

from the chair

Dear Friends,

There have been some interesting responses in the media to the various novelty attractions available in our cathedrals this summer. A helter-skelter in Norwich offering closer views of the remarkable medieval ceiling. A mini crazy-golf course laid out in the nave at Rochester incorporating various hazards in the form of models of local bridges and other structures. A lunar landscape at Lichfield (I like the assonance!), commemorating the 50th anniversary of the first moon landing. Some felt the sacred and secular were being confused and that it was another example of the Church desperately trying to be trendy and attract people who might otherwise never darken the doors of our cathedrals. Other responses were more sympathetic, recognising that cathedrals' finances are always in need of extra cash and that in other respects cathedrals are bucking the trend of falling congregations, which parish churches are experiencing.



All this comes from what I suspect was an off-the-cuff remark by the Archbishop Justin that there should be more fun in cathedrals. On the whole we don't have a problem with our churches and cathedrals accommodating concerts, drama, art displays and other exhibitions, and the occasional dinner-in-the-nave. It's so easy to forget that for most of their history our medieval church buildings had naves that were clear of seating and were often used for a wide variety of events and as a meeting place.



The more Puritan advocates of our Reformation inheritance were not so keen on this approach. After all, the division between screened off holy area and nave was on the whole abandoned and listening to lengthy sermons demanded some measure of comfort albeit on hard wooden benches and pews. Our 19th century churches with the Tractarian influence restored the design of nave and sanctuary as largely separate areas and filled up the nave with fixed seating that imposed a very strong fixed axis to the buildings.

Meanwhile, the more community-oriented events that used to happen in the open naves in pre-Reformation times were both impossible and frowned upon.

People have often resorted to quoting the incident of Jesus “cleansing the Temple” as a justification for restricting any activity in a church that smacks of secular commercialism. But I wonder, is it so easy to draw a line between the sacred and the secular? I rather like the Dean of Derby’s response, when he was criticised recently for allowing films to be shown in the Cathedral there that contained a couple of scenes of sexual activity: “It’s nothing God hasn’t seen before...!” I know there is a line to be drawn in some cases, but what is in bad taste to some can be perfectly acceptable to others. And I do wonder if our ideas of God and what is holy are often just too narrow and confining. Washing disciples’ feet, criticising one’s host at dinner, allowing a woman of doubtful reputation to stroke him – these were all considered in bad taste by some that convinced them Jesus could not be from God.

Well, they were wrong there, weren’t they?

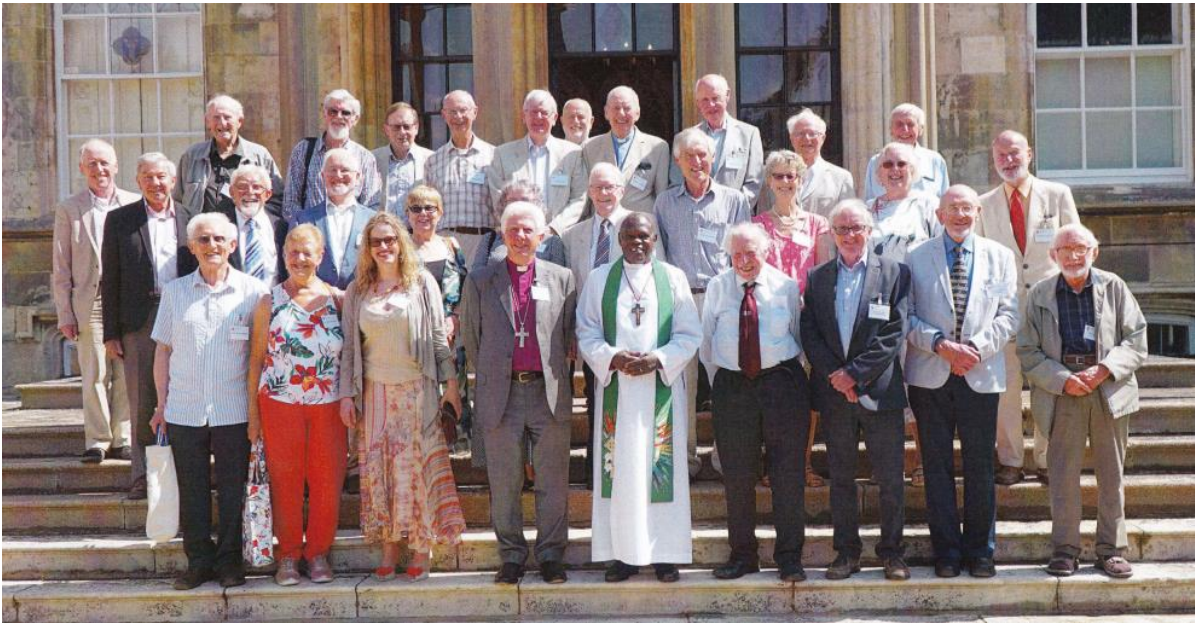
I hope you have been enjoying a pleasant summer ... and having fun too!

+Ian Brackley



**Please send items for the next Newsletter
to Robin Isherwood at
revslob@gmail.com before the end of November 2019**

Report from the 91st Annual General Meeting Bishopthorpe Palace, 24th July 2019



Bishop Ian Brackley welcomed everyone to the meeting and especially Clive Mather, Chair of the Pensions Board (PB), John Ball Chief Executive of the PB, and Elena Benato, its Welfare Adviser.

Clive Mather pointed out that the Board was in good shape with a reduced deficit since 2008, a CHARM scheme bond of £50m, and playing a major role in an ethical investment group worth £33t. Climate change was a big issue both from an investment and asset perspective.

John Ball gave a presentation relating to surveys of customer experience and expectations and future provision by the PB. Elena Benato made a presentation on her work in welfare advice.

The Chairman reported that Canon David Pritchard would be replacing Revd. Dr. Malcolm Grundy as Vice-Chairman and Malcolm G. was presented with a small gift. He also announced that our new President was The Rt. Revd. Andrew Watson, Bishop of Guildford.

The vacancy for the Dioceses of Newcastle, Durham, York and Leeds has now been filled by Revd Clive Harper. The vacancy for Lincoln, Southwell and Nottingham, Derby, Sheffield and Leicester was still vacant but being considered by Very Revd. Geoffrey Marshall. (See update on page 7. *Ed*)

Under AOB the Chairman spoke about the low attendances at general meetings in the last two years. It was hoped to meet at Lambeth and York next year. Members are invited to send in ideas to refresh our meetings in future. Malcolm Liles expressed the hope that members would try to actively recruit for the association and help encourage those dioceses which do not contribute the membership fee for retiring clergy. He also asked for input from members about diocesan strategies, PTO/DBS issues.

