

March 2021

Teme TRIANGLE

Clifton upon Teme • The Shelsleys • Lower Sapey



Clifton pupils' RSPB Big Schools' Garden Watch

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www.temetriangle.net

Free to Residents



'Jan the Milk' has been declared a Community Warrior by the Worcester Warriors Rugby Club for her community service in the Teme Valley during the Covid-19 pandemic.

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Front Cover Picture

Pupils at Clifton Primary School have been taking part in the RSPB Big Schools' Garden Watch last month. Pictured with teacher Zoe Fisher are three of the children taking part: (Left to right) Harry Prickett, Harry Birch and Jack Evans

CLIFTON PARISH COUNCIL

Speeding Signs

Clifton Parish councillors discussed the need for more vehicle activated speed signs in the village in order to reduce speeding by motorists passing through. The village already has one speed sign located on the B4204 and councillors voted by a majority to install a second one at a cost of £2,800. Despite Mandy Henry saying she was not one hundred per cent convinced that another vehicle activated sign would resolve the issue, Bruce Gilbert said he believed the Parish Council should be seen to be supporting those residents who do think there is a problem.

County Councillor Ken Pollock agreed to contribute £500 towards the cost of the additional sign.

Pedestrian Crossing

Councillors also debated whether to install a pedestrian crossing near the Primary School in the village, but decided instead to explore the possibility of opening up a footpath leading from the village hall car park via the Meadows estate to the school for children to walk to school that way.

Chairman John Bowden said he had been informed that a pedestrian crossing on a public highway would have to have lighting. "That would not be in keeping with the village," he said. "We are a dark village." When it was suggested that a Lollipop person should be employed to guide children across the road, Bruce Gilbert queried whether there was enough traffic to justify the expenditure.

Bus Shelter

John Bowden also said that part of the S106 money from the Hope Lane development had been ear-marked for a bus shelter in the village. Parish councillors decided to explore the possibility of erecting a shelter at the top of Hope Lane near the horse chestnut tree.

[See Parish Council minutes on pages 4-5]

CLIFTON FOUR ACRE FIELD PROJECT

Clifton upon Teme Parish Council would like to thank and congratulate everyone who volunteered as the Project Team and secured the successful award of £245,000.00 from MHDC s.106 development funding.

The commitment shown by the whole team has been excellent and the application has been noted as an 'exemplar project' by MHDC Officers.

The Parish Council looks forward to working with everyone concerned in order to successfully deliver the project for the community.

THANK YOU ALL!!

Draft Minutes of a Virtual Meeting of Clifton Parish Council held Thursday 4th February 2021

Present: Councillors J. Bowden (Chairman), A. Henry (Vice-Chairman), R. Henry, J. Colins and B. Gilbert. Also present: County Cllr K. Pollock, C. Hurley and J. Johns.

Welcome: The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked the Clifton Hill Helpers for their continued support to the community.

Apologies: Councillor C. Haywood and District Cllr C. Palethorpe.

To agree the Minutes of a virtual meeting held 7th January 2021 – The minutes were agreed as a true record. Proposed Cllr Gilbert, seconded Cllr Collins. All agreed. No matters arising.

District & County Councillor Reports: Reports to be uploaded to the website as circulated.

County Cllr Pollock reported on Worcs CC budget decisions including Adult, Social Care allocations. Congratulations were given to the Four Acre Project Team on their success with S.106 funding.

£500.00 has been awarded from the Cllr Ken Pollock's divisional fund towards the purchase of vehicle activated signage for village.

Financial & Governance Matters: Payments were approved as per the schedule circulated.

Parish website – the Clerk is having a meeting with B. Higgins next week and will circulate a demonstration link shortly for feedback. Precept – MHDC has confirmed receipt of the parish precept request for £30k as agreed. Grass cutting 2021-22 – It was proposed Cllr Bowden, seconded Cllr Gilbert, that the quote by R. Wilks for the next year should be accepted. All agreed. This decision taken in order to finalise the Village Maintenance Plan. Grass cutting to be reviewed again in Feb 2022. Clerk to Notify R. Wilks. Football & Bowls Club agreements – it was confirmed that no old agreements were currently held by the Clerk. Cllr Bowden agreed to see if Clubs have previous copies or if not, the PC will draft new agreements asap. Parish bus shelter – Cllr Bowden explained that part of the Hope Lane s.106 agreement made provision for a new bus shelter. Further to discussion it was suggested that subject to need being established, it could be located on the small green at the top of Hope Lane, but the Clerk was asked to check land ownership. Grass verges at Lovells development – the request to change to tarmac has been logged with Highways. Vehicle Activated Signage (VAS) – the Clerk confirmed that each portable VAS would cost £2800.00 from Westcotec.

