



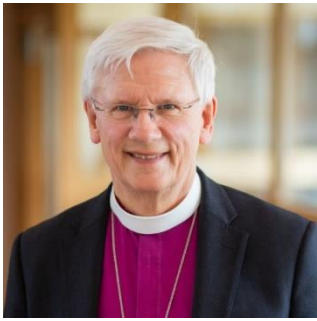
## Summer Newsletter 2025

### Focus on Wellbeing and Welfare

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#### **From the Chair: The Rt Revd Colin Fletcher writes:**



Dear Sisters and Brothers,

I am writing this before the meeting of the York Synod when I, and I'm sure the overwhelming majority of the readers of this newsletter, will hope that the proposals coming to it because of Ian Paul's Private Members Motion, coupled with the work that has been done by James Blandford-Baker, Adrian Youngs, and the Steering Committee of the Clergy Pensions Action Group, together with considerable input from Malcolm Liles, will have produced some very good results for the wellbeing of our present and future members.

But, knowing as I do the complex dynamics of Synodical Gatherings, I shall restrain myself from further comment at this stage, except by adding that I have pledged my personal support for whatever steps are taken to implement changes further.

Instead, I wanted to share with you my experience the other week as I went to two art exhibitions in London. The first was at the National Gallery - 'Siena: The Rise of Painting, 1300 - 1500'. It celebrated artists like Duccio, Simone Martini, and the Lorenzetti brothers, and, not surprisingly, it was dominated by Christian imagery. Saints, biblical stories, and scenes from Christ's life, death and resurrection filled the panels, manuscripts, work in precious metals and sculpture. What struck me were the portrayals of the crucifixion. For these artists there was no attempt to diminish the pain and brutality of the suffering of Christ. Here was Jesus, with his friends watching on, in agony as he bled to death. (A book related to the exhibition is available at <https://shop.nationalgallery.org.uk/siena-the-rise-of-painting-e-c-1053024.html?srsId=AfmBOopQMvf29Lr6umrKdbJYd4KeRL2dD93WB5kNANGelkMq8O74yNCY> )

What a contrast with a fascinating early medieval sculpture at Langford Church here in Oxfordshire. It is one of two quite similar ones in the Church. The crucified Christ has his arms outstretched straight whilst in the other one they are slightly bent, though nothing like the sagging ones depicted by the artists of Siena. This, as we will remember from our essays on theories of the atonement, is Christus Victor. Christ reigning from the Cross. Christ triumphant over sin, death and every kind of evil. Today, and for many years past, there is no longer any head to the sculpture, but, if there was, it is more than likely that the face would have been looking straight ahead and, on the top of the head, would have been a crown.

All of which takes me to another image of the crucifixion which I saw that day at the Royal Academy's Summer Exhibition. The work is entitled, very simply, The Crucifixion 2025 and it is by Tracey Emin. Christ wears a crown. His arms are outstretched, but from his face he is clearly in pain. To his right and left are

the two thieves, similarly positioned, but with no crowns on their heads. Very cleverly, Emin has placed Christ's Cross slightly ahead of the other two and, from that perspective, his arms seem to intertwine with theirs. Here is the Christ who is wholly committed to his world, sharing its pain and suffering, but still, I think, triumphant. More unusually too the thief on the left of the picture, at Christ's right hand, is a woman - something I do not think I have ever seen in a portrayal of the crucifixion, but one that so beautifully encapsulates the Good News that Christ died for all. Christus Victor, yes, but the self-emptying Christ at one with the sufferings of the world as well. Both truths held together as only a great artist can do.

I noticed from the catalogue that it is NFS - Not For Sale - but I do hope that it will find its way to a place where it can be contemplated and prayed over in ways in which those paintings from Siena have been for so many centuries for it richly deserves to be, not least in an age of so much suffering when we need as humanity to know that the Christ who shares our pain with us is also the God who triumphed on the cross and that nothing can defeat him.

Your Friend and Brother

+Colin

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### **A word from the Editor**

In this newsletter there is much relating to welfare and wellbeing, with very good news from General Synod and useful information on the hugely beneficial work of the Clergy Support Trust. I am conscious that the summer months are often a busy time for those retired clergy with PTO as we enable others to take a well-earned break. Thank you to those who wrote in with details of their summer holidays of the past.

For the next newsletter I would be pleased to receive articles pertaining to music. Perhaps you remember a teacher who encouraged you to persevere with a musical instrument. Maybe you have attended a great concert or performance. Have there been occasions when music has brought you closer to God? Tales of good, bad or indifferent experiences with church musicians will be welcome also. Is there a specific piece of music that brings you joy?

Items from members for the Autumn newsletter should be with me please by the end of September, at [cjpchad9@aol.com](mailto:cjpchad9@aol.com) preferably in Word, Calibri 12-point narrow margin. Thank you.

The views expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of the Retired Clergy Association of the Church of England.

*Charles Chadwick*

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### **Meeting with Pension Board Officers.**

At the RCA Council meeting on Wednesday 9<sup>th</sup> July, it was good to be joined by John Ball, Chief Executive of the Pensions Board, and Natasha Gray, the Board's Director of Strategy and Engagement.