Discussion arose about PTO and the seeming ageism in some dioceses at the age of 80. Also concern was expressed about changes relating to the appointment of retirement officers and the feelings that pastoral care of retired clergy was being downgraded by the national church. (Similar sentiments were expressed at the RCAoCE General Meeting at Birmingham Cathedral on June 11th. *Ed*)

I HAVE AN INVISIBILITY CLOAK – IT’S CALLED BEING RETIRED!

When I retired as dean of Wakefield, it was a joy to be able to simply exercise my priesthood through sacramental and pastoral ministry instead of being caught up in administration, fundraising, fabric, etc. I’m not complaining. Those things go with the job and are in themselves “Ministry” as in “adMINISTRATION”! It was a great privilege to be given the stewardship of the mother church of the diocese.



And I cannot fault the hierarchy for the way in which they tell us retired clergy that the Church could not run without our ministry. The annual lunch laid on by our bishop and the excellent work done by our retirement officer to keep us in touch with one another are also most welcome.

However, at another level I do feel “Invisible”.

Two examples: The new diocese of Leeds is too large for a paper diocesan directory to be published and so you have to go online [not a problem for me but can be for some clergy and churchwardens] to the diocesan website if you want to find out about parishes, clergy, the diocesan structures, etc. That’s fine, and yes there is a section headed “Retired Clergy” under the heading “Resources” which has practical information, including the names of the retired clergy officers. But what is missing is a list of the active retired clergy with PTO. This was present as a separate section in the old paper diocesan handbook. I know that many a harassed churchwarden, whose priest had gone down with flu on Saturday, used it to find someone who might cover services for them.

Quite apart from that practical use there is the simple matter of acknowledging that we exist. To be listed by name as active priests is so affirming! When for years you have been “on the payroll” and named in the diocesan directory as a member of the diocesan team, to disappear is hurtful. Surely, if we have been given PTO that means we are part of the diocesan college of priests and so should be named as such?

Secondly, I was told recently by a retired priest in another diocese that their new diocesan strategy made no reference to retired clergy at all. So, I did a little trawl of a number of diocesan strategies and in none of the ones I looked at were retired priests mentioned!

Surely, if we are doing so much to keep the “show on the road” someone should be thinking strategically about how we might be deployed. We bring a wealth of experience and knowledge (which is not limited to being people who say, “It wasn’t like that in my day”) to those who want to be part of the furthering of the Kingdom of God.

I know that when some of my colleagues retire they feel that they now want to explore different parts of their lives. However, for those of us who are willing to be regularly available for ministry, I wonder if the powers that be might not be missing a trick? This is what I mean: as stipendiary clergy get thinner on the ground and are being asked to take on more and more, instead of using retired priests and deacons on an ad hoc basis, why not put their ministry on a more organised footing by agreeing a length of time for them to be committed to a particular post? Having done that, then the active retired can be “planned in” to diocesan and deanery strategies. This has happened to me to an extent by my being asked to look after a number of parishes [but only one at a time!] during their vacancies to provide stability and continuity, both for them and also for me!

Of course circumstances change. As we get older ill health can intervene in our plans. Moves by stipendiaries can mean a change in the “chemistry” of a team.

Unfortunately, retired priests are sometimes seen as a threat to stipendiary clergy. It’s true that some retired priests are a pain and need taking aside to be told, “Stop being negative”, but allowed to be part of the team, we can be part of the solution and not part of the problem!

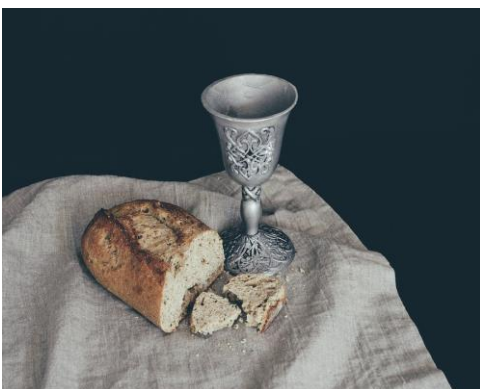
I am fortunate to be welcomed as a member of two Deanery Chapters. There I find the joy of the warmth of fellow clergy in that way in which you exchange news of your parishes and ministry that is so essential to personal flourishing. The speakers at Chapter don’t always resonate with us retired, [Finance, structures, etc] but the stimulation we can receive from the input of theological and pastoral wisdom is so invigorating. And we also occasionally have something to put into the discussion too!

However, I am glad not to have to attend Deanery Synods anymore. I remember a very astute lay member of Deanery Synod saying to me that she spent her time counting the number of bald heads of the clergy as a way of passing the time in what felt like a body that had never really been given a proper role in church life except as an electoral body for Diocesan and General Synod!

Unfortunately, when it comes to meetings like Clergy Conferences all too often there are no places for retired clergy. Again, if we are part of the workforce shouldn’t we be acknowledged as such by inclusion in the college of clergy who gather round their bishops for discussion and learning?

I appreciate that we can’t all be invited, but there was a time when a representative number of retired clergy were invited to clergy conferences and asked to report back to the others. Again, the fact that we were invited indicated that we were seen as part of the “team” and not just pairs of hands to fill in. Our brains didn’t die when we retired!

Meanwhile it is such a privilege to be a priest. I am just so thankful that I get to say mass every Sunday and during the week, to put together a sermon that would be [hopefully] worth hearing and to be involved in the hearing of confessions and the giving of pastoral care which is part of the wonder of sharing in the ministry of the Great High Priest.



Whether or not we are acknowledged in the official documents and strategies of the Church, we are still “Priests for ever after the order of Melchisedech”.

I still have my “Invisibility Cloak” [If you don’t know, that is a reference to Harry Potter]. But above all it is the love and support of the people of God in parishes, and of our fellow parish priests, that mean that it doesn’t matter as long as the sacraments are celebrated and the Gospel is preached and the sheep are fed.

And in that I rejoice!

George Nairn-Briggs, Dean Emeritus of Wakefield

Notes from the Secretary

Provincial Meetings



We have recently held our provincial meetings in Birmingham Cathedral and at Bishopthorpe, York. Neither were particularly well-attended, so council members would like to hear from readers about how we might make these meetings better attended. Are the costs of travel prohibitive, meetings content dull, timings wrong, or is it something else? Please let us know. At present we are hoping to return to London for the 2020 southern meeting and Bishopthorpe in June for the northern.

Would it be better, in terms of travel, to start with a noon lunch and finish at say 5 or 6pm? We have made enquiries at Lambeth for the southern province meeting in 2020 and received an offer of a specially discounted cost of £600 before catering is considered. Would members consider this a worthwhile use of our funds, or would they be prepared to contribute towards it in order to meet at Lambeth? I think I know your answer, so we shall be looking elsewhere.