Speed survey data from 2020 was discussed and is shown below. Figs shown in miles per hour.

The Pavilion, Pound Lane, Clifton-on-teme

From 05/03/2020 To 11/03/2020	Daily Vol.	Mean Ave.*	85th %ile*
Northbound	233	21	28
Southbound	195	20	27
Combined	428		

Hope Lane (Nr. Winnington Cl.), Clifton-on-teme

From 05/03/2020 To 12/03/2020	Daily Vol.	Mean Ave.*	85th %ile*
Eastbound	157	30	38
Westbound	191	24	34
Combined	348		

Further to discussion it was proposed by Cllr Bowden, seconded Cllr Gilbert to purchase x1 VAS in order to be proactive in addressing concerns about speeding through the village. Voted x3 for / x2 against. Vote carried. Clerk asked to progress the purchase.

Parish Matters: Garden on parish land – Cllr Bowden explained the history to the Britain in Bloom garden previously maintained by a resident, and the suggestion that it should be maintained going forward as part of the parish together with flower tubs and other agreed areas. There may be need of a Parish Gardener or Volunteers, but Cllrs Gilbert and M. Henry agreed to tend the garden / flower tubs in the interim period. It was agreed that Cllr M. Henry could purchase plants as required and liaise with Cllr Gilbert re planting. Tree maintenance – Cllr Bowden to liaise with R. Wilks re the work required in Kenelm Close.

Section 106 Matters: Four Acre Field Project – congratulations were given to the Project Team on the successful award of s.106 funding of £245k from MHDC. C. Hurley gave an update on maintenance required which is available on the project G-drive. It was proposed by Cllr M. Henry, seconded Cllr Gilbert and agreed by the Council that formal letters of thanks should be sent to all team members. The Clerk was asked to arrange this with Cllr Bowden. Thanks also to be published in Teme Triangle. The opening ceremony was discussed, and the Council agreed to consider options for this and bring to the next meeting. Sensory Garden – no further update but H. Hurley will liaise with the Clerk about the Natural Networks funding application, which needs a new project lead. Community Transport – the matter remains with Worcs CC Officers.

Planning Matters: Notifications Received – 20/02036/HP – Highgate House, 36 The Village WR6 6DH – No objections submitted to MHDC for proposed two and single storey extensions, internal alterations and new porch. South Worcs Development Plan Review – Cllr Gilbert will attend a briefing on 1st March.

Highways Matters: Parish Lengthsman – it was agreed that the scheme will renew on 1st April 2021 with Worcs CC and R. Wilks will continue to be the Parish Lengthsman. Pedestrian crossing near the school – Cllr Bowden has looked at options, but it was agreed that as all options required lights, it would not be appropriate for the area. Other options have been considered in the past by the school but were not considered practical. There may be an option to put a footpath which links Hope Lane development through to Pound Lane which would give an opportunity for pedestrian traffic to move between these sites and create an internal link to village facilities. Cllr Bowden agreed to look into this further. Overhanging hedge at Forge Meadows – matter being dealt with by Worcs Highways now. Footpath & road closure notices – the request for these to be sent to the Clerk has been noted by Worcs CC. All asked to monitor closures please. Local footpath issues have been raised by Cllr Bowden to the Countryside Team at Worcs CC. All known closures have been circulated to Cllrs by the Clerk and placed on the notice board.

Councillors Reports & Items for Future Agendas: Cllr M. Henry reported that lots of volunteers had come forward for litter picking! Some young people are also doing it for Duke of Edinburgh Awards. It was agreed that Cllr M. Henry could purchase additional equipment in liaison with the Clerk. It was also agreed to include litter picking in the future Village Maintenance Plan.

Next virtual meeting to be held Thursday 4th March 2021 by Zoom invitation.

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SIENNA'S RUN CHALLENGE

My daughter Sienna is 12 years old and has decided that during lockdown she wanted to do something good for charity. She decided to set herself a challenge of running with a family member the distance from Clifton to London. For her daily exercise she goes for a run around the field and does as many laps as she can to accumulate the distance to London. She set a target of £200 and has double this already, reaching a very impressive £594, due to the generosity of the village and surrounding areas in Clifton.

Sienna set herself up with a just giving page (through her mother's account) and has sent messages to her football team and the local community. She has chosen her charity as it is local and she has raised money for them before. She is supporting Worcestershire Animal Rescue Shelter (WARS). Her just giving page is: <https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/sienna-heath12>

Victoria Heath



SHELSLEY LITTER PICK VOLUNTEERS WANTED

As we walk in our local lanes, you may have noticed litter on show while the vegetation is low. Would you be willing to add purpose to your walk by picking up litter on a section of the lanes in our Shelsley parish? I have access to litter collecting-kit from our district council. Please phone 01886 812222 if you or your family group can help.

