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Focal Point

Bitton Churches' Magazine

February 2021

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*Deadline for the March
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0117 932 2122

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Pete Midgley
30 Kenilworth Drive, Willsbridge
0117 932 6898

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

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

Services in February

It is likely that the COVID-19 pandemic will still prevent us from entering St Mary's Church throughout February. We will continue to share worship on Sundays and also Midweek services on Wednesdays through video links which will appear on our Website:

www.stmarysbitton.org.uk

This month's church calendar

Tuesday 2 February

THE PRESENTATION OF CHRIST
Candlemas

Sunday 7 February

Second Sunday before Lent

Sunday 14 February

Sunday next before Lent

Wednesday 17 February

ASH WEDNESDAY

Sunday 21 February

First Sunday in Lent

Sunday 28 February

Second Sunday in Lent

From the Register

Funeral

5th January Poppy Harris





UPTON CHEYNEY United Reformed Church



It is unlikely that any services will take place during February due to Coronavirus restrictions and the need to maintain safety. As soon as possible, information will be provided.

Focal Point Subscriptions

The annual subscription for Focal Point remains at £10 for 12 copies.

Subscriptions for 2021 will cover 12 monthly issues to January 2022, inclusive and may be paid now or collected with the February distribution. Payment may be made by cash or cheque payable to
Bitton Churches' Magazine.

If you have not yet paid your 2021 subscription, please do so to your distributor before the end of this month.

Lent 2021

Ash Wednesday

Lent begins with Ash Wednesday on 17 February and the Midweek service on that day will be our Benefice Ash Wednesday service for 2021.

Lent Course

In the 5 succeeding weeks there will be a Lent Course based on our home groups which have continued to function online through Zoom during the Pandemic.

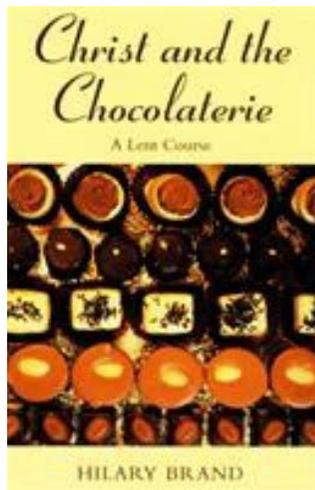
This innovative and lively Lent Course entitled 'Christ and the Chocolaterie' is based on the story and characters of the Oscar winning film 'Chocolat' from the bestselling novel by Joanne Harris.

In five sessions it opens up the life changing themes that Lent presents to us and is well suited to our informal group sessions on Zoom. All participants will have a copy of the course booklet and arrangements will be made to ensure that we all have an opportunity to view the film in our own homes.

Probably we all have more time available at this moment and if you would like to join in this Lent project then you will be most welcome at any of the groups. Just phone the contact name and we will be glad to explain the plan in more detail.

Contacts for the groups are –

- | | |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| • Wednesday morning group | David Bailey 932 8949 |
| • Wednesday evening group | Ken Gibson 932 2122 |
| • Thursday evening group | Pete Midgley 932 6898 |



St Mary's Matters



Pete Midgley

One of the biggest challenges of the last twelve months has been making decisions about when and how to open (or close!) the church building. This has been a roller coaster ride, not made any easier by the failure of the heating system. The problem was detected just before Christmas as a drop in pressure in the circulating hot water.

After extensive investigation engineers discovered that this has been caused by corrosion of the underground pipes leading from the boiler house into the church, with consequent leaking of water from the system. These pipes have been excavated and as I write we are anticipating that the necessary repairs will be carried out in early February and the heating system re-commissioned.

Repair of the heating system will be an important piece of maintenance work and completing it will mean that getting back into church will be much more pleasant once it happens. Nevertheless, decisions about when to reopen the church will remain focussed on keeping everyone safe as the COVID – 19 virus continues to present a challenge to all of us. With cases coming down and mass immunisation going on we should all remain hopeful and look forward to getting together for worship in 2021.

Meanwhile we continue to meet as much as possible. House groups are still going on via Zoom. Lent will soon be upon us, with Ash Wednesday on 17th February and the Lent groups this year will be using the film 'Chocolat' as the basis of their discussions. If you'd like to join one of the groups please contact myself, Ken Gibson or David Bailey. There are also Zoom prayer meetings on the evening of the first Tuesday of the month, and a virtual prayer breakfast at 9am on the third Saturday of the month. Get in touch with me if you would like to be sent the links.

