



# St Helen's Church

Ashby-de-la-Zouch

Loving God, Loving Others, Loving the World



# Parish Magazine

February 2024

# WELCOME FROM THE EDITOR



Hello and a warm welcome to February's parish magazine.

Well January went by in the blink of an eye and it seems the season of Lent is now almost upon us. Judith Lewis, one of our readers, leads us in thinking about how we might use this time to grow in our faith personally over the page. First I'd like to highlight the series of evening services which will be held across the Flagstaff family of churches, one for each Sunday of Lent and each starting at 6pm (18th Feb– Holy Trinity, 25th– Viscount Beaumont's school, 3rd March– St Helen's, 10th March– Isley Walton, 17th March– Worthington, 24th March– St Helen's).



Donations can be left in the boxes at the back of St Helen's Church, in the porch of Holy Trinity or the Congregational Church, or at any of Ashby's Co-ops. Thank you to everyone for the continued support.

Getting together with other members of the Flagstaff family is always an encouragement. Lots of the things you'll read about in this, and most magazines are the fruit of such collaborations.

Hope to see you at one of the services, and hope you enjoy reading.

With blessings for the month ahead,  
Emily

## St Helen's Church is part of the **Ashby Churches**

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## FROM THE MINISTRY TEAM

Dear Friends,

I came close to starting this letter by saying Happy New Year! And then realised that that isn't really appropriate for February. However, I'm not sure that I've really got into the swing of this new year yet – January seems to have flown by. And now I find myself asking questions like “how can it be February already?” And “how can it possibly be Lent in only 2 weeks?” And “what do you do when Ash Wednesday, the primary day of penitence in the Church's calendar, coincides with one associated with chocolate and champagne, namely Valentine's Day, 14<sup>th</sup> February?” And “what should I do for Lent this year, given that it's not so long since I made my New Year's resolutions and I don't think I have time or space in my head to add anything extra into my routine?”



The first two of these questions are, of course, rhetorical. And you'll need to make up your own mind about how to manage the juxtaposition of Ash Wednesday and Valentine's Day, given that the Bible has nothing at all to say on the subject of chocolate, nor, indeed, about Lent. Popular culture, surprisingly, has quite a lot to say about both – chocolate and Lent! Having googled Lent, I found innumerable sites with titles such as 38 Meaningful Things to Give up for Lent in 2024 [Good Housekeeping Magazine] or 32 Ideas for What to Give up for Lent (And When to Start) [Country Living Magazine].



A free phone line of hymns,  
reflections and prayers

Perhaps not surprisingly, many of the suggestions were about things that would make “me” feel better. Giving up chocolate and alcohol were, of course, there, but primarily in order to make me healthier and shed a few pounds. Ditto going to the gym or other regular exercise. And saving money by reducing on-line impulse shopping and take-away expensive coffees. And, of course, adopting greener and more environmentally-friendly habits, which are a good thing in themselves, but any associated smug feelings of being virtuous are not really in keeping with the spirit of Lent!

Many of the suggestions in the 2 articles above were much the same as New Year resolutions, shifted into February. The focus being on what I can do for me, to make me feel better about myself. Whereas Lent is a very different thing. It is about making more time and space for God, about taking our spiritual life seriously. That is where the giving up of things such as chocolate and alcohol or other self-denial may come in – they can act as a reminder that we are not enslaved to or controlled by our physical habits and so they can be a prompt to focus more on God. But they don’t have any intrinsic spiritual merit. [Although if you feel you should do something, then Fair Trade chocolate might be a suitable compromise!]

What would help you deepen your relationship with God this coming Lent? Your answer might be that keeping on with how you do things at the moment works best for you, whatever that might be; that adding more things in or doing things differently is a distraction rather than a help. Your options to make changes might be limited by time or other commitments. Or there may be so much going on in your life right now that survival is the name of the game, and the thought taking on anything new is more than you can bear. That’s OK – doing something for Lent is not obligatory and being a Christian is not a list of rules that have to be followed, but a relationship with God who loves us immeasurably.

