



St John the Baptist Scottish Episcopal Church Perth

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August and September 2020

Letter from Bishop Ian



Dear friends,

Many of us are eager to return to worship in church as soon as we can. So many people have told me how deeply they miss receiving Communion, and so many clergy have told me how much they miss being together with their congregations. At the same time, we know that returning will not simply be a matter of opening the doors, but will require careful planning and commitment to keeping everyone safe. And we know that not everyone will be able to come to church because they will need to remain shielded at home for some time yet.

So the Scottish Government's recent announcement that churches will be able to re-open for public worship is welcome, as we await the circulation of the Bishops' Advisory Group Guidance for the possible re-opening of SEC churches. The Guidance may look detailed and complicated, but it is meant to assist us as we consider the very important question of how to return to worship, safely.

We have all suffered the stresses and strains of the last few months, and the clergy especially have been working incredibly hard, providing worship online or on paper, giving pastoral care, supporting the sick or bereaved, helping congregations to stay in touch. They are now very tired, and just at the time when many people might be taking a well-earned break from work, perhaps going on holiday, they are having to think carefully about re-starting worship in church.

But the Guidance says *how we may* open, not *when we must* open. I want to encourage clergy and vestries to take time about this. Some may feel able to open on the first available Sunday, some to start with a weekday service, others to delay opening for worship for weeks or even months. All of these possibilities are fine, and depend on what is realistic.

So congregations will return to worship as they are able, and they will be different from each other about this. But one thing will be the same. And that is our calling to be, in the words of the Ordination liturgy, “the People of God, the Body of Christ and the dwelling of the Holy Spirit”. Yes, our return to worship will heed all the requirements of safety, not because we love ourselves too much to take the risk but because we love others too much to put them at risk. But we should also be clear about this: that we *will* return to worship together, to breaking the bread and blessing the cup, just as soon as we can, delaying not one day more than we have to. And we will do this because we are called to be “the Church, the Body of Christ and the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit”, and because we are called by Jesus to “do this in remembrance of me”.

So as we make our plans to return to worship, let’s be realistic, let’s be kind (especially to our clergy), and let’s be faithful to our calling.

With blessing and prayer,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'tla' with a flourish.

Weekly Services

The church building may still be closed but weekly services are available via the church website. www.episcopal-perth.org.uk or a link on our Facebook page.

There is also a weekly prayer meeting on Zoom. For further details please contact Rob Mackay at the church office; 01738 634999.

Editorial

Since time immemorial, well, certainly since 1895 which is the date of the oldest surviving edition of *Quest* in the Archives, the first item has always been the Rector's letter. However, Canon Graham and Annie, our Curate, sent out letters at the beginning of July, in between editions of *Quest*. He wrote about online services and the prospect of re-opening St John's and the difficulties that it would present; she spoke the soothing effect of solitary walking in the countryside and not being cast down by our travails.

Instead, here are some reflections on the pandemic. The lockdown imposed some months ago is gradually being relaxed though I find it difficult to work out what Phase we are supposed to be in. There is a certain irony in the fact that from the beginning one could go to Tesco's for worldly sustenance but not to church. The Bishops have been ultra-cautious in their approach, possibly because most members of the congregations are older people, said to be a greater risk than the young. One might be surprised to note that the wearing of masks in public places has only become compulsory three months and more since the start of the pandemic. The politicians say that they are following the Science. One is tempted to ask 'Which Science?' Medical experts, like economists, disagree; armchair epidemiologists have had a field day. Is the virus spread by human exhalation, or is it free-floating in the air? If the first, then should we be two metres apart (two clubs' lengths, for golfers), or one metre? If the second, then are we all doomed? Perhaps not. By comparison with outbreaks of disease in the past, we have got off comparatively lightly. Covid 19 is not Spanish 'flu or bubonic plague (see later). Many of those who have died have had 'pre-existing medical conditions' and the elderly have been more vulnerable because their bodies' immune system is slower to operate than that of younger people. Viruses are always with us and they can die out as fast as they come.

Some flourish in warm weather, others prefer the cold. How many would have died anyway because of winter 'flu?

