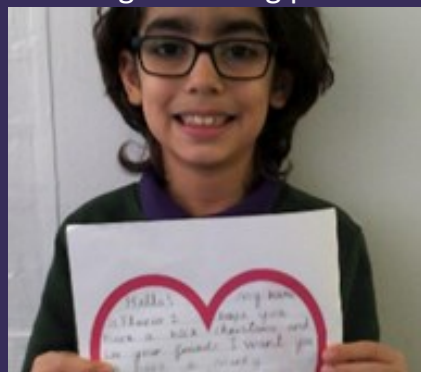


newt

schools café church



Dwelling & Abiding p.3



Hearts for Homes p.4



Newt Homes pp. 8-9

Thinking about *Home*

CHRISTMAS 2020

St John & St Stephen's, Newtown Community Magazine

stjohnandststephen.org.uk



Christmas & HOME

Welcome to NEWT 30

What springs to mind when you think of 'Home'?

I expect 'working from home' is one phrase that might spring to mind, with either happy or not so happy connotations. The pandemic has altered our relationship with 'home', especially if we used to leave home to work and return at the end of the day to relax. Now some of us have to navigate and working living in the same space, and for some significant weeks, even most children were at home all day every day. Home is the subject of many images and sayings: *Home is where the heart is*, or *Home sweet home*. Where do you feel 'at home'? When people ask, 'Where's home?', what do you answer? Do you perhaps say: "Cumberland Road", or "Reading", or do you think back to a childhood place, or to another country which feels more like home for you than the UK?

Home can sometimes be a difficult place, especially where there's conflict or high levels of stress. Or home might feel like a strange place if you've moved to the area from somewhere else, and you're in fact missing 'home'. Or maybe home is a pipe dream entirely, if you're unfortunate enough to have experienced homelessness.

'Home' as a theme features heavily in Christmas adverts. The latest from *Sainsbury's* is captioned "Food is Home. Home is Christmas". Our ad-makers tend to envisage home as a place of warmth, food and celebration with

others. This of course is in the hope that you'll buy your turkey, or your Christmas lights, or a new carpet from them and not from their rivals. But we're drawn in to the ad because we all want to belong.

Those people with a religious faith have had to learn to worship from home. For those seeking connection with a faith group, joining in online 'incognito', as it were, is often easier than coming into the building. That's what we've found at St John and St Stephen's – and if you'd like to join our Sunday worship, do email the St John and Stephen's office and the link can be sent to you.

See the back page for our virtual carol service and an online caberet party too, and for carol singing coming down your street. You can also watch services on our *YouTube* channel – search: *St John and St Stephen's Reading*. We're hoping in December to offer a mixture of both online and physical worship.

We all have a strong sense of home, and Christmas can make this either more enjoyable, or sadly for some, more poignant because of loneliness or conflict. However you're approaching Christmas, may you sense a homecoming to God, who loves you and invites you into fullness of life.

Claire.



Copy date for NEWT's Easter edition will be 5th March 2021

Please send contributions to the Parish Office office@stjohnandstephen.org.uk or directly to the editor at chris@meunier.org.uk