It was encouraging to hear not only how much creative and thoughtful work is being undertaken to enhance clergy pensions and housing for retired clergy, but also that, subject to General Synod's approval

of the next three year's spending proposals, a considerable amount of money will go toward supporting retired clergy.

A key document is GS2402, and its discussion at General Synod, which will be covered elsewhere in this newsletter. A great deal of work will be undertaken to advise pensioners of any changes that ensue from the debate with the aim of implementing any changes between April 2026 and April 2027. Given the complexity of the task and the number of pensioners and the complexities of dates of retirement and tax implications, it will take the Pensions Board several months to work out how much individuals stand to receive.

Through grants from the Church, the Board hopes to do more to support clergy with retirement planning. For instance, introducing regionally based teams, who will work with local Retired Clergy Officers and other diocesan colleagues, to provide more advice and assistance relating to wellbeing, pensions and housing.

Much useful information, including FAQs, can be found at

<https://www.churchofengland.org/about/governance/national-church-institutions/church-england-pensions-board>

*Charles Chadwick*

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### **Pension News from General Synod**

As the newsletter goes to print, thoughtful and painstaking work by our council and many others has resulted in General Synod, at its meeting earlier this month, has given its wholehearted support to considerable enhancement of the provision made for the Church of England's retired clergy.

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"A "VAST cloud of witnesses to injustice" were thanked on the floor of the General Synod on Saturday, as members voted to welcome a package designed to improve the clergy pension.

The debate followed an announcement earlier this month that the clergy pension was to be restored to two-thirds of pensionable stipend: the reversal of a change made in 2011 (News, 23 May). This will be applied retrospectively: those already retired will see a pension increase reflecting a two-thirds accrual rate since 2011.

Moving the motion, which welcomed a "significant and immediate step towards correcting an historic injustice", Canon James Blandford-Baker (Ely) said that the work belonged to "a vast cloud of witnesses to injustice and in many cases poverty among retired clergy". Two thousand clergy had joined the Clergy Action Facebook Group, 700 had signed a letter to the *Church Times*, and 192 members had signed the private member's motion, he said.

The motion also calls on the Archbishops' Council to commission a "comprehensive, independent review of what is needed to ensure that clergy and their dependants are supported in retirement with dignity and fairness". It requests that this be chaired by an independent lay person "with a working group representing all relevant interests, and engaging fully with clergy, clergy spouses, retired clergy and other stakeholders", and that it should report back to the Synod within 12 months.

The review was necessary, Canon Blandford-Baker suggested, to ensure “we never end up in this place again.” There were “deep structural questions to be faced”. Some clergy were paying the entirety of their pension back to the Church through the clergy-housing retirement scheme (CHARM), he said. Some were unable to live near to children, grandchildren, or friends, or “lost on some soulless new estate disconnected from public transport and unable to access vital public services”.

Canon Blandford-Baker called for a pension “that provides dignity nor poverty” and suggested that the current decline in ordinand numbers could be the “direct result” of the current “poor provision”.

A layman from the diocese of Southwell & Nottingham, Ian Boothroyd, highlighted the situation of those clergy who had retired after 2022, during a period of high inflation.

The Ven. Dr Adrian Youings (Bath & Wells), formerly Archdeacon of Bath, said that one quarter of all Sunday services were taken by retired clergy. The Revd Lis Goddard (London) was concerned about the inequity experienced by those who had a portfolio ministry, or by women who might take house-for-duty posts as a way of serving part-time while caring for young children.

The chair of the Pensions Board, Clive Mather, said that he was “delighted” with the proposals and that a “unified implementation date” of 1 April 2026 had been set. He cautioned, however: “This is very, very difficult. The number of individual calculations that need to be made are simply mind-bending and there are all sorts of issues around taxation and personal circumstances. . .

“Please don’t start ringing us or writing to us in the middle of April and May to tell you what is happening; we won’t be able to . . . What we will do is keep you updated through the web.”

The Revd Dr Ian Paul (Southwell & Nottingham), who last year moved the private member’s motion that served as a catalyst for the commitment to improving clergy pensions (News, 16 February 2024), spoke of “persistence over many years” and thanked colleagues in the national church institutions. He said that the chief executive of the Pensions Board, John Ball, had “taken the time and trouble” to read every single story shared by the Clergy Pension Action Group. One person had written of the new settlement: “I no longer fear retirement.”

The full Synod digest will be in the Church Times of 1<sup>st</sup> August.

More information can be found at <https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/pensions/clergy-pension-improvements>

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### **Person in Profile**

David Burrell, who was ordained in 1988, spent his entire stipendiary ministry in the diocese of St Edmundsbury & Ipswich serving in a number of rural multi-parish benefices. In his retirement in the West Country, he volunteers with His Majesty’s Coastguard.

#### **1. *What is the first thing you can remember?***

My first memory is of a knitted pair of gloves from my grandmother as a Christmas present. Perhaps that is why I love Christmas.