But if you are looking for an opportunity to deepen your relationship with God this Lent, or to do something more about responding to what that relationship means to you, let me share with you some of the rather more God-centred suggestions that I found on the magazine sites that I googled.

- When driving, consider turning off the radio and using the time to

pray, reflect and talk to God [but please don't close your eyes!] Alternatively, listen to CDs or downloads of hymns, worship songs or Christian talks or sermons.

- Finish your day by reflecting on what you can be thankful for, and thank God for it.
- Donate an item each day to charity. Most of us have far more stuff than we need or use – in addition to doing something for others, it also makes us conscious of and grateful for what we have.

There are, of course, always a number of devotional Lent books available – I am extremely excited about one I have discovered that is spiritual reflections taken from the writing of Jane Austen, though I appreciate this might not be everyone's choice!

There are, of course, in this day and age, innumerable on-line resources.

And finally, let me remind you of what Andy Smith wrote in last month's magazine, which is as relevant to Lent as to New Year: To commit ourselves to finding regular moments of stillness with God, time to meet with him and to simply "be" in his presence, putting aside the agendas, to-do apps and checklists.

Whatever Lent means to you, however you feel led to mark it, it is my prayer that we all, in our different ways, with our different opportunities and challenges, will find ourselves blessed and enriched by God during its 40 days.

**Judith Lewis**



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# HAVE YOU HEARD ABOUT... THE FLOWER ARRANGERS?

**As we continue our series looking at the many and varied things God does within our church, we hear from Helen about our wonderful team of flower arrangers and their contribution to our worship.**

There's a group of volunteers at St Helen's who work behind the scenes week in week out to decorate the church with flowers that enhance our worship and provide a warm welcome. It's such a lovely ministry to be involved in – using beautiful flowers to praise God, whilst working in the peace of the empty church or chatting with visitors as you arrange. And then there is the fun of coming together as a team to decorate the church for the festivals of Christmas, Easter, and Harvest.

We all have our reasons for 'doing the church flowers' but maybe the following prayer sums it up best:

May God grant that our hearts, our eyes and our hands,  
May receive his inspiration enabling us to glorify,  
His House with the beauty of the leaves and blossoms,  
Which he has created.

Amen

(The Flower Arrangers Prayer)

From the earliest times flowers and foliage have been brought into church buildings as decoration but what we do today has its origins in the 1900s when flower arranging became a popular hobby and church guidance was given on how plants and flowers should best be used for the glory of God but not to distract from or be in the way of worship. Much of this is still observed today – we place flowers near to but not on the altars, use fresh rather than artificial blooms, and don't have any flowers in church during Advent and Lent.

The flowers need to be seen to be enjoyed so the arrangements are large, normally on pedestal stands with designs that complement the architecture of the church. Lilies, chrysanthemums and roses are popular to

use but colours will be chosen to reflect the liturgical or natural seasons, and can convey emotions of praise, celebration, reflection, or remembrance while the arranger uses their skills to bring expression to their work to enhance the beauty of the flowers. And whilst you may not pay particular attention to the flowers every week there is nothing like the glorious displays created for Easter Sunday or a church full of flowers for a wedding.



My own personal journey with flowers started with a Guide badge and a Saturday job with a florist who was so generous in sharing her skills. I will always be grateful to her for all the experiences and adventures flowers have brought me over the years – doing flowers wherever I have worshipped; designing flower festivals (remember St Helen’s Past and Present?); helping with flowers for so many weddings; arranging one last gift at the funeral of relatives; decorating for the late Queen’s Maundy Thursday visit to Leicester Cathedral; tipi dressing at Timber Festival; having flowers delivered from Holland in the middle of the night; and even being the ‘entertainment’ at an 18<sup>th</sup> Birthday party. Flowers were the way I first got involved at St Helen’s and I have met so many amazing and talented ‘friends in flowers’ along the way.

