



Welcome to this week's In touch.

With the churches closed we have been finding other ways to meet and share our Christianity and the zoom services are great fun allowing us to make face to face contact with people and feel part of community – but we have longed for our churches to be open once again. Next Monday sees the first step. We are, with suitable precautions opening the churches for private prayer. I know that many of you cannot wait to set foot again in sacred space and sit for a while in prayer or thought allowing the atmosphere to seep back into your inner being – it is going to be such a special moment for many. As most of our churches are quite small we are asking you to comply with the notices on the door of each church telling you how many people can be in there at one time and any other safety measures applicable to that church – please be welcome in our churches once again but please also help to keep others safe.

With blessings Fiona xxx

Editor: by Tim Lenton.

Discovering the Great Barrier Reef - the hard way!

It was 250 years ago, on 11th June 1770, that English explorer Captain James Cook discovered the Great Barrier Reef off Australia, when his ship ran aground on it.

While the aborigines and the Chinese may have found the Reef – the largest structure in the world made of living organisms – before him, Cook made more of an impact. His ship, the Endeavour, unloaded ballast and was re-floated at high tide, but extensive repairs were necessary, as well as skill at navigating a way out through the labyrinthine coral.

Cook made extensive journeys to unexplored waters, particularly in the Pacific. At an earlier stage, when he was charting Newfoundland, he said he intended to go "not only further than any man has been before me, but as far as I think it is possible for a man to go."

Born in Yorkshire, he worked for a Quaker ship-owning family at Whitby and started his sea life as a merchant seaman before joining the Royal Navy. Later he attended St Paul's Church, Shadwell, in East London. Although he had six children, he has no direct descendants.

He was killed aged 50 in 1779, during a scuffle with some natives in Hawaii, but left a huge legacy of scientific and geographical knowledge.

St James the Least of All

On how to mix town and country – or not

My dear Nephew Darren

Your idea for our two churches to hold a combined New Year's Day walk was an admirable one, although I could sense a certain clash of cultures when your party arrived at the starting point with boots, waterproofs and GPS equipment. Our own group, rather anticipating tottering between tea shops, with a little light shopping in between, sported tweed suits, shopping bags and furred umbrellas.

Even the two sets of dogs seemed bemused with one another, with your Westies and King Charles spaniels making enough noise to scare all the wildlife in the county, and our Retrievers puzzled why the pheasants were not dropping from the sky. Dear Miss Mill's miniature poodle, with the painted toenails, will probably need life-long counselling; the furthest she had walked previously was from her bed to beside the dining room table.

The electronic navigation equipment brought by members of your group made me think that if only the wise men had had these blessings, they wouldn't have had to follow anything as unreliable as a star. Although I suppose that instead of gold, frankincense and myrrh, they would then have arrived with an MP3 player, a mobile phone which would have been obsolete before Jesus' first birthday

and a CD of Madonna's greatest hits.

I do concede that our two congregations learned much from one another. Our ladies were most interested to hear about the latest in personal trainers, while yours discovered how to bring a pan of jam to a rolling boil. Your men seemed impressed to hear of squirrel shooting while ours gathered useful tips for caravanning abroad. And poor Miss Mill's poodle learned that the great outdoors was a parallel and hostile universe.

By mid-afternoon, however, the balance of power shifted. When the leader of the walk from your group lost his SatNav, our members felt the need to assert themselves. The gentlemen navigated using wind direction, moss on trees and angles of the sun, while our ladies, with tweed skirts furred somewhat higher than one would have wished, showed yours how to wade through peat bog without complaining.

Perhaps town and country really can learn from one another. But if Major Bullock's wife arrives for Mattins next Sunday sporting the latest gym gear, you will have much to answer for.

**Your loving uncle,
Eustace**

The Rectory
St. James the Least



Jacopo Bassano: The Good Samaritan (1562-3)



Look for instance at the two dogs in this painting, rendered with great care and genuine interest in their shape, colour and character. Many artists have their dogs sit or stand, but very few show them so absorbed in that typically 'doggy' detailed investigation of the ground before them. Such concerns flow through the entire painting, especially the two main characters, the victim of the brutal robbery, and the Samaritan who comes to his aid. Unusually the painting is vertically divided at the centre into bright and shadowed halves with the victim starkly highlighted against the overhanging bank which curves into his shoulder and beneath which the Samaritan's donkey stands. A neatly placed oil flask points the way from ground level, just in case you hadn't spotted what the artist is up to.

It's said that the road from Jerusalem to Jericho is very open, and although Bassano does not pretend that he is depicting anything other than his own countryside of Northern Italy, both the Priest and the Levite who have passed by are still visible, their heads guiltily withdrawn into their shoulders as they hurry on.

The helpless victim is barely conscious, his skin having taken on the pallor of a man close to death. He is a man not without strength, but considerably weakened by his beating. By contrast the Samaritan is a sturdy countryman with a sunburned nose. His hair may be thinning but his

luxuriant eyebrows and beard more than make up for that. And that firmly planted right foot must be one of the great feet in all art. We feel the great effort he expends in lifting the injured man to his feet. He works at the task with strength and tenderness, using all the power of limb and body which tough country life has given him.

Two strangers then, whom life has thrown together in perilous circumstances, with kindness and compassion exposing the poverty of the fear and carelessness which makes others walk away. Jesus gives the word 'neighbour' fresh meaning, one vividly brought home to us as we contemplate Bassano's meditation upon it.

Jacopo Da Ponte was the son of a Northern Italian village painter who adopted the name Bassano from the small town in which his family was based. Although he moved to Venice in his teenage years and became part of the artistic circle which included Titian, he remained at his most confident a peasant artist depicting the world of country people and the animals alongside which they lived.

A prayer for all those affected by coronavirus

*Keep us, good Lord,
under the shadow of your mercy.
Sustain and support the anxious,
be with those who care for the sick,
and lift up all who are brought low;
that we may find comfort
knowing that nothing can separate us
from your love in Christ Jesus our Lord.
Amen.*

If you would like to donate to any of our churches in the current crisis - details are below. We would be very grateful in your help to keep our churches going.

Thank you.

PCC OF RUSHDEN
LLOYDS BANK: 30-94-30 A/C 01845350

SANDON PCC
BARCLAYS BANK: 20-73-26 A/C 53610802

PCC OF ST MARY'S CHURCH WALLINGTON
LLOYDS BANK: 30-94-30 A/C 01845466

WESTON PCC
BARCLAYS BANK: 20-41-12 A/C 40946850

PCC OF CLOTHALL
LLOYDS BANK: 30-94-30 A/C 01845245

Focus on St Mary's, Rushden.



Photos courtesy of Mr James Hawkes

As you come up the steep hill into picturesque Rushden from Mill End you do not immediately spy the church. However, upon entering the heart of the village the church is suddenly there, perched on its own little hill and surrounded by its churchyard – flowing around the church like green skirts around a stately lady. The neat little porch with its stone benches is always a welcome haven from heat or cold and beautifully decorated for major seasonal services. The Tower with its six

bells is 15th Century but most of the church was rebuilt in the late 1800s and early 1900s and the lowered roof makes the church feel snug and friendly as if it wants you to rest there and be comfortable. Clear glass windows allow light to flood into the simple interior and the trees through the great window above the main altar create a constantly changing image of the turning seasons for those who attend the church. It has a faithful and welcoming congregation who love to sing and often enjoy a wine and cheese moment after celebrating evensong. A simple church and yet also simply lovely!