Val Jones

CALLING ALL LOWER SAPEY RESIDENTS!

Do you take a pride in your beautiful parish?

Would you like to volunteer to keep it that way?

We are looking for Parish Litter Pickers to help keep our parish looking lovely, even if it's just the verge in front of your home.

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To contact Brad Phillips, ring 01886 812292 or visit the website: yeomansgaragelimited@hotmail.co.uk

ZOOM QUIZ RAISES £900

A Teme Valley fundraising quiz via Zoom, held on 23rd January, raised a colossal £900 for Worcester Foodbank which fed a record number of people in December 2020 with more than 1,200 being fed in the run up to Christmas. Worcester Foodbank opened in June 2012, supported by the Trussell Trust, to combat poverty and hunger in our area.

The work of Foodbank helps to prevent crime, housing loss, family breakdown, and mental health problems and is an invaluable source of support and help to many. Thank you so much to all involved, particularly quiz leaders Sue Johns and Chris Hurley.

Marion Dipple.

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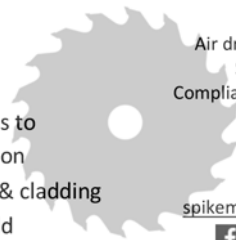
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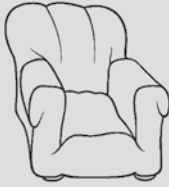
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LOWER SAPEY NEWS

'Tomorrow will be a good day'. This is what the late Captain Sir Tom Moore once said. I think I shall always remember that phrase, which is full of hope. So many of us have had an awful year since the start of the pandemic. Someone said to me recently that the atmosphere in the area seemed full of sadness and this area has certainly had more than its fair share of bad times. Hope for the future must keep us going and I am sure that the coming of Spring and some warm sunshine will help, especially after the dark, cold winter that we have had. The Spring flowers are indeed struggling through and once or twice, the birds have attempted a spirited dawn chorus. There is still a lot of cold weather to come though. The news from St. Bartholomew's Church doesn't improve I'm afraid, despite the hard work put in by Candy and her supporters. We are still waiting for diocesan approval, faculties and of course, cash, before we can go ahead. We will keep going though regardless of outside help. First, the roof has to be repaired, then the ceiling and eventually, we can start on the plans for development. However, our Church looks very pretty with all the snowdrops out, especially in the sunshine.

The Parish is again planning to plant daffodils in the verges to give a good display in the springtime. We had a successful parish meeting recently and also a PCC. What would we do without Zoom? These occasions are nothing like the recently held Parish Council meeting in Handforth, Cheshire, which was a YouTube sensation for a day or so.

The delivery drivers are still busy round the area and we owe them a big debt of gratitude for driving round these lanes, often in dark or inclement weather. Thanks as well to those delivering milk, papers and the post.

Easter is not so far away and the Lent Talks will start on February 24th for five weeks. These will be on Zoom of course. Full details are to be found in this magazine. I have no details as yet of future church services, but I am sure they will be also printed in this edition.

Sadly, St Bartholomew's will still be closed until all the repairs are finished and this may be some time. However, I am sure we will be able to hold outdoor services as soon as the warm weather returns. We hold a Zoom service every month and usually have between 12 and 18 participants, with Candy and Shane providing the music.

NOTICES

Howard wished me to let you know that for some mysterious reason, the Lower Sapey website has had to close. Not to worry though, as a new site has been created to keep you up to date with any local news.

This is www.lowersapey.wordpress.com. If you wish to comment, or make suggestions, please contact the website administrator on lowersapey@btinternet.com

Candy would like all nature lovers to have a look at the Natural Networks programme on-line (freewebinar) which offers suggestions for our area to create natural habitats for wildlife. They also offer financial support for anyone interested to help with this.

Finally, some of you may have already been contacted by the local library to let us know that even though we may not have the monthly visits of the mobile library at present, books are still available. If you wish to order a special book, please ring them and it will be available for you to collect at the nearest library. Please quote Worcestershire digital libraries offers if you do so. It seems, many local organisations are doing their best to help communities through these times.

Finally, can I say how good it is to see Jen safely home from hospital after her recent serious operation. She and the family are now settled into their new home and we wish them many happy years together in Harpley House. Good wishes to everyone for a happy, safe March. Take care.