At Home: *Dwelling & Abiding* at St John's School

Our School Prayer

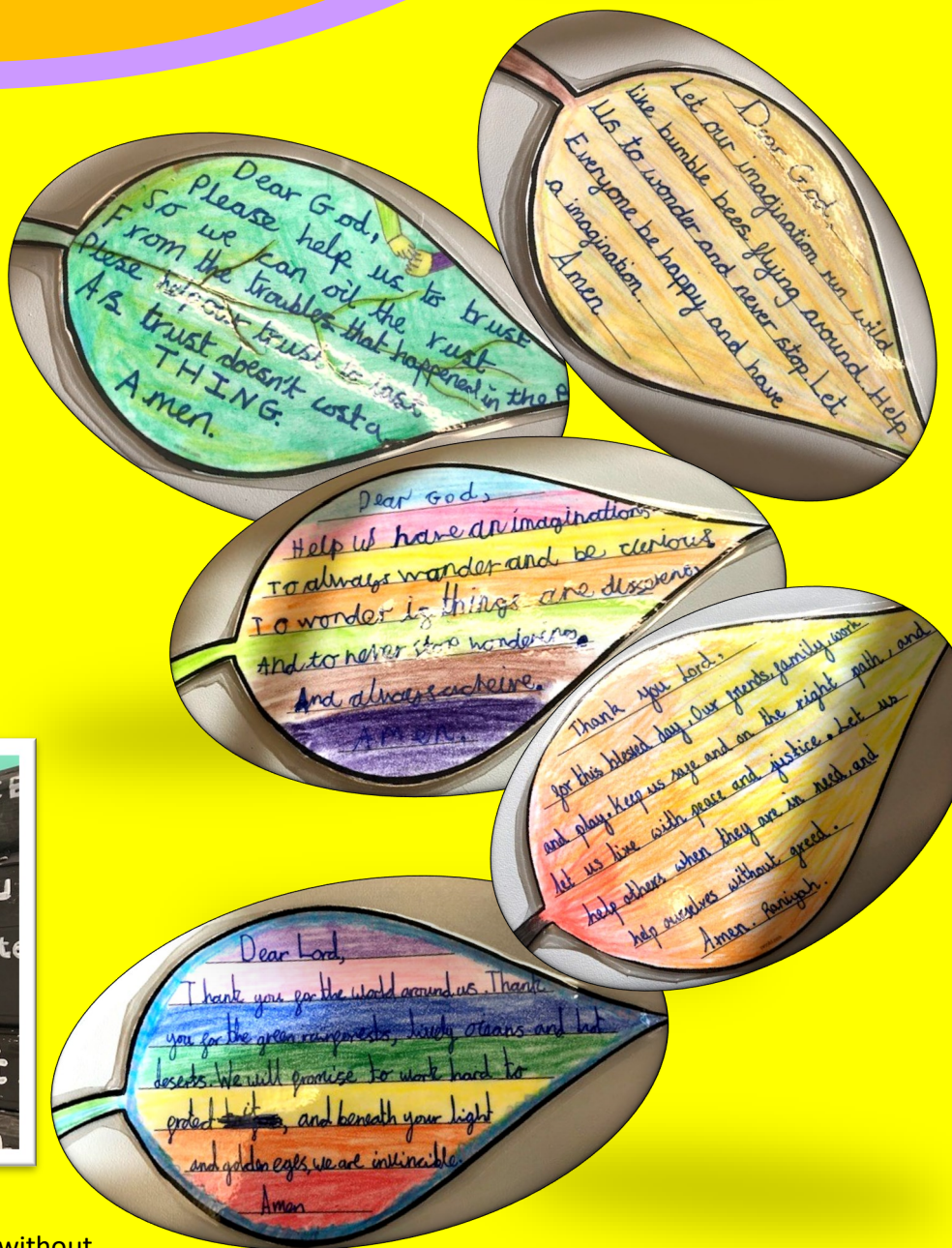
This is our school
Let peace dwell here
Let the rooms be full of
contentment
Let love abide here
Love of one another
Love of mankind
Love of life itself
And love of God
Let us remember
That as many hands build a house
So many hearts make a school

Amen

Our children this term have been thinking about our school values and putting them into prayers. These values underpin all that we do in school and are: Respect, Empathy, Hope, Trust, Wonder.

We have also been remembering our School Prayer and what this means.

We have been considering our environment and recently one of our classes created a giant keyboard reusing the special lunch boxes we have been eating lunch from.



This year, Christmas will be a bit different, without our usual Nativity service and KS1 Christmas performance and sadly we cannot invite our parents in to enjoy these special times. However, we still make Christmas as special as we can, and will still enjoy a Christmas lunch, a Christmas tree and parties, whilst remembering the true meaning of Christmas,

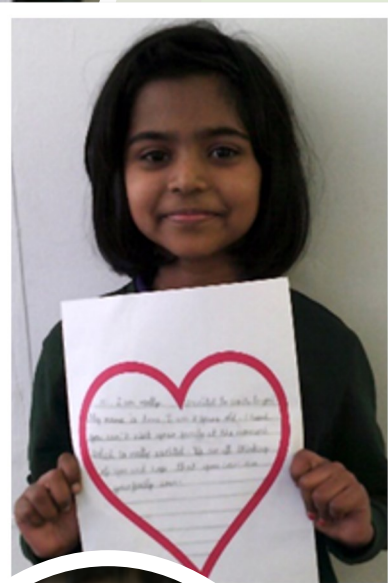
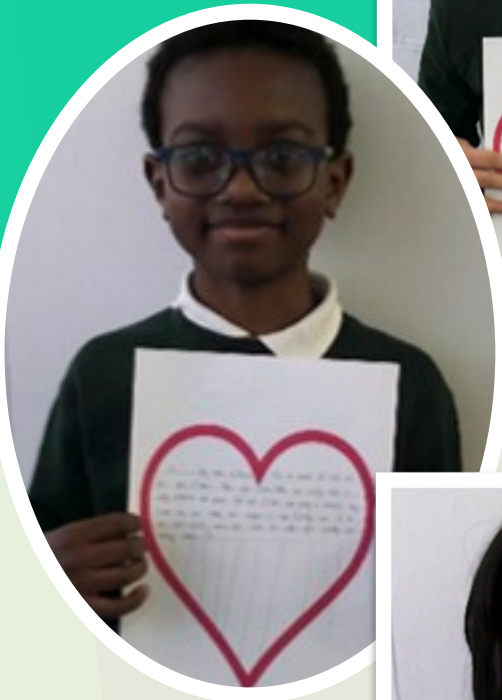
the birth of Jesus. We will also have our very own sheep (sadly, not real, and his name is yet to be revealed!) which will form part of the Wycliffe's Sheep trail. We hope children can spot our sheep as well as taking part in the rest of the trail organised by Wycliffe Baptist Church.

