

THE LINK

A COMMUNITY MAGAZINE FOR THE
SEVEN PARISHES IN THE SOUTH
WARWICKSHIRE 7 BENEFICE

July 2020

£1



■ BARCHESTON with WILLINGTON ■ BARTON-ON-THE-HEATH
■ BURMINGTON ■ CHERINGTON with STOURTON ■ LONG COMPTON
■ WHICHFORD and ASCOTT ■ THE WOLFORDS

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<https://editor794.wixsite.com/sw7link>



EVENTS DIARY

Contact: The Editor
Email: editor@swlink.org.uk

Events Update

Once again, the programme of events across SW7 Benefice has been hit by the restrictions. Some events are planned, but they are not certain. Until normal service is resumed, please admire the view...



'Blenheim in Isolation' - Photograph by Trish Holmes from Stourton



LINK cover: *Poppies in June Sunshine, Condicote*
Photograph by Immi Murphy of Great Wolford.
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The LINK welcomes contributions for the front cover or elsewhere.
Portrait orientation photographs or artwork preferred.
Please send items to editor@swlink.org.uk

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Monday 13 July

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EDITORIAL

LINK Talk

Welcome back to the printed LINK! I am more than aware that it has not been possible for all of you to read the May and June issues online, but I am grateful to those readers who did take up this option. I am especially grateful to those of you who took the trouble to print out The LINK for your neighbours who couldn't go online. Thank you.

If some of you have got used to reading our content online and wish to continue, please email me and I will add you to the online subscribers list. It's free if you are already a paper subscriber. To reduce our environmental footprint, I can also arrange to stop your paper copy if this is something you would like to do. It's up to you, just let me know.

How and where the Nation goes with this situation I can not predict. I can only say that I will do my best to produce a LINK magazine for you to read and enjoy. Its content may be different at present, but given time, maybe we'll get back to something like 'normal'.

On the subject of content, you will see that the third and final part of the *LINK Lit* serial, *A Job for Life* is now with us. This means that the way is now clear for you to submit your very own short story or book for us to enjoy. Please do contact me, without your contributions I would have a hard job putting the magazine together for you.

The LINK needs you please...

Janet Moore, our Treasurer and Company Secretary will be leaving us shortly to move to Dorset. This means that as from September, we will be in need of volunteer(s) to fill these roles.

Some experience of working with voluntary organisations in these capacities would be helpful. Please consider stepping forward if you think you can help.

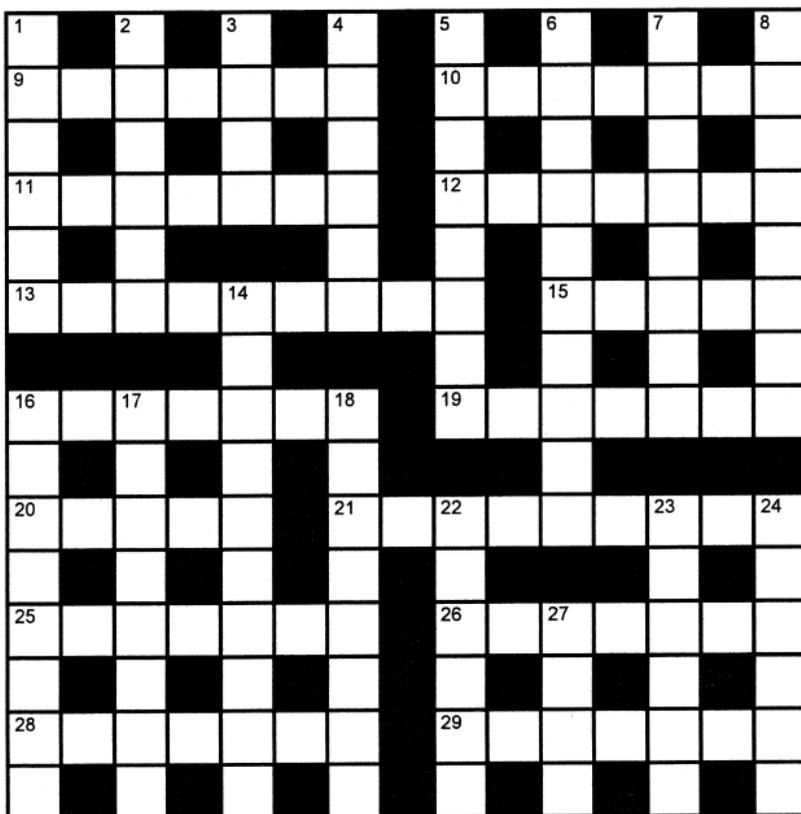
The treasurer records all income, ensures bills are paid and compiles and submits the year end accounts to HMRC. Anyone with an eye for detail and good record keeping skills can do the basic role. Guidance is available from Janet on the role of the Company Secretary.

Janet has held all this together for a number of years and she's going to leave a rather large hole that we'll need to fill somehow. These, like all the positions at The LINK, are unpaid roles.

You will see from the Whichford pages that Kath Haughton, our Whichford Village Editor, is also leaving us. If you, or someone you know is able to consider taking this on, please do get in contact.

Keith Murphy, editor@swlink.org.uk

The LINK Crossword



Across

- 9 American state containing the Grand Canyon. (7)
- 10 The perils when ballerinas have a change of heart. (7)
- 11 Tramp in Modern Times. (7)
- 12 Find a counterfeit for this clue. (7)
- 13 Absolve. (9)
- 15 Fairy tale writer sounds forbidding. (5)
- 16 Music master smear it carelessly. (7)
- 19 Possible dates in a spotless life. (7)
- 20 List on a slab. (5)
- 21 Aztec emperor taking revenge on tourists. (9)
- 25 A caller. (7)
- 26 Modify rig when I bellyache. (7)
- 28 See 19ac for her. (7)
- 29 Devilish description of mills by Blake. (7)

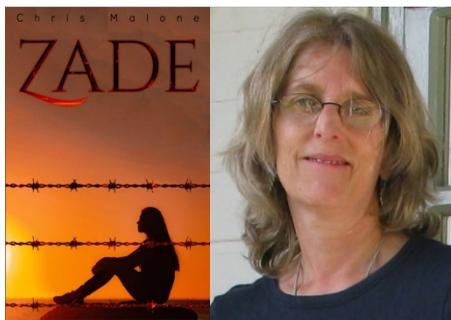
Down

- 1 Left for Paris? That's awkward. (6)
- 2 Gilbert's Japanese emperor. (6)
- 3 Search one's inner being for this. (4)
- 4 Make-believe world according to Lewis. (6)
- 5 Counsellors. (8)
- 6 This is a cover-up. (2,8)
- 7 He made silt for a merited reward. (8)
- 8 Highly regarded. (8)
- 14 This will need supplications. (10)
- 16 Move a tit to trigger spring activity. (8)
- 17 Standing out in raised relief. (8)
- 18 Absolutely unforgettable. (8)
- 22 The latest news use an eastern trap. (6)
- 23 It's top priority you get this. (6)
- 24 Said to be a dark place. (6)
- 27 This won't matter a tad. (4)

Compiled for us by our
friend Campden John

Long Compton Author

Chris Malone's first novel, 'Zade' was published by Austin Macauley on 29 May. It is a provocative dystopian vision of a future education system involving 'scintillation'. If children's eyes scintillate, they, and their family, can stay in the prosperous Central Area, but if not, they are displaced to the neglected Periphery. Can Zade, homeless and powerless, expose the sophisticated con-trick perpetrated by the education elite? Can she, against the odds, end the drug-dependency and end scintillation itself, releasing millions of unknowing families from its grasp?



Chris has worked in education for thirty years, most recently as Head of Education in Warwickshire. She uses her experiences as a headteacher, inspector, and council manager to raise many challenging issues facing the education profession today.

Paperbacks and e-books can be purchased from Amazon and from Austin Macauley. Chris is currently editing her second novel for publication in the autumn. Watch this space! <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Zade-Chris-Malone/dp/1786930412>

Long Compton Village Hall Car Park

Users of the hall will know that the car park, and particularly the approach road, are in urgent need of resurfacing. The tarmac is crumbling at the edges and potholes are appearing. The Hall Committee are now fundraising to repair this.