David Bailey

Saint Valentine's Day



**Statue of Saint Valentine
in Terni, Italy**

Have you had more than enough updates on the COVID pandemic and vaccination statistics? Then sit down, relax and read about a topic which makes the world go round!

The Feast of Saint Valentine was thought to be established in AD 496 by Pope Gelasius in honour of Saint Valentine of Rome who died on 14th February 269.

This date, February 14th, has been fixed by the Western Christian Church to celebrate love and affection. In the Anglican Church it is celebrated by the Feast of Saint Valentine.

Saint Valentine's Day became associated with romantic love in the 14th and 15th centuries when notions of courtly love (nobility, chivalry and all that jazz) flourished apparently by association with the lovebirds of Spring.

The first recorded association of Valentine's Day with romantic love is believed to be in the Parliament of Fowls (1382) by Geoffrey Chaucer, a dream vision.

Focal Point, February 2021

*For this was on Saint Valentine's Day
When every bird comes there to choose his match
(of every kind that men may think of)
And that so huge a noise they began to make
That eark and air and tree and every lake
Was so full, that not easily was there space
For me to stand, so full was all the place*

In the 18th century, in the UK, Saint Valentine's Day grew into an occasion in which couples expressed their love for each other by presenting flowers, confectionary and Valentine cards.



**An early
20th century
Valentine**

Focal Point, February 2021

We are all familiar with today's symbols of love. The heart, the historical centre of our emotions and , of course, Cupid, the god of desire, love and affection. In Italy, Saint Valentine's keys are given to lovers "as a romantic symbol and an invitation to unlock the giver's heart". In Slovenia Saint Valentine, or Zdravko, is one of the saints of Spring, the Saint of good health and the patron of beekeepers!

In William Shakespeare's Hamlet (1600) Valentine's Day is mentioned

*Tomorrow is Saint Valentine's Day
All in the morning betime
And I a maid in the window
To be your Valentine
Then up he rose and donn'd his clothes
And dupp'd the chamber door
Let in the maid, that out the maid
Never departed more*

The verse "Roses are red..." comes from Edmund Spenser's epic The Faerie Queene (1590)

*She bath'd with roses red and violets blew
And all the sweetest flowres that in the forrest grew*

The modern Valentine's Day poem, however, dates back to a collection of English nursery rhymes of 1784

*The rose is red, the violet's blue
The honey's sweet and so are you
Thou art my love and I am thine
I drew thee to my Valentine
The lot was cast and then I drew
And Fortune said it should be you*

So, on February 14th, if you receive a greeting card which looks very attractive but is unsigned, use your imagination (the handwriting may be very familiar) and open your heart to the one you love.

David Bailey

Lay Minister

An invitation to the Benefice Prayer Meetings on Zoom

In non-COVID times there are two occasions each month when we are invited to come together and pray – one at the Vicarage at 7.30pm on the first Tuesday of the month and the other, which moves around our 3 churches, at 9.00am on the third Saturday of the month when we have breakfast and then pray.

Both these meetings have moved to Zoom which is working really well and this is an invitation to join in either or both of the February Zooms:

Tuesday 2 February at 7.30pm

Saturday 20 February at 9.00am

The link inviting us to these meetings will come out by email from Pete Midgley shortly before the day fixed for the meeting and it will also be posted on the St Mary's website www.stmarysbitton.org.uk in the same way as the links to Sunday and midweek services are posted.

The pattern of the meetings is that we have a period of chat when we can mention things we want to pray about whether close at hand or around our country and indeed the world. This can include news on our mission links in Brazil, Uganda and Gaza. Then we have a time of prayer. Short prayers are encouraged and various people speak prayers. However there is no pressure to do this as it is of equal value to pray as we listen to others. There will also be times when we are all praying silently and no one is speaking. Whether our prayer is a thank you or a request, Jesus has assured us that God wishes us to bring our prayers to him.

Candlemas—the forgotten festival



**The Presentation in the Temple—Altarpiece c. 1470.
The Master of Liesborn**

Courtesy The National Gallery, London

40 days after Christmas comes the Feast of Candlemas. Largely unobserved these days, it has developed in sometimes bizarre ways.

The Church of England calendar still uses an old and traditional title for t=2 February, that of *Candlemas*. By tradition, this was the day on which the candles for the year were brought into the church and blessed -a mass for candles.