HEARTS for Care HOMES

at New Town Primary School

During these uncertain times we have been thinking of those living in care homes locally. We have taken part in *Hearts for Homes* by creating messages on hearts to send out and spread a little cheer. Our pupils were really pleased to be able to participate and showed great empathy and understanding of how others may be struggling. We are so proud to be able to share some of their kindness.

Now that November is coming to an end, we are starting to think about Christmas at New Town. We are creating an Advent Calendar to share our celebrations within school with the wider community via our website and Facebook page. Please watch out for it from 1st December!



Nativity

*There was blood on the straw. And on Him.
Just born, labour over, exhausted, she wipes Him
with the good shawl,
and wraps Him tightly,
holds Him to her for blessed moments, before
the world claims Him.*

*Silent awe eases the memory of pain.
Hers for a little while.
Adoringly, she gazes at Him.
Unblinking, He gazes back.
And she sees the world reflected there.
Naked joy and pain mirror her own.
She gasps at the knowledge of the age-old eyes,
but recognises that she knew it would be like this.*

*Caressing Him, she unwraps tiny hands.
Her being stills.
Marks there. Spitting on the shawl, she hastily rubs at
the tiny palms.
The marks don't come off.
Shaking now, she unravels Him to see the feet: and yes, these
marks too.
Not the residue of birth but something long-distant: a residue
of death.*

*His beautiful body. Stroking, awed by Him her fingers find His side.
Yes, a faint hollow, a livid red mark.
She didn't know that she knew all this
and yet her soul memory knew it always.
Bowing her head in submission, like that time before, in terror at
the huge conflict of love and adoration.
And grief. And pain.*

*For a while she can hold Him, can be the
first earthly person to adore Him.
Yet as for all mothers, she cannot own
Him: He is not hers.
His destiny will always be in other hands.
Others will soon come and claim Him.
She knows she is just the link, that labour
and pain and blood has
given Him life. A short life.*

*Kissing his light-filled face, she waits and
lays Him back down
where the blood on the straw stains the
good shawl.
A mark that will never be erased.*



SAVING THE PLANET

Starts **at Home**

*says Jo Laynesmith
a member of St John's eco group*

Reading is my home. When I arrived in our town 15 years ago, I had a toddler and was expecting a second baby. I was worried about the world they would be growing up in. So, I joined Reading Climate Change Partnership, hoping to be part of a solution.

It was exciting then to share in writing Reading's first climate strategy. But, as I've not been directly involved in it for a long time, I was hugely impressed to learn just lately how much has happened since then. The town as a whole has cut its carbon emissions by 48%. Apparently, that's better than any other local authority area in the south east!

This month the Reading Climate Action Network launched a new and more ambitious strategy: for our town to reach a target of net zero carbon by 2030. They're inviting schools, businesses and individuals to work together to cut our emissions further and remove as much as carbon as we create.

The strategy isn't just about insulation, recycling and electric cars. It has a whole section on health and wellbeing and another on encouraging wildlife. I know I'm not the only person who has found walking in Reading's green spaces more important than ever for staying sane this year. Delicate cherry trees and magnificent oaks are not just a pleasure to look at, they also keep carbon out of our atmosphere and our climate under control.



The Climate Action Network has a colourful new website at readingcan.org.uk. This has lots of information about what is happening and what we can do. There are tips on topics from eating & drinking to travel. There is also an invitation to all the citizens of Reading to join the network to make our shared home cleaner, healthier and more beautiful for everyone.

A screenshot of the ReadingCAN website homepage. The header features the ReadingCAN logo and navigation links for 'Home' and 'Individuals'. The main image shows a diverse group of people smiling and holding up a white plastic bag. Overlaid text reads: 'Individuals', 'Citizens of Reading, getting involved has never been easier...', and 'Here you can find everything you need to know about how to take positive action to reduce your contribution to climate change.'

There has never been a better time to get involved, see the reasons why...