2. *Who has been the greatest influence on your life?*

There is not one greatest influence rather it is the diligence and sense of vocation exhibited by many of the self-supporting ministers I have had the privilege to work with

3. *If you appeared on 'Mastermind' what would be your specialist subject?*

Battleships of WW1

4. *What is your favourite prayer?*

Go forth into the world in peace; be of good courage; hold fast that which is good; render to no one evil for evil; strengthen the faint hearted; support the weak; help the afflicted; honour all people; love and serve the Lord in His Holy name.



5. *What brings you contentment?*

My wife and my dog

6. *What is your favourite piece of music?*

Rachmaninov vespers

7. *Who is your favourite fictional character?*

Hornblower, I spent my childhood reading and re-reading CS Forester's books.

His character's self-doubt and self-effacing attitude resonate with me in many ways.

8. *What advice would you give to a new ordinand today?*

Create the habit of prayer and don't forget to enjoy your life.

9. *What do you enjoy the most about being retired?*

The lack of pressure and having time for my family

10. *How would you like to be remembered?*

He cared.

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### **Serving those who serve others:**

#### **The work of the Clergy Support Trust**

One of things which became very quickly apparent to me, during my curacy at a wonderful civic church in Surrey, was how reliant we were on the support, skill and services of retired clergy. As a large, town-centre church, we had a fantastic full-time rector, alongside me and another self-supporting priest, but our team was strengthened, enriched and made complete by several retired colleagues. Some were at the altar most weeks; others led or preached less often – but what they had in common was the more hidden ministry which they exercised, supporting parishioners in need, providing a listening ear, visiting, chatting, praying. We would have been far poorer a parish without them – indeed, I'm not sure we would have managed.

Partly because of this formative experience, I've always been keen that Clergy Support Trust is truly there for our retired sisters and brothers, as well as those serving clergy who make up the bulk of our applicant body. Indeed – and perhaps in common with some readers – I struggle a bit with the whole phrase “retired clergy”. It doesn't seem to do justice to the considerable workload which many have, but it also feels slightly contrary to the whole concept of diaconal and priestly ministry! Either way, Clergy Support Trust is very much here to walk alongside readers of the RCA newsletter, as much as any other ministers.

Some readers might know the Trust as “Sons and Friends of the Clergy” – a rather lovely name, but which we changed a few years back because it was misleading to some applicants. Now, our name reflects more accurately what we do: we exist to serve those who spend their lives serving others. In one form or another, we've been doing that since 1655, when a group of clergy sons got together at St Paul's Cathedral, concerned about the welfare of their fathers. We still come together with supporters and friends of the Trust, each year at St Paul's, for our glorious Festival Service – at which all clergy are very welcome – and we're immensely honoured to have His Majesty The King as our Patron, nearly 250 years after his predecessor Charles II granted us our Royal Charter.

But our core business, in a nutshell, is helping clergy households with their financial, mental and physical health. We're here not just for ministers, but for their partners and families, who can access a broad range of grants, services and resources. Some of those are for everyday costs, the things which catch many of us out at the end of the month, or which are unexpected and unmanageable – a new appliance, a car repair, energy bills, home maintenance. Other grants are focussed on health and wellbeing – whether that's aids and adaptations around the house, or access to free counselling and coaching. We offer support with holidays and retreats, and with managing debt.

Across all these areas, Clergy Support Trust is helping thousands of people: last year, 22% of the Church of England's clergy came to us at least once. That's humbling and a great privilege, but it's also problematic – representing as it does a wellbeing deficit at the heart of our Church. Increasingly, therefore, we offer training and resources, as well as grants and services: for example, our Wellbeing Workshops, proving popular in many dioceses, and our co-produced research projects. And, as well as acting to support clergy, we advocate for them too – CST's data was instrumental to the recent proposals for a 10.7% rise in the stipend, and to the evident centrality of wellbeing in the Triennium Funding Group announcements.

Part of the Trust's challenge is reaching all those who might want our help in some way – and it would be wonderful if readers of this newsletter might consider any friends who could do with knowing about us. Seven years ago, our entire marketing team was one person; that has since tripled, as our workload has steadily grown too, but it's still a big ask to get into every diocese, community and network! So we'd be most grateful for any help you can give us, in ensuring that all who should hear about CST, have done so.

It's been an enormous privilege to lead the Trust's work and team since 2020, through the huge challenges of the pandemic and the subsequent cost-of-living crisis. Alongside that role, I'm also a parish priest, currently house-for-duty in a small, growing parish in Surrey. Here, as in my curacy, I'm supported by wise clergy friends of diverse experiences and backgrounds, often giving so much, sacrificially and selflessly, to the Church and community they love. Such a calling is, in my own limited experience, truly joyful – but it's also, at times, very hard: exhausting, emotionally draining, lonely. It's for those moments that the Trust is

here to try and help. If that might be relevant to you, or to a fellow clergyperson you know, please remember Clergy Support Trust.



If it *isn't* relevant to you, please don't forget us either! Although the Trust is fortunate to have good investments which have been well-managed over many centuries, our recent spending has dramatically outstripped the available income. That has been a deliberate strategy to reach more people, and help in new ways, but it isn't sustainable for ever. That's why we've established easier ways to support our work, like donating through the website. We've also set up a Free Wills Scheme, where anyone can write their will via us – whether they choose to leave us a gift. So please do visit our website and be in touch any

time: there is no greater pleasure in this amazing role than to meet my sisters and brothers in ministry, to learn from them, and – if I'm not speaking out of turn – to thank them for their example and for making me a better priest myself.

