

Grays

United
Reformed
Church

A place to pause, and then step forward.

Minister: Rev'd David Coaker

drcoaker@gmail.com

07378 348191

Silent Visitor



Here Comes The Sun – we hope!

June 2021

Reopening for Worship

Family Worship

Sunday 20th June

between 10.15 – 11.15 am

Sunday 27th June

between 10.15 – 11.15 am

Sunday 4th July

between 10.30 – 11.30 am

Annual Church Meeting

Sunday 18th July

between 10.15 – 11.15 am

Sunday 15th Aug

between 10.15 – 11.15 am

Young Families

Sunday 6th June

between 9.30 – 10.15 am

Sunday 4th July

between 9.30 – 10.15 am

Sunday 1st Aug

between 9.30 – 10.15 am

This will be very different from what we usually did both in form and content, as we comply with the necessary restrictions to safeguard each other's health and wellbeing.

- Each opening will start and finish with an informal time of worship.
- You will be required to wear a face covering and maintain social distancing.
- As you arrive you will be asked for Track and Trace information; to sanitise your hands and to follow the one way system.
- We will have stewards to maintain social distancing and to help us. So please follow what they say.
- If you are suffering from COVID-19 symptoms, please remain at home. (if you have tested positive you should be isolating, as per government advice.)
- We do not wish to put anyone under any undue pressure to attend, so please consider your circumstances beforehand.

Zoom Worship

Sunday 6th June

between 11.00 – 11.45 am

Join with your computer:

<https://us04web.zoom.us/j/77149140785?pwd=NGI4aGVsbVBZVnNqb0U0d1JBRFVZZz09>

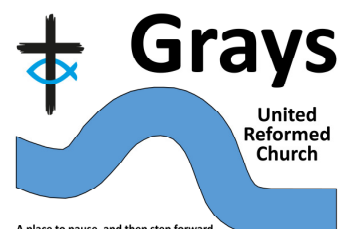
Meeting ID: **771 4914 0785** Passcode: **zpxN3e**

Join with your telephone: Dial **0 2 0 3 4 8 1 5 2 3 7**

When prompted enter meeting ID: **7 7 1 4 9 1 4 0 7 8 5 #**

When asked to enter participant ID press **#** to skip

When prompted enter meeting passcode: **7 2 1 5 1 9 #**



Uncoiling ...

In the run up to items for SV being due for submission, I spent 3 days on Zoom attending the ministers' spring school for our Eastern and Thames North synods. John Proctor, past General Secretary and NT Tutor, led us through the book of James in Bible study. Karen Campbell, Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries, was our chaplain and shared a session about reconciliation. Carla Grosch-Miller led us through three sessions exploring 'Trauma-informed ministry for times like these'.

Now which of the three would you prefer me to speak more about? Congratulations to those that went for Trauma!

Carla began by sharing with us about individual trauma and how our bodies can react to, and deal with it. Then the idea of collective trauma, particularly how the last 15 months could be seen as such, and the phases we move through and suggestions for leadership and individual response. The final session explored reconciliation and how to take stock of the situation and move through it.

I found much that resonated for me in what she shared. The idea that when we are initially faced with an event we can go into 'hero' mode and throw ourselves into dealing with it. Then, when the adrenaline has subsided, we can become disillusioned as we struggle to accept what has happened. When we do accept it, we begin to rebuild and restore and then move into the final stage of restored living or 'new' normal. The skills required to discern our true reality, whether the time is right for change, and the resources required to do so. (If you'd like her notes I can pass them along.)

A key message for me was the idea of a liminal moment, that space between now and not yet. Having the patience to hold on to that moment and let lessons be learnt, horizons be scanned, and paths forward be discerned.

The last 15 months has left us like wound up springs, eager to bounce out in new and/or familiar directions. Maybe we would be better served, and God's will better discerned, if we tried to hold ourselves in this moment? To allow ourselves to gently unwind, heal, review, plan and step forward in faith, peace and unity.

With every blessing, Rev'd David R. Coaker

Elders' decisions on behalf of Church Meeting

Elders have been weaving our way, making decisions on your behalf, based on government restrictions, advice from the URC, and our best judgments. It has not been an easy time for anyone, it is regrettable if anyone feels let down by Grays URC, but we have all acted with the best of intentions.

Entrance Path

Some areas of the paving have become of more concern as trip hazards. Quotes have been sought (£4200 or £1975 +VAT) to make repairs, the lower one accepted, and the work will be undertaken in early June. Elders have taken this decision on church meeting's behalf as it is a safety issue.

Little Roos

Elders received a request from Little Roos to extend their usage of the Annexe. This was initially to have 'sole use' to allow them to leave displays and resources out throughout the week without having to remove them each day. Such an agreement would have needed the creation of a lease, rather than a letting agreement, and exclude any other lettings or church activities in the Annexe.

Instead Alan and Charlotte negotiated an extension of their letting agreement to cover Monday morning through to Friday evening, with a commensurate increase in income to the church.

Pre-existing lets were contacted to talk though this change and the majority have been reallocated into the main building. (Weight Watchers have been offered a two-week free trial to see how meeting whilst the Dance School is operating will affect them, and after being offered alternate spaces and times Chestnut Guild have chosen to meet at St. John's.)

Elders were saddened that we were unable to retain the Chestnut Guild and have sent a letter of thanks on behalf of the church for their contribution to our life together and wishing them well at St. John's. Events moved ahead of our wish to bring this to church meeting so, on behalf of church meeting, elders' agreed this change in our lettings arrangements.

Financial Update

It has been a more settled month which has seen our income and expenditure more or less balance. This means that I will not have to draw on investments this month. Very welcome news.

As always though, there will be more bills coming in. Charlotte informs me that the long overdue repairs to the footpath will