Politicians have an unenviable task. On the basis of scientific advice they have to make decisions that affect the lives and livelihood of millions. Collectively we are entering 'uncharted waters', the realm of 'known unknowns'; we know in a general way how viruses behave, but not this one. Will there be a second 'spike'? (Quite apart from anything else, the pandemic had sparked a lot of new metaphors.) And when the virus has finally run its course, what shape will the economy be in? There is a balance to be struck between saving lives by isolation and restarting commercial activity. There are potent arguments on either side. Yet decisions have to be made and there is no such thing as a non-political judgment, despite such claims made in interviews. Whatever decision is arrived at, brickbats will be thrown, doomsters will pull long faces and anonymous tweeters will vent their spleen. Perhaps the most unsettling thing is that no one knows what the future will hold. And there are so many other things to worry about which won't go away, for instance Brexit, Climate Change, Chinese depredations and attacks on free speech (illiberal liberalism). Truly, 2020 is an *annus horribilis*.

David Willington



Praying like a Woman

Praying like a Woman, by Nicola Slee.

Gentlemen, please don't be put off by the title!

Nicola Slee is a theologian and poet who teaches theology at the Queen's Foundation in Birmingham, and also a free-lance writer.

The inimitable Alastair Cruickshank sent me a note saying he thought it 'just right for our present circumstances'. He also recalled that in the 1960s & 70s there was a George B Slee in the congregation - he thinks he was People's Warden, and lived in Scone. His son, Iain, was in South Queensferry some years ago. If anyone recalls the said George B Slee, please tell Alastair!



Praying Like a Woman

Give me the resolution to say 'No' to the good,
so that I will be ready to say 'Yes' to the better.

Give me the courage to keep living in the open-endedness of the future,
without foreclosing the mysterious work of your Spirit in my haste or
fear.

Give me the persistence to stay in the wilderness of unknowing,
until I am ready to receive your call.

Give me the strength to keep still and keep waiting,
when all about me is pushing towards movement and activity and
choice.

Give me the acceptance to live these days in uneventfulness, simplicity
and hiddenness,
without craving excitement, distraction or change.

Give me the grace to live in the emptiness of 'not doing',
without the rewards of achievement, fulfilment or success.

Give me the wisdom to discriminate between my own impatience to
move forward,
and your Spirit's deep stirring of my spirit when the time is right to
move.

Give me the faith to trust in your obscurity,
the obedience to stay faithful to your mystery,
the courage to keep trust with your inscrutability.

Nicola Slee

Another Plague

The Great Plague of 1665, the Poor's Plague, as it was also known, was said to have originated in the Levant and brought to England in bales of merchandise from Holland. At first it appeared to be only in the outskirts of the town, and in the most obscure alleys, among the poorest people. It spread then to St Giles in the Fields, site of the worst slums and rookeries in all London. There it reached epidemic proportions and then spilled into the city itself. Almost without exception, it was most virulent in the poorest parishes, among the crowded tenements, cellars and shacks in close and blind alleys. Infections 'in small and strait rooms and habitations was one of the chiefest occasions of the great plague and mortality'.

The stigma attached to the disease and the ferocious measures imposed in a vain attempt to counter it caused many plague deaths to be concealed. Disclosure resulted in the incarceration of all the inhabitants of the household for forty days, trapping the healthy with the sick. If any more of them succumbed to the disease during that time, a fresh period of forty days' isolation was imposed.

No citizen was permitted to travel outside the city without a certificate of health, signed by the minister and churchwardens of his parish and countersigned under the seal of a justice of the peace. Many were sold on, stolen, copied or forged as desperate citizens sought a means of escape.

Inns turned travellers away, and strangers, vagabonds and beggars were expelled by the constables and watchmen or driven away by frightened citizens with volleys of stones. Shops, taverns and theatres were closed,

‘wakes and revels’ and all other gatherings of people were prohibited; all fairs within fifty miles of London were banned. A nine o’clock curfew was imposed in the evenings, and even funerals were forbidden. No longer could a family even bury its dead. Plague victims went unescorted to the grave and their last resting places were unrecorded and unknown.

Most merchants, doctors and priests, along with other richer folk, left the city before the plague reached its height. With ‘pulpits to let’, some dissenting ministers, expelled from their churches, took the opportunity to return to their former roosts, from where they mocked the orthodox churchmen for their cowardice and denounced the sin and licentiousness of Charles and his subjects that had brought the judgement of plague upon the city.

Adapted from Neil Hanson: *The Dreadful Judgement*.