We are not necessarily asking for donations, although all will be very gratefully received. We are mainly asking for your support. Please read on.

We have entered a draw for a Community Fund award, which gives us a grant of £5,000 if we get enough support. For every 'Like' we get 1 point, and for every donation, we get 10 points. The projects with the most points on 16 July will get one of the grants. Please look at the link below and support us – morally or of course, if you prefer, financially.

<https://communityfund.calor.co.uk/resurface-the-badly-damaged-village-hall-car-park>

The website will ask for your name and email address, and later, your postcode. This is to allow 'one person - one vote' and is purely to stop cheating! Without identification of some sort the committee could just press 'Like' for ever! This is a secure site and all data will be destroyed as soon as we reach the closing date of 16 July. When making a donation the site will ask you for an optional tip. You can change this to zero if you wish. Please help, do it now while you think of it! Thank you.

[Ed – I know this page looks like a Long Compton 'takeover', but I felt these items have appeal across the villages and I'm very grateful at present for items such as these.]

CAMEO Lunch Club and the Lockdown

We never closed! The Club waits anxiously for every mail hoping for a letter from HMG informing us we can re-open. In the meantime, the club continues to function, delivering hot lunches to the homes of existing and potential members around the Benefice.

A meal for those in self-isolation - If you are a vulnerable person in any of the Benefice villages, restricted to self-isolation at home and would like the CAMEO Lunch Club to deliver a free hot lunch to your home once a month, please call Brenda Fitch on 664313.

Advice for Village Halls

WRCC (Warwickshire Rural Community Council) has up to date advice on reopening village halls at <https://www.wrcrural.org.uk/reopeningvillagehalls/>

Keith Murphy, editor@swlink.org.uk



Blooming Broadway by Great Wolford Artist, Jenny Henderson.

Yes, this did appear last month but many of you would have missed this little gem as the June issue was online only.

PARISH PEOPLE

Parochial Church Councils (PCCs)

Barcheston St Martin

Churchwardens David Hodges 664310
 Secretary Nick Jackson 684846
 Treasurer David Cleave 666002

Burmington St Barnabas & St Nicholas

Churchwardens Sonia Baker 661459
 Michael Macdonald 662483
 Secretary Graham Lancaster 663265
 Treasurer Sue Bradley 661635

Long Compton St Peter and St Paul

Churchwardens Jill Kirby 684923
 Secretary Zoë Wrigley 650404
 Treasurer Walter Sawyer 684755

Wolford St Michael & All Angels

Churchwardens Janet Piller 674396
 John Wrench 674389
 Secretary
 Treasurer Ann McKenna 674009

Barton-on-the-Heath St Lawrence

Churchwardens Hamish Cathie 674303
 Secretary Gillian Cathie 674303
 Treasurer Mandy McPherson 674734

Cherington St John the Baptist

Churchwarden Roger Maycock 686404
 Secretary Paul Levitch 686353
 Treasurer Rory McLeod 686278

Whichford St Michael

Churchwardens Mandy James 684479
 Hilary Blakemore 684142
 Secretary Hilary Blakemore 684142
 Treasurer Andy Chapman 684652

Parish Councils

Barcheston
 Barton-on-the-Heath
 Burmington
 Cherington
 Long Compton
 Whichford
 Great Wolford
 Little Wolford Parish Meeting

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David Sutton
 James Coker (674601)
 Robert Hutchings (661496)
 Philip Townsend (686529)
 Bill Cook (684771)
 Geoff Bromage (684454)
 Lynn Mathias (674247)
 Helen Bostock (chairman@littlewolford.org.uk)

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Ann Batchelor (661527)
 Colin Maynell (674104)
 Sara Cole (686250)
 Elizabeth Gilkes (684336)
 Sara Cole (686250)
 Janet Piller (674396)

If you wish to update information on this page, please email the Editor: editor@swlink.org.uk



*Happy
Birthday!*



July Birthdays

| | | | |
|------|------------------|--------------|----|
| 1st | Lauren Aubrey | Stourton | 16 |
| 1st | Faith Upward | Long Compton | 16 |
| 13th | Arthur Seys | Willington | 7 |
| 21st | Phoebe Williams | Willington | 11 |
| 26th | Jake Fairbrother | Stourton | 16 |
| 26th | Ryan Baldwin | Stourton | 12 |

SW7 BENEFICE CHURCH NEWS

Dear Friends

The Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdown has brought challenges to almost every area of our lives. Not least of these is the impact on our mental health. Worry for our friends and family; being isolated from loved ones; concerns for the security of our futures; the prevailing sense of fear and anxiety when we venture out; all these things can and do negatively affect our mental health. As someone who has suffered from depression in the past there have been periods in the last three months when I have felt myself spiralling down into that dark place once again. It is indeed a challenging time.

As both a follower of Jesus and a church minister, my experience of depression has caused me to reflect on what the Bible has to say about the mental struggles that many of us face in one form or another. Two passages have been especially important for me. The first is Psalm 88. It's well worth looking at. The first thing that strikes you as you read Psalm 88 is how unrelentingly bleak it is. The writer is clearly in a very dark place and does not try to hide it. He says things like this:

I am overwhelmed with troubles and my life draws near to death (verse 3)

I am confined and cannot escape; my eyes are dim with grief (verse 9)

You have taken from me friend and neighbour - darkness is my closest friend. (verse 18)

What's surprising about these words is that the psalmist is addressing them to God. This Psalm shows that God does not require us to have our lives all neat and tidy and sorted before we come to him. He wants us to come to him with all our fears and doubts and griefs and struggles. He wants us to pour out our hearts before him. That has been of great comfort to me as I have battled depression.

The second passage which has meant a lot to me, comes from the last book of the bible. Revelation chapter 21. In that chapter we are given a glorious picture of what the world will one day be like when Jesus returns. Verse 4 says this:

He (God) will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.

Christians believe that a day is coming when, like a Father comforting a crying child, God will tenderly wipe away the tears of his people. Everything that ruins and spoils our world, including mental illness, will be a thing of the past, a distant memory. Amid the darkness of depression, I've found the words of that famous hymn 'Great is Thy Faithfulness' to be powerfully true. God does indeed give 'Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow.'

It's my prayer that you too would find in Jesus Christ the same truth and hope in whatever darkness you are facing.

Ben Dyson (Pioneer Minister)

Deanery News

There is every chance that by the time we go to print, there will have been new news about coming out of lockdown. It's certainly proving more complex for everyone, including churches, than shutting down was.

As I write, we have permission to open for private prayer (but not for services), as long as we can do so safely. Just because we can open doesn't mean every church will, though. Across the Deanery, there are some that are opening (for varying times in the week) and some that can't at present. If your local church is closed but you would like to visit, get in touch with your clergy to find out which others might be.

As we begin to think tentatively about what the future might look like, we need to be asking some questions about how church might look, as well. Some of the online prayer and worship around the Deanery has been so helpful that we might want to continue it in some form. We might not want to pick up exactly where we were before lockdown – God has been taking us on a journey together.

Many of us have missed our buildings, but some of us have also enjoyed freedom to worship in new ways. We'll be thinking and praying as a Deanery too, and sharing good practice and good ideas as we emerge and discern where God wants us to be next.

Sarah Edmonds, Area Dean



SOUTH WARWICKSHIRE SEVEN BENEFICE

Church Services



SW7 Benefice church services have now gone online!

During the Lockdown we have been uploading videos on to our
YouTube channel: SW7 Benefice Churches

Each services lasts about 30-40 mins and contains a Bible reading, short talk, prayers, and a couple of hymns or songs. There are also some Bible teaching and craft activities for younger children.

Do log on each Sunday at 9.00 am when the next service is made available.



