



Down to Earth

A newsletter
for rural
communities

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 THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND
DIOCESE OF SALISBURY

Richard's Scribblings!

May the love of the Risen Christ be with you all in your lives as we go forward into a new life! As I write this issue of *Down to Earth*, I do so with a slight feeling of nervousness, as we have been here before. Let us hope and pray that this time, and now we have the vaccine, things may go smoothly towards freedom again. We have another great issue for you again. Thanks must go to Rural Services Network, the BBC, Country Living, Coulters Property and The Fishing Daily.

Richard

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Reflection

Bible Reading: Psalm 150

Praise the Lord.

¹ Praise God in his sanctuary;
praise him in his mighty heavens.

² Praise him for his acts of power;
praise him for his surpassing greatness.

³ Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet,
praise him with the harp and lyre,

"Praise the Lord..."

⁴ Praise him with tambourine and dancing,
praise him with the strings and pipe,

⁵ Praise him with the clash of cymbals,
praise him with resounding cymbals.

⁶ Let everything that has breath praise the
Lord.

Praise the Lord.



Reflection:

Going back some sixty years or so, when I was at the Minster School in York, the choir used to sing an arrangement of Psalm 150 by Dr. Francis Jackson, Organist and Master of Music, after every Service. They still sing it today. The words of that glorious Psalm of Praise and Thanksgiving had a profound and long-lasting effect on me. It became one of my favourites of all the Psalms.

This current coronavirus pandemic is the biggest single event that has hit the world for decades, and some say centuries. The number of cases that were admitted to hospital during the last year was completely unprecedented. The immense number of relatives and friends that so sadly passed away was horrendous. The excessive number of cases of anxiety and exhaustion amongst NHS staff has never been known before. The effect on many people of lockdown is probably immeasurable. This has become prevalent in rural areas, with loneliness and isolation really hitting home. So as we begin, very gradually, to come out of lockdown and the restrictions to our lives in a measured and controlled way, we should be giving thanks with every ounce of strength that we have. We should praise the Lord for all that has happened in the way of COVID testing, the wonderful way that the NHS has responded, the scientists that created a vaccine, all of which are designed to bring us back to some sort of normality again!

We should praise the Lord for his Creation as well. The second verse of the Psalm fits well here: "Praise him for his acts of power...for his surpassing greatness". The Lord's Creation talks very much of power and greatness. That Creation provides us with our food, and the opportunity for a lot of people to be able to exercise, let alone discover the countryside and wallow in its beauty. I have always believed that, as Christians, it is our job to protect rurality, nurture it, look after it and protect it from being spoilt. There are those, however, who would wish, through wilful stupidity, to ruin it for everyone else. The amount of fly-tipping and general rural littering that is happening at present has leapt by 83% in the last five years. If we do not do something about it soon, rural areas will begin to be spoilt for good. We can change things!

So, despite all the pain, suffering, grief, and anxiety that lots of us have endured during this last year or so, let us 'Praise the Lord' for all his goodness and love. As this country very slowly begins to move out of lockdown and restrictions, we have far more things to be thankful for than not!

Prayer:



If my lips could sing as many songs
as there are waves in the sea.
If my tongue could sing as many hymns
as there are ocean billows.
If my mouth filled the whole firmament
with praise.
If my face shone like the sun and moon
together.

If my hands were to hover in the sky like
powerful eagles,
and my feet ran across mountains as swiftly
as the deer;
all that would not be enough to pay you fitting
tribute,
O Lord my God.

Jewish prayer

Response - what we can do:

A new, refreshed Countryside Code has recently been launched by Natural England and Natural Resources Wales. Take time to read it and promote it to others.

Protect God's Creation by being greener in our daily lives. Also, encourage our churches to become Eco Churches.

Think about what we can do for our countryside. Pray regularly, both privately and in corporate worship, for our rural areas and those who live and work in them.

When out for a walk in the countryside, in a COVID-secure manner, pick up any litter we see on verges and hedges. This can be deposited in our recycling bins. However, always be aware of safety issues, such as broken glass and drug paraphernalia.

"Praise the Lord..."

Top ten rural areas for property price increases

Rural property prices are at an all-time high, as more Brits swapped city life for country living in lockdown. In fact, according to the 2021 Rural Property Report by Coulters Property, house prices in rural areas have risen by 20.8% in the last five years - 3.3% higher than in urban areas. We might be spending more time at home, but lockdown has sparked rural relocations, giving many the chance to reconsider where to live.

Their research found that Harborough in Leicestershire is one of the most expensive rural areas to reside, with the average house price reaching £328,172 in 2020. In second and third places came East Northamptonshire and Rutland in the East Midlands, respectively, which had both seen a sharp rise in property prices. The percentages below show the average five-year price increases:

- | | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. Harborough (33.6%) | 6. Mendip (30.3%) |
| 2. East Northamptonshire (32.8%) | 7. Swale (30.2%) |
| 3. Rutland (31.7%) | 8. Staffordshire Moorlands (30.2%) |
| 4. Hinckley and Bosworth (31.3%) | 9. Derbyshire Dales (30.2%) |
| 5. High Peak (30.3%) | 10. Forest of Dean (29.6%) |

So, Dorset doesn't show in the top 10, despite being rumoured to be one of the most expensive places in the UK. You will notice that we are not too far off, as Mendip in Somerset has weighed in at number 6!

