plant of the same name (M)
- 15. A fighting force mainly at sea (N)
- 16. A small oval drupe, eaten as a relish and used as a source of oil (O)
- 17. A round fruit, often made into juice and often served at breakfast
- 18. A male bird that has a tail which can be spread like a fan (P)
- 19. The title of the Kaiser Chiefs' song (R)
- 20. Surname of 'Blue Peter' presenter Zoe (S)

Name:	Please send your answers to Carolyn
	Russell at Martin House, Church Road,
Contact:	Bitton (the yellow house) or email
	mrscrussell@icloud.com by 15 May



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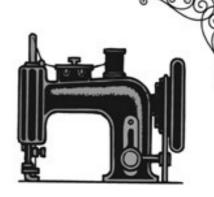
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