South Warwickshire Seven Benefice



Reverend Stuart Allen

Tel: 01608 684207 - rectorsw7@gmail.com (off duty Thursday)

Reverend Ben Dyson

Tel: 01608 685752 - pioneersw7@gmail.com (off duty Friday)

Benefice Administrator: Mrs Lucy Simpson

Tel: 01608 684787 - officesw7@gmail.com

Monday, Wednesday, Friday 2 – 4 pm

www.southwarwickshirechurches.co.uk

GARDENING NOTES

Editors:

Margaret Welsh, Long Compton Garden Club

Miranda Arnold, Whichford Amateur Gardener

I've been locked down in London for the last twelve weeks, so my gardening horizons have been reduced to my small urban back garden, and the even tinier front garden. The garden I otherwise have access to and grow vegetables in is in Whichford, and is huge, so there is room for a much wider range of ornamentals and edibles there than I can grow in London.

Nonetheless, by careful use of raised beds and containers, and a good understanding of your soil and light/sunshine, it is possible to grow a surprising variety of plants, even in a small space. Particularly if you use your vertical space cleverly.

We took out our lawn a few years ago, because, what with two terriers, three children, and shade from a huge sycamore in a neighbouring garden, it never looked good. We replaced it with a permeable membrane underneath gravel, so that water can still drain away, and birds can still peck through for random seeds. It also makes it very easy to pick out weeds.

We built four raised beds in the middle, which are filled with a mixture of topsoil, compost, and farm manure. I top them up each year with more compost and manure, because I expect them to work quite hard for me in terms of crop rotation. I grow a combination of permanent ornamentals and annual vegetables in them. So, there are huge white lilies and orange tiger-lilies, which only flower for about two weeks, and otherwise are just big green stalks. But the beauty of their flowers and the scent mean they deserve their space. I'm trying gladioli for the first time this year, for their drama (and for Dame Edna).

Around the permanent planting in the raised beds, I put rows of lettuces, rocket, annual herbs like parsley and coriander, interspersed with peas and French beans. I grow garlic and shallots over winter, and when they come out, about now, I'll put in more lettuce and other salad leaves. The raised beds are really very productive for their size.

The London clay in the flowerbeds is fairly thin, even though I pile on the farm manure every year, and it covers a lot of builders' rubble from a previous owner's home improvements. (We found some shards of beautiful tiles when digging it over, sadly.) This limits what I can grow in the beds, so I put hungry plants into containers on top of the soil. This gives the remaining plants more room for their roots to grow under the soil surface. I use those plastic potato planters to grow cucumbers up against the south-facing fence - the plants in the beds grow up to mask the ugliness of the planters.

We use a lot of containers, which sit on the gravel. I'm trying sweetcorn in one large pot this year - four plants, under-planted with climbing French beans, which will curl up and round the sweetcorn stalks. This is an old Native American trick to maximise productivity from a limited space. They would grow also squash scrambling on the ground around the upright plants (I haven't got room for that though!).

The big neighbouring sycamore casts a lot of shade over half the garden, so I have to cram the sun-loving plants (cucumbers, tomatoes, aubergines) in pots on the sunny side,

and use the darker side for shade-tolerant plants like lettuce, geraniums and certain climbing plants that can grow up into the sunshine.

The back bed (where the shards of tiles came from) is also the playground of the younger terrier, so we have to grow fairly robust plants there. We've got two gooseberry bushes, which do very well, and potato planters in which I grow (surprise, surprise) potatoes. The potatoes are not huge and there are not millions of them, but I still quite like growing them. Irises, alliums, and chrysanthemums seem to survive the terrier's attentions, and also add a bit of colour.

The washing line holds the bird feeders for the tits, goldfinches, robins and the growing population of parakeets (and the lockdown masks for their three days of quarantine after wearing on the lockdown one-hour-only dog walk - now that masks are more available, I think I can throw them away).

Having had an enforced twelve weeks at home to focus on my garden, it's doing really well this year, despite its small size and now, I'm just off to pick the red gooseberries.



Miranda Arnold

Such has been the extent of natural activity in the village these last few weeks, that we cannot leave the confines of the parish without reporting them. The prize sighting must go to friends who, whilst looking round their garden one day, spotted a most unusually marked moth flying around and over a large patch of flowers. Taking some pictures, they checked in their reference book and decided that they probably spotted a narrow-boarded bee hawk-moth. A check with a friend who records moths confirmed that this was probably so, and it appeared that she herself had never seen one. They duly recorded the sighting on the Butterfly Conservation Warwickshire website, and received an excited reply that this was indeed the species they had identified, assuring them of its rarity. This rarity was confirmed by the Warwickshire County Moth Recorder, telling them how he had never seen one, having unsuccessfully been seeking one for fifty years. Indeed, it had been declared extinct in this county, the last sighting in the county having been in Tanworth-in-Arden in 1936! So there we are, Long Compton's claim to fame as the site in Warwickshire where, after 84 years, the narrow-boarded bee-hawk moth was rediscovered!

Each year, about November time, we have a return visit of a pair of mistle thrushes, landing first in the meadow behind our cottage, then presumably repairing to the trees in the churchyard. But for the last four or five years, they have chosen to nest in a more friendly garden immediately opposite the church. And once more, this year, they have successfully fledged another brood. The mistle thrush is one of the earliest birds to nest, and produce its young. Will they, we wonder, produce another brood before leaving us once more? The mistle thrush is so called because of its habit of feeding on mistletoe berries where they are found. Storm cock is another name given to it due to its habit of calling out its song even in the most inclement weather. It will emit a strange churring sound sometimes when both flying or perched. We are delighted to see the pair return, and to know that they will not find a more peaceful and friendly garden than the one they have now found.

No such luck has attended the fortunes of a pair of tawny owls which last year nested successfully in an owl box behind the home of friends living nearby. This year, before they were able to settle in, a pair of kestrels took over their residence. The kestrel is a fairly vicious bird and the owls decided not to mix it with them. The kestrel, though, as well as nesting on a ledge or some projection will take over another bird's nest should the occasion present itself. As I write, this pair are busy going backwards and forwards to satisfy the insatiable appetite of their waiting young! The kestrel's prey is mainly mice and voles (more bad news for our owls whose prey is similar) and it is probably the only bird which truly hovers. Others try to, but without much success.

So meanwhile, we here in our own garden have had to contend ourselves with a number of blackbirds, both male and female, which have taken advantage of our feeders. Additionally, though, one or two of the males have given voice to their songs and rotated the trees in our garden. What a lovely song this bird has! And sadly, if ever, repeats itself. From where does it get the music?

But is there no end to our nature this month? As I am about to write my next news, my wife comes to see me and to tell me that a mallard duck and her young have just been spotted on the stream running along the edge of the meadow. This is rather good news, for I have not seen mallards on this stream for a number of years. Let's hope the young avoid all predators (we know a fox has his lair quite nearby) and survive to produce their own young. Birds of the duck family such as these, have a supreme advantage over young birds such as those we have already discussed who rely entirely on their parents to be fed until fledging. These young mallards are able to go about feeding themselves almost from the word go, and are in that way independent of parents – except of course for protection.

We will still stay with birds, but take ourselves over the waves to the Netherlands where our grandson constructed a nest box at school and proudly brought it home. My son and he put it up in the garden and awaited developments. Sure enough, in a day or two, along came a blue tit, detected the nest box and decided, yes this will make an excellent home for their 2020 brood of chicks. There was, however, one snag. The entrance hole was too small for it to get through! But be assured, your Dutch blue tit did not entertain discouragement of any sort and it straightaway started pecking around the edges of the hole in order to make it bigger. Soon the aperture was large enough to enable both birds to enter. Eggs were duly laid and the brood reared. Will they return next year? It is to be hoped they will do so. Curiously, my son tells me that in spite of him having bird boxes already in his garden none has yet ever been occupied. Perhaps my grandson has some magic touch in his fingers. Who knows!

Tony Partridge



**Goatsbeard
(*Tragopogon pratensis*)
with their wonderful oversized
dandelionesque seedheads.
Pepperwell Lane, Little Wolford.**

Photograph by Helen Bostock

Farming Catchup July 2020

As we gradually come back to normal, how has farming survived the lockdown? In many ways farming was relatively unscathed as we could work outside in our solitary way as is normal. Farming has several issues which are now coming to a head not necessarily related to Covid-19. The very wet winter is now showing in the crops, with large bare patches in the winter wheat where it was too wet to germinate. However, the crop that is there is looking well despite the current drought.