As for the future, you may notice that we start to make some changes in the way we decorate the church. Flower costs have increased since Brexit; floral foam is a single use plastic; and there are significant environmental and human costs associated with the cut flower industry. There is likely to be new guidance from the church about these issues as

part of the target for achieving 'net zero' carbon emissions by 2030. So, we are already looking at how 'doing the church flowers' can be more sustainable whilst continuing to *glorify His House with the beauty of leaves and blossoms*.

If you are interested in the flowers at St Helen's you could help in a number of ways. You could join us on the rota (there are people who would be happy to share top tips if needed); you could join us to create displays in the windows and around the font for Harvest this year; or you could let us prune your garden for foliage. We look forward to you becoming one of our friends in flowers.

**Helen Smith**

## **GARDENING TIPS FOR FEBRUARY**

February is the gateway to Spring. It can be a very cold, wintery month but we know that Spring is around the corner and you can see definite signs of life in the garden.

Now is a good time for dead-heading and light pruning. However, the orange, red and yellow stems of dogwood (Cornus) are best left as long as possible to appreciate their glorious colour. This is your last chance to Winter prune Citrus, Apples and Pear trees, as well as Autumn-fruiting Raspberries.

With the recent winds it is worth going out and clearing fallen branches and debris from around your garden.

When you can't get out into the garden, why not try growing some vegetable and flower plants (from seed) on the window sill, in a conservatory or porch, and even in a heated greenhouse. Good vegetable seeds to try are Tomatoes, Chillies, Lettuce, Broad beans, Onions and Herbs such as Garlic, Dill, Basil and Coriander. Potatoes should be chitted now before planting out in March.

Strawberries are hardy Perennials so they will look a bit tired at this time of year. This is a good time to remove the old brown foliage to encourage fresh growth and let in more light. For an early crop put them under a cloche in late February, but don't forget to water.



For early flowers buy pot-grown bulbs and plant them either in containers or in your borders. Dahlias are making a comeback and are easy to grow. They can then be planted outside when all risks of frost are gone. Most fruit trees are very hardy but, once they start to grow, the buds are especially vulnerable to frost and will need protection.

Prune hardy evergreen hedges and remove overgrown deciduous hedges. Also, cut back deciduous grasses left uncut over the winter and remove dead grass from evergreen grasses.

February is a good month to remove algae from paths and patios, especially if they start to become slippery. Gently remove snow from greenhouses and conservatories to prevent damage to the glass and allow good light penetration.

Don't forget to feed your birds! Put out feeders and nest boxes ready for Spring and keep plenty of fresh water available. Remember to remove any old nests from bird-boxes as our birds prefer to build new nests. It is worth keeping the old nests as they are beautifully made and can create great discussion with children (and adults). We have a few and we also have a large Byke (a wasp's nest) with thankfully no wasps still remaining.

The weather is looking to be a bit warmer and dryer over the next few weeks so a perfect chance to walk around your garden and see what is flowering. You may be surprised by what is bursting into life. We have noticed Snowdrops, Mahonia, Winter Honeysuckle and Witch Hazel. Now is a good time to start a garden journal to keep tabs on how your garden is performing each Season. Write down everything you can think of, both positive and negative. Taking photographs is a great way to monitor your garden's progress throughout the year.

Just remember to wrap up well and keep warm when out in your garden!

**Alan and Alison Cross**

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# WHATS HAPPENING AT LOUGHBOROUGH TOWN OF SANCTUARY?

Well, it's been a VERY busy and exhausting month!

Large numbers of our asylum seeker friends are now being given Leave to Remain in an attempt to 'clear the backlog'. This is great news in the long run, but with only 28 days to find a job and a home - with limited English language and often few computer skills - all against a backdrop of acute housing shortages ... well, let's just say, it presents a bit of a challenge!

Trying to support them and avoid what for many seems to be inevitable homelessness is a struggle. They - and we - would appreciate your prayers. I tell \*Basim all the time that I pray for him and he tells me "you pray good for me!"