Hymns for Lockdown

Where others will turn to biblical passages for prayer support and inspiration in times of need, I frequently turn to passages from Hymns for help. I therefore set myself a task to identify what I thought was the most appropriate Hymn to support me through Lockdown. Among those I considered were 'O God Our Help in Ages Past' and 'Lead Us Heavenly Father Lead Us'. This old favourite was my final choice. I wonder what Hymn you might choose?

Graham Kingsley-Rowe

What a friend we have in Jesus,
All our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
Everything to him in prayer!
O what peace we often forfeit,
O what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer!

Have we trials and temptations?
Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged
Take it to the Lord in prayer!
Can we find a friend so faithful,
Who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness –
Take it to the Lord in prayer!

Are we weak and heavy-laden,
Cumbered with a load of care?
Jesus is our only refuge,
Take it to the Lord in prayer!
Do thy friends despise, forsake thee?
Take it to the Lord in prayer!
In his arms he'll take and shield thee,
Thou wilt find a solace there.

St John's Pastoral Care Covid-19

It was January when we here in Scotland first became aware of a deadly virus causing fatalities in Wuhan, China - a long way off. In early March, when the Italian government ordered the lock-down of Lombardy, that seemed extraordinary, but rather too close to the UK for comfort. Then events began to move very quickly. Sunday, March 15, Canon Graham, responding quickly to this crisis, told the congregation that my phone number could be used as a point of contact if anyone became ill, or had any other need. At the same time, he set up a pastoral care team – GT, AMH, RM, EC, who have met regularly.

One week later, our churches were closed. But not inactive! Members volunteered to do whatever was needed – phoning, emailing, getting messages. Canon Graham wanted all members of St John's to be assured they had a church volunteer who would be in touch with them. His initial concern was that all who lived alone, and the especially vulnerable, were supported. Volunteers agreed to phone or email people weekly.

These contacts were warmly welcomed, and I supported the volunteers with weekly emails, offering various kinds of information. Three volunteers who are not on-line received a hard copy of the email.

We had not expected this phase to continue quite so long. Having consulted with the volunteers, and as we moved into lockdown Phase 2, we agreed that the communication was needed only occasionally. And that is how it now is. Until life has returned to something more like 'normal', and we are back worshipping in St John's, we hope to maintain a small group of volunteers to keep occasional contact.

Canon Graham is very appreciative of the way in which the volunteers' care and diligence is testament to the loving nature of St John's congregation.

Elaine Cameron

Sunday Lectionary

August 2nd Pentecost 9

Psalm 17. 1-7, 15, Romans 9. 1-5

Matthew 14. 13-21

August 9th Pentecost 10

Psalm 105. 1-6, 16-22, 45b

Romans 10. 5-15

Matthew 14. 22-33

August 16th Pentecost 11

Psalm 133

Romans 11. 1-2a, 29-32

Matthew 15. 21-28

August 23rd Pentecost 12

Psalm 124, Romans 12. 1-8

Matthew 16. 13-20

August 30th Pentecost 13

Psalm 105. 1-6, 23-26, 45c

Romans 12. 9-21

Matthew 16. 21-28

September 6th Pentecost 14

Matins: Psalm 119. 49-56

Revelation 8. 1-5, Matthew 6. 1-18

Eucharist:

Psalm 149, Romans 13. 8-14

Matthew 18. 15-20

September 13th Pentecost 15

Psalm 114, Romans 14. 1-12

Matthew 18. 21-35

September 20th Pentecost 16

Eucharist:

Psalm 105. 1-6, 37-45

Philippians 1. 21-30

Matthew 20. 1-16

Evensong:

Psalm 119. 145-152

Revelation 14. 1-5

Matthew 8. 23-34

September 27th Harvest Festival

Psalm 65, 2 Corinthians 9. 6-15

Luke 17. 11-19



From the Registers – Eternal Rest

Evelyn Helen Dowie: 3rd December 1924 – 17th June 2020

The funeral took place at Abernethy New Burial Ground on Friday 3rd July 2020 at 3 pm.



My warmest thanks to all of you for sponsoring the 100 km cycle round the North Inch during Christian Aid Week so very generously. Sally Foster-Fulton, Head of Christian Aid in Scotland, writes gratefully of how supporters like you reached out to neighbours far and wide - without leaving the house! You may have seen Sally on TV recently, because she chairs the Scottish arm of the UK Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) which brings together 14 leading UK aid charities to raise funds quickly and efficiently when major disasters hit countries without the capacity to respond. Christian Aid is one of these charities.