*Ben Cahill-Nicholls is Chief Executive of the Clergy Support Trust and also serves in the Bourne with Tilford in the Diocese of Guildford.*

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### **Clerical Roots**

The children gave us DNA testing kits for Christmas. There were no big surprises there, but as part of the process, I started working on an online family tree. And where better to start than with the work my great uncle Cyril Stackhouse had done 50 or 60 years ago. I had all the material. I just hadn't looked at it properly. And that's where the surprise came.

My husband and I came to Durham in 1978, when he took up the job of teaching church history in the Theology Department of the University. I worked in the NHS for 16 years, leaving in 2000 to be ordained, serving in parishes in the Diocese of Durham. I retired at the beginning of Lockdown in 2020 and am now 70. But even after 47 years living in Durham, I felt I was still very much an incomer.

Not so! It turns out that I have deep roots, going back 350 years.

In Uncle Cyril's papers, I discovered that my 7x great grandfather, John Stackhouse, had ministered in the Diocese of Durham from 1675 to 1734, 59 years, because they didn't retire then. Born in Thornton in Lonsdale, North Yorkshire, 1651, he graduated from St Johns College Cambridge and was the first person ordained in Durham Diocese by Bishop Nathaniel (later Lord) Crewe. He served as Curate at Witton le Wear and took on the neighbouring parish of Hamsterley in 1682, presumably because curates were paid so abysmally. He became vicar of St Andrew's Auckland in 1695, the largest parish church in the diocese. This parish was pretty much next door to Auckland Castle, the bishop's principal residence. He was collated at St Edwin's High Coniscliffe in 1712, and moved on to the north of the diocese in 1718 to be Rector of the Boldons. He was 83 when he died in 1734.

I have visited all these churches now and had the privilege of presiding and preaching at St Nicholas West Boldon, where John is buried.

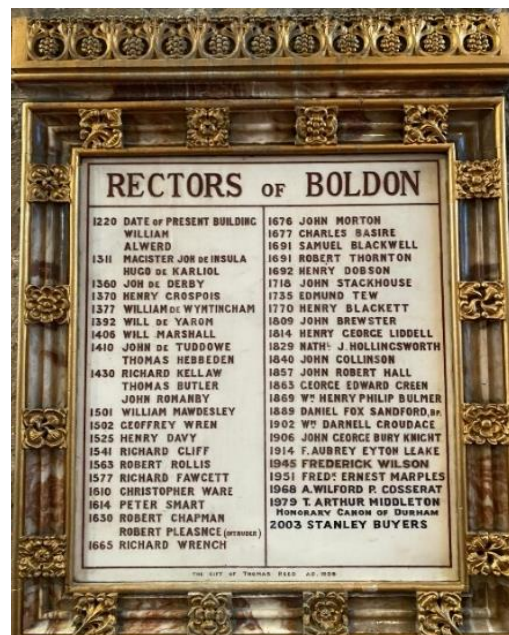


John was married twice. My great granny Ann gave birth to 4 children. There is a sense of pride in John's baptismal record of their first son Thomas on 19 April 1677. Thomas was buried the following day. The next two children, Ann and another Thomas, survived infancy. The last child, John, presumably an infant, was buried on 25 August 1685. The next entry in the burial record is that of his mother, ten weeks later.

John married Mary, his second wife, who gave birth to seven more children, most of whom survived childhood.

Two of John's surviving sons were also ordained. My 6x great grandfather was Ann's son Thomas, born 1880, though his Wikipedia page mixes him up with his older deceased brother. Yes, the Revd Thomas Stackhouse has a Wikipedia entry and can be found in the Dictionary of National Biography. He wrote lots of books including *The History of the Holy Bible*, *A Compleat Body of Divinity*, and *A New and Practical Exposition of the Apostles Creed*. His first book, *The Miseries and Great Hardships of the Inferiour Clergy, in and about London*, is an extended complaint about how much curates were paid, how badly they were treated, and how they were despised. Thomas ended up as Vicar of Beenham Valence in Berkshire. Amazingly, many of his books have been reprinted and I am collecting as many as I can. Confusingly, there were three Thomas Stackhouses who wrote books, as Thomas' son and grandson were also published.

John Stackhouse's youngest son William, born 1701, was also ordained. He married Dorothy in Wooler Northumberland in 1728. By the time they were burying their first child at the end of 1729, they were in Sunderland. Another child was buried the following year, and the year after that, 1731, Dorothy herself died, presumably giving birth to a daughter Dorothy. William gave the baby to his parents in Boldon. John had turned 80 by this time. William himself went just about as far south as he could, to be installed as Vicar of St Erme in Cornwall in March 1732. His father John was buried December 1734, and child Dorothy died 4 months later, aged 3.