Margaret Griffiths

CORONAVIRUS COMMUNICATION

Malvern Hills District Council is looking at combining with Worcester City Council to run a joint campaign called “Don’t break now” – trying to keep people’s motivation up to follow the rules. This will be a long lockdown but hopefully, if people stick with it, this will be the last one and we will be able to bring this pandemic to an end. As a District, we will be doing more to support the NHS vaccination messages. The current group of people being vaccinated are more likely to take the vaccine but as we move through the priority groups and into the wider population, we expect there to be more resistance.

Contact tracing is showing a lot of transmission at workplaces. It’s not that companies aren’t putting safety measures in place but people are becoming sloppy on coffee breaks etc and so we are working with Worcestershire County Council to push out material to help employers stress the importance of people remaining on their guard at all times. We are also trying to reinforce the message on self-isolation and how to do it properly as we have seen a number of household outbreaks. We are also looking to develop a campaign called Wellbeing Wednesdays to encourage people to take time to focus on their mental and physical health.

Caroline Palethorpe

Church Matters

by Rev Canon David Sherwin



Almost a year has gone by since we were told as a nation that we had to stay at home, Lockdown had begun and since then, though, we have had brief respites we are still struggling to move forward.

Last year we had the difficult news to contend with that places of worship had to close. We were not even allowed to open them for private prayer. Yet it was necessary for everyone's safety though hard for those who missed being able to enter the building for prayer and worship. Lent and Easter moved online and we learnt new skills very quickly, YouTube and Zoom became part of our everyday planning. The Church never stopped being the church.

Thankfully we have moved a long way since then and places of worship are now open for private prayer and worship. This means that Lent and Easter can be celebrated even though there will still be restrictions on numbers inside our buildings.

The rhythm of the seasons and our Christian festivals are so important to our lives. The seasons are not stopped by a pandemic and neither is our yearly remembrance of our Lord's ministry amongst us, his passion and resurrection. It is good to be reminded, as we do in Lent, that Christ himself walked a difficult path, indeed he walked the way of the Cross, and we reflect that he calls us to take up our cross, deny ourselves and walk with him.

Life has its difficulties and those difficulties have been amplified by the pandemic, yet Jesus Identifies with us in his suffering on the cross. But there is a rainbow after the storm, there is resurrection, there is new life. For we as Christians believe that Jesus rose again from the dead and is alive bringing hope for us all. This indeed is Good news and it is the message of the Church that has not changed for 2000 years and no pandemic or war or anything can take that hope away from us. Whatever we face we know that Jesus promise is true. *"I am with you always"*. Through good times and through bad we know that God is love, and that love caused him send his Son into the world to live, die and rise again, and his love cannot be quenched by anything,

St. Paul knew that in all his troubles and said;

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

I do hope that the message of Lent and Easter can bring us all the Hope that beyond suffering there is life, for Jesus promised *'life in all its fullness'* to his followers. God bless you and go with you.

LOCAL CHURCH SERVICES IN MARCH

7th March	10.30am	Zoom Celtic morning prayer Harpley
14th March	10.30am	Clifton Mothering Sunday Service
	4pm	Harpley Compline via Zoom
21st March	Zoom Team Service for all	
28th March	TBC, usually an outdoor service at Laylocks	
(Palm Sunday)		

Holy Week

Tuesday 30th March	7.00pm	Clifton - Compline in church
Thursday 1st April (Maundy Thursday)	7.00pm	Zoom Passover Meal
Friday 2nd April (Good Friday)	1pm-2pm	Meditations on the cross Clifton There will also be a YouTube meditation
Sunday 4th April (Easter Day)	9.30am	Clifton – Holy Communion
	11.00am	Shelsley – Holy Communion
	10.30am	Harpley Zoom service for Easter

For details of the ZOOM links please contact Rev Canon David Sherwin 01886 888664, davidwin56@aol.com

WWRT 2021 LENT TALKS ON ZOOM - 'Sustaining Faith During Covid'

Wednesday 3rd March

Revd Canon Mia Hilborn, Head of Spiritual Health Care and Hospitaller at Guys and St Thomas NHS Trust, London, shares her experiences on the medical frontline.

Wednesday 10th March

Harriet Baldwin MP talks about how her faith has sustained her in facing the challenges within Government.

Wednesday 17th March

Karen Smith, Primary Teacher explains how her faith has kept her going through the demands of educating children both in school and online.

Wednesday 24th March

Bishop of Dudley, The Rt Revd Martin Gorick, shares his experience of moving during lockdown and offers an opportunity to meet him.

All talks start at 7.30pm and finish at 8.45pm latest with Compline.