- ✓ Let's make Reading a better place for our children
- ✓ We can enjoy cleaner air and healthier lifestyles
- ✓ Acting together helps us move farther and faster
- ✓ Going green can actually save you money and time

[Join the network](#)

readingcan.org.uk

Making a **HOME** for **everyone**



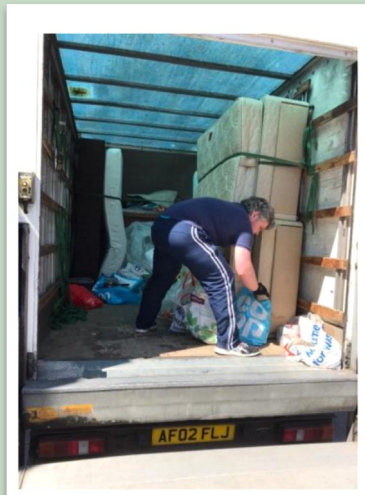
Used furniture warehouse with delivery vehicles and charity shops.

"Demonstrating God's love by meeting people's physical needs and restoring self-worth."

'We are shouting out for joy ... TO GOD BE THE GLORY ... having raised enough money to get us through the first lockdown,' says the charity's recent newsletter.

So many people have been affected by lockdown not least those who were street homeless, fleeing domestic abuse, sofa surfing and those being discharged from hospital. CCA sprang into action with its Emergency Support Service, and between April and September they provided household items, emergency food and clothing for 945 people.

The money to set up this emergency support service came in from individuals and churches and funds from grants and trusts. 'We were dangerously close to closing at this time so this has made a huge difference,' they say. Particular thanks go to Berkshire Community Foundation and funds from the government distributed via TNL Community Grant.



Charity shops were able to open again in July, and many donations were gratefully received. But with the new restrictions imposed recently, it's been back to emergency service. To keep this running:

If you can donate, please do so at ccam.org.uk/donations (CCA is now needing funds to replace one of its delivery vans.)

If you need help or know someone who does, then you can telephone 0118 951 2337 or e-mail support@ccam.org.uk

Reading charities find ways to keep serving through the pandemic



Last Christmas, NEWT reported on the rotating night shelter project run using church premises in Reading. Working with Reading Borough Council and St Mungo's Rough Sleeper Outreach Service, they provided 3 months of safe shelter and during that time enabled many to find permanent accommodation.

But, of course, the pandemic means that new ways of meeting this need are having to be devised.

So, as we go to press, the charity and the local Council are urgently at work finding premises and funding that can do the job safely.

If you want to donate to this work, please do so at fcg.org.uk/help/



The previous B4N: cosy, but no longer safe in a pandemic.

Newt **HOMES**



Cemetery Junction ... with key-worker priority homes



Newtown West ... an established community



Orts Road and Kennetside 1970s' redevelopments



Between the railway and the Kennet ... includes Kennet Walk, Robert Parker Road, Oscar Wilde Road ... connected by footbridge

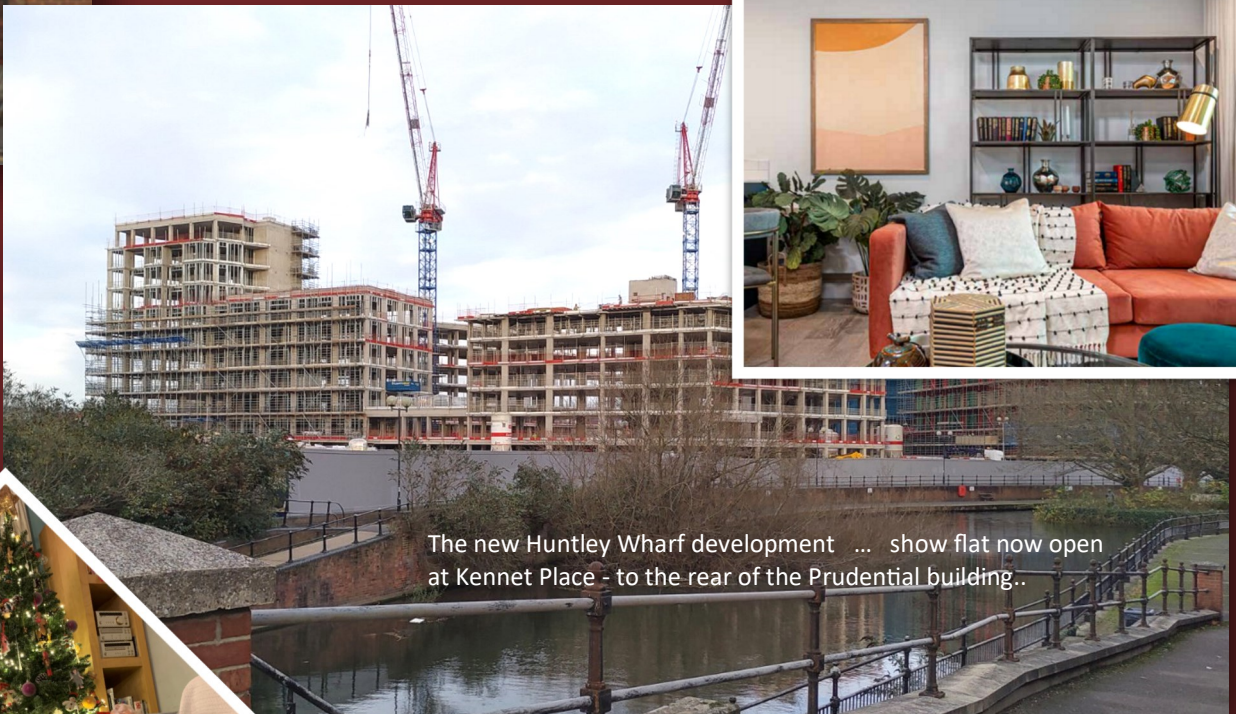
Diverse and developing ...