Thomas Stackhouse

William was married again in 1738 to Catherine Williams. He thus married into nobility. Their four children survived into adulthood. His eldest son was ordained and his two daughters married priests. His second son, another John Stackhouse, became a world expert on marine botany, particularly seaweeds. You can also find him on Wikipedia and in the Dictionary of National Biography. He married Susanna Acton and built Acton Castle above Stackhouse Cove. Their son was MP for Cornwall.

There are multiple Stackhouse clerics over many generations, some directly related to me, but mostly more distant. They became Quakers for three generations. My grandfather Arnold Stackhouse was ordained in 1914/1916 to serve the loggers in British Columbia, and served mainly overseas as a





missionary priest in British Honduras, Fiji, etc. His last parish was Ingleby Greenhow in North Yorkshire 1937-1950. He retired to New Zealand. His daughter Mary, a SPG missionary in Sarawak, was my mother.

I am still researching John and Thomas and hope to write up what it was like to be a cleric in the late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

*The Revd Dr Meg Gilley      Retired Priest, Diocese of Durham*

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## From the Secretary

**Vacancies of Retired Clergy Officers** If you know who the RCOs are for the following dioceses: Chester, Chichester, Canterbury, Salisbury, Winchester (Bournemouth Archdeaconry) could you please send their contact details to our secretary on [secretary@rcacoe.org](mailto:secretary@rcacoe.org) please.

**A vacancy on the RCACoE National Council** We need a volunteer regional representative/trustee for Canterbury, Rochester and Chichester dioceses. Any offers or enquiries about the role from members living in these dioceses should be forwarded to our Secretary, Malcolm Liles at [malcolm.liles48@gmail.com](mailto:malcolm.liles48@gmail.com), as soon as possible. Council would especially welcome women priests in these roles to improve the gender balance of council. If there is more than one nomination an election will be organised.

The main role of a council member is to be a trustee of the association and to be in touch with the Retirement Officers in the dioceses they represent, to produce a regional report twice a year for consideration by council. These reports inform our actions and relationships with the national church institutions and other bodies. Also, to attend by zoom meetings of the national council on no more than 4 afternoons a year to guide us in our work. Unless we fill this vacancy the service we offer to our members will be much reduced.

### **PTO pathway or not?**

We understand that in some dioceses retired clergy with PTO are being told that if they take more than 5 services a year they have to take the full leadership safeguarding course rather than the PTO Pathway. This is apparently the result of "national guidance". Is this happening in your diocese or do you have access to this "national guidance"? If you do, could you please let me know at [malcolm.liles48@gmail.com](mailto:malcolm.liles48@gmail.com)

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**New Members:** Kelvin Woolmer, Chelmsford diocese; Stephen Lister, St. Albans diocese; David Page, Chester diocese; David Brown, Oxford diocese; Paul Kingdom, Exeter diocese; Julie Read, Hereford diocese; Nigel di Castiglione, Ely diocese; Stewart Jones, Lichfield diocese; Kate Mier, Coventry diocese; Sheelagh Aston, Durham diocese; Peter Sutton, Leicester diocese; David Wales, Oxford diocese; Andrew Micklethwaite, Leicester diocese; Philip Sutton, Oxford diocese; Richard Walton, Sheffield diocese; Nigel Lacey, Norwich diocese; John Russell, St. Albans diocese; Thomas Fish, Sheffield diocese; Vicky Fleming, Lichfield diocese; Michael Brandsma, Coventry diocese; Ian Kitchen, Newcastle diocese; Larry Wright, Birmingham diocese; Elaine Hall, Derby diocese; Keith Bristow, Guildford diocese; Garry Tubbs, Carlisle diocese; Beverley Jameson, Chester diocese; Peter Walsh, Blackburn diocese; Ivor Jones, Chichester diocese; Charles Stewart, St. Andrew Dunkeld and Dunblane; Helen Chandler, Norwich diocese; David McDougall, Oxford diocese; Mark Jones, Blackburn diocese; Jayne Lewis, Leicester diocese; Antony Macrow-Wood, Durham diocese; Steve Hall, Liverpool diocese; David Mundy, Norwich diocese; Paul

Moore, Sheffield diocese; Jennifer Gray, St. Albans diocese; Sally Lynch, Oxford diocese; John White, Exeter diocese.

Malcolm Liles

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## What is it about clergy and trains?

When I was a boy, Junior Membership of Somerset County Cricket Club cost £1. The folded rectangle of crested card gained me unqualified entrance to all home games on all the home grounds. (A quick browse tells me that Junior Membership is still a bargain today, at £24.) Growing up in Bath, membership mainly meant attending the handful of games played on the Rec. But once Dad's summer holiday started, it could mean trips with my brothers to Weston-Super-Mare and Taunton.

It was at Taunton's County Ground that we watched Dad's beloved Lancashire. He pointed out the way Brian Statham put on his jumper after another flawless over; little Harry Pilling's jaunty approach to the crease; the serene inscrutability of the skipper, Jack Bond – who, if he'd ever shown any prowess with either bat or ball, had learned perfectly to conceal it.

After a long day in the sun, we headed home on the Bristol train across the Somerset Levels. Honeyed western light warmed the compartment. We smacked the old seats to raise clouds of dust. Dad dozed. Slowly, slowly – a rattle across points, a friction of the brakes – his dentures loosened, coming to rest on his lower lip. He'd had all his teeth removed in his teens, ensuring perfect dental health for the rest of his life – that, and, much to the delight of his sons, periodic goofiness.