Focal Point, February 2021

Today, as always, it more properly recalls the day when Mary and Joseph brought their infant child to the temple in Jerusalem. The story of the visit to the temple in Jerusalem is told in the second chapter of Luke's Gospel. Joseph and Mary performed the rite of purification by making a sacrifice of two turtle doves and two young pigeons. Afterwards, they took the infant Jesus into the temple itself where his presence caused a stir. Both Simeon, a holy man, and Anna immediately recognised the child as the Messiah Simeon declared that he was now happy to depart the world in peace; his words are those sung as the *Nunc Dimittis* in every evensong.

The events described in the story bring the Christmas period to a conclusion, as the prophesy and birth of the Messiah are confirmed in the holiest place in Judaism, as is the promise of his greatness to come. In earlier times the day would have been not only holy but a day of feasting. In some ways a festival of light as the candles were not only blessed but lit.



Like many festivals in the church, it seems likely that it supplanted an earlier pagan festival on 2 February. The day falls mid-way between the winter solstice and the spring equinox. A pagan festival of *Imbolc* was celebrated by Celts in Britain and Ireland and is often linked to the worship of a goddess called Brigid and celebrated with fire.

So why has it become so forgotten?

Probably because Shrove Tuesday usually falls in February and having two celebratory days (Pancake Day/ Mardi Gras) so close together may have just been too competitive. The last gasp of excess before Lent was always going to win out. But not every country takes the same view. In France, the day is known as *La Chadeleur* and is celebrated by the eating of crepes. In Liechtenstein and Luxembourg, the day is a public holiday. In Spanish speaking countries *Candelaria* is celebrated as a feast day. In some traditions, Christmas decorations are left in place until Candlemas.

The date also seems to have become connected with some superstitions that in themselves have shaded out the original purpose of the festival.



According to some country customs, it is bad luck to bring snowdrops (which also have a common name of Candlemas Bells) into the house before this date, for example. In Germany, in particular the actions of badgers and hedgehogs were watched, and, if either emerged on that day from the earth and the sun gave them a shadow, winter was still not done.

It was a tradition that Dutch (or German) settlers in Pennsylvania took a cross the Atlantic and, with the absence of hedgehogs and badgers on the American east coast, attention turned to the groundhog and thus *Groundhog Day* was born.

Today, the main event centres on the Pennsylvanian town of Punxsutaney where a groundhog known as Phil (a local celebrity who appeared in the 1993 film *Groundhog Day*) makes an annual television appearance. Phil lives in climate controlled habitat adjoining the local library and such is the importance of his annual predictions of the weather, they receive national attention.

This may all seem a long way from either a pagan festival of fire or a Christian celebration of the fulfilment of the prophecy of Christ's birth. But Candlemas should still be seen as a day of hope—a light shining in the darkness of winter and the promise of greater things to come.

Fête Date set for Saturday 11 September



**The famous Bitton
Egg Throwing
Competition
brings the fête to
its final climax.**

Focal Point, February 2021

Planning is already underway for this year's Church Fête. The Fête Committee hope that by September pandemic restrictions will be such that this popular outdoor event can bring the whole village together.

They hope to have many of the regular features, including the Dog Show, games, stalls, food drink and entertainment, culminating as always with the raffle draw and the famous Bitton Egg Throwing Competition. It is an event not to be missed.

Already booked for an appearance are *The Companions of the Longbow* and we have also booked a special classic car display.

Detailed planning will get underway in April, but this is the moment to make sure that the date is firmly fixed in your diary for 2021.



First one side...



Photos by Becky Feather

then the other!



A crane of two halves

Sales Office moves out as Bitton Mill nears completion,

After three years the Linden Homes Sales Office had become a marker on the High Street, at the corner of the newly renamed Sommerville Way. Now with all of the units sold and most work completed it has been lifted off the site and taken away on the back of two low loaders.

The 115 new homes have brought new residents to the village , and once the restrictions of COVID 19 are behind us we hope that we can welcome some of the new arrivals to more community events.

Focal point has picked up a number of new readers in Bitton Mill and we hope to expand our numbers in 2021.

Bitton History Group

THE LONS

and the people who lived there

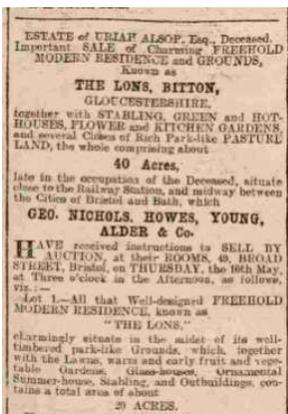


Part 3

The Bitton Parish History Group has continued to investigate the history of The Lons or Lons Court as it is now known, and the people who lived there.