Synodical Representation

A question was asked at the Birmingham meeting about clergy representation on synods. There is a procedure for this but it seems not to be well-known. Every 10 retired clergy with PTO in a deanery can elect one of their number to represent them on that deanery synod. If there are 11 that means 2 representatives. They can then stand for election to the Diocesan Synod in the House of Clergy. If they are successful in that they can then stand for General Synod when those elections take place. It may mean giving your Area Dean or Diocesan Secretary a nudge.



Postal Newsletters

We have had 81 members requesting postal newsletters following the announcement of their cessation in the last newsletter. Some have sent donations towards the cost of these and others have asked about the costs. The Spring newsletter in paper form cost over £1100 to distribute in 2019. The costs include paper, printing, envelopes, and the ever-increasing postage, nearly £2 per paper newsletter. We have been forced to restrict sending the paper version to those who specially request it because our income is falling short of what we need to sustain and develop the association. Currently only 17 dioceses offer the £50 membership fee to their retiring stipendiary clergy. Some of these also pay the membership fee for retiring SSM clergy. Those who wrote asking to continue to receive the paper newsletter will continue to do so for as long as we can financially sustain this. The digital newsletter only costs us around £100 to send out each issue.

Member feedback

At our provincial meetings we sought information and views from members on improving recruitment, diocesan retirement courses, PTO/DBS processes, diocesan strategies (hoping to see retired clergy mentioned), and on issues over shared housing. We would still like to have more member responses on these themes and issues so that our council meetings and meeting with the National Church Institutions can more effectively represent the interests of our members. If anyone has come across a recent diocesan strategy mentioning retired clergy we would be glad to receive it!!

New Members of National Council

We announced two vacancies on our national council in the Spring newsletter, asking for nominations to represent the East Midlands dioceses and the North-East dioceses. Two people have come forward and offered to serve so no elections will be taking place. The new representatives will be Revd. Clive Harper from Newcastle diocese and Very Revd. Geoffrey Marshall from Derby diocese. We look forward to working with them in the years to come in furthering the need and concerns of retired clergy and their partners as well as the further mission of Christ's Church.

Live well and love later life

This is the title of a free booklet available from Age UK which aims to counteract some of the contemporary negativity about later life to be found in some books about retirement. It is well-researched and each chapter focuses on one of the most important aspects of ageing and gives the advice of the experts. 27 pages from Age UK, Tavistock House, 1-6 Tavistock Square, London WC1H 9NA www.ageuk.org.uk 08001698787.

Malcolm Liles



How to be near while retiring?

In July I gave an address to the annual gathering of Retired Clergy in the Diocese of Sheffield. I myself had retired as Bishop of Warrington in 2018 and I was looking forward to the opportunity of reflecting alongside colleagues with whom I had previously served as a parish priest and archdeacon. In the process of editing that address I am aware of two difficulties: firstly, as I looked again at the script I am aware that perhaps the bits Malcolm most wanted were when I went “off piste” and secondly, I reminded that what we say is ephemeral, addressed to a particular person or group of people gathered in a particular place at a particular time. We know that sermons do not easily translate – one that seems to fly on its first outing can so very easily crash on the next.

Words can lose not just their freshness but their very meaning if we simply repeat them. At worst it’s like repeating well-worn mantras and we clergy can easily get stuck in that groove. Worse still is the tendency to massage the message, as the growing influence of Diocesan Communication Officers testifies. As a serving bishop, I found myself meekly acceding to what was being put out in my name – in quotes, of course. I do wonder whether it was laziness or cowardice on my part that stopped me from asking, frequently enough, whether the words ascribed to me were authentically and truthfully what I really wanted to convey.

Of course, I could say that as a bishop, there is a collective responsibility to uphold. All professions get trapped into using language that doesn’t properly reflect who they are (or think they really are). But for the church, believing the Word was made flesh, I would claim that its ministers have a particular responsibility to take care about how they express that truth. It seems to me that means being unafraid of using nuance and subtlety alongside a spirited sense of conviction. It is tempting to think we can reduce the immense grandeur of God and the wonder of the incarnation to a mere soundbite.

The tendency to surrender to words we think others want to hear is particularly evident to those of us who find ourselves reading (and compiling) job applications. These days clergy don’t get to move without applying for posts. This requires them to master the art of completing written job applications and submitting themselves to interview. Understandably (and indeed perhaps quite rightly!) it is not something every priest should feel comfortable about and it is sometimes hard not to be cynical when encountering a person who seems to be rather too proficient at it. I have to say it is tedious to read the number of times words such as “passionate” and “excitement” abound, even about the most difficult or dreary of jobs.

The problem is that hubris can quickly turn to nemesis as the juggernaut of enthusiasm is abruptly stopped in its tracks by the intractable difficulties on the ground. Unsurprisingly, those expressions of passion and excitement can soon enough become muted groans because even a cry for help becomes impossible. So a shining star has become dimmed by depression, if not to the point of extinction then to long-term sickness. We can heartily rejoice that clergy numbers, as witnessed at ordinations, are on the increase; we should be equally concerned that so is clergy stress.

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Nowadays we have HR to help us to compose those lengthy letters of appointment that set out in great detail the obligations clergy agree to fulfilling when they take up their new appointments. Compulsory MDR should make everyone more happy and functional. But sadly and perhaps predictably the lack of resources to make this work simply aren't there in any meaningful and substantive way.

Common tenure with regular Ministerial Development reviews are supposed to be a contract: clergy openly and honestly review with their bishops (or their representatives) how and where their ministry is going and in return, they'll provide the encouragement and support to make it happen. But we simply don't have the resources. (A few hundred pounds per annum, perhaps a bigger sum for a sabbatical, doesn't even begin to address some of the complex ongoing development challenges.) We've spent it front-loading all our ministerial training budgets on pre-ordination training. So MDR is a contract that lamentably fails to deliver, precisely where clergy training and support is most needed.

Having spent longer in my ministry as an archdeacon and bishop than as a parish priest, I sometimes wonder whether I have anything useful to say to my colleagues who serve our parishes. But I do think highly of them and think they do increasingly difficult and demanding jobs in trying circumstances. It can be tempting to think we do not measure up to the giants of the past. I offer up the following as a corrective: Henry Montgomery Campbell, who as Bishop of London (1956-61) wrote a poem in his will for his clergy: "Tell my priests when I am gone, o'er me to shed no tears; for I shall be no deader then, than they have been for years."