As I write this in mid-June we are hopefully coming to the end of a long dry period which is unusual in the spring, so the various environmental mixes we planted in the abandoned rape fields are struggling to germinate because of the drought. Farmers are never satisfied!

Spring barley has been part of our rotation for several years but this year, a lot more farmers have grown spring crops to make up for the winter crops which they could not get in during the winters wet ground. This may lead to an oversupply for barley. Because of Covid-19, barley usage for brewing, malting and distilling fell to the lowest April figure since 2009. This was 28% less than April 2019. This is likely to mean that there will be a much larger carryover from the 2019 harvest into the 2020 harvest year. Next time you enjoy a beer in a pub, think of the farmers you are helping. You may also be missing Marmite which is in short supply as it is made from brewer's yeast, a by-product of the brewing industry.

Rather surprisingly, beef prices fell significantly at the start of lockdown because of the lack of pubs and restaurants using the more expensive cuts. People staying at home were wanting lots of the cheaper cuts such as mince and braising meat, but this led to a carcass imbalance. Things have eased over the last few weeks and the price has been recovering. Now barbeques are becoming a possibility, more of the expensive cuts are being bought.

Even in our rural situation, the quiet has been noticeable with less traffic noise coming up from the A3400 and fewer aircraft in the skies. Walking round the farm one late afternoon in almost total silence apart from the birdsong, I saw the barn owl come back from hunting with a shrew in its talons. As it made its way back to the barn, a red kite spotted it and bombarded it to try and get it to drop the shrew. However, the owl managed to hang on to its prize and headed back to its nest. We are hoping this means that it is rearing some chicks.

Lynn Mathias farms at Manor Farm in Great Wolford

VILLAGE NEWS

BARTON-ON-THE-HEATH

Editor: Karyn Sassella
Email: barton@swlink.org.uk

Barton Fete Saturday 25 July

Please note, this event has had to be cancelled.

VILLAGE NEWS

BURMINGTON

Editor: Graham French
Email: burmington@swlink.org.uk

Thank You to Burmington 'Angels'

A number of Burmington people are giving up their time to help and support Burmington villagers in this pandemic.

Cameo Lunch

Sonia Baker and Jan Lennon cooked the last two meals and also delivered them to homes across the Benefice. Jane Holder, another Cameo cook stalwart, just before her 90th birthday, cooked the last lunch before lockdown!

Newspapers

Shirley Broadway collects newspapers from Shipston and brings them to the village every weekday.

Medication

Kate Hall, Patrick and Fudge Ramsay bring medication from the Shipston Medical Practice Pharmacy and deliver packages direct to Burmington residents.

Groceries

Sue Bradley organises deliveries of groceries to people who can't go to the shops, or get delivery 'slots'. Karen Faithfull also gets groceries for residents.

Church Spring Clean

Sonia Baker has given our church a thorough spring clean ready for door opening for private prayer. As you can see from the picture, it looks wonderful.

A loud round of applause and grateful thanks goes to these helpers for giving up their time to help Burmington residents.



Burmington Church Re-Opens

Burmington church is now open every day for private individual prayer. In accordance with Government safety rules, if more than one person enters at the same time, they are requested to observe the 2 metre social distancing rule. The church has been thoroughly cleaned and door handles and surfaces disinfected. Visitors are requested to use the hand sanitizer which is placed outside the church. There are latex gloves provided for use by visitors.

Dog Fouling

Following on from the item in last month's LINK regarding dog fouling, I endorse the sentiments. This is I suppose, to many people, 'an old chestnut' which is a boring subject that will never go away and a problem we all have to live with.

All villages suffer the same from dog owners who either can't be bothered to clear up after their dog, or who just don't notice it. I remember a number of articles in past LINK issues from the dear departed Barney Henderson in Barton who was a great campaigner on the dog fouling issue.

As Churchwardens, Michael and I appeal to all dog owners to respect the churchyard and to keep their dogs on leads whilst there. The problem of fouling affects anyone out walking; it is very nasty for people attending graves or who mow our churchyard and the village greens and verges when the mess engages with the machinery, and of course, it remains a danger to children.

It is sad that this message has to be repeated so often.

Sonia Baker, Churchwarden, Burmington Parish Church

Deja Vu...

One hundred years apart but seems very familiar.



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THE LINK

Brailes Picturehouse

Hi to everyone, hope you are well and coping. Whilst out with my dog, a big buck rabbit raced across our path which brought to mind one of the winners in the 500 Words Children's story writing competition. *The Old Rabbit* was written by Lenny Tucker aged 8, wonderful storytelling – it can be heard, read by Joanna Lumley, at

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/5p8nL2kHZOP1vtWqbFN66tF/500-words-final-2020>

Sadly, yet again, we are unable to have a film show. September seems to be a possible start date, but if things suddenly change please keep an eye out for our boards and village notice boards dotted round the parish. Best wishes and keep safe.

Deirdre and Team

Anecdotes from the Lockdown

Did you see the international tennis championships in Stourton, the north against the south, hedges having been cut to the official Wimbledon height to see fair play? Umpires and ball boys were suitably rewarded with tinctures and libations, as seen befitting such an occasion!

All us locals have enjoyed not hearing so many aeroplanes or helicopters and hearing the dawn chorus, and magnificent bird song, which has now almost disappeared except for the several thousand pigeons!

For those who used to live in Barking in Essex, we have noticed the numerous hounds in the locality that have formed a choir, which even Gareth Malone would be defeated by.

People have been saved by take-away meals from our pub, The Cherington Arms. Many thanks to Tracy, Jean-Michel and Frankie.

Everybody has enjoyed walking and cycling on quiet roads, fully appreciating the historic beauty of the evening sun on the ridge and furrow fields.

We must all pull together to preserve the village facilities and fellowship as we emerge from the gloom.

CO and SDD

Long Compton Village Hall

During this period of lockdown, when many people have found themselves with time on their hands, the Salvation Army clothes bank, sited at the entrance to the village hall, has been doing great business. In fact, we had to request an extra collection as it was jammed full and with extra bags piled up all around just a week after the first collection! Everybody has clearly been very busy having a sort out, and we're pleased to be able to provide this service which helps our community as well as those further afield. Thank you for supporting the Salvation Army and, in turn, the village hall.



The fundraising for the drive continues even though we have been unable to hold the Events we had planned. Please support our Crowdfunding Project if you can (see separate article on page 7).

The village hall committee would like to assure you that when all this is over and we return to some sort of normality, your village hall will once again be available for your celebratory needs. We are currently working on a plan to make sure the hall will be ready for use as soon as we are able, taking into account current safety guidelines and social distancing rules. We will not reopen until we are satisfied that we can operate in a safe manner.

At that point, we look forward to welcoming you all back to our regular classes and events.

Mo Read on 684130, 07814802814 or lcvillagehall@yahoo.co.uk

Long Compton Neighbourhood Watch



Our local co-ordinator is Jordan Boswell, who would very much welcome reports of suspicious behaviour. Do let him know about anything that seems to you to be out of the ordinary. Your information might just be the little piece of the jigsaw that helps solve a problem. All calls and emails are completely confidential – your name will not be made public. Contact Jordan on 07795 008998, or at jordanboswell@hotmail.com

Long Compton Short Mat Bowls Club

Meets at the village hall on the first and third Tuesdays of the month, 2 - 3.30 pm. New members especially welcome.

Contact Adrian on 684024 to learn more.

Long Compton & District Walkers

It seems such a long time since we were able to meet together as a group to enjoy our monthly walks, but I know that most, if not all, of the members have been out and about exploring new routes or retracing familiar footpaths. At least we have enjoyed some glorious weather and non-muddy conditions underfoot.

As soon as we are permitted to do so, we shall aim to restart the monthly walks, but that will only be possible when social distancing guidelines are relaxed. It would not be much fun, or very practical, to string ourselves out across the countryside, unable to socialise or putting anyone at unnecessary risk. There have been no guidelines issued, as far as I am aware, to cover groups such as ours and so we must be patient for a little while longer. I will be in touch with everyone in due course, when further guidelines have been issued.

Meanwhile, stay safe and enjoy the solitary walks, remembering what the Queen said - that one day we shall be able to meet our friends again.