After the departure of the Alsops, the house was on the market for some time, but it failed to sell and the next family, the Nicholetts who took up residence in 1909, did so as tenants. They were, however, both wealthy and well to do. Edward Nicholetts was the manager of Stuckey's Bank in Bristol and appears to have had wide business interests. During the time he was at The Lons, Stuckey's become incorporated into the Westminster Bank. His wife, Ellen, also come from a privileged background and their life at The Lons with their five children appears to have been lavish, although relatively moderate for the Edwardian wealthy.

Born in 1864, Edward had joined reservist companies in his youth, but was too old for military service when the First World War broke out in 1914. Nevertheless, he helped set up the Bristol Volunteer Regiment and continued with military charity work after the war ended. Ellen was also active in the local community undertaking charity work and was herself an avid golf player. It seems likely that their joint business and social interests meant that the house and its 20 acres of grounds was used for regular entertaining. Unfortunately, there is little record of such activities, but the researchers have found a number of advertisements for servants, some sounding quite desperate, placed by Ellen Nicholetts during this period. They also identify that by the 1920s, The Lons had its own telephone.



1906—Auction notice in The Bath Chronicle



Inside the Bristol Branch of Stuckeys Banking Co around 1909
Photo courtesy NatWest Group Heritage Hub

The family left in 1927, moving to Bath. Ellen unfortunately died a few years later although Edward lived on to see his 90th year, before passing away in 1954. One of his children, Gilbert, gained a national reputation as a flying ace, gaining a world record for long distance flying (5,309 miles in 57 ½ hours) in 1933. He had joined the newly formed Royal Air Force from the navy in 1921 and was by then a flight lieutenant. He spent a lot of time between the wars with the RAF in the Far East. In 1942 he was taken prisoner by the Japanese. Remaining in the RAF after the war he rose to the rank of Air Marshall. Knighted by the Queen in 1956, Air Marshall Sir Gilbert Nicholetts retired from the RAF in 1959 and died in Wareham, Dorset in 1983.

Following the departure of the Nicholetts, the Alsops again tried to sell the property. By now it would have been in some need of modernisation and its two Turkish baths would no longer have been seen as the last word in luxury. The house took two years to sell, to an architect and builder, Charles Thornton Hall. Charles was a Welshman, from Prendergast in west Wales, who had joined his uncles building firm. He was married to Gwladys and had two children when the family moved to Bristol when Charles oversaw a building contact in Kingswood.

Their move to The Lons took place shortly after their eldest child Morwyth had been fatally killed in a car accident at the Cold Ashton crossroad. Whether this tragedy was the spur to the move is not known. Morwyth is buried in Warmley Churchyard. Also unclear is the extent of the work to The Lons itself, but the property was sold again in 1931 and quite quickly, which may suggest it was in a better state of repair. Unfortunately, the family do not appear to have regained the same level of grandeur and Charles' business interests did not prosper greatly in the years afterwards. He lived until 1959, his wife died a year later.



Air Marshal Sir Gilbert Edward Nicholetts

Walter Stoneman, bromide print, 1954
NPG x186838 © National Portrait Gallery, London

Bitton Parish History Group

Research on this part of the History of The Lons was undertaken and described by Mike and Annette Rothwell in an extensive set of papers.

The full sections of The Lons History are available online at the email address below.

Mike Gates is also happy to provide printed copies for readers without access to the internet.

Contact: Mike Gates, Secretary, 0117 932 8777
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Brenda Claxton

The joy of bells and bell ringing

The air is clean and bright as only early morning air can feel. I can smell the scent of grass and sunlight and early morning. This crispness, sharp in my nostrils, takes me by surprise and fills my consciousness. It is as if I am surrounded by a new dimension which enters and fills my body and wakes up my senses.

I am about four years old and this is my earliest memory, living in South London.

Later, a few years later, by which time I am now around eight years old it is again early morning. Now I live in Combe Martin, Devon, evacuated and residing in a Catholic Convent during the war years. This time the early morning bright coldness is accompanied by the sound of pealing bells which drifts in the air above my head, floating around almost as if the music is clouds. I feel and hear the resonance of the pealing bells. I find myself surprised by their clarity, as if they are living beings.