For us, all journeys of significant length were by train. Hard to credit now, in the world of *Trainline* and *GWR* apps, but we used to make our plans with the help of the national railway timetable. At the issue of every new edition, Dad used to settle in his armchair and *read* it, memorising whole columns.

Dad was never ordained. But he served for 40 years as a Reader. He wrote his sermons on the back of envelopes, resting on the *Radio Times*, the *Playfair Cricket Monthly*, the *Railway Magazine*.

*Approaching Doniford Beach Halt, West Somerset Railway*

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<https://www.geograph.org.uk/photo/7477186>

Now in my fourth decade of priesthood, I've learned that my airy fondness for trains is the fanciful sentiment of a frivolous dilettante. The conversations I've heard in gothic chambers where clergy gather to shuffle and robe! About track gauges, wheel configurations, rolling stock, branch lines. Father John had for years run the entire East Anglian network. And then the whole exchange all over again, this time in regard to the model railways laid out in the attics of a score of rural rectories.

So, what is it about trains and clergy? (And pseudoclergy, as Dad's old friends from his Methodist days might have called him.) A friend of mine suggests it's simply a matter of nostalgia. I think it's more than that, more than a longing for the past, a kind of homesickness. It seems to me that the tracks that denote so much promise don't simply lead back to where we came from; at least as much as that, they head into a future we're unable to define. Perhaps the kind of people who become vicars are often the kind of people who are sojourners – people for whom the reward lies as much in the voyage as in the arrival. People whose treasure is not laid up in any here and now, where the moth frets and the rust corrodes, but in the beyond. People whose *life's star*, as Wordsworth puts it, *hath had elsewhere its setting*.

Dad used to get as much pleasure from reading the timetable, from watching a train pass under the bridge by my piano teacher's house, as he did from travelling on one. Those people – real ones glanced at the passing windows, plastic ones manipulated up and down the platform of my Hornby Double O trainset – were going somewhere. Pilgrims of the soul, they travelled in hope. Trains, like prayer, take time, alter the landscape. Passing through and through the meadowed verges of the transcendent, the tracks bring substance to the rumour of Elsewhere.

*Robin Isherwood, who was ordained in 1994, spent time serving in the Chester diocese and in retirement lives in Frome, Somerset.*

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## Remembering Childhood Holidays

### 1. Time in Kent



When I was a child, our family holidays were on the Kent coast. This had the advantage of being a short journey from home, whether by train or coach or, later, car. For the first few years, we stayed in the hotel at Cliftonville, where my parents had had their honeymoon. There was the cliff lift (if we had 1d to spare) or the steps down to golden sands, safe swimming waters, donkey rides and ice cream. I remember being chased by bigger boys after I had

kicked their sandcastles down. On the day my father had promised to take me for a ride on a bus like this, the rain was torrential, but I insisted that a promise was a promise. To my chagrin, the conductress made us sit downstairs!

When I was about eight, we switched to holidaying in a flat at Westgate. The sea there comes right up to the sea wall at high tide – perfect for swimming – and disappears to the distant horizon on the ebb, exposing a vast area of sand for building castles and rocks to clamber over, looking for winkles, mussels, limpets and crabs. My grandmother used to come with us, and I remember her taking me to the Congregational Chapel. I even remember the sermon. *Don't hang your fiddle on the wall*. 50 years later, I visited the same chapel on the Friends of Kent Churches Ride & Stride and told the people there this story. They said I wouldn't notice many changes since 1964! I loved those holidays so much that one year I caused consternation by hiding in some gardens when it was time to go home.

In those days, there were funfairs and arcades, cinemas and theatres and the Dreamland amusement park. You could hardly see the sand for people on the beach at Margate. The vast crowds and most of the entertainment venues vanished it seemed overnight, but I'd still recommend the Kent coast for a good day out or a fine holiday.

*Roger Knight was ordained in 1980 and, after two curacies, was the Rector of Cuxton and Halling in the Rochester diocese from 1987 to 2024.*

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## 2. Enjoying North Wales

The long summer holiday from school was one of the highlights of my year when I was child! Five weeks without school meant lots of time to build dens, take long bike rides and go fishing in the canal. I grew up in



Audenshaw near Manchester, and my father worked in a foundry. He had to take the local "Wakes" holidays, a fortnight at the end of July and beginning of August, when the foundry shut down along with all the factories in the area, so we always had a week's holiday at the seaside at that time. We went as a family to North Wales or The Fylde Coast usually, always by train as we didn't have a car. My favourite place was Llandudno, where I spent my hard-saved pocket money on donkey rides at 6d a ride. I recall falling into the paddling pool in Rhos on Sea one

summer, fully clothed. It wasn't deep, but I was so stunned that I just sat there dripping wet, not knowing whether to laugh or cry!