Dorset County Show - cancelled for 2021

The Organisers of the Dorset County Show have announced that a series of events will be held across Dorset in place of the main Show event this year to promote Dorset's renowned agricultural industry and the county's range of high-quality food and craft producers. Nicki Ralph, Chair of the Dorset County Show, says: "We have made the very regrettable decision not to hold the Show this year, due to the uncertainties surrounding COVID-19 restrictions. The safety and welfare of everyone involved remains our top priority, and we will therefore be focussing our efforts on hosting a series of 'alternative events'. Our new programme of events allows us to celebrate Dorset agriculture and local produce through a smaller scale format, to ensure health and safety standards are sufficiently managed. We look forward giving the public an opportunity to enjoy many elements they know and love from the Dorset County Show. Planning preparations for 2022 will also kick off towards the end of this year, so we'll be working hard to bring back our main event in its fullest form next year."

The events programme includes:

- **An Exclusive Members Only Reception** hosted by Society Presidents Lord and Lady Fellowes;
- **Dorset Food and Craft Festival** including the Dorset County Show Homecraft and Horticulture classes;
- **Dedicated Equine Show** held on the first weekend of September, including National qualifiers;
- **Sheep Dog Trials** held in their usual location of Cheselbourne;
- **Agricultural Machinery Demonstration Day** - view the latest machinery working in live demonstrations;
- **Ploughing Match** - hosting the usual conventional and reversible plough classes;
- **Winter Livestock Show and Christmas Market** - sheep and cattle, farm produce and seasonal Homecraft judging alongside local food and craft stands.



What happened to the Brexit fishing boom?

Sir Barney White-Spunner, Chair of the UK Fisheries Advisory Board, has hit out at the UK Government's handling of Brexit and has called for answers on their broken promises. He writes:



Only a year or so ago our crew – those now heading home from what might be their final trip, as well as those who are already laid off – believed they could look forward to good jobs in a proud industry. Such was the Brexit promise on fisheries. Whatever happened to the promise of a Brexit fishing boom? Were our fishermen just misled or is the UK simply not up to the job of negotiating a trade-for-access deal with the Norwegians?

We at UK Fisheries have used every means at our disposal to persuade our negotiators to take the simple and logical step of making continued low-tariff access to UK markets for Norwegian exporters contingent on Britain receiving the Arctic cod quotas without which there can be no distant-waters fishing industry on Humberside. We have told the powers that be of the opportunities that exist for a vibrant and growing fishing industry in north-east England – we have even detailed the £100m+ of investment that is waiting. What's the point in setting up a freeport on Humberside to stimulate the economy if your first action is, by design or neglect, to eliminate £120m of existing investment and future opportunities for the fishing fleet?



We have had years to prepare for discussions with the Norwegians. It should have been, to paraphrase former Trade Secretary Liam Fox, "the easiest deal in history". But the UK's approach to its post-Brexit fishing negotiations seems to have been characterised by error and neglect. Historical precedent suggests that the amount of Arctic cod available to the UK is 2% of the Total Allowable Catch (TAC) - the sustainable limit set by international scientists - for the Barents Sea. Would Norway really risk tariffs of perhaps 15 – 25% on its £1bn+ of annual fisheries exports to the UK for this? The amount of TAC available to the UK now that the EU has taken its share is actually about 3%. This is still a drop in the ocean to the Norwegians, but if Britain asked for this amount in exchange for access to our market on attractive terms, the UK fleet would effectively have added 50% to its historical quotas in the Barents Sea, resulting in more investment, more jobs for British fishermen, and an expansion of the UK's distant waters fleet.

But that's not all that's baffling us. Why did we bother negotiating a good deal on Svalbard cod with the EU, only to completely fail to take up the opportunity? We doubled our take of the EU Svalbard quota in the TAC but now we're meekly accepting a lower amount from Norway. Why?

In any access arrangement between states, there has to be 'currency' – usually cash or other fish stocks – that a state will use to gain access to the waters of its partners. But the UK seems to have entered negotiations with Norway only after having carefully emptied its own pockets of any currency to exchange for Arctic cod. In the past, Britain's EU quotas in Greenland have been offered to Norway as currency. Incredibly, the UK didn't accept them this year – even though Greenland offered them up in return for tariff-free access. There is now an imminent danger that the UK team comes back with little or no Arctic cod from the Norwegian zone. We have no more licences to fish off Svalbard, or anywhere else for that matter. So is this the final nail in the coffin of the English distant waters fleet?

All of this leaves us searching for the fishing dividend of Brexit and its fabled "Sea of Opportunity". And all we find is more questions. Why is the Government so happy to abandon the last remnant of an industry whose history dates back generations and which is an integral part of the culture and society of the Humberside region? Why are the policymakers refusing to heed the concerns of our crews and their families, whose optimism gave way first to confusion, and now, increasingly, to anger? And finally, the most important question of all: how can a fisherman feed his family if he doesn't have anywhere to fish? Because that's where we've got to.

One-man show reflects on rural racism

Pleased to see this story - rural areas need to stay alive to the challenge of racism

A man who suffered racist abuse as a child has written a one-man show about his experiences of growing up as a mixed-race person in rural England. Norfolk actor Ashton Owen, 25, will perform his show, 'Outskirts' at Sheringham Little Theatre in north Norfolk. It will premiere virtually on 22 April, Mr. Owen playing more than a dozen characters from his childhood. The performance is part of the theatre's Rewriting Rural Racism project, led by young performers in light of the Black Lives Matter movement and the death of George Floyd in the United States last year.

Mr. Owen said: "I hope the play gets people to think about what they say and do and how it impacts on people of colour. We are trying to make people more aware of issues faced by people living in rural areas, by highlighting real experiences, so they realise it happens here as well as the United States."

And finally...

This is the time to be slow,
lie low to the wall
until the bitter weather passes.
Try, as best you can, not to let
the wire brush of doubt
scrape from your heart
all sense of yourself
and your hesitant light.

If you remain generous,
time will come good;
and you will find your feet
again on fresh pastures of promise,
where the air will be kind
and blushed with beginning.

John O'Donohue, Irish poet and philosopher