I experience a surge of joy. It seems as if the music of the bells is alive. They and I are all part of the living universe, we are one.

Alongside this pervading sensory memory comes the knowledge that their tolling brings with it a celebration of the end of the War. The end of World War 2. A celebration carried on the wind. I have no idea where it is the bells are ringing. I can see no church spire but their call is insistent. The War is over. Life will again be free for us to live as we want. And for me to go home.

Some years ago I joined the bell ringers in Bitton Church belfry to try my hand at bell ringing. To ring the bells I had to become a living part of the thick rope which disappeared into a large hole above my head, where I knew it was attached to the bells in the belfry.

Focal Point, February 2021

My body moved in unison with the rope and the sound of bells ringing moved my soul. We were one. That is how the magic of bell ringing works. This experience remains with me, is part of my inner self, just as the scent of early morning and the melody of bells drifting across the landscape did when I was a small child.

Bell ringing is a living moving experience whose essence doesn't change over the centuries. This sense has clearly endured throughout the life of our ancient church of St. Marys in Bitton right into the present twenty first century.

I look forward to a time when I will hear the sound of the bells ringing as it wafts out of the valley as a Celebration of the end of the present Coronavirus crisis.



The bells of St Mary's. Most church bells in England are currently silent as social distancing is impossible in a bell chamber.

Eggs Enterprise

Since the start of the first lockdown in March, Peter Harris has launched his own enterprise providing eggs to the local community. The eggs come from a farm in High Littleton where his older brother is employed. The eggs are freshly laid and delivered to your door. Sold as a box of six or a tray of thirty, Peter says the price is very reasonable. A tray of 30 eggs is £5 and a box of 6 costs £1. Eggs are delivered free, locally, to your doorstep. Peter is open for orders by phone or text to 07848 012783



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Photo: Becky Feather

Snow comes to Bitton

It wasn't the *Beast from the East* but when Bitton residents woke up on 24 January, they found the village in a light covering of snow, albeit of a wet variety.

Many made the most of the winter wonderland, sliding, tobogganing and well—doing what you do in snow.

While it lasted, Bitton was even more of a picture postcard than usual.

David Holley

We are sorry to report the death of David Holley, who died at home on Monday 11th January. David played the organ in the three churches for many years and until recently worked with his wife, Suzie, in their shop in Bath. A full appreciation will be given in next month's edition.

Our condolences, thoughts and prayer are with Suzie, their son Julian and other members of the family.

News from Bitton WI

It is hard to believe that we are already in the second month of 2021, and that we are also in the third national lockdown due to COVID-19. It seems a long time ago that we met in St Mary's church hall to enjoy a talk by Clive Brett, about Remap a rather special charity which made, and adapted equipment for people with disabilities.

We were looking forward to a packed programme for 2020 with Bitton WI hosting the Royal Chase group events for the year. The summer outing in August was to be at the Blue Stone Vineyard, and the Christmas carol service was to be held at St Mary's with all WIs within the Royal Chase group to be invited. Unfortunately none of these events could take place, but we hope to be able to rearrange all of the things we had planned when we are able to resume meetings.

I do not think anyone thought, when we wished one another goodbye on March 9th that we would not be meeting again for over a year. A year later we still do not know when we will all be able to be together again. The only hope we have at the moment is the vaccine, and hopefully when we have all been vaccinated it will be safe to resume our meetings.

At the moment during this latest lockdown, we will have to keep busy with knitting, jigsaws, reading and going for a daily walk. I am sure many members have (unlike me) been baking, and this month I have Sheila Jennings to thank for the recipe of Almond Flan.

I am sure you will enjoy making and eating Sheila's Almond Flan, and I hope it will not be too long before we can enjoy the refreshments at the end of the WI meeting. Hopefully life will be back to normal sometime this year, so please stay safe and take care.

Lyn Coles



ALMOND FLAN

Ingredients

Pastry:

5oz. flour
3oz. butter
1 egg yolk
teaspoon of sugar
water to mix

Filling:

8oz. mincemeat
1 apple peeled, cored
and sliced
1 tablespoon of brandy
sprinkle nutmeg
sprinkle mixed spice

Topping:

2oz. butter
2oz. ground rice
4oz. caster sugar
2oz. ground almonds
1 egg white whisked
small teaspoon almond
essence

Method:

- 1). Make pastry and line a flan case
- 2). Mix filling ingredients and spread in case
- 3). Cream butter and sugar and stir in almonds
- 4). Whisk egg white and fold into mixture, spread over mincemeat
- 5). Bake 40 - 45mins at 350 degrees

The flan freezes well. It can be served with cream or is a lovely dessert.