Jan Treadaway 684553

Long Compton Bridge Club

The Bridge Club will reopen in October, unless it becomes clear that we can safely start before then. We will contact all members by email if so.

Best wishes.

Chris Galloway 684234

100 Club News

Due to the present restrictions and to be on the safe side, the monthly 100 Club draws will be suspended until such time as we can all gather in the village hall again. There will then be a grand draw to cover those that have been missed.

There are ten draws left this year, so if anyone would like to join in at a cost of £10 (or buy another ticket!), please contact me on 684234.

Chris Galloway



The LINK can offer your local business.....

Advertising across SW7 Benefice directly into the community.

Please contact Simon Lewis-Beeching adverts@swlink.org.uk

Long Compton Parish Council

The Council has continued to meet via Zoom but hopefully regulations will soon have eased sufficiently to permit physical meetings to reconvene and for new councillor, Linny King, to physically meet her fellow councillors. She has already proved her hands-on approach to the role by agreeing to become the Council's inspector for Aunt Phoebe's play equipment. Sadly, at the time of writing, there is still no indication when Covid-19 restrictions will ease, and the Council will be permitted to reopen play areas. Unfortunately, the scramble net element of the fort failed its last external inspection and has had to be removed.



One project that Council has continued work on is 'wildflowering verges' and is very pleased that the initiative appears to have strong support from villagers as a way of improving the environment. A new verge management plan is currently being produced ready for contractors to tender for, but it is interesting to note the progress that some residents have already made in adapting their gardening approach to respond to the needs of wildlife and climate.

In Compton Court many residents leave lawns to flower and get an abundance of meadow flowers that would have been grown in the field prior to development. A mix of sainfoin, clovers, selfheal, etc. and all being enjoyed by bees.

Another villager has seeded an orchard with wildflower mix and is delighted that there's already a swathe of corncockle flowers



What Makes a Villager?



'What Makes a Villager?' is a National Lottery funded project exploring the subject with Acorns Primary School children acting as interviewers. The intention is to interview a wide cross-section of villagers of all ages. If you would like to be involved, please contact the Clerk for more information. Interview content will be included in a professionally edited video exploring the subject. The video will contain archive and current material relating to village life.

Elizabeth Gilkes – Parish Clerk/RFO - longcompton@googlemail.com

The Friends of Long Compton Church

Long Compton Church is open again! The church is open from around 9.00 am until 5.00 pm every day (except Saturdays) for anyone wishing to attend for private prayer. Please use the hand sanitiser provided and respect social distancing.



For obvious reasons, our spring and summer events are mostly on hold, however, we have been able to run the Photographic Competition as this can be done digitally. The theme this year was 'Green' which, in light of our current life, has appealed to many. We have had more entries than in the previous two years, which is good news. At the time of writing, the judges have yet to make their decisions, so we look forward to announcing the results in the August edition of The LINK.

We are hoping very much that the Exhibition in the church of all the entries can go ahead – again, we will let you know when this is possible.

Please follow us on Facebook. Our information and contact points:

e: friendslcchurch@gmail.com

f: [@friendsoflongcomptonchurch](https://www.facebook.com/friendsoflongcomptonchurch)

www.friendsoflongcomptonchurch.com

Sue Klatt, Chairman: [@friendsoflongcomptonchurch](https://www.facebook.com/friendsoflongcomptonchurch)

Long Compton Chapel - A Congregational Church

Although not able to visit, Reverend Marion Hartwell has continued to send through *Thoughts for the week*. Always interesting, with reflective observations on issues currently affecting us all. These are posted outside the chapel and shared on social media, but if you would like to be included on the paper circulation list, do get in touch with Sally (07870 545431).

The Chapel has continued to operate as a 'community hub' and thanks to all donating for Shipston foodbank, who are most appreciative of deliveries being made. If any villagers wish to access the foodbank, then they can be contacted via their website or Facebook group. <https://www.shipstonfoodbank.org.uk/>

The plant sales table outside the Chapel has so far raised over £100 for Shipston Home Nursing. Thanks are due to all of you kindly dropping off plants for resale and those purchasing.

There are still considerable stocks of donated fabric, mainly now being used by kind volunteers for mask production. If you would like some, please do get in touch.

The Chapel can now be accessed for private prayer and the key can be collected from the Shop or by arrangement. Anyone visiting will be pleased to note that we have new heaters installed in the main chapel for added winter comfort and economy.

The schedule for the August Bank Holiday Weekend Flower and Produce Show is attached, but obviously dependent upon being able to comply with Covid-19 regulations that might be in place then.

| | |
|--------------------|---------------------------------|
| Sunday 19 July | Memorial Garden Blessing |
| Saturday 29 August | Village flower and produce show |
| 27 September | Harvest Festival |
| 3 October | Harvest Supper |

longcomptonebenezerchapel@outlook.com

Long Compton
book club

Our next meeting is on Thursday 9 July at 7.00 pm (Via Zoom)

We will be discussing 'The Dutch House' by Ann Patchett

All Welcome - Contact: Carole Clements 01608 684938

carole.r.clements@googlemail.com

Long Compton Inaugural Flower and Produce Show

To be hosted by Long Compton Chapel, August Bank Holiday weekend (Covid-19 restrictions permitting).

For some strange reason, Long Compton, unlike other villages, does not appear to have ever held a traditional flower show. As it is recognised that these events are popular and that there are many excellent gardeners and crafters in the village, it is hoped that this event will be well-supported and be the start of a new tradition for the village. Classes have deliberately been kept simple and are shown below. There is no entry fee. At this stage, prizes will simply take the form of certificates.



Preserves

- Jar of jam
- Jar of pickles
- Jar of chutney
- Jar of marmalade

Flowers

- A vase of garden flowers
- One specimen bloom
- Vase of roses
- Fragrant rose

Handicrafts

- Painting – any medium
- Greeting card – any medium
- An item to wear
- An item to display

Baking

- A Classic Victoria Sponge
- 6 decorated cupcakes
- A savoury tart
- 6 cheese scones

Fruit and Vegetables

- A basket of five or more vegetables
- Beans/peas
- A dish of soft fruit
- 5 tomatoes (matched or different varieties)
- Collection of culinary herbs

Floral Art

- In the Green – leaves and flowerheads
- An English Garden
- Five flowers and pebbles
- Arrangement in a teacup and saucer

Primary School Children

- Miniature Garden
- A painting – my favourite place
- Decorative item from recycled materials
- Greeting card



Entries to be staged from 4.00 – 7.00 pm on Friday 28 August or from 9.00 am to noon on Saturday 29 August. The show will be open from 2.00 pm on Saturday 29 August through to 5.00 pm Monday 31 August.

To help us allocate space, prior notification of classes you intend entering would be appreciated. Please let us know your name, contact details and class(es) you wish to enter by emailing us at longcomptonebenezerchapel@outlook.com or by dropping a note in the post box at the Chapel.

Compton Creatives

The Compton Creatives have been busy during lockdown, sewing much-needed supplies for front line workers.

We have had many messages of thanks, expressing appreciation not just for the items, but for the fact that we are thinking of them. Many thanks to all those who have donated fabric. Your sheets and duvet covers have been transformed into scrubs, bags, and headbands, and even an NHS flag!

Our items go to an organisation delightfully named the *Warwickshire Scrubbers* (because they are also making theatre scrubs) and will then be distributed wherever they are needed, including hospitals, care homes and social care providers. I have already had grateful messages from the nurses in Warwick A and E.