Each Wednesday, all those who have registered an interest will be sent a Zoom link early in the evening. After a brief introduction the speaker for the evening will be asked to talk for approximately ½ an hour. There will be 15-minute breakout rooms for participants to chat among themselves and to raise any questions. These will be followed by a Q & A session. To register please email Revd Anne Potter on anne.wwrteam@gmail.com

BUSINESS FEATURE: MOOKIE TOYS IS A SHELSLEY SUCCESS

Despite the challenges of the past year, a Shelsley-based toy design team has played a key role in helping its parent company to grow against the odds. *Teme Triangle* asked Miles Mann, Head of Product Development at Mookie Toys, to lift the lid on what happens at the 'Mookie Design Barn', at Homme Castle Barns near Shelsley Beauchamp.

TT: Who is Mookie Toys?

MM: Mookie Toys is a leading global supplier, distributor and manufacturer of branded and licensed toys, including outdoor, infant/pre-school, plush and ride-ons. Mookie has been providing a world of play to children of all ages for more than 25 years, and we're a Top Ten UK toy supplier. We have two UK offices and one in Hong Kong. Mookie's heritage is in outdoor sports toys. We're best known for the Swingball® brand, which is one of the top-selling toys in the UK. We're also the UK's number one supplier of ride-ons, including Scuttlebug™ and Scramblebug™. In 2012 Mookie acquired Stourport-based TP Toys out of administration, which expanded our portfolio of larger outdoor toys with an award-winning brand of slides, swings and trampolines.



Miles Mann (centre) with some of the Mookie Design Barn team

TT: What happens at the Mookie Design Barn?

MM: It's the 'design hub' for the business's creative activities, including product and graphic design. With this in-house product design team Mookie is able to constantly innovate and develop new lines.

TT: When did the Barn open, and why Shelsley?

MM: We moved into the Design Barn in 2017 as our team had outgrown our temporary offices in Kidderminster. Product design requires a lot of space, especially when building larger outdoor products like trampolines, swing sets and climbing frames. We'd already identified barns as a good option because of their large, open plan interiors, so we were excited to see this one become available, especially as it was well-located for the existing team members. We also like its rural location. Our studio space is on the converted top floor and we have amazing views of the Teme Valley, very inspiring! Today we have ten

people in the design team, and three more supporting sales, purchasing, quality and customer services.

TT: What's your approach to toy development?

MM: We design fun products which allow children to play freely, explore and be active. To achieve this we couple innovative design with good quality materials and rigorous safety testing. In the barn we have a prototyping workshop where we can build and test new products. We've also invested in the latest 3D printing machines so we can prototype plastic components prior to commissioning production tooling. All of this means we can test our new designs, sometimes with children, to ensure everything is perfect before production.

TT: How did Mookie fare during 2020?

MM: Toy businesses in generally fared extremely well – primarily driven by parents needing products to entertain their children whilst at home during lockdown. Mookie sells both to the UK and internationally; and toy industry sales across 12 global markets increased by nine percent in the first half of 2020, compared to the same period in 2019.

TT: How has the team adapted to lockdowns?

MM: Being mainly computer based we could all work from home reasonably easily. We were already well-versed in remote software such as Zoom through our communications with Head Office, Hong Kong and our global suppliers. What we did miss – and still do – is the team camaraderie and quick group brainstorming. Also, we miss our 'sausage sandwich' Friday mornings where we all gather around our kitchen table and share weekend plans!

TT: What are your plans for this year?

MM: 2021 began with various difficulties caused by the pandemic, including shipping increases from the Far East, labour shortages in the busiest production period prior to Chinese New Year and raw material price increases. However, signs are good that 2021 will be positive from a sales perspective. We also have some exciting new products in development. My main hope is that we stay fit and well and get back to some sense of normality – looking forward to us all getting back to our barn.

TT: Are there any new products out soon?

MM: We have an exciting new TP Treehouse Range launching soon – designed by very local product designer Jack Whitefoot who lives in Shelsley! It's a modular playhouse enabling customers to create their own bespoke design using a 3D builder on our new website, which launches in February. We're also designing a new indoor wooden activity range for toddlers, which will be a brand new sector for TP.

TT: Where can we find Mookie products?

MM: We have direct-to-consumer websites for our main brands, such as www.tptoys.com. We are also supported by retailers such as Argos, Smyths Toys, The Entertainer, Aldi, Asda, B&Q, garden centres and independent toy shops. Find out more at www.mookie.co.uk

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FORMER RECTOR'S MEMOIRS (Continued)

In this concluding extract from Clifford Owen's new book, **10 Churches, 3 Crises, 1 God** he relates the story of the 'tarot card crisis' in Clifton in 1994.