But at LToS, we are all engaged in fighting their corner - and there are some *really* good people out there who are also 'on the case'!

Firstly, 'The Bridge' at Loughborough have been helping us find our way through the minefield of housing rules:

[The Bridge \(East Midlands\): Housing Support and Advice in ...The Bridge East Midlands, Loughboroughhttps://www.thebridge-eastmidlands.org.uk](https://www.thebridge-eastmidlands.org.uk)

Yesterday, I was also enormously grateful for the help of the team at Fearon Hall Community Centre when I arrived there with \*Basim. (He volunteers with them on a regular basis.) The team there is kind, resourceful and strongly proactive. It's a long story, but at the point where I just didn't know where to turn - they were an answer to my prayers, for sure!

<https://fearonhall.org.uk/>

Another charity who have been calm, patient and supportive is the Exaireo Trust. This is a Christian charity in Loughborough who offer basic temporary housing and a support programme to foster self-confidence, build skills and support people into paid employment. Their work has in the past focussed on those with drug and alcohol addictions, but increasingly they are also

helping refugees to settle in Loughborough and begin to be happy, active and productive members of our society.

We hope that Basim will soon benefit from what they have to offer - I'll update you next month: more prayers please!

<https://www.exaireo.org/>

Finally we have discovered an organisation called 'Refugees at Home'. Their programme is a bit like the 'Homes for Ukraine' scheme - but for refugees from other nations - and without any government support. If you have ever thought of hosting a refugee, take a look: they currently have no hosts in our area - and trust me: they are very much needed!

<https://refugeesathome.org/>

So - as they (don't) say on Strictly:  
Keeeeeeeeep praying!

Pat Stafford

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## OUR WORSHIP IN FEBRUARY

	am	pm	Wednesday
<b>1<sup>st</sup> Sunday</b> 4th February		<b>3.30pm</b> All-Age Worship <b>6.00pm</b> Choral Evensong	1st Wednesday-7th Holy Communion 10.30am In Church
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday</b> 11th February	<b>10.30 am</b> Holy Communion (with children's church)		2nd Wednesday- 14th Holy Communion 10.30am Prior Park Community centre
<b>3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday</b> 18th February	<b>10.30 am</b> Word & Worship	<b>6.00pm</b> <b>Flagstaff lent</b> <b>service</b> <b>Holy Trinity</b>	3rd Wednesday-21st Service of the word 10.30am In church
<b>4<sup>th</sup> Sunday</b> 25th February	<b>10.30 am</b> Holy Communion	<b>3.30pm</b> Messy Church Viscount Beaumont School <b>6.00pm</b> <b>Flagstaff Lent</b> <b>service</b> <b>Viscount</b> <b>Beaumont</b>	4th Wednesday- 28th Holy Communion 10.30am In church

### Regular activities:

- Monday mornings - Little Fishes 9.30 - 11.30am during term time
- Mondays - Monday Group – 8pm
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesday - MU meeting – 10.30am till 12 noon
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesday - PCC meeting – 7 till 9pm
- 1<sup>st</sup> Wednesday - Knit and natter – 2 till 4pm
- Thursdays - Choir practice – 6.30 till 8.30pm
- Fridays - Heart- warming Space 1-4pm
- Saturdays - Parish Prayers – 9.30am in the Hastings chapel

# DATES FOR YOUR DIARY // FEBRUARY

## SUNDAY 11TH FEB– ASHBY STRING ORCHESTRA CONCERT– 7PM

Featuring Polish international award winning violinist Ada Witczyk. Tickets £15, Under 16s free.

## WEDNESDAY 14TH FEB– ASH WEDNESDAY HOLY COMMUNION– 7.30PM

Throughout Lent there will be a service every Sunday at 6pm, themed around aspects of Benedictine spirituality.