In North Wales I was fascinated by the language. I heard local people speaking Welsh in the shops and saw Welsh language signs everywhere. I wanted to learn what sounded like a magical language to me, but living in Manchester I didn't have the opportunity. Decades later, during the pandemic, I got lucky. Welsh lessons were offered online, and I grabbed my chance. Now I spend my retirement learning this wonderful ancient tongue, revisiting childhood haunts in Wales as well as discovering new places, and making new friends. Thanks to the seeds sown in those long-ago summer holidays of the 60s and 70s, I have discovered a whole new world. *Bendigedig!*

*Kathy Colwell is the Bishop's Officer for Retired Clergy, Widows & Widowers in the Diocese of Lincoln. She lives in the far north of the Diocese, in Barton upon Humber.*



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## 3. Time in the Home Counties

We lived in Yorkshire, but my summer holidays were spent at my grandparents in Surrey. It was an adventure travelling with my grandma from Leeds to Kings Cross behind (usually 2) steam engines and having a meal in the restaurant car. By the time I was 11 I had been to all the museums and parks, seen the changing of the guard at Buckingham Palace, been to Hampton Court, Kew Gardens and more. I was the only one in my class to have seen all these things for real.

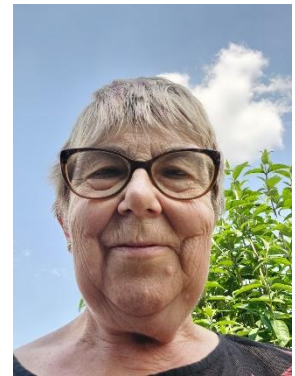
I didn't have anyone to play with, but I had toys and books which had been my mums and a scooter to ride round the pavements near their house. There was a recreation ground across the road and Gran used to take me there to play on the swings, go on the crazy golf or the tennis courts and eat ice cream from the café. I can still hear the sound of leather on willow from the cricket pitch.



My Grandad was one of the London commuters with the hat and rolled up umbrella. Every morning, he left at the same time (8.23 on the dot) and took his place in the stream of men walking to the station. It all happened in reverse at 6.20 when he turned into the front gate. At weekends he tended the roses and grew runner beans. I 'helped'.

My grandma had gone to the first Billy Graham rally in 1954 and since then had gone to Cheam Baptist Church every Sunday. I was only 5 then so we went for the first part of the service and came home before the sermon. Later when I could read, I took a book, and we stayed to the end. That was my first introduction to church. I looked forward to the summer... to go to church!

*Ordained in 2004, Chris Shedd served in a number of parishes in Bradford and lives in Huddersfield in her retirement.*



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#### 4. Appreciating CSSM in Cornwall

My vicar father had, until recently been a small-holding Devon farmer, so it was in a canvas topped Land Rover we made our way to the Cornish campsite. This became our holiday venue year after year; Mum and Dad in a small Bluebird Caravan, painted green, and we youngsters in old army bell tents.

The main draw for me, regards Polzeath's sandy beach became the Children's Special Service Mission, (CSSM) – dawn to dusk activities by age categories, of a light and cheerful Christian flavour. Although morphed, they are still there, still S.U. umbrella I think, as 'Tube Station' with focus on surfing youth.

Back to the 1950's, the red and white CSSM banner would blow vigorously in the Cornish winds across the house of the CSSM team, mostly Oxbridge students in blazers, and would be flapping down on the beach as the Atlantic rollers crashed on shore.

The core event was the daily morning beach service. With what razzmatazz and calling out to cues, quizzes, choruses, competitions together with prayer and scripture passages did we lap up this morning ritual. Seating comprised self-dug sand-dug pews arranged as a horseshoe around a massive built pulpit which would be washed away each night.



But the CSSM day began for me with ‘Gold Diggers’ before breakfast. I’d make my way to the scripture passage sessions, again in age groups, where we’d speak about a Bible portion, sing or say the prayer, ‘Open Thou mine eyes\_ - -’ and devise our own text ‘password’ for the day ahead.

After lunch the programme was secular, with tide-fights, whirligig sandcastles, beach hockey, sand modelling or car treasure hunts (parents included). Evenings and wet days were based at the shore-line Methodist chapel, often with filmstrip shows of God’s world of masterful provision in beauty and order: (argument by design of course). Or night-fall sausage sizzles in coves lapped by the sea; quieter thoughtful times, before returning to the parental camp.

During the year ahead I would keep to my own ‘gold-digging, with daily reading of scripture to the A.V. version (until J B Phillips came along). I see myself in prep boarding school dormitory so doing at the mid-day ‘rest hour’. Other pupils were curious but never rude. Some years later I joined the team at Polzeath for a year or two and still make this seaside my annual holiday most years.

Martin Weymont: Paraphrased extract from ‘Vicar on the Run: Life from early childhood to post-retirement’ obtainable via Amazon and Kindle with illustrations.

*Martin Weymont, who was ordained in 1973 lives in retirement in Wiltshire.*

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## 5. The Annual Trip to Borth



One of my earliest memories is our annual trip to my grandmother’s holiday home in Borth, near Aberystwyth. As described in Ysenda Maxtone Graham’s book *British Summer Time Begins*, it was always wise to keep out of the way while my father packed the car, a Morris Traveller, which was done with much exasperation and expostulating. In the 1960s to travel from South Oxfordshire to the Welsh coast was really quite a journey, with no M4. Our much-loved dachshund, Martin, would sit in the back with my sister and I, and would invariably be sick. The skill was to avoid him being sick on one.