Your gifts are helping families around the world deal with the coronavirus, threatening those with the most fragile health systems in the world's poorest countries, needing urgent help. The world's poorest were already facing a lack of water, food and healthcare with underlying issues such as HIV – and that was before the pandemic.

Some of you requested that at least a portion of your money be donated to the Rohingya Appeal. Be assured that it will. Over 850,000 Rohingya refugees have been living in overcrowded camps in Cox's Bazar district, where they are very vulnerable to Covid-19. Christian Aid and their partners have already helped many displaced by violence in Rakhine State, providing food, clean water, dignity kits and shelter, and will continue as long as there is need and they have resources. This pandemic has indeed shown us that our futures are bound more tightly together than ever before.

Of course, you are all wanting to know how much the cycle raised – much more than I dared hope! When I last looked at the e-envelope it said £850. Very good, but that doesn't count the cheques which went directly to the

Christian Aid London office - a further £550. So the grand total is a very impressive **£1400!**

Please be aware that this final amount has been reached with the support of St Ninian's Cathedral congregation. When Wendy Duncan and Pat Butler, the Cathedral Christian Aid representatives, heard of the sponsored cycle, they suggested Cathedral folk might wish to donate, as this year the Cathedral had no plans for Christian Aid Week.

Depending on how life moves in light of Covid-19, the Cathedral may hold a social fund-raising event for Christian Aid this autumn. Wendy is wondering if we might make this a joint venture with St John's – nothing definite as yet, but it might be good to share some Christian Aid activities with St Ninian's. Of course this depends on Canon Graham and Provost Hunter!

Again, my very grateful thanks to you all – and special thanks to David Willington for his invaluable pedalling support!

Elaine Cameron



Some Thoughts on Black Lives Matter

The whole issue raises personal challenges for me. I am happy to see History rewritten to portray what is true, but I am uncomfortable when such rewrites ignore the mores of the time. I think there is a valid argument to review the appropriateness of those that have been placed on pedestals from time to time, rather than leaving the statues of past, and often largely forgotten, “heroes” to the blessings of the pigeons! However, we shouldn’t lose sight of the fact that statues are a valid memorial to our history, both good and bad, without which history risks being sanitized. It is perhaps better, that today we tend more to memorialize our heroes by the likes of charitable trusts rather than readily subscribing funds for statues.

I am wrestling with the concept that the current generation must atone for the “sins” of our forebears. This is particularly relevant to me, as my sister recently discovered that a several times great grandfather and his brother moved from Devon to found Sugar Plantations in Jamaica in the early 18th Century. (No mention of this shameful legacy has ever been mentioned). Three sons (including a Jamaican Archdeacon!) were born there and eventually owned between them eight estates employing 729 “enslaved” and 113 “stock” slaves before returning to Liverpool in 1840. They received the equivalent in today’s money of about £1.75 million in compensation when Slavery was abolished. They also left behind two illegitimate mixed-race sons. A dreadful family legacy to unearth!

I was brought up to treat all people equally. In my youth, and later in business, I have deliberately bucked the trend of institutional racism. I have even overruled a Personnel Manager who did not wish to support my decision to appoint the best candidate at interview because of his ethnicity. However, I feel uncomfortable with the vehement anger that is

now being manifested yet, were I to be challenged, I would find it hard to justify that my privileged upbringing was funded solely by the endeavours of my immediate parents and grandparents, as, almost certainly, it owes something to the inherited wealth obtained from the exploitation of black Africans by previous generations. Even if I were in a financial position to do so, I struggle to accept the premise that there is a burden of guilt for which I should atone. For me, true atonement lies in the attitudes I have instilled in my children and grandchildren. I believe, also, that true equality is a pipe dream: there will always be masters and servants and the temptation of the powerful to exploit the weak will remain. We can only do our Christian best as individuals to Love one another.

Graham Kingsley-Rowe



Problems of Filming a Reading!

When I agreed, in late May, to be the reader for the St John's online service at the end of June I thought this would be even easier and less stressful than reading in Church. By then I was allowed to visit my family in their gardens and both my children are technically savvy and have up-to-date smart phones so all I had to do was find an appropriate background, spend five minutes reading while one of them filmed me and they could then send the clip to Gordon.

By the date at the end of June when the filming was to take place it seemed as if it would be even easier as by then I had been able to form a "Social Family Bubble" with my daughter (Morag) and family which allowed me to go inside her house.