How you could help:

- If you can sew and have a machine, maybe you would like to join us. If you don't have the necessary materials, we can try to source them from within the village.
- We need the following items: large buttons, approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ to 1-inch diameter. Wide elastic, $\frac{1}{2}$ to 1-inch diameter. Pillowcases (to convert into drawstring bags). Fun ones and flowery ones are absolutely fine, they don't have to be sombre clinical colours.
- Do you know anyone who might be able to sew for us, but does not do stuff online? If so, perhaps they could give me a call and I can give them written instructions. Contact Caroline Nixon 07557 022531
- I am shielding for three months so can't deliver and distribute items. Could anyone help with this? Either on foot around the village or by occasionally delivering items to a properly socially distanced collection site in Wellesbourne?
- We would like to look after the healthcare workers in our village. If you know anyone who would benefit from these items, do let me know.

caroline.nixon@btinternet.com

Instructions for making headbands and drawstring bags can be downloaded from my website <http://www.handmadetextilesbycaroline.co.uk/433923837> (look for 'COVID' on the drop-down menu). Any in the village are welcome to join us in this activity – contact me for details. I hope it won't be too long before we can meet again and create together instead of in isolation. To find out more about joining this sociable group please contact:

jhburras@yahoo.co.uk or caroline.nixon@btinternet.com

Village Organisations

Long Compton and District Garden Club - Contact Anthony Wells 684337 or Lesley Roberts 684545 or lesleyroberts46@gmail.com

Compton and District History Society - Contact Diana Cook 684771

Comptonians - Contact Margaret Welsh 684238

Village Hall - Mo Read on 684130, 07814802814 or lcvillagehall@yahoo.co.uk

Compton Creatives – caroline.nixon@btinternet.com or jhburras@yahoo.co.uk

Long Compton & District Walkers - Jan Treadaway 684553

Long Compton Short Mat Bowls - Club Contact Adrian on 684024

Long Compton Bridge Club - Chris Galloway 684234



JULY "SOCIALLY DISTANCED" WALK AT BLACKBERRY FARM

Walking in July

Price: £5 per adult
6 people at a time

Children FREE

Through July you can book a time to walk around Blackberry Farm's uninterrupted views across the Stour Valley, for a "socially distanced" walk. This stunning location situated between Honington & Halford, takes you through fields with well marked paths on a search for beautiful butterflies and stunning sculptures. Donations welcome

Please call Richard Gray to book your individual slot at a time to suit you & him on 07977 587911

Blackberry Farm, Halford, CV36 5DL

For more information please call Rebecca Mawle on 01608 674929

Many thanks to Richard Gray for his support



Nature Encounters



Lockdown and a drop in work have given many of us an opportunity to spend more time in nature, and as someone who already grabs any opportunity to do just that, I can honestly say that this spring has been my best ever in terms of wildlife sightings and photography. My discovery of a litter of six fox cubs just a short walk from Whichford was one of many highlights, with their natural curiosity giving me some chances to capture them in their idyllic hideaway.

This plastic container appeared over the bank holiday weekend, presumably tossed into the undergrowth by someone who had no idea what lay just feet away, (or who simply had no idea)*. Though it proved to be a popular toy with one of the cubs, it was a stark reminder that the other important issues facing our planet have not disappeared during the pandemic. The coronavirus will fade away. Plastic waste does not.

Patrick Fox

**[Ed - Well said Patrick!]*

The Reading Room Draw

Congratulations to Charlotte Copley, who was the winner of the June Reading Room draw.

Jenny Scrivener

Village Editor

After two and a half years as editor of the Whichford and Ascott village pages, it is time for me to pass on the mantle. This will be my last edition. I have thoroughly enjoyed my tenure and hope you have likewise enjoyed reading the news and events from our wonderful community. My thanks to everyone who contributes copy. This is an important local publication and your contributions are valuable to many.

If you are interested in taking on the role of village editor and wish to know more about it, please contact me via email at whichford@swlink.org.uk. Alternatively, make your interest known to one of the members of the Whichford and Ascott PCC.

Kath Haughton

[Ed – I would like to express my thanks to Kath for all that she has done in her time as Village Editor. We are sorry to see her go, but hope that someone from Whichford and Ascott will be prepared to come forward to take over. My email 'door' is also open if anyone would like more details. The job can be as light as you wish. It can be just prompting and collecting items and involve no laying out of pages if necessary.]

In the meantime, anyone can send items direct to whichford@swlink.org.uk and they will arrive at my door. I can put a page together with what I receive, but I'm sure you understand, if I receive no items, unfortunately there will be no page.]

Keith Murphy editor@swlink.org.uk



**Watercolour *Resting Boats* by Stourton Artist, Colin Beckett.
A repeat from last month that some of you may have missed.**

Immi Murphy – World Challenge Update

During the past eighteen months, with the very kind help of various people in villages across the SW7 Benefice, I have been fundraising for a trip with the company World Challenge to Malaysia and Borneo that was to take place during July of this year after my GCSEs. As expected, after all the restrictions that the government enforced a little over eight weeks ago, World Challenge cancelled the trip and issued a full refund that is to be sent to me between August 2020 and January 2021.



I have now contacted all my individual donors to advise them of my plans and I cannot thank people enough for the generosity they showed me, whether it was a job I did for them or at the Quiz night we held in the Wolford's Village Hall during April last year. I intend on donating the money raised that night to the Wolford's Village Hall, as it is a local amenity that has also suffered from the lockdown enforced by the government.

If you would like any help, or for me to do any jobs, I am still available to do these if needed. I have plans for a later trip after my A Levels in 2022.

If needed, you can contact me over the phone at 01608 674005 or 07598 744711, or you can email me via imogenmurphy@btinternet.com

Thanks once again for helping me fundraise the money for the trip, and whilst it is sad that it is no longer happening, I really enjoyed the various things I did in order to raise the money. Thank you.

Immi Murphy

The Wolfords Village Hall One Hundred Club

The June winners were as follows;

1st prize: Jean Parsons 2nd prize: James van Helden 3rd prize: Isobel and Keith Murphy

Many congratulations to the above. Please let me know if you would like to have more shares as the club is still short of 100 shares. Proceeds help with the upkeep of the hall.

James van Helden

The Wolfords Village Hall

The hall at present is closed, but please be aware that it will open again for you to use as soon as restrictions ease sufficiently. If you are thinking ahead, please do not hesitate to contact us so we can at least 'pencil in' something for you and your event.

<https://www.thewolfordsvillagehall.org.uk/>

A Repeat

As last month's LINK was online only, many of you probably won't have seen these photographs by Gabi Duck from Great Wolford. They are really too good to be missed, so without apology, here they are again for you to enjoy.



Photographs from Wolford Woods by Gabi Duck from Great Wolford (age 13)

Chairman's Corner

You Cannot Be Cirrus!

Cloud-watching can be a satisfying and relaxing pastime, especially on a warm summer's day, when white fluffy groups of water droplets and ice crystals drift by on a gentle breeze, inducing moments of quiet contemplation, daydreaming, or absent-minded shape-spotting.

I may have had an over-active imagination at the time, but a few years ago while on holiday, I spotted a cloud that bore a strong resemblance to a baby polar bear hovering above the horizon (see picture). If you let your imagination run riot, you can often see clouds that take on the appearance of the outlines of countries, mythical creatures (I'm convinced I've seen a 'dragon'), birds, whales, or even faces.



Being intrigued and enchanted by clouds led me to becoming a member of The Cloud Appreciation Society (yes, such an organisation does exist). Not only do they provide you with scientific information about clouds, but they also send you regular updates and amazing photographs captured by fellow cloud-spotters from all around the world.

There are many types or 'species' of cloud, each with their own structures and characteristics. Knowing your *stratus* from your *cumulus* can be useful, especially when assessing what kind of meteorological conditions to expect.

The 'fair weather' clouds, like the ones we saw in late May, are called *cumulus humilis*. These are small white detached clouds, showing plenty of blue sky in between, and float by at a relatively low altitude of around 2,000 feet.

The largest and most dramatic clouds are those associated with heavy rain and storms. These are the towering *cumulonimbus capillatus*. Their base starts at around 2,000 feet, or lower, extending up to over 60,000 feet, where the troposphere meets the stratosphere. This makes them the tallest structures on earth. The power of these clouds is immense – they typically have as much energy as ten Hiroshima-sized atom bombs. When fully formed, these clouds are capped by their characteristic and instantly recognisable flattened anvil shape, known as the *incus*. After these enormous clouds have decayed or 'rained out', all that remains is the wonderfully named *cirrus spissatus cumulonimbogenitus* – a dense incus-like cirrus cloud.