The sand and the sea seemed to be enormous and many a day was spent happily exploring rock pools and building sandcastles. Various other friends and their children would join us for some or all of the stay. One year a young Norwegian woman, who was a friend of our parents, came with us. I remember her not being impressed with that seaside delicacy, Fish and Chips, and asking if we ate the paper too. In 1966 my godmother and her young family joined us, and we sat in the sand-dunes listening to England win the football World Cup on 30<sup>th</sup> July.

Eventually our father realised that the time at Borth was no real holiday for our mother, so we started to go elsewhere, but Borth lives on in our family as my sister and her three sons, and their children were in Borth just a few weeks ago.

*Charles Chadwick who lives in West Oxfordshire in retirement*

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## Then and now:

### A reflection offered at the Northern AGM by Bishop John Pritchard

#### GOD

- I used to think God was the answer. I still think God is the answer, but I also think God is the question.
- I used to think my mind could grasp the idea of God. Now I know I'm utterly out of my depth and my mind crumbles before the mystery of God.
- I used to start my prayers with 'Almighty God.' Now I want to start them with 'Gracious God.' Or 'All-vulnerable God.'
- I used to think God was a winner and wanted winners around him. Now I think God loves losers too, indeed especially losers.
- I used to think God was in control from afar. Now I think God is working steadily from within everything, and succeeds not by being powerful but by being inexhaustible

#### JESUS

- I used to think Jesus was my companion and saviour. Now I think he is my companion, saviour, example, inspiration and *provocateur*.
- I used to think Jesus was 'God from God, light from light, very God from very God, begotten not made.' Now I also think, and prefer the emphasis, on Jesus as the ultimate human being, completely open to God his Father, and completely responsive to God's will.
- I used to think Jesus came to die for us. Now I think he came to live for us, but that involved dying because of the way the world is.
- I used to want to prove the resurrection of Jesus. Now I'm more concerned to live in the joy of the resurrection and trust people will meet the living Christ along the way.
- I used to focus my faith on Jesus. Now I focus my faith on Jesus.

#### FAITH

- I used to think faith was 'either/or.' Now I think it's 'both/and' because truth has many dimensions and we don't own it.
- I used to think faith was believing certain ideas. Now I think it's about trusting and living with compassion and justice in the light of that trust.
- I used to think faith meant safety and peace. Now I think faith also means the desert, disruption and patient perseverance. It means not being safe but being saved.
- I used to want to be good. Now I think only God is good and if I stay close something might rub off.

#### MINISTRY

- I used to think ministry was about what I did. Now I think it's about how I am that feeds what I do.
- I used to think I could argue people into faith. Now I prefer to invite them.
- I used to want to succeed for God. Now I want to loosen up and let God do what God wants with me.
- I used to think God, the Church and the world needed me to help sort things out. Now I think God has sorted things out already and we must help it come to pass.
- I used to think that if the human heart was changed then evil would be overcome. Now I think sinful *structures* need to be transformed as well – and the roots are deep.
- I used to fear failure. Now I think 'rock-bottom' is a gift and makes me hand over the controls.

- I used to think I could earn spiritual airmiles by working hard and trusting my resilience. Now I think God loves me anyway, and might just be able to use me sometimes, despite my attempt to do God's job for him.

## PRAYER

- I used to think prayer was telling God what we needed. Now I think prayer is listening, aligning ourselves with God, and staying in the mystery.
- I used to think prayer was a technique. Now I think you learn to pray by praying.
- I used to think prayer was what I did in those ten minutes I squeezed out of the day. Now I think prayer is the fabric of the whole day, directed towards God.
- I used to think I couldn't bear the absence of God. Now I think such absence might be the dark angel that leads me to the treasures of darkness.
- I used to long to feel the tangible touch of God. Now I think 'it's no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me' – and what more could I want?

*Ordained in 1972, Bishop John's ministry has served as Archdeacon of Canterbury, Bishop of Jarrow, and Bishop of Oxford. It has included time as Warden of Cranmer Hall, vicar of a parish in Taunton, Diocesan Youth Chaplain in Bath and Wells, and a curate in the centre of Birmingham.*

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## The Temple

Lord, let me build unto thee a Palace  
Wherein my King may dwell,  
That shall be massive and well-wrought without,    And all glorious within.

Let it have four foundations – faith, prayer, good works, and holy learning.  
And furniture – nine graces of the Spirit – contrition, humility, self-discipline, integrity, purity, courage,  
love, joy, peace.

Lord, who hast bidden, *Abide in me and I in you*,  
Who dost stand ever at the door and knock,  
Let me toil mindfully all day, all ways                      To build myself for thine indwelling.

Yea, come Lord Jesus, thyself to build;                      For without thee I can do nothing  
Nor may the place be lovely or strong.

Only, O Lord, let it not rise, although thy work    A palace, but A TEMPLE;  
The hear of it no throne of state                      But an Altar of Sacrifice,  
Whereon in eternal sovereignty is set  
A LAMB AS IT HAD BEEN SLAIN.

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