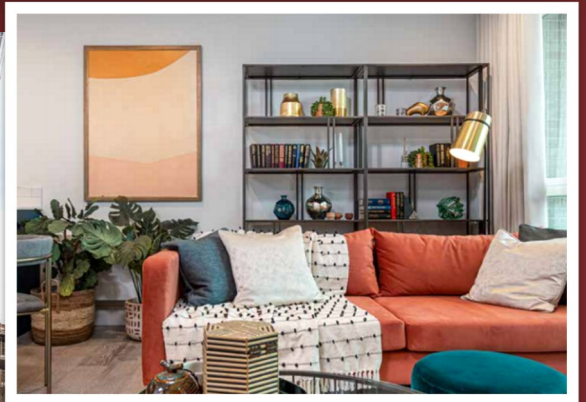
... the 'village in the town'



Huntley & Palmer's site ... factory conversion and new build apartment blocks.



The new Huntley Wharf development ... show flat now open at Kennet Place - to the rear of the Prudential building..



... over the Kennet and road access via Kenavon Drive ... gas holder soon to be replaced by more flats

Know your Newts

meeting the people in our community

KAREN HARRISON

Karen and her husband Paul moved into the house at Blake's Lock on the Kennet last July. NEWT met up with Karen for a socially distanced chat on a bench outside The Fisherman's Cottage, one chilly November morning, to find out why.

Is Paul the lockkeeper then? We haven't had one of those for a while!

Yes, lock and weir keeper: keeping water levels safe at the weirs is as important as operating the lock. He was a lockkeeper at Teddington, the only 24 hour lock on the Thames. The Environment Agency decided to have more lockkeepers living on site, so instead of renting out the lock houses, most sites now have lockkeepers living there. Paul had had enough of shift work at Teddington and we saw an advert for this post in Reading. Our daughter was 9 months pregnant and lost the lease on her flat so we quickly decided she could live in our house in Ham while we moved in here. She went into labour while we cleared her flat! They couldn't find a replacement for Paul so he continued to work at Teddington into the Autumn. Although he's based here, his role includes doing relief shifts at Caversham, Mapledurham, Sonning & Shiplake.

And you joined us at St John's Church!

Yes. We came and looked around Reading before the move. Ham is between Kingston and Richmond but it's like a village. We weren't sure that we wanted to move to somewhere a bit more urban but it's lovely out along the Thames. I was keen to find a church for me to join. Luckily there was a copy of NEWT in *The Jolly Anglers* which told me where St John's is; it's not got a spire so I'm not sure I



Home by the lock

would have found it otherwise. After a few weeks, I came one Sunday and I found it so welcoming. It's a really friendly church that tries to be rooted in the community. I heard about the *Hope Into Action* house, the importance given to green issues and its encouragement of the foodbank and was pleased. So many people are involved in leading the worship and it's 'in the round', just like the church I came from in Kingston.

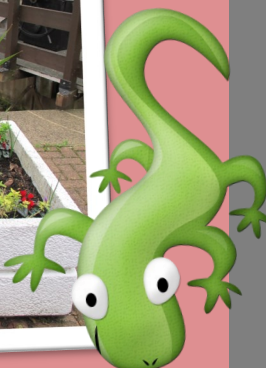
Was Kingston where you were born?

Yes. My parents lived on a boat there for a while when I was born. My pram nearly blew into the Thames but it was caught by a neighbouring boat resident! At that point Mum decided that boat life wasn't for them anymore so they moved into a flat above the hairdressers in Surbiton where she worked.

Was yours a Christian family?