I have already hinted that the United Benefice of Clifton-on-Teme, Lower Sapey, and the Shelsleys was united only on paper. It was just as well because they were like three well-detached houses. If one caught fire, the fire wouldn't automatically spread to the other two. If they disliked the Rector in one parish, the other two might tolerate him. I knew from my rural Warwickshire childhood that everyone had an opinion about their vicar, especially the non-attending majority! However it did seem important that the centre parish, Clifton, the largest in population, should thrive. And for a few years it did. It was well attended: 95 on the electoral roll and most Sundays produced 50 attenders. But there was a charismatic fault line underneath. Once a month a Praise and Worship service filled the evening service slot. A small music group led the songs and usually a speaker was invited. Keith Jaffrey, our organist and choirmaster, organised these services and they had the consent of the Parochial Church Council. They had been in place for some while before I arrived and I had no problem with them; being no different from the kind of renewal services I had experienced in previous places. I hoped they would grow, mature and my hope was that they would integrate their style into the total spectrum of the church's spirituality. By and large they did. If it wasn't people's 'cup of tea' they stayed away. Neither did the enthusiasts hide their enthusiasm! I think that Keith, our organist, was prominent in enabling this to happen, since he was equally at home playing chants for the Te Deum or livening up an electric keyboard with voice over for Praise and Worship. At the other end of the spectrum Keith belonged to Worcester Festival Choral Society and once per year in Passiontide we put on an oratorio of a high standard for the parish church. Keith had many instrumentalist contacts and over the years this performance had built up to a good standard of music and devotion. Despite the fact that Clifton and the Shelsleys had two of the only robed choirs between Worcester and Tenbury Wells, it was necessary for the choir to be augmented for such works as Maunder's 'Olivet to Calvary', Haydn's 'Seven Last Words' or Handel's 'Messiah'. So there existed a pool of around a dozen extra singers who could be invited along to sing for Passiontide. At Clifton-on-Teme in 1995 the failure to invite one of these augmenting singers was to trigger a rumpus that tore the church and village apart for a while, had ripples around the region, and even reached Australia!

Kate Harper was a well known village friend of many. I knew her in passing and she was always pleasant; not the sort of lady you could easily argue with. She had firm opinions but I never came to any issue of conflict with her and she was an occasional church attender. She had been a regular choir member in the

past but had left the choir a few years before the incident. However St Kenelm's Clifton-upon-Teme was still her church. I soon discovered the important lesson that in a village it's 'their church' whether they attend it regularly or not. If there's a problem in church it affects the village and vice versa. It doesn't happen so much in urban areas.

Now Kate was one of the pool of singers who could be invited to augment the Passiontide choir. She had been invited to sing in 1994 but declined. In the meantime, she had opened a New Age shop in Tenbury Wells, which sold Tarot cards and other sundry cult pieces of kit. Keith heard about the shop and his conscience became severely exercised over the matter. The oratorio for 1995 was to be William Lloyd Webber's 'The Saviour'. The issue for Keith was how could one sing in an oratorio, where Jesus is proclaimed as the only way to God, when one was commercially involved in pouring scorn on that assertion. Perhaps one can begin to see why passing the GOE Ethics exam was compulsory for ordination! A spiritual and ethical question was about to appear on my exam paper for real.

The news that Kate was not being invited to the Holy Week choir was already known to the regular church choir, and they were a bit divided about it. I had not yet been told although the church warden had dropped me a hint that there could be 'trouble ahead'. This was clearly going to be a difficult one to unpick. Even at that stage I could sense the church would be divided and already folk were wondering where my opinion and loyalty lay in the matter.

There are some situations in life that you cannot plan for, cannot quite imagine and have no prepared answers for. We call it nowadays 'uncharted territory'. I could sense that Keith had made a decision, would not change it and had the general support of the renewal group that he led. Where would I be in all of this? I had been very supportive of renewal, but also was pastor to a goodly sized congregation whose loyalty I wanted to keep. In fact my first reaction was to ask myself how I could hang on to everybody. The only way I knew was to visit the key players, hear their stories and concerns, and try to piece a solution together. But Keith had already acted and believed that what he did was in line with his conscience and integrity.

What I didn't know was that one of Kate's relations worked for BBC Hereford and Worcester, our local radio station. While I was thinking about the issue, the phone rang at 1610 one afternoon. It was BBC Radio Hereford and Worcester! They asked: "what was this issue about a lady being banned from the choir?". I said that I had heard that the choirmaster wasn't going to invite a certain person but I had yet to discuss it with the churchwardens to decide on a course of action. When we had decided we would issue them with a statement for the

local radio, the reporter said, “well we are going to put the story out in our 1700 bulletin”. You can guess the rest. It lit the blue touch paper that triggered off a heated debate which ran for three months. The morning after the BBC local news item (which they repeated in all their bulletins thereafter) I received a call from a ‘stringer’ in Great Malvern who wanted to know what it was all about. I made a careful statement, but somehow you can tell when the media are onto a good story. They smell blood. Within forty eight hours we were in all of the national dailies and on Midlands Today TV. I had to travel to St Martin’s in the Bullring Birmingham to give a TV interview. It was my first experience of what happens when a story ‘runs’, but the hardest part was encountering so many other people getting in on the act. I had comments from the archdeacon, vicars in Kidderminster and the Dean of Worcester who gave to the Press a theological expose of charismatic errors! But Bishop Philip Goodrich (The Diocesan Bishop) phoned me up as a good friend and simply asked: “Clifford is there anything I can do to help?” I replied that there wasn’t much he could do, but he did phone Kate and Keith to get a fuller picture.