We retired clergy might feel that there is a tendency to treat us as "deader" than we actually are. Having taken a year off from subscribing to the *Church Times*, I returned to an issue which included the timely article (for me) "Positive about ageing", a tone somewhat betrayed by a comment made by a retired priest: "I am not keen on the idea of the Church relying on the retired clergy, with services being taken by doddering elderly clergy struggling to get through." It's devastatingly dismissive, in the way such generalisations are, and invites the equally unhelpful retort: "Well if it weren't for retired clergy, you'd never keep the show on the road."

Henry Montgomery Campbell



The other day an incumbent came to talk to me about a church that was added to her benefice when she was appointed to it. She is perplexed what to do with a congregation that is a smallish by urban standards but shows small but healthy signs of growth across all ages; it has been kept going by a retired priest and her constant lament was: “He won’t be there for long.” Well, I pointed out he had already been there for 20 years and he, too, seemed to have more than a few more in him. And that’s a good deal more than we could say about some so-called active clergy.

The next generation won’t be able or allowed to retire until their 80’s anyway – the price, I tell my children, for keeping your parents in the comfortable retirement you’ll never get. It’s a sobering thought that when pensions first came about, the actuarial calculation was that men would only need a pension for four years. A decade ago, actuaries were calculating life expectancy in retirement was rising at the rate of one year a year: no wonder we have pension crises. And just to make things more difficult, on average, clergy live an average of two years longer – God, it seems, being in no great hurry to meet us.

So, if we’re going to live till we reach a hundred, we’ve not only got to have something to do – it needs to be appropriately valued. Like that retired priest faithfully tending to his flock for more than twenty years, (much longer than we’d get out of most stipendiary clergy in one parish) we’ve got to get out of the knee-jerk reaction of defining that as the problem. As I said to his incumbent, simply give thanks for what the Lord has given you – and use your gift in a constructive way – get him and the parish to review the situation annually, especially to ask the hard questions constructively: should he continue, should the church continue. Perhaps, in these challenging times, we should be asking all clergy and parishes to be doing exactly that.

We have a problem as a church in failing to acknowledge positively the resources we should value and spend an awful lot of energy chasing rainbows. How many times does “All age worship” get put on with no one under 40 present but with content totally aimed at the absent school children? You don’t grow anything, whether it’s your business or your Church, if you treat your loyal customers with contempt. If the attitude towards faithful Christians taught to receive the sacrament week by week is: “What’s the point – can’t they wait for a week?” then one more person gives up attending and it doesn’t seem a terminal moment – but this is one more death by thoughtless self-inflicted cut. The old Parish Communion movement – the Lord’s family gathering around the Lord’s table on the Lord’s day at least had a strong sense of inclusivity in community.

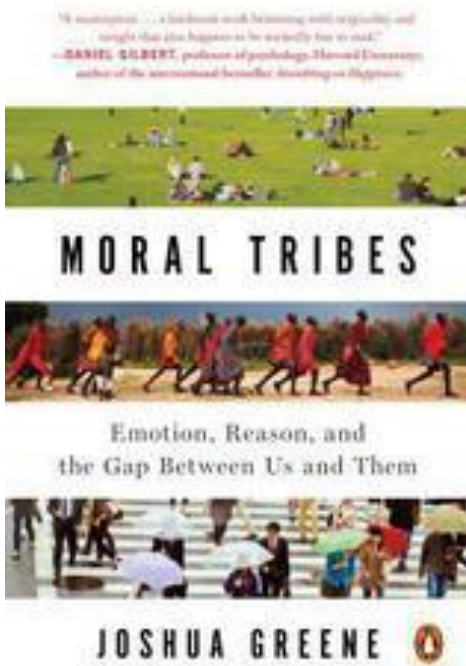
The former Dean of St Paul’s, the poet and preacher John Donne, said that the effectiveness of a preacher was not their wit or their cleverness or their authority. The effectiveness of a preacher, he said, lay in their “nearness” how near, how close they got to those who were listening. It is a sign of the times when I need to say, what would have been obvious to our generation of priests, that there is a non-negotiable need for Christian communities to be near people in their lives, as much in their losses as in their celebrations.

As the Church of England shrinks its ability to be present in our communities, we lose our own relevance to people and our ability to resonate with authority and authenticity. Retired clergy have the essential quality of priests with their theology of experience, the time and skills to listen to people and to be present in our parishes. I can’t see that’s anything other than priceless. My question to our Church today is: can we sustain that authentic and truthful engagement with those whom we should know and love without us retired priests?

Rt Rev Richard Blackburn

REVIEWS

Choose your Tribe

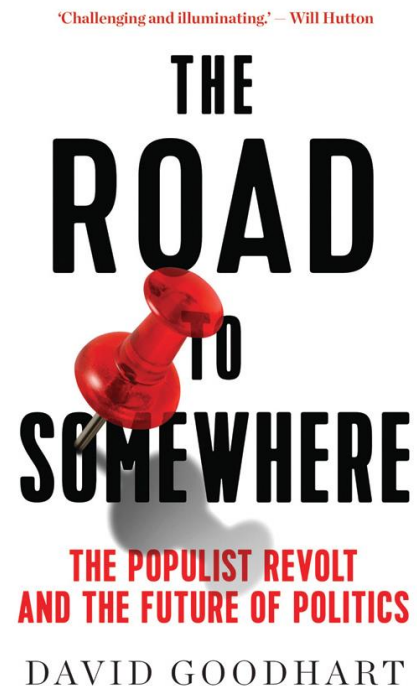


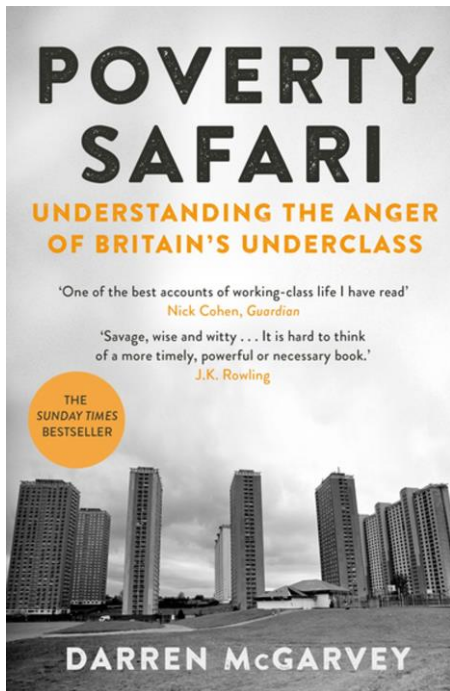
Apart from my usual diet of detective fiction and other random light reading, I have, over the last year or so read three books with something of a common thread. They explore the theme of “Us and Them” which seems to be responsible for so much of the grief in the world today.