My mother had a strong faith but my parents divorced when I was two—which was a much more difficult thing to do in the 1960s. She was a Catholic so felt she couldn't go to church after that. But she was a strong believer and was always reading books about faith and not just Christianity. She was fascinated by the similarities between religions and always respected people with different beliefs. When she married my stepfather, we moved to Sussex and two brothers, were christened there,

"I've always had an affinity for water"



but they didn't attend church and I went to Sunday School on my own. Then my step-dad's new job took us to Lake Minnetonka near Minneapolis, USA when I was 9. Minnesota is known as the land of 10,000 lakes. I've always had an affinity for water and have spent most of my life living near rivers, lakes or the sea. Here the family became part of St Martins by the Lake, an Episcopalian church, which warmly welcomed us. Two sisters were christened, I served as an acolyte, helped in the crèche and was confirmed. (In England my father also remarried and they have four children which made eight brothers and sisters altogether. I have always felt incredibly lucky to be part of such a big, close family). I loved High School in America because it has a modular system; you pick modules and build up credits. In history, for example, I studied *Pre-colonial Africa* and *Japan*! You were more likely to succeed and gain confidence if you could choose to study what interested you.

So when did you come back to the U.K?

My parents couldn't afford for me to go to university in America and my grandparents were getting older so we flew to New York and sailed to Tilbury Docks on a Russian liner, the *Mikhail Lermontov*. I was 17. My uncle met us off the boat and a young man called Paul Harrison offered to carry my suitcases. I said I could manage on my own. Five years later we would be married!

"a young man called Paul Harrison offered to carry my suitcases. I said I could manage on my own."

I started A levels at Kemble near Cirencester, and then had to stay in lodgings to finish my studies when the family moved to Cornwall at the start of my second year. Paul and I married in St Keverne in Cornwall. It was not a good time for him to be a train driver. Strikes were called every Tuesday and Thursday because of imposed changes in working conditions: weekend working would no longer merit a higher rate of pay and split shifts were introduced. We couldn't cope financially so he decided to leave. He's worked on trains, driven buses and captained riverboats on the Thames in Kingston, and later in the City, as well as being a special constable. After the *Marchioness* disaster, the RNLI set up stations on the Thames and Paul worked as Helmsman at the Chiswick Lifeboat Station.

So what did you decide to do after university?

I had always wanted to be a teacher but a lack of confidence and teaching vacancies meant that my year's

training led me into education administration instead. I worked in London as clerk to school governing bodies before organising support for school advisers and school governors. During this time my three children were born. I took voluntary redundancy and retired early in 2017. I was also a governor at my children's school for 27 years - and at another of my schools when I couldn't get anyone else to help.

So what is it like being retired and in lockdown at Blake's Lock?

I always enjoy other people's gardens and like gardening myself. The lock house has a large garden behind the fence; it was covered in 3 foot high weeds when we moved in. I've dug the beds over and planted vegetables as well as flowers. By the lock side, I've spruced up the planters and I'm really pleased with the Cosmos that I've grown from seed. Working with everyone on the church garden recently was fun too.

I love walking. I still walk with the Kingston and Richmond Ramblers, if they meet somewhere I can get to on public transport nearer Reading, as I don't have a car. I've been meeting up with my friends in my old book group on Zoom. Paul and I have a canal boat. We like travelling at that slow pace when we get the chance. And we have three grandchildren with a fourth on the way.



However, like a lot of people reading this, I have really missed our extended family gatherings in lockdown. The best part of returning from America when I was 17 was re-establishing close relationships with the Surrey based family. One year, there were twenty six of us for Christmas dinner...

I watch Michael Portillo's *Great British Train Journeys* or *Great Canal Journeys* on the T.V. but I'd rather be baking cakes, biscuits or brownies. I get satisfaction out of baking for church fêtes and it's great because in lockdown I can join my old congregation at St Paul's, Kingston online at 10.30 on Zoom

and then my new church, St John's, at 11.30!

Thank you for telling us your story, Karen. We really hope you'll be very happy here when life in Newtown returns to normal.

At Home around the world 2020 -What a year!

by Rosie Croft

BANGLADESH – February

We again visited the hospital where we used to work many years ago. It felt like a kind of homecoming, seeing many old friends who were much the same - except their children had changed dramatically.

We saw the new homes built with flood-resistant concrete pillars after last year's floods, and heard of the fear of rising sea levels in the south.



READING , ENGLAND– Locked down March, April & November

Like many of us, learning new words - or maybe new meanings for words such as 'shielding', 'social distance', 'furlough' and 'Zoom.' Even more grateful than usual for my husband and dog and computer, my friends and WhatsApp.





NORWAY – August

Our daughter lives in Oslo; she has married and this is her new home. Joy of joys: she had a beautiful daughter earlier this year, called Ellie. Between lockdowns we managed a visit.

Oslo is a great city, rich and modern and >50% cars are electric. But much of its wealth comes from oil that it continues to extract and export.