The day chosen was not perfect regarding the weather as there were showers around so we decided to do it indoors. What followed turned into a farce! We chose a position in her living room with an appropriate background and I began reading. Halfway through the Epistle Morag stopped me, saying the light had suddenly changed and my face had gone into sharp shadow.

We paused and when about to start the next attempt Morag's cat suddenly appeared and made a beeline for my knee and there was still the problem of my face going in and out of shadow so I moved to the other side of the room, checked the suitability of the background and whereabouts of the cat but again - the same problem of shadow.

We then decided to try outside and found a good background where Morag could place the phone / camera on a garden table just in front of me. This was all set up and I started to read just as drops of rain started to fall on and smudge the print on the sheet of paper I was reading from. I dashed indoors and found a plastic folder to protect the printout of the

reading. However, the rain became too heavy to proceed so we paused and had mugs of tea.

Once the shower had passed we tried again. This is the version that was submitted and was shown in the service but it also had its problems. As I read gusts of wind were catching my script and I was struggling to hold it still and then in the pause between the Epistle and the Gospel I could be seen smiling / smirking. This was because Morag's dog had appeared and walked between the table on which the phone was positioned and me, almost walking over my feet. However I had been determined to keep going and actually get to the end this time but I felt as if my final "Praise to Christ our Lord" looks more as if I was thinking "Thank God that's it finished and I'm not reading it again"!

When I viewed it I realised I had crows cawing as my "background birdsong". The smirk in the pause between the Epistle and Gospel was skilfully edited by Gordon and replaced with a picture of an open Bible and candle. It was only when we watched the Service online the following Sunday that I noticed that the dog had still managed to make an appearance in the background in the garden during the second half of the Epistle.

When I see everyone else's efforts it looks as if they just spent five minutes either just sitting or standing with an appropriate background, doing the reading, and that's it done just as simply as if reading from the lectern in Church. However, with my experience of the possible problems that can arise, I have been wondering if there were possibly a few repeats of our Rector's welcome the previous week from beside Gannochy Pond?

What has been very impressive throughout is Gordon's work in combining and editing everyone's efforts, adding appropriate music, words of hymns and photographs to produce an online Service from St John's of such high quality.

Jean Hendry

The Problem of Evil

During lockdown I have been listening to my CDs, working backwards up the alphabet, through Wagner, Vaughan Williams and Ravel. Recently I reached Purcell. Purcell, one of the finest and most original of English composers, was a chorister in the Chapel Royal and later organist there and at Westminster Abbey.

He lived in troubled times. During his boyhood he witnessed the bubonic plague ('Bring out your dead') and the Great Fire of London. Later came the crisis of James the Second's overthrow and the accession of Dutch William. By his wife, Frances, Purcell had six children, of whom only two survived infancy. In 1694 the much-loved Queen Mary II died and the music he composed for her obsequies is very moving. His ceremonial music for the Court and works for the stage, including his opera *Dido and Aeneas*, are well known. But I, as a singer, cherish his church anthems.

He set many texts from the Bible, particularly the Psalms, and the English Prayer Book. There are joyous anthems, such as *Blow up the trumpet in Sion* and *Rejoice in the Lord Alway*, the so-called 'Bell Anthem'. However there are a number of penitential anthems in which his astringent and unconventional musical language is to the fore. The eight-part fragment *Hear my prayer, O Lord, and let my crying come unto thee* is a classic example. Other examples are *Remember not, Lord, our offences; Lord, how long will thou be angry?; O God, thou hast cast us out; Man that is born of woman; In the midst of life we are in death;* and the sublime *Thou knowest, Lord, the secrets of our hearts*. The last two come from his Music on the Death of Queen Mary and are especially poignant, since they were sung at Purcell's own funeral in Westminster Abbey a few months later. He was thirty-five.

In the Old Testament, the afflictions that came upon Israel and individuals were regarded as punishments for sin and disobeying the Divine Word. The notion is still firmly rooted in the Western psyche. Considering what

Purcell himself and his generation suffered, no wonder people thought they were being punished, whether it was for Adam's original sin or, more recently, for the licentiousness of Charles II's Court and the corruption of politics, business and the Church. Non-conformity of various kinds had flourished during the Civil War and the Protectorate. It put an emphasis on punishment for sin and, for Calvinists, redemption came only for the elect.