- SUNDAY 18TH FEB– LENT SERVICE AT HOLY TRINITY, ASHBY– Meeting St. Benedict
- SUNDAY 25TH FEB– LENT SERVICE AT VISCOUNT BEAUMONTS SCHOOL, COLEORTON– Listening
- SUNDAY 3RD MARCH– LENT SERVICE AT ST HELENS– Living the Rule with Guest preacher Canon Sacha Slavic, a Benedictine Oblate

## TUESDAY 27TH FEB– HERITAGE TALK– PARISH LIBRARIES OF LEICESTERSHIRE WITH URSULA ACKRILL– 7.30PM

Parish Libraries were attached to churches, and were chiefly intended for the use of the clergy. As part of her role in the University of Nottingham Special Collections, Ursula Ackrill cares for the treasure that is our own Ashby Parish Library. Tickets £4, available on the door.



In January we enjoyed the annual Haggis supper for Burns night and shared lunch together after church.





**JP SPRINGTHORPE & C<sup>o</sup>**

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# MESSY CHURCH

Wow! What a very busy time we all had at Messy Church - celebrating Candlemass and making different sorts of lanterns and glow in the dark pictures, plus playing in a dark den with torches and bouncing light sources! It was a double celebration as it was Messy Church's eleventh birthday! - Some of those who came as babes and very young children to those early sessions are still much loved members of our Messy family so there was MUCH to celebrate!

Happy Birthday, Messy Church! Many happy returns!!

Next Messy Church - at Viscount Beaumont's School, 25th February, 3:30pm. See you there!



## THE CHILDREN'S SOCIETY SHOP

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THE CHILDREN'S SOCIETY

# PRG

As you probably know, for the PRG book club we are currently reading The Diary Of Anne Frank. On the 25th of January we had our first discussion on what we thought it was about. We all contributed for answers.

The PRG leader, Liz, told us that she is thinking of booking a trip to Amsterdam! She will try to get some funding and we will be doing a fundraising event to help contribute to make it as little cost as possible.

We will be taking a plane to journey there. In Amsterdam we will be seeing the Secret Annexe that Anne Frank, and her family and friends, hid in. We will be staying in a Youth Hostel where meals will be provided.

**Ebony Price**

## ASHBY YOUTH FOR CHRIST

### Rock Solid– Healthy Thinking

Beliefs are hard to change. Like my formerly stretchy tendons my brain seems to have become less elastic over time. Ditching ways of thinking that are rubbish or which though once useful are now obsolete is hard. There is more hope for young people as their brains are more malleable but sadly there are plenty of nasty powers invested in taking advantage of this plasticity and establishing their own territory where they can.

This week Rock Solid were thinking about thinking. Please ask God to give us, and them, the sort of wisdom that helps us welcome truth and eject falsehood– however scary this is. Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life and our defence of our worthless or redundant beliefs is only depriving ourselves of the liberating/fulfilling kingdom of God. Pray we will have the courage to welcome Him despite our doubts and fears.

Thank you,

**Vernon, Emily, Karen, Josiah and the RS young people**

‘Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is– His good, pleasing and perfect will.’- Romans 12:2

# CELEBRATING OUR LOVELY PIANO MAN

In January we had the opportunity to give our thanks to Andrew Chapman as he retired from the role of Director of Music. Amongst other tributes and celebrations was a rendition of Piano Man by Billy Joel, masterfully rewritten for the occasion by Judith Lewis. In case you missed it, or if you'd like to read it again, here are the lyrics...

## The Piano Man – With apologies to Billy Joel

It's half past ten on a Sabbath-day,  
The regular crowd shuffles in;  
There's a man at the front  
with his back to me,  
Who's playing the organ with  
vim.

There's no one who plays it  
quite like him;  
His hands range all over the  
keys  
With twiddles and twirls, and  
with squiggles and swirls:  
Maestro, stand up, and take a  
bow please.