By now Kate was becoming something of the victim and a folk hero in the narrative. Keith was the baddy to be brought down and I was portrayed as the woolly, indecisive, typical Church of England ‘please ‘em all’ vicar, sitting on the fence. It was becoming a soap opera. One of the most painful parts was the stream of mail arriving through the door each day (thanks be to God we hadn’t got Facebook in those days). I received 120 letters; Keith about 100 (nearly all supportive of his action). Kate had a larger number. My letters were mainly as a result of comments the Daily Mail had printed about me. Most letters were critical. One old man wrote: ‘It is obvious that you cannot run your parish’. Some had verses of scripture underlined saying how I had strayed from the truth. Mercifully none were in the hate mail category. One letter came from a friend in the Naval Christian Fellowship who recognised my name in the paper. She promised her support in prayer at this difficult time.

Kate arranged for a TV crew to film her Tenbury Wells shop for a Chris Evans show, but the amusing one came from Australia. I had a call from an Australian TV producer who wanted me to tell him the story of the lady excluded from the choir. I said to him that I thought he was a hoaxer...perhaps a friend of mine, having fun by impersonating an Australian accent. “No, no Mr Owen. I am a genuine producer. This is not the BBC. I will record a piece from you and then it can go out directly into my Sydney programme!” It went and I later found out that the producer whose name I have long forgotten was quite genuine and was a very big name in Australian Radio and TV. It was staggering to think how such interest was created by a small rural church rumpus in a quiet Worcestershire village.

The incident happened in the spring but even as late as August a popular TV discussion program entitled 'Right or Wrong' featured the ethical issues surrounding the Clifton Choir incident. I was away cycling from John O' Groats to Land's End when the programme was televised, but no-one consulted me and once again I took a critical hit in the media. Even the quiz game 'Trivial Pursuit' included a new question: 'What was Kate Harper banned from?'

When the crisis was at its height you can imagine how lonely and deserted I felt because I was in a no-win situation. One of our Readers (assistant preacher) came to chat to me and comfort me and reassured me that 'Jesus would help me'. I cried in his presence. I did not know which way to go. No-one had asked me to vote. The way ahead was not clear. I felt my confidence in free fall. What would it be like when I hit the rocks at the bottom of the fall? Would there be a bottom to hit? It was then that I made a major psychological personal breakthrough: to take my stand on my own convictions. I wrote an article about that key discovery a few years later in Corfu. If one is looking for courage you are likely to find it near your convictions. So I worked out my own theological position. I imagined I was answering a GOE Ethics question. I owned that my position was sincerely somewhere in the middle; not sitting on the fence undecided, but that I accepted Keith's conscience decision and would take no action. Sadly he and a churchwarden both felt that they should resign and leave the church. I had lost two key players and good friends. But most of the congregation stayed put. Very slowly the crisis eased down.

Needless to say, blame and vitriolic statements had been flying around the village like missiles. Someone eavesdropping in the village shop heard: "that vicar should re-instate that lady NOW". But there was one phenomenon that was stirring around many churches at that time. For better or for worse it became labelled 'the Toronto Blessing'. Some in the village had obviously tried to link it to the tarot card shop crisis.

I had an amusing phone call one day from Alan, a member of the Royal British Legion but not a regular in church. He said: "Mr Owen, I am very worried about some of the people you've got in your church. I have heard that in order to gain publicity for their services, they are throwing themselves on the floor. And what is worse, Mr Owen, I have heard that they have just been away on a course in Canada to learn how to do it!" I have to say that, in the midst of much pain and stress, 'The Vicar of Dibley' had nothing on Clifton-on-Teme! But Alan's phone call was evidence of the kind of narrative that was circulating around the village.

To be fair, the main congregation at St Kenelm's were quite open to hearing from Keith, leader of the renewal group, when they got back. We had an open evening of questions and prayer. Some people stayed behind after the morning

service waiting in prayer for 'the fire' or 'the blessing' to fall. I approved and didn't try to pour cold water on this idea. On a couple of occasions some people claimed that they couldn't stop their legs shaking or feet stammering. We had vibrations and occasionally someone falling on the floor, but no screams or animal noises! It might well have faded for Clifton and been left there, but within weeks the tarot cards in the Tenbury shop issue lit the blue touch paper and the rest is history.