Were the Londoners of the 1660s particularly sinful? Are Americans today more sinful than New Zealanders, since Americans have had the most official deaths from Covid 19 than anywhere in the First World, and New Zealanders the least? Put like this, the question is preposterous. But still lurking in the background is the assumption that it is a punishment for sin when misfortunes occur. If wrongdoers get 'what they deserve' or 'what is coming to them', that is a satisfactory outcome which we can understand. Christian fundamentalists are in no doubt that the apparently virtuous, if they suffer, have secretly sinned.

In effect, it is a simplistic attempt to explain the Problem of Evil: Why do bad things happen to innocent people? This has exercised theologians and philosophers since the Book of Job, written in the 6th century BCE. Evil can come to the innocent through Man's wickedness, for example at Auschwitz. But how does one apportion blame for natural phenomena, pandemics, earthquakes, volcanoes and so forth?

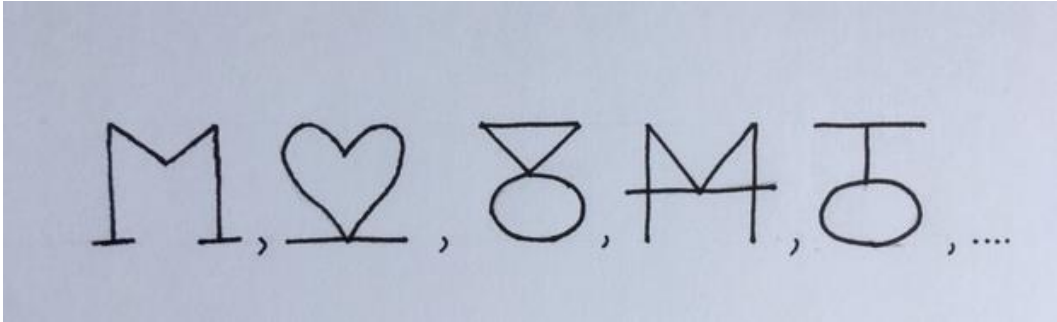
The problem can be baldly stated: If God is Almighty, why does He allow suffering? If He is not, then there must be another entity that brings it about, the Manichaeian position. Most theologians take a more nuanced view. But when all attempts to explain the inexplicable fail, then one has recourse to the default position: 'God moves in a mysterious way'. Let us hope that He is 'An ever-present hope in trouble'.

David Willington

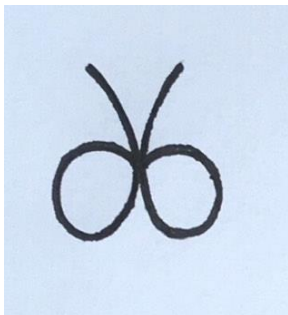
Sequence Puzzle

In the last edition of *Quest* I gave you a little puzzle to fill the long hours of lockdown.

What symbol comes next in this sequence?

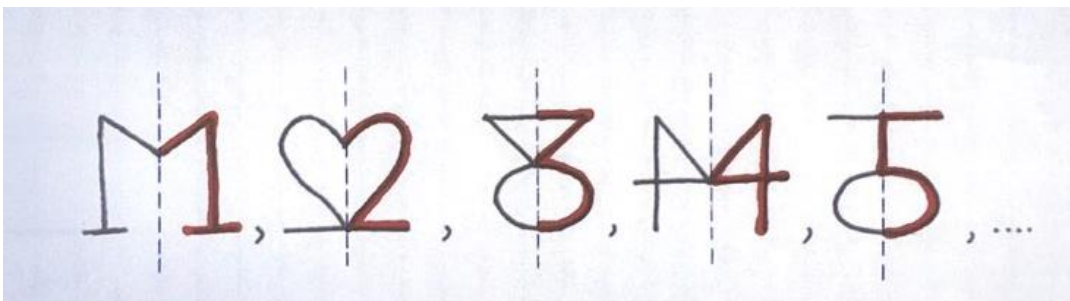


Hopefully some of you spotted how these seemingly random symbols were generated. For those of you who have been anxiously waiting for the answer here it is:



However that may be of no help whatsoever in understanding what the sequence is!

This should clarify things:



Hence the answer is the numeral '6' with its reflection to the left.

I love this sequence 😊

Cath Bodrell

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From the Editor

Thanks very much for everyone's contributions to this issue and to those who helped prepare it for printing and distribution. Please hand in or email all items to David Willington for our October / November issue by

Sunday 13th September

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