La, la-la, di-di-da  
La-la di-di-da da-dum  
*Play us a song, you're the  
piano man.*  
*The sopranos know how it  
goes.*  
*The altos and basses come in  
the right places,*  
*But the tenors – well nobody*

*knows.*

Sixteen years director of  
music;  
He's led us in psalms, chants  
and hymns  
All age, Christingles and carols  
And an evening of hymns  
laced with Pimm's.

But how will Jill cope on a  
Thursday night?  
She's not used to him being in.  
We hope they find time to sit  
down to dine  
And enjoy a shared tonic and  
gin.

Oh, la, la-la, di-di-da  
La-la di-di-da da-dum  
The trebles are feeling quite  
miserable  
Will Thursday nights still be  
such fun?  
The tenors sigh with relief that  
they'll get far less grief  
And a feeling that good times  
have come.

But they've no clue what

Caroline's plotting  
And Anna has not made it known  
That the future will be all happy-clappy  
As we all sing in unison. *[loud protests here!]*

*Play us a song, you're the piano man.  
The sopranos know how it goes.  
The altos and basses come in the right places,  
But the tenors – well nobody knows.*

It's a pretty good crowd for this sabbath day,  
And the organist gives a small grin,  
Then raises his hand as he makes a last stand  
And conducts us in one final hymn.

Mr C, we're so glad you're not leaving us,  
Just passing the baton along;  
And we're marking the day in our own special way  
By saying please play us a song.

Oh, la, la-la, di-di-da  
La-la di-di-da da-dum  
*Play us a song, you're the piano man.  
The sopranos know how it goes.  
The altos and basses come in the right places,  
But the tenors – well nobody knows.*



# THE LAST MARQUIS

Henry Weysford Charles Plantagenet Rawdon-Hastings, the 4<sup>th</sup>, and last, Marquis of Hastings died young at the aged of 26, and as you learn more about his life-style you probably won't be surprised.

He was born on 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1842, the second son of George Augustus Francis Rawdon-Hastings and Barbara Grey de Ruthyn. His father died when he was only two years old and his elder brother inherited the titles and ownership of Donington Hall at Castle Donington. This brother, named Paulyrn Reginald Serlo Rawdon-Hastings, (the family certainly went in for fancy names!) also died young. He was only eighteen when he fell into the docks at Liverpool and "was not rescued until his strength was almost exhausted". He later died in Dublin and so Henry became the 4<sup>th</sup> Marquis at the age of eleven.



In the 1864, he began paying attention to Lady Florence Cecilia Paget. She was being courted by a rich gentleman named Mr Chaplin, but as he was away on a sporting tour in India, Lord Henry must have fancied his chances. When Mr Chaplin returned, he immediately proposed marriage to Lady Florence and was accepted. Lord Henry went to her ladyship in the hope of changing her mind but she told him it was too late. But apparently it wasn't! According to Scott, the very next day, Lady Florence arranged to visit Marshall & Snellgrove in London. She entered via the Oxford Street doors, met a friend inside and they exited via another set of doors, apparently unseen by her coachman who waited patiently for another five or six hours! She was driven to St George's in Hanover Square where she married the Marquis on 9<sup>th</sup> July 1864.

Henry led an extravagant life-style. He ran up huge debts and kept mistresses so it is hardly surprising that his wife demanded a separation in 1866.

He enjoyed hunting and often brought his hounds into Ashby and let them loose in the streets. Another passion was for cockfighting, a nasty sport

which often resulted in the death of one of the birds. He was often to be found indulging in cockfighting in a brick barn in Featherbed Lane and on one occasion, he and his butler were charged with cockfighting on a Sunday at the police court in Loughborough.

He also enjoyed cricket, but always refused to run. Instead, he would “cut capers at the wicket” and afterwards treated both teams to lavish refreshment. In 1862, when an Ashby band came to play at Donington Hall, he gave each of them a sovereign and free access to the best wines in his cellar.