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January's Quiz Answers

Last month's quiz was anagrams of cheeses.

The correct answers are:

(1) Burrata; (2) Parmesan; (3) Cheddar; (4) Gouda; (5) Roquefort; (6) Gorgonzola; (7) Stilton; (8) Camembert; (9) Mozzarella; (10) Mascarpone; (11) Lancashire; (12) Appenzeller; (13) Manchego; (14) Emmental; (15) Wensleydale; (16) Halloumi; (17) Red Leicester; (18) Havarti; (19) Port Salut; (20) Ricotta.

Correct answers were received from:

Frank FitzGibbon and co.; Sue & Rod Nethercote; Mary Younie; The Booths; Anne Burmester; Alan & Sue; Ros & Charles Knight; Sheila Read and family; Denise & Paul Sebastianelli; Richard & Stacey Howlett; Janet Hillier; Carolyn Betts; Jan & Diane; The Wakefield family; Margaret & Bryan Garlick; Pearl & Debbie Evans.

This months winner is:

Carolyn Betts

Apologies to the following, whose correct entries were missed last month: Denise & Paul Sebastianelli; Alan & Sue Murtagh; Jan & Diane.

The February Quiz

This month's quiz is on Great Novels, they are all 1 word answers and I have given the initial(s) and the length to help you

No.	Initial & length	Clue
1.	O 7	Tourist city in central Florida
2.	P 10	Getting someone to do something
3.	C 5	An accident that you may have to involve your insurance company in
4.	D 9	Natives of the capital of Ireland
5.	M 6	A feeling of distress or discomfort
6.	S 5	Power from the sun
7.	F 7	Being able to do as you want
8.	J 4	The top and bottom mouth structures that holds the teeth
9.	T 8	Evening between daylight and darkness
10.	T 13	Collecting locomotive numbers as a hobby
11.	M 9	A native of the county of Wiltshire
12.	S 5	Extinguish a candle
13.	R 4	A space in a home, often with 4 walls
14.	A 9	Making amends for a wrong or an injury
15.	I 7	A large out of control fire
16.	R 9	The part that is left
17.	C 8	Niece of Sir Winston Churchill, is currently 100 years old and has a connection with Avon
18.	M 11	On or around the 75th day of the year
19.	D 9	Being different or developing in a different directions
20.	M 9	Dates from the 8th century, abolished in 1965, but the name lives on particularly in cricket and university

Name:

Contact:

Please send your answers to Carolyn Russell at Martin House, Church Road, Bitton (the yellow house) or email mrcrussell@icloud.com by 15 February



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The last word

Keep Safe and Carry On



. The civilian deaths in Britain from enemy action during the whole of the Second World War was 70,000. It is a large number but is now dwarfed by the toll of those who have died from COVID 19 in the past 11 months which is just reaching the grim milestone of **100,000**. To take the comparison further, the death toll in the second wave has been higher than in the seven month period of the Blitz in 1940. These comparison of these numbers emphasises the grim reality of our times.

Leaving aside the fact that no services are listed for the whole of February in either the church or the chapel much of this edition of Focal Point is largely COVID-free; reflecting, I hope, that people want to hear more about normality than the current reality. For it is far from normal at present. We are forced to mask and keep our distance from others. Our pubs and places of entertainment are closed. Travel is restricted, shops selling anything more than essential items are only allowed to trade on-line. And the virus is becoming less discriminate – like the bombs of the Blitz no-one is safe any longer, just because of their age – although the young and healthy have major advantages. But the comparison of the casualty rates demonstrate just how dangerous this current pandemic is.

Fortunately, we have good reasons to look forward with optimism that vaccines have been discovered and that we will be inoculated in large enough numbers to control the virus and allow more normal life to return. In the meantime, keep safe and try to carry on looking forward to better times ahead.

Jim Heavens

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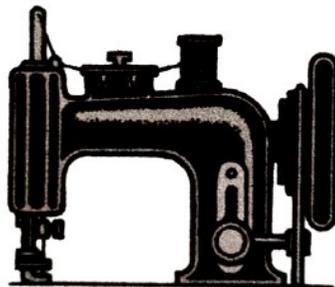
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