The book *Moral Tribes: Emotion, Reason, and the Gap between Us and Them* by Joshua Green, published by Atlantic Books was recommended by a friend. It looks at the idea that humans are hard-wired to cooperate with others of their own “in” group as matter of evolutionary necessity, but that we are similarly pre-disposed to see anyone from an “out” group as a threat. There’s a considerable body of scientific evidence for this, which the author quotes at some length. It seems we have to make a continuous and deliberate effort to overcome our prejudices. The book comes up with various (basically Utilitarian) strategies, and seems to conclude that Utopia could be achieved. It is an interesting read, although I found the tone rather patronising and some of the content decidedly repetitive.

Perhaps the most obviously tribal volume is *The Road to Somewhere: New Tribes Shaping British Politics* by David Goodhart, published by Penguin (picked up at the Cheltenham Literature Festival) which was written in the wake of the 2016 referendum. It puts forward the thesis that the population can be divided into “Somewheres” and “Anywheres”, being respectively people who identify strongly with a particular location and people who do not. The author suggests that the most common reason for individuals to move away from their birthplace is to go to university. Many never return to live at home. David’s idea is that these people are happy to travel, to live anywhere that life may take them. They will have friends and connections anywhere in the world. By contrast, those who stay in their home towns are much less open to a cosmopolitan viewpoint. He goes on to explore the extent to which the “Leave” vote resulted from Somewhere people resenting the imposition of internationalist Anywhere values. The book makes a number of generalisations, but is certainly thought-provoking; I found that, being someone for whom “home” can be wherever I’m happy and my friends are, I could identify with many of the descriptions of Anywhere attitudes.

It is difficult to escape the conclusion that the author is probably on to something when he says that, to heal our divided society, politicians need to pay more attention to the views of those who still value a sense of place. However in the Global Village which we inhabit, I was left wondering whether this any more achievable than Joshua Green’s Utopia.





The third book, *Poverty Safari: Understanding the Anger of Britain's Underclass* by Darren McGarvey, published by Picador, was another Literature Festival find, and is certainly the most powerful of these three books; it inspired and depressed me in equal measure. The author talks with wonderful honesty about the circumstances in which he grew up, and the insights which have helped him to break out of the cycle of poverty and deprivation. He acknowledges that the system is broken, and that there is no easy fix, but also that we all have to live with the choices that we make as individuals, which may not always be the right ones. He describes how, from the perspective of a child growing up in a deprived community, he saw the middle classes as the enemy, and how he gradually came to realise that this is not necessarily the case. Darren is someone who, as the saying goes, has pulled himself up by his own bootstraps, and as a personal story it is really inspiring. However the sense that whole communities will always struggle to do this in the face uncaring bureaucracy is hugely depressing.

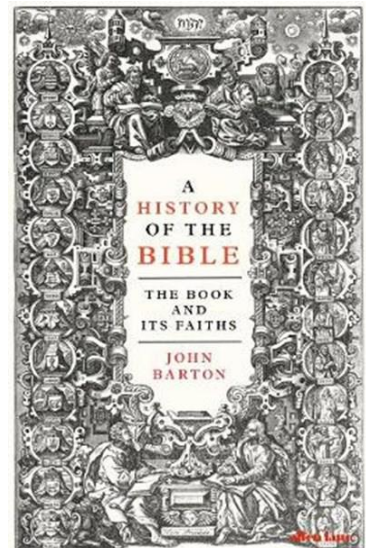
In many ways, this book is an easy read. The language flows and doesn't get bogged down in technical terms, clichés, and over-long sentences. However, in a number of places, it can appear to digress from the topic in hand, and the reader needs to be willing to stay with it and have faith that everything will all come clear in the end. It's well worth the effort!

All these books are available in Kindle format, as well as paperback.

Canon Frances Wookey

A History of the Bible – The Book and its Faiths by John Barton Allen Lane £25 (hardback)

I have always trusted John Barton's scholarship ever since we shared Old Testament tutorials together as undergraduates at the feet of John Austin Baker. One week he would read his essay, which could immediately have been published in the *Journal of Old Testament Studies*, and the following week it was my turn and that would probably have found its best audience at the Edinburgh Comedy Fringe! John went on to be a Professor of the Interpretation of Holy Scripture at Oxford for many years and that lucid, accessible style of writing that I remember so well has never deserted him. This book tells the story of the Bible, explaining how it came to be understood, from its remote beginnings down to the present. Untangling the process by which some texts that were regarded as holy became canonical and were included, and others weren't, he demonstrates that the Bible is not the fixed text it is often perceived to be, but the result of a long and intriguing evolution.



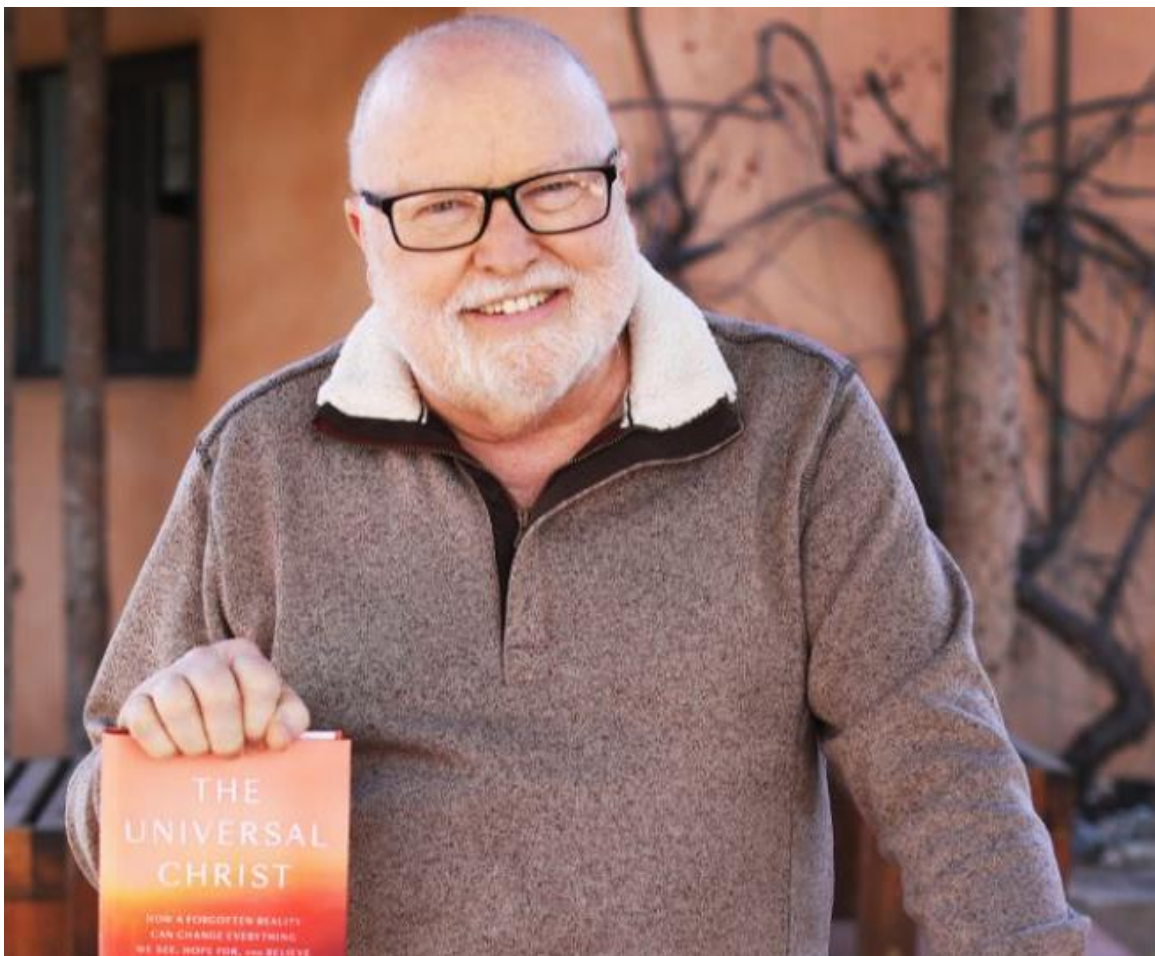
This is a substantial book, some 600 pages, with lots of helpful notes, suggestions for further reading and good indices. Don't be put off by its length. It reads easily. If there were just one book you read concerning the Scriptures, this should be it.