If you think you have seen a UFO, then it's more likely to be a lenticular or *lenticularis* (lens- or almond-shaped) cloud. These are formed when a layer of moist air rises as it encounters a high obstacle, such as a hill or mountain, and then sinks once it has passed it. Lenticular clouds are a familiar sight in New Zealand, where stacks of elongated lenticulars ('lennie stacks') can be seen over North Island's Mount Ruapehu. Aotearoa, the Maori name for the antipodean islands, means, quite aptly, 'land of the long white cloud'.



A mackerel sky can be a beautiful spectacle, where rippled *altocumulus* or *cirrocumulus* cloud formations resemble the wavy stripes on the upper body of a mackerel. Beware though, if the clouds start to thicken, these skies can indicate an advancing depression and imminent change in weather, potentially leading to rain and strengthening winds.



There are also nouns for various clouds that are created by human activity – *fumulus*, is a thin cumulus cloud that forms above industrial cooling towers; *pyrocumulus* clouds result from moisture-laden air being intensely heated by fires burning at ground level; *contrails* (or condensation trails) are those white lines produced by jet aircraft when water vapor condenses and freezes around small particles expelled from their exhausts.

Sometimes, having your head in the clouds can be inspirational, educational, or even awe-inspiring - but never boring.

Simon Lewis-Beeching, chairman@swlink.org.uk

Remember – you can opt for the online LINK and stop or retain your printed copy through the door. It's your choice. Subscription to The LINK online is FREE for existing subscribers within the SW7 distribution area, so sign up and never have to search the house for your paper copy!

THE LINK

<https://editor794.wixsite.com/sw7link>

THE LINK

Email online@swlink.org.uk for more details

This month's poem is by Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872 – 1906), a poet we have featured in The LINK before (August 2016). Dunbar became one of the first influential Black poets in American literature. He sought employment with various Dayton (Ohio) businesses, including newspapers, only to be rejected because of his race. He finally settled for work as an elevator operator, a job that allowed him time to continue writing. I've also heard that he used to sell his first published book of poetry to the users of his elevator.

I have to admit, I was searching for poems related to pandemics, but *We Wear The Mask* written by Dunbar in 1895 somehow seems appropriate.

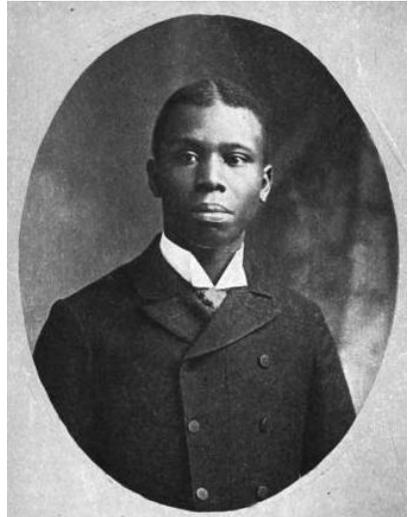
We Wear the Mask

We wear the mask that grins and lies,
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes, -
This debt we pay to human guile;
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,
And mouth with myriad subtleties.

Why should the world be over-wise,
In counting all our tears and sighs?
Nay, let them only see us, while
 We wear the mask.

We smile, but, O great Christ, our cries
To thee from tortured souls arise.
We sing, but oh the clay is vile
Beneath our feet, and long the mile;
But let the world dream otherwise,
 We wear the mask!

Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872 – 1906)



Please keep your poetry suggestions coming; writing them for us would be even better! Please be sure to submit your suggestions in good time bearing in mind that more recent poems will often be protected by copyright and if this is the case, the publisher's permission will need to be obtained.

Keith Murphy, editor@swlink.org.uk

We have now arrived at the final part of the short story *A Job for Life* that has been serialised during the lockdown. As I have said, the featured work(s) will either have connections with the SW7 Benefice villages, or the author will live in the Benefice. I also said that the author's name would be revealed this month.

Well dear reader, I have to admit it was me! I did ask for submissions, but unfortunately receiving none from our readership, I was left with few options.

The first and second part of *A Job for Life* was published in May and June. This month you can read the third part of the three-part short story. If you'd like to catch up, all parts are now available at <https://editor794.wixsite.com/sw7link/link-lit>

I have decided to self-publish the story on Amazon to raise money for Shipston Home Nursing so if you'd like a nicely bound version or a copy for your Kindle, please purchase at <https://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/B086Y3SD5X>

Thank you.

Keith Murphy, editor@swlink.org.uk

A Job for Life

3

Valerie was just finishing her training as a nurse at the time of her marriage. Her new home was close to the hospital in which she trained, and she had no trouble in obtaining a position as soon as she had finished her probationary period. She was after all, less inclined than John to provoke reaction from those in authority. Valerie came to understand that although John managed to make any discussion look like a confrontation, and give the feeling to those on the other end of the conversation that those big fists were about to fly, this couldn't be further from the truth. The pair of them, whilst their disagreements were violent, whatever the provocation, John never hit her. That's more than can be said for a number of Val's friends, whose new husbands had lashed out. Valerie had also seen the disturbing results of domestic violence in her work at the hospital.

John's driving work was beginning to be affected by a gradual tightening of the economy and the subsequent loss of contracts operated by his firm. Driver layoffs started and he was one of the first to go. If this was caused by the universal law of 'last in, first out', John's ability to rub customers and fellow drivers up the wrong way or the falling numbers of haulage management drinking at The Red Lion it's hard to say. The resulting loss of work was ill-timed. Valerie was pregnant with their first child.

Valerie and John had been good managers of their income up to this point. The only gripe that John had was the amount of money that went on Valerie's cigarettes. It was a little luxury that Valerie enjoyed and was the cause of many a blow up between them. Now with a break in income due to the baby and the loss of John's driving income, matters needed to be addressed.

John had a few days' work left, and on his visits to the various supermarkets, he managed to extract the promise of a job from a warehouse manager that he hadn't upset too much in the past. The job was nothing special, unloading deliveries and transferring stock onto the retail floor - otherwise known as shelf stacking. There weren't a large number of shifts and they were at pretty anti-social times, but luckily there was a friend of Valerie's who worked on the checkouts who could give him a lift there and back for most of the shifts. The rest of the time, he'd have to get on his bike for the eight-mile round trip.

John's work in the supermarket came with some unexpected pleasures. He found that tidily stacking and ordering the shelves, brought a satisfaction all of its own. Products of differing size, flavours and slight variations all had an ordered place in the shelved world of the supermarket and John was going to make sure everything was in its right place. He couldn't walk by a misplaced item carelessly discarded by a customer without rectifying the situation. In fact, customers were pretty annoying with their habit of denuding John's perfectly laid out shelves.

The supermarket shifts were never going to be enough. John was on nodding terms with the old chap who kept up the rather extensive churchyard just around the corner. It was clear to both of them that his gardening days were coming to an end and after a few sessions with old Toby, John was duly appointed by the PCC as church gardener. Fitting in the gardening around the supermarket shifts was no problem. The problem lay in the income from these activities being just a little less than his relatively well-paid driving work. When they factored in Valerie's impending loss of nursing income, things didn't look great. In his mind John turned over the offer he'd had from Harry Walker down in Brighton. He could see where this would lead and despite the temptation, John resisted. He'd have to work something out.

Baby Jack arrived with no complications, save the obvious financial hit and this was helped by a somewhat unexpected financial contribution from Rose and Donald. The pair of them were looking towards getting out of the pub business, now that the emphasis was less on 'boozing' and more on 'eating.' This change of business focus didn't suit Donald and he was looking for a way out.

John's churchyard gardening was showing results similar those he had achieved with the school garden. It was noticed by the good church-going community of the town, that the churchyard had picked up in the few months John had been in sole charge. He always made sure that by Saturday night, everything was as tidy as it could be ready for Sunday. Occasionally on their walks on Sunday morning, John and Valerie with Jack in the pram, would see the good townspeople coming out of the church and admiring the neatly clipped yews over which John had taken so much trouble. A number of the congregation were known by sight to John and Valerie through their school experiences, but the little Sheen family passed by unnoticed and unremarked upon.