GUATEMALA – November

No I haven't been there – but we prepared a church service about a family from Guatemala and so I got to know about it, and the work of Christian Aid encouraging farmers to change from coffee to cocoa which is a much more climate resilient plant. The coffee crop had been failing because of the unreliable rains.

But now, 2 hurricanes have caused devastation through the country and flattened many of the new cocoa plants. 2020 is the year I realised Climate change is not just coming, its here!



'From the archives'

THE CHURCH COOKERY BOOK

Cover design by Celia Hayes April 1977

NEWT obtained a copy from June Russell's kitchen

And it's also still being used in Orkney by Kate Fletcher, daughter of one of the original contributors.

The book's typed, hand-duplicated and well-thumbed pages give an interesting glimpse back into the home-making process as two formerly separate church communities created a new shared identity in Orts Road.

Here are a couple of favourite recipes from it:

DATE CAKE

1 cup chopped dates
1 cup boiling water
1 tsp. bicarbonate of soda
1 tbs. butter
1 cup sifted plain flour
2 eggs

Add bicarb. to dates and pour on 1 cup boiling water.

Leave to stand for at least 1 hour.

Cream butter and sugar, add eggs, flour and dates.

Spread in well-buttered tin, approx. 8" x 10", with fairly deep sides.

Bake 1 hour at Reg. 3 (340°) or until well risen

N.B. "Cup" measures as on side of Pyrex jug (1/2 pint liquid measure).



Note:
temperature conversions -
340°F : 170°C
300°F : 150°C



HOKEY POKEY BISCUITS

4 oz. margarine.
4 oz. sugar
6 oz. flour
1 dessertsp. milk
1 dessertsp. golden syrup
1 teasp. bicarb.

Cream marg. and sugar till soft. Melt syrup and milk over low heat and then add bicarb and heat until frothy. Add to this creamed marg and sugar, fold in flour.

Shape into marble size balls, place on a baking tray and flatten slightly with fork.

Bake at Reg. 2 (300°) for 30 mins.

Veg4Reading has been selected by the Co-operative Local Community Fund as a 'Good Cause' that Co-op members can support when doing their own food shop.



The project, which was only set up in July, has now delivered nearly a tonne of fresh fruit and vegetables for free distribution to people in Reading badly affected by the Coronavirus crisis.

Project Coordinator, Naomi German, said "It's very rewarding to have Veg4Reading valued in this way, especially for our dozens of volunteers who have stepped up to help grow the produce that is so desperately needed. It's so important that we can keep our food growing and distribution going into next year because sadly, even when this virus is beaten, the knock-on effects on people in need will continue for a long time to come and we want to be there to help".

Co-operative members can help by nominating **Food4Families** as their chosen good cause, which means that 4p of every pound spent will be donated whenever they scan their card in the shop, Login to your membership or visit <https://membership.coop.co.uk/causes/51412>

Reading Blood Plasma Donation Centre

At Kennet Place (to the rear of the Prudential building) the NHS is collecting plasma from people who've recovered from Covid-19.



Book Review

A Newtown book for your Christmas list

Alina Saves The Moon

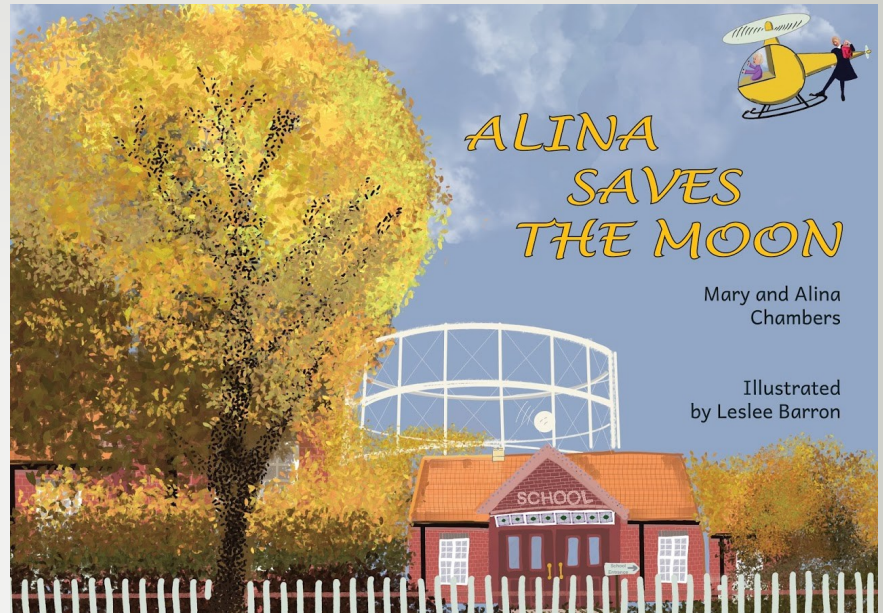
Nisha Anil (former BBC TV presenter for CBeebies) writes:

The story is an urban adventure with bold illustrations and block colour, fused with digital paintings of local landscapes. There are helicopters, birds, daring feats, flight and a rescue mission to the moon, but not quite as you might think!