+Ian Brackley

The Universal Christ by Richard Rohr SPCK 2019

For the past few years Richard Rohr has become an oft chosen guide for my reading in seasons such as Advent, Lent and Retreats. He has the rare ability to let you walk with him on a journey in which he shows you familiar and less familiar sights as if you are seeing them anew. He has a conversation with you and in the best Franciscan tradition allows you time to sit and breathe at particular points on the journey; time to think and ruminate; time to absorb what he is saying, though he doesn't expect you to take on everything he suggests. It's a rare gift and much appreciated.

The Universal Christ is an excellent example of his model of working. He takes you on a journey away from the details of Jesus' life and times, his teaching and parables. Rohr wants us to stand back and to see the wonders of not just Jesus the Man, but Jesus the Universal Christ. 'Christ is everywhere', he proclaims in the Introduction, 'in Him every kind of life has a meaning and has an influence on every other kind of life'. It's a startling statement and he delights you even more, not by carefully dissecting that thought, but inviting you to experience it. The book is an enlivening one. He carries you along on a wave of heartfelt companionship, even in the moments when you might want to disagree with him. In the last chapter he thanks you for trusting him to journey with him. This book has taken me on a journey I will want to explore many more times. I would be very surprised if you don't feel the same way.



Richard Rohr



This book comes recommended by distinguished intellectuals, including Melvyn Bragg, whose name appears in bold red lettering on the front cover like a warning. I recognised all but one of their names and they are all members of the left-liberal establishment of interfaith studies. They take themselves seriously, so don't pick this book up if you're of the sort that likes theological discussion to be leavened by a little light-heartedness. The author has a certain po-facedness: a man for whom jokes are no laughing matter.

The title itself begs the question, Does religion do more harm than good? It all depends which religion we're talking about. A few approaches to the study of religion – philosophical, ethical, aesthetic – are mentioned, if not discussed with great rigour, and dismissed as more or less inadequate. One analytical method provides what Dr Casaubon called “the key to all mythologies.”

Shortt declares: “Sociological spadework is needed to place the insights expressed by defenders of religion on a surer foundation.” It is hard to resist the conclusion that the author's religion *is* sociology with Max Weber and David Martin among its prophets. The book is dedicated to two contemporary sociologists.

Shortt is a rationalist fan of the 18th century Enlightenment which “formed a protest against unaccountable authority.” Yes, but only by setting itself up as a new, equally unaccountable, authority based on rationalistic abstractions of the sort first criticised by Kant and, more recently and with sublime eloquence, by R.G. Collingwood in his *Essay on Metaphysics*.

The style and examples chosen are frequently whimsical and fey. For instance, discussing creativity, he says, “Carpenters can pass on the articles they make, never seeing them again. But a song is, by definition, an emanation of a singer.” This is plain snobbery. A fine chair has Mr Chippendale written all over it quite as much as Erna Berger's rendering of *Die Holle Rache* is entirely her own.

Shortt claims: “Three-quarters of humanity possess a faith.” That is a pretty shallow judgement – or are we to suppose that Marxists and other atheists have certainty? In reality, every worldview starts from its own particular absolute presuppositions; and these presuppositions cannot be demonstrated but must simply be *assumed*.

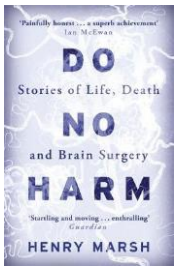
He cites the famous description of religion in the Roman Empire, that it was “...regarded as true by the ignorant masses, as false by the philosophers and by the magistrates as a convenient method of social control.” Is there any perspective which allows us to escape this class-based subjectivity?

Shortt leaves us in no doubt that the universal salve is the practice of sociology – and pursued with all the fastidious intensity of Ignatius Loyola's *Exercises*.

Rev'd Dr Peter Mullen

Do No Harm – Stories of Life, Death and Brain Surgery

Henry Marsh Weidenfeld & Nicolson £8.99 (paperback)



Brain surgeons have become a byword for brilliance in the field of medicine and surgery. Here Henry Marsh gives us an insight into the very human and challenging world in which he has distinguished himself. Starting off with no scientific background at all (he read PPE at Oxford) a gap year working as a porter in a hospital convinced him he should become a doctor and gradually, as he gained experience, he succumbed to the lure of treating the diseases of the most delicate, amazing and mysterious organ in the human body.

I found it fascinating to learn how many forms of tumour can occur in different parts of the brain, the effects they can have on the function of the body and how difficult it can sometimes be for surgeons once they are actually inside your head to carry out the necessary operation without it resulting in the possibility of some damage. Needless to say it requires enormous skill, great experience and considerable humility.

There is a fascinating discussion about brain function, personality, “soul” and quality of life. I found it interesting to read that Henry Marsh finds hospital buildings awfully tedious and tiring in their sheer scale and functionality, and also of his frustrations of dealing with NHS managerial systems that struggle to cope with huge demand on slender resources both human and financial. But thank God for people like Henry, even if he doesn’t believe in Him.

+Ian Brackley

The Uninhabited Earth: A story of the future David Wallace-Wells reviewed by *Malcolm Liles*

I’m writing this review at the beginning of the Creation season when the Church calls us to emphasise especially in our worship and action the care we need to exercise for the whole of creation, and as news comes of the devastation caused in the Bahamas by Hurricane Dorian.