One evening, whilst tidying up some bits in the churchyard, John heard the bellringers hard at work. The noise in the churchyard was close to deafening but even so, John was

able to identify that the tower had eight bells. With his practised ear, used to opera arias and a growing variety of music, he was able to hear when the bells changed and realised that there were two different sorts of 'rings'. One was where the order changed and stayed put for a period and then changed again and stayed; the other type was where the bell order changed at every ring of the bells. In the case of the latter, John could hear that the deepest sounding bell was always at the end of the eight bell order. This led him to listen hard for the highest sounding bell which started off as the first bell to sound and once the changing started, John thought he could track its progress up the seventh in order and then back down again to become the first. He wasn't entirely sure, and this aroused his curiosity. He was just on the point of making the trip up to the ringers when he suddenly remembered that his old primary school adversary, David Ryan would be in up in the bell tower. David had recently returned from university after completing goodness knows what. John was vaguely aware that David had been away around five years and acquired himself some well-paid job in Brighton. He also knew that David Ryan was making the short trip to ring the bells in the tower every Wednesday evening and, that meeting him in the small confines of the church ringing room was not a good idea.

Events at the supermarket coalface took a predictable turn after a few years. John lost his rag with one of the youngsters assigned to his care when he wouldn't do it the way John had told him. Unfortunately, the youngster had family connections within the store and John suddenly found that due to 'unpredictable trading conditions', his number of shifts were cut in half. Whilst his shifts were cut in half, the size of his family had just doubled with the arrival of Gail earlier in the year.

Both Valerie and John had taken to parenthood but decided to do their best not to have any more children whilst John's job security was doubtful. Valerie gave John a really hard time over his inability to keep his mouth shut when things didn't go his way. It had lost him work and with a family, this was unforgivable. Valerie saw the argument flow over him and just drain like the proverbial water off a duck's back. Things were frosty for a few days, but both calmed down and life went forward.

Valerie tapped up a friend at the hospital and an opening for porter and cleaner suddenly appeared. John was on strict instructions not to upset Maureen who had done this for the sake of Valerie's friendship and also in the hope that she would come back on the nursing staff, sooner, rather than later.

The role of porter and cleaner took some getting used to. The shifts were long, although the breaks did give him some free days in the week to carry on with his church gardening and the few shifts he had left at the supermarket. It was during this time in John's life that he began to see the effects of ageing and what it could do to a person. He was still continuing with his weight training and winning a few competitions, but began to realise that he wouldn't be young for ever. Contemplating the finite nature of life whilst cleaning a toilet pan was not for everyone, but John was learning a lot from his little job working for the ever-pleasant Maureen. In his usual methodical way, John's deep cleaning techniques were much appreciated by her, but went unremarked upon by most others who had bigger things on their mind as they busied themselves around the hospital site.

With the improved money coming in from all of John's jobs and with some help from Rose and Donald and Valerie's mum, the Sheen family were finally able to buy a car. Second-hand and in need of some tinkering that John was more than up to, the car

became a dependable member of the family. Modest holidays on a Bognor caravan site for a week bought delight to the young Jack and Gail, able to spend most of their waking hours in the open-air pool provided for their entertainment. John had perfected the art of making a bottle of orange juice last all night whilst he and Valerie enjoyed the camp club nights out. Babysitting was helpfully provided by the young teenage girls from the family in the next-door caravan with whom they invariably shared the same slot in the summer.

As Gail reached school age, Valerie was able to make Maureen's dreams come true and return to work, albeit initially on a part-time contract. John was aware of this possibility and had told Valerie that as soon as she started back, he was going to do something else. Both of them realised that the two of them bumping into each other and possibly sparking off each other was not going to lead to anything good. John actually had dark misgivings about being ordered about by his wife, even though he'd been pretty good about taking it from others.

On the summer break in Bognor, John had been chatting up Geoff from the next-door caravan. Geoff had a minor position in a nearby council in the waste management office. John enquired what it took to get a position on the bin lorries and before Geoff realised it, he was promising a job to John, initially on the collection crew but possibly leading to a post later as driver. These jobs were not easy to get and were often 'dead man's shoes' but Geoff's girls were much taken with the young Jack and Gail, and if John was honest with himself, he suspected that Geoff had developed a bit of soft spot for Valerie.

So, jobs took off from that September. John on the bins and Valerie back as a nurse. The churchyard gardening continued. In fact, the church had received the best kept churchyard in West Sussex award two years running and as a result, John received a small bonus and an increase in his hourly fee. Despite this vote of confidence from the church, John had still to properly cross the threshold of the establishment for a service or the like. They'd decided that being non-believers, they wouldn't get Jack or Gail christened. John was still hankering to find out more about bellringing, but unfortunately David Ryan was still in residence and had now risen to the position of Tower Captain and steeple keeper. This being the case, Valerie had forbidden John to go anywhere near the bells.

The bins provided John with employment for a good many years. He started with the loading crews but by skill, physical presence and some work by Valerie on Geoff, he soon became a driver. Uncompromising approaches were not unexpected in this environment and several times John did have conversations where his fists were ready for use. There was something left of John's reputation from his weightlifting days and from his time in the boxing gym that held some currency with the bin crews. Nobody felt confident to take John Sheen beyond the point where they could manage him. None of these encounters made it back to the office and John derived a good income from both legitimate sources and from the many valuable 'useless items' that were disposed of by unknowledgeable householders.

Time marched on, John's father became terribly afflicted by dementia or possibly Alzheimer's; it was difficult to tell the difference. John thought it probably had a lot to do with the liking for hard spirits that had developed just as they sold out the pub business. Unfortunately, his father had been somewhat imprudent in his dealings with one of the breweries and as a consequence, his 'sale' of the business was in reality, more

of an invitation to leave quietly. Donald passed away shortly before the dawn of the new millennium and was sent to earth in a coffin draped in the Union Flag. Rose followed him just after the millennium and this almost bought a tear from John; throwing his mind back to the days in Priorton Priory Preparatory School when he last had almost shed a tear for his mother. After Donald's death, Rose had made her peace with John about the errors they had made in his early life. John had no need of an apology, he was settled on his assessment of his own life and had no need of any maternal comforting.

After his mother's death, John decided that it was time to chuck the bins in. He'd had his eye on going 'on the Post.' It was all close at hand, gave him exercise and steady income. If nothing else, they'd save on the copious amounts of hot water that was needed to keep a binman fragrant.

The Sheens still kept in touch with Geoff and Jean, their holiday friends from Bognor. John and Jack spent a number of early summer breaks on Geoff's brother's farm picking the crop of strawberries that was packed off to Wimbledon. Jack missed a few days off school through this activity, but it wasn't noticed. Jack was on study leave prior to his summer exams. John and Valerie were forever grateful that the condition that had blighted John's school days had not been passed on to Jack or Gail. John was somewhat less than grateful that Jack had managed to outstrip him in the 'weight of strawberries picked' race.

After what seemed a twinkling of an eye, John reached the age of sixty, still working as a postie and occasional fruit picker, he was beginning to feel the weight of time on his shoulders. He was still sparking off Valerie but had won a considerable victory a few years back by getting her to give up smoking. Life is full of little victories, interrupted by a series of defeats. One just has to hope that the victories outweigh the defeats.

One house move had occurred since Valerie and John had come together some forty years previous. The purchase stretched them, but the portfolio of jobs put forward by John was accepted by a kindly mortgage broker at the time and the four-bed semi with sizable garden was theirs. During the ups and downs of their income affected by short time, adverse weather, economic decline and disciplinary issues, they had always managed to keep the payments going on their property.

As was customary on their birthdays, Valerie and John walked down to the newsagents to buy their lottery scratch card tickets. Why they did it, they didn't know. They'd never won anything. John began the process to reveal what he suspected would be a number of fat round zeros. Without showing a flicker of emotion, John informed Valerie that they'd just won £100. The newsagent pricked up his ears, "your luck's in John, well done!"

"It's the first time I've won the lottery, maybe my luck's changing!" replied John.

"Let's hope so" said the newsagent. "Have you seen those unlucky beggars in Wuhan out in China? All dying in numbers from this cornea bug thing."

"Well if it comes over here, it's a good job I've got..." – John's comment was interrupted by a sudden unexpected cough – "...a few quid now to tide me over." And with that, and the pocketed £100 in cash, Valerie and John walked home.