The journey begins with young Alina's observation while looking out of the window. Her inquisitiveness and concern for the world around her springs her into action. Armed with a confident solution, and with her family's help, 'Alina Saves The Moon' (and the world!), all in time for her sister to go to school.

A lovely daring tale, where questions are asked and permissions granted!

£6.99 plus UK shipping (£2)



Available at : www.readinggastower.co.uk

A proportion of the profits from *Alina Saves The Moon* will go to Reading Refugee Support Group, who work to improve the lives of refugees and asylum seekers in Reading and Berkshire.



Created in Newtown



Mary Chambers is a self-employed proof-reader, writer and mother of two. She lives in Newtown, Reading, in the house featured in the story.

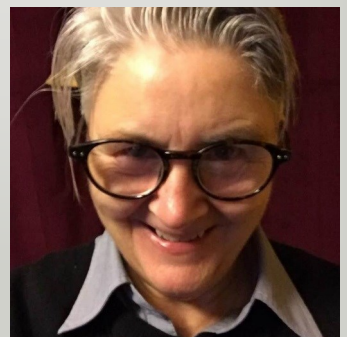
Alina Chambers is a 3 year old bundle of fun who has some great ideas. One morning she looked out of the window and saw that the moon was "stuck" in the gas tower. "We must rescue him!" she exclaimed. "I'll just get my helicopter." And so the story began.

The lively and detailed illustrations have been



created digitally by **Leslee Barron**, some of whose other work can also be accessed via the the Gas Tower website at the address given above.

Leslee lives in Newtown too and is still working with Mary and others to bring together a wider exhibition of Gas Tower inspired art. Due to the pandemic this will be rescheduled for sometime in 2021.



Celebrating Christmas in Newtown

Tues 15th December 5 - 6:30 pm Christmas carol-singing around our streets in small safely-distanced groups. Meet up outside church at 5 pm

Wed 16th December Reach out to your neighbours and organise to join in the 6 pm Christmas carol sing-along on local radio stations:
find out more at doorstepcarols.co.uk

Sun 20th December 10:30 am Holy Communion **St John & St Stephen's church***
6 pm Carols by Candlelight **YouTube channel and Zoom 'mulled wine'**

Mon 21st December 7 pm Christmas Cabaret: **YouTube channel and Zoom party**

Thurs 24th December CHRISTMAS EVE
11 pm Midnight Mass **St John & St Stephen's church***

Fri 25th December CHRISTMAS DAY
10:30 am Holy Communion **St John & St Stephen's church***

Sun 27th December 10 am "Church at Home" online at oxford.anglican.org

Sun 3rd Jan 11:30 Epiphany service on Zoom 4 pm Evening Prayer in church

Carols and Cabaret

Find us on YouTube: search 'St John and St Stephen'

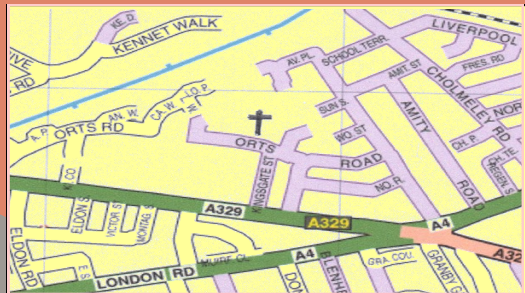
Join in live on Zoom: just e-mail the Parish Office (see below) for a meeting invitation link.



*To book a safe space in our building for any church service, please just e-mail the Parish Office (see below) saying how many are wanting to come.



Church Contacts



Vicar
Rev Claire
Alcock



Assoc. Priest
Christine
Bainbridge



Parish Centre
Manager
Tanya Penn



Churchwardens
Rosie Croft &
Ian Maynard

Sunday worship 10:30 am
- everyone welcome →

For details and to book a place, please contact the Parish Office
0118 926 3633 email: office@stjohnandststephen.org.uk

School Contacts



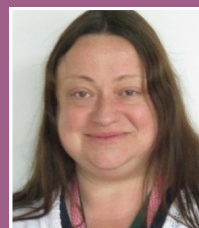
Head teacher
Polly
Cornish



Deputy
Head
Penny
Cornish



Chief Executive of the Trust
Angharad
Brackstone



Head teacher
Martina
Parsons



Deputy
Head
Kim
Blythe

New Town School 0118 937 5509
email: admin@newtown.reading.sch.uk

St John's School 0118 937 5540
email: admin@stjohns.reading.sch.uk