I’ve been reading a book which paints a grim picture of the results of our exploitation of the earth’s resources. In 228 pages and with 60 pages of scientific references the author sets out our dire predicament and “the sixth great extinction.” The book is an expansion of an article he wrote in the New York magazine in the summer of 2017, which frightened the life out of everyone who read it.

The longest section, the Elements of Chaos, sets out all the dimensions of the doom to come: Heat Death, Hunger, Drowning, Wildfire, Disasters No Longer Natural, Freshwater Drain, Dying Oceans, Unbreathable Air, Plagues of Warming, Economic Collapse, Climate Conflict, “Systems” challenging our complacency. But we have all the tools needed to prevent this catastrophe: carbon tax; the political apparatus to phase out dirty energy; a new approach to agriculture, shifting away from beef and dairy in the global diet; and public investment in green energy and carbon capture.

There is much I did not want to know: We are now burning 80% more coal than we were in the year 2000”; every return flight from London to New York costs the Arctic three square metres of ice; global plastic production is due to triple by 2050 when there will be more plastic than fish in the world’s oceans. Most of the real damage has been done since the reality of climate change became known. If we observe these things from a privileged western viewpoint it’s easy to overlook how bad things have already become, to accept hurricanes and heat stroke deaths as simply the unfortunate nature of things. But what would be the use of our talking about this if we could not do something about it? We only have One Planet and we have to respond.

I recommend readers to look at Green Christian <https://greenchristian.org.uk> and to buy the book.

Permission to Officiate

I was saddened by the negative tone of the item in the Spring Newsletter by John Evans about the new procedure for PtO from the House of Bishops. Of course we should welcome clergy who no longer minister through holding a Benefice or a Bishop's Licence, and encourage incumbents and other leaders to use their ministry. It would be lovely to feel we could trust everyone to minister to the full extent of their capability with no risk of wrongdoing. Sadly, history shows that we cannot.

For a beneficed minister or a curate, there is a clear structure by which the Bishop and specific office holders in the church as a whole can expect to become aware of wrongdoing within the well-defined scope of their ministry: Churchwardens, PCC, the Rural Dean, the Archdeacon, as well as the Bishop. In contrast, for a retired minister with PtO, although they may reside within a particular parish, their ministry may legitimately have a much wider and diffused scope, with no particular individual having formal oversight, other than the Bishop with all their wider responsibilities. In the past different people within a diocese have known of individual allegations but a failure to see the wider picture, or take responsibility for action, has allowed wrongdoing to perpetuate. Given the history of abuse by ministers, there can be no excuse for not having a more formal structure of oversight.

It is entirely legitimate to question what level of oversight is appropriate, but to claim that the proposed procedure is more suitable to commercial or military organisations than to the Church of England seems to me to be premature and unwarranted. As one of the Retired Clergy Officers (ourselves all PtO) within our diocese, we have been involved in reviewing the proposed procedure and planning its implementation. Yes, it will be a formal procedure, but in our view is suitably light-weight while achieving its fundamental objective of minimizing the risk of failure to detect any future abuse that irreparably damages the whole mission of the Church. I hope each one of us with PtO can approach the new procedure with an open mind.

Martin King, St Albans Diocese

getting old

'We're left out of diocesan plans.' 'There's no mention of us in the staffing strategy.' 'We don't get invited to training events.' Retired Clergy Officers hear many comments of this kind. There's a lot of frustration among retired clergy about on the one hand being excluded and on the other being taken for granted when someone's needed to lead Mattins at St Chasm, Nether Darkly.

I'm not retired yet. I'm still at work, but recently have been finding it stressful. My GP has sent me to a weekly clinic for Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT). I've found myself apologising to the therapist for repetitive use of the phrases, 'I used to ...' and 'In the past ...' Of course, there are things wrong with me, as there are with all of us. And there are things wrong with my working environment, as there are with all. But some of the particular flaws – those that bring me to the end of the day with neither will nor heart for anything more than the cricket highlights, those which cloud my judgement and confidence – are I'm sure connected with the fact that I'm growing old.

Last year I attended the London Diocesan pre-retirement course. Yes, we did talk about the possibilities of (changing) ministry following retirement; but mostly we talked about growing old – about pensions, housing, bereavement, declining health.

This course was the most enjoyable and worthwhile clergy gathering I'd been to for sixteen years. I suspect that one of the reasons for this was that much of the talk was about laying bullshit aside rather than picking it up from the latest bright spark at Diocesan House. But there was something else too: we were all about the same age.

On page 4 of this newsletter George Nairn-Briggs likens being a retired clergyman to wearing an invisibility cloak. But the sense of becoming invisible is not peculiar to retired clergy: it's integral to the ageing process. We might remember how we felt about the old buffer from The Chapel of the Holy Foreskin talking about sanctuary slippers when we were young curates keen to introduce Ken Leech and Gustavo Gutiérrez to the rural populations of Herefordshire and Shropshire.

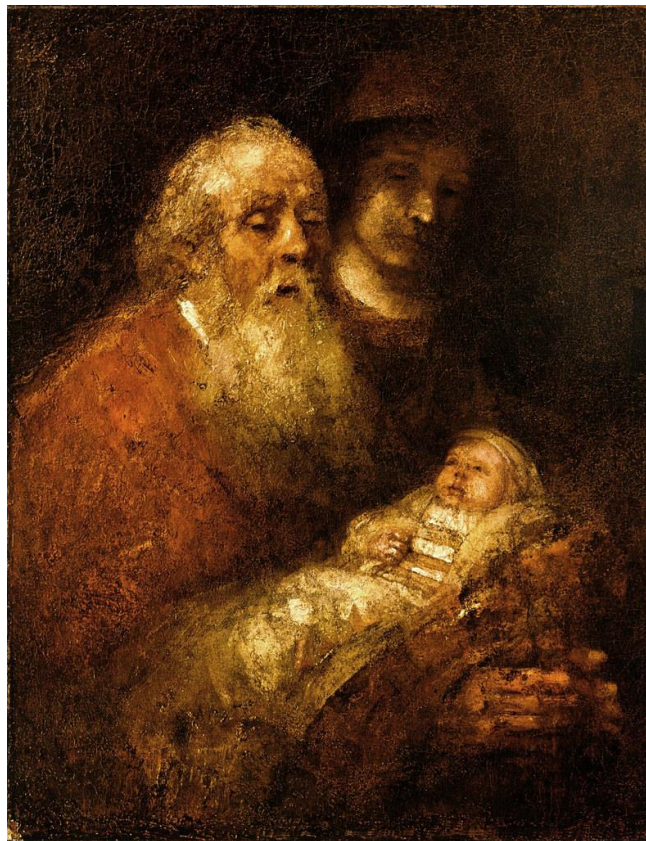
A couple of years ago, I enrolled for the first clergy conference I'd been to for nearly a decade. I was astonished by the youth of my colleagues – their vitality, engagement, and their extraordinary loudness. Following a keynote address we arranged ourselves into breakout groups. The young people in my group couldn't wait to talk to one another. And I realised that as far as they were concerned (and there is nothing more than description in this observation) where I was sitting – grey-haired, slack-mouthed, slumped – there was an empty chair.