Lord Henry was very keen on horse racing and this led to him losing a great deal of money. At a race meeting held in Ashby in 1864, he paid for a cup said to have been worth 50 sovereigns and put up 25 sovereigns in prize money for another of the races. But the Epsom Derby was his biggest downfall. Determined to win with his prize mare, he decided to spend the night before the race in the stable to ensure that nothing happened to her. Unfortunately, he was persuaded to get drunk and while he was asleep the mare was drugged and lost the race. It was said that he lost between £200,000 and £300,000. Ironically, the winning horse, Hermit, was owned by his defeated rival Mr Chaplin.

The Marquis ran up plenty of other debts through reckless gambling. On one occasion he was playing draughts with Sir Sutton Courtney for £1,000 per game and lost them all. The men then bet on “cutting cards” at £500 a time and he lost a further £5,000. Courtney was in debt himself to an unprincipled money-lender known as Hawkes. This man introduced Henry to a Covent Garden dancer called Favorita and he spent a fortune on her. One night, he called on her unannounced and found her with another man, Major Murray. The two men fought a duel and despite Murray being an expert sword fencer in the army, Henry survived.

Hawkes set Henry up with yet another mistress called Trixey. The scandal that this caused was what led his wife to demand a separation. Henry went away to Paris for a few months and when he came back he was gravely ill. His wife arrived in time to be with him for his last few hours. His final words were said to have been instructions for laying yet another bet on a horse! He died on 10<sup>th</sup> November 1868 and was buried in Kensel Green cemetery. He had no children which is why he was the last Marquis of Hastings.

**Wendy Freer**

# God and the dog

By Richard Vann

Doubtless you are wondering what on earth has God and our pet dog in common. Is this all a joke? No, it's not a joke. It's a challenge.

Hardly a church service goes by when we are not told 'man was made in God's image.' The challenge today is to see if a dog can in any way be like God. Have they any features in common? Indeed, would my dog, assuming she could articulate her thoughts, claim she too was made in the image of God?

Let's check that out. Does a dog have any of the characteristics of God?

Well, a dog can see, hear, taste, touch, and smell. We don't exactly know if God can do those things, but a human can. So if humans are made in the image of God, my dog would claim the same.

Virtues. Now this is a barrel of laughs. For example, for some people, humility is a virtue, but to others it's an anathema. But stay with it. Does my dog have any virtues? I would say yes.

My dog's virtues are a feisty personality, super-alertness that spots squirrels that I miss altogether, and she's a good communicator - we are left in no doubt about her feelings. If she needs to go out, she lets you know. When she wants to get back in, she barks.

Obviously, she's not into the theological aspects of life like salvation, justification, and transubstantiation. But she does know that putting on her harness to go for a walk to the woods is good news. She's happy, and that makes me happy as well.

In the woods she's looking about, and following the tracks of the wild animals that roamed free last night. So for her, any woodland is heaven. What's ordinary to us is heaven to her, and I think there's a lesson in that.

Come to think, that's a bit like Jesus who wanted to show us what heaven is like. Will explore that aspect some other time, or we'll be going off at a tangent.

Another thing, Poppet has a good sense of humour. Like, she has her tea just before us. Finishes it in 30 seconds flat. Then when we sit down, she kicks her aluminium bowl with a ringing sound to ask for some more food. I think that displays a wicked sense of humour, don't you?

Her most endearing virtue is this. When I sit down in the lounge, she jumps up beside me. No ifs, no buts, she's there beside me. She's read, and is re-enacting, Psalm 73 that says 'I am always with you.' This is so profound, and sadly there's no time now to explore this more. A topic for your private devotions perhaps.

To conclude, the original challenge was: Is a dog in any way like God? You've heard my point of view, but don't let that colour your opinion in any way. You can, and should, put your own sincere thinking into this matter.

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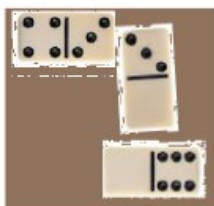
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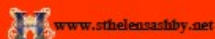
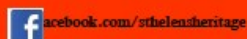
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