At the height of the tarot card crisis I had a growing conviction that, despite public pronouncements and efforts to bring understanding and reconciliation, there were a few, probably no more than four, people in the village who were bent on stoking the fires of division and strife. I didn't know who they were or their motives but it was a deduction growing into a conviction. So I did something I had never done before or since. I prayed: 'Lord if I am right, can you show me, give me the names even, of those who appear to be stoking this fire?' In the event just two names came to mind and I recognised them as the answer to my prayer. The two names shocked me. Obviously I will not identify them, but both had been 'nice to my face' for years. When the Kate-Keith crisis had hit the media I met one of the two names in the village street. She smiled at me and said: "Clifford, I wouldn't have your job for all the tea in China". "Well don't worry you haven't got it," I replied.

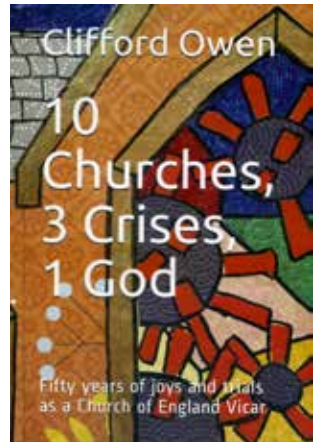
But underneath there was obviously a lurking hostility. A few weeks later I happened to call on her about something else. Her countenance towards me was clearly hostile and she said that she was tempted to tell me what she really thought of me. She didn't and she hardly needed to! A desire for power may have had something to do with it. Certainly there was a strong anti-Keith element in their hostility but it was also an opportune moment to so manipulate events that could hasten Clifford Owen's departure. I have absolutely no problem in believing how Judas Iscariot did what he did. Both of the people I have referred to above have now departed this life. In their day I counted them among my good friends. That chapter is now closed and they are forgiven, but as I reflected more deeply for the purpose of writing my story I realised that at least two or three others may have been fuelling the ladies concerned. I once, very sadly in a completely different context and part of the country, heard one clergyman talking about another: "Oh, it was well known that 'X' made the bullets but got others to fire them".

In considering my own position the 'R' word had to be considered, even momentarily. What if I came out unconditionally on the side of Keith and the renewal group? Would they expect me to lead them although perhaps I would be reduced to a puppet leader, a 'yes man'? I wasn't a million miles from their position. I wasn't unsympathetic, but something made me cautious that it

wouldn't have a long term happy ending or be for the good of Clifton church. You can support a group at one point and be ditched by them some months later. On the other hand I couldn't support the outright chorus of condemnation that was coming from some of the regular traditional members of the church and villagers. So I stayed in my own quiet central position and played for time. It worked! No-one actually called for my resignation. Bishop Philip had wisely enquired if I was OK and agreed (at my request) to watch from a distance. Now it was up to me to pick up the pieces.

Recovery and 'itchy feet'

I remember saying to myself, 'It will be ten years before anyone dare mention the Holy Spirit again in this church'. Miraculously the church stabilised itself in about six months. The Men's Group continued and the good fellowship survived the tarot card crisis. Folk coped in the good old English way of not mentioning the immediate past and its problems; though as months passed one or two old chestnuts surfaced. There have been many congregations who have had disputes and divisions over renewal matters from the 1960s up to the millennium. My questions are: have we learned any wisdom from these experiences? Is there a collectively wise pastoral way of allowing God to integrate 'renewal' into a church in an unthreatening way?



Clifford Owen's book is available via Amazon in paperback and Kindle formats:

BEESWAX WRAPS

About two years ago Jessica Middleton's grandchildren saw her using cling-film. 'Granny,' they said, 'cling-film is doing so much damage to our environment. It's our future that's being destroyed. Never use it again.' This got her thinking. Having found out the cost of beeswax wraps, she decided to find out how to make them. 'Now, with the help of my grandchildren and my daughter Emma, who does most of the promotion, we are up and selling well, and keen to expand,' says Jessica.

Hence the logo: Green Granny ... on a bike not in a car. The wraps sell as multi packs of six in three different sizes for £15 and a metre roll by 50cm so you can cut them to your own sizes for just £20. They make great presents and are easy to post. For further information, contact Jessica Middleton on 01885410228 or email jessicamiddleton@outlook.com



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Contributions for the next (April) edition by Friday, 12 March 2021 please

Printed by Orphans Press of Leominster Tel: 01568 612460