We've noticed the ebb and flow of presence at other stages in our life. When moving from childhood to adolescence, we become noticeable, putative competitors for territory. Transitioning to middle age we noted the speculative glance not being returned, and that we were no longer viable candidates for a beating up. At least in this stage we were still building our establishment, buttressing our status. But the third metamorphosis is bound really, when you think where it's going, to head towards invisibility.

The young clergy at the conference were sweet when I made a contribution. I can't remember what I said. But I can remember how their evident kindness served as a nudge to keep it short.

In his notes from the secretary (page 7) Malcolm directs readers to the Age UK website. It's up to readers whether or not they use the link, but it does gladden me that we have a reference to old age: we run the risk of delusion if we think we can talk about being retired priests without talking about being elderly.

Robin Isherwood



Simeon in the Temple Rembrandt 1669

Independent Supported Living

When I became secretary of this organisation earlier this year my wife and I decided that it would be a good idea if we became better acquainted with the breadth of provision available from the Church of England Pensions Board. We are now part of the way through a series of visits to the Church of England *supported and independent living homes*. As we go, we are informing considerations about our own future, and becoming better able to advise members who are considering their future accommodation needs. There are seven supported living homes scattered across the country and each has its own particular ethos. Clergy and their partners are able, and encouraged, to spend up to two nights in each to see what they are like. So far we have visited Fosbrooke House, and Capel Court.

Many people think of schemes like these as somewhere they will “end up” or need to look at when life gets too difficult in their current property. But these homes do all claim to be places to come and *live*, and live independently with support available if it is needed. I don’t at this stage want to engage in wrestling with what the term “independent supported living” might represent. I shall come back to this at the end of our investigation. For the present I just wish to offer some impressions of how this is interpreted in the various homes.

Fosbrooke House is in Lytham, on the Lancashire coast. All of the flats at Fosbrooke are 1 – bedroom but in three different designs for couples and single residents. There are two wings with three floors served by a lift. The views over the gardens and the Ribble estuary can extend to Snowdon on a clear day, especially if you are on the top floor, whilst the ground floor flats have a view of the sunken gardens and pond and easy access to these. There is a small library, a chapel and laundry. Most of the residents at the time of our visit attended local churches on Sundays but there are two weekday eucharists in the chapel. A small charge is levied for the use of the laundry equipment.

At the time of our visit the altar in the chapel was raised above floor level, making it difficult for clergy with some disabilities to celebrate the eucharist there; we also noticed that wheelchair bound residents might find it difficult to access the gardens without help over the threshold. There is a parking area for disability scooters but there was no provision of elementary light gym equipment such as a bicycle turbo or rowing machine; outside gym membership would be necessary for this. One of the ground floor flats is available for short-term convalescent use (or possible use in part of a sabbatical?) The capacious central lounge/dining area provides a comfortable setting for residents and family visitors to meet, helped by the all-day availability of a hot water dispenser with tea and coffee.



The flats, inevitably, are a challenge to downsizing skills; storage is limited and at least one resident chose to keep books in the bath and just use the shower. Each kitchen has sink, kitchen units and a small fridge; some residents have also purchased electric hobs to supplement these. Otherwise the only cooking facility is a microwave.

There is a community lunch each day with some scope for choice, although it must be a challenge to the catering staff to deal with the residents' likes and dislikes. Wait till the vegans appear! We also wondered about portion size. Breakfast and tea time are in the flats, or in one of the many cafés in Lytham. The communal areas of the building were being cleaned by members of the support team and it conveyed a sense of well-being.



In common with all of the supported homes there is no personal or nursing care provided. This needs to be bought in from local agencies and it could be that if needs develop further this would not be a home for life. Whilst we were staying at Fosbrooke a resident with Parkinson's was moving to a local nursing home more suited to his care. Both here and in our next visit, to Capel Court, we wondered about the space in the bedrooms for the lifting equipment required by such residents.

A recent bequest has enabled Fosbrooke to purchase a number of small "seaside huts/sheds" for residents to adapt at the sides of the gardens providing additional views to those from the flats and lounge and somewhere to sit and have a natter. Lytham itself is just down a road well-served by public transport with some interesting shops and eating places and there are trains to Blackpool and Preston. The Lake District and Dales are only a short drive away.

The guest room we stayed in was comfortable. Guest rooms can be booked by the night for £30. We greatly enjoyed speaking with the residents, visiting their flats and hearing about their experience of supported living.



Capel Court, in Prestbury, near Cheltenham is in another previously unexplored area. (We need to get out more!) Here the flats are all on one level with the residents each having their own door and key; they do not have a key to the public entrance door of the complex. Again the flats are 1-bedroom, but of different sizes for couples and single residents. Each has a private patio and small garden for the residents to tend as they wish; inside, there is a fitted kitchenette with a cooker – although the main kitchen provides three meals a day, with breakfast and lunch being optional.



Money has recently been spent on new divider doors between the library and chapel to make this space more accommodating for a wider range of activities, including film shows. There are ample parking facilities including garages: one resident has set up a workshop in his. The communal space at Capel Court is a sun lounge where tea and coffee are served during the morning and afternoon. Again, residents were enthusiastic to share their thoughts and experiences of living at Capel Court, some offering generous hospitality; most of them seemed to be relatively local and drawn to Capel by their knowledge of the area and its facilities, and by proximity of relatives. The average age was a little higher, at around 83, than at Fosbrooke, where at least one resident was in her early 60's and others around 70.

There is a good relationship between Capel Court and the local parish church, to which quite a number of residents are attached. There are good local amenities with a library 50 yards away, pharmacy and shops within a few minutes walk.

At both of these homes there are opportunities to be involved in groups outside the home – bookgroups, hobby pursuits and organisations such as U3A, as well as in the voluntary sector. At the time of our visit the Cheltenham Music Festival was taking place so it was somewhat surprising to see how few people there were around the town centre in the early evening; in terms of shopping there were the usual high street names with only a few more interesting niche shops.

I'd be grateful to hear from residents provoked or annoyed by what I have written and hope to take such comments into account when I write the final account of our journeyings some time next year.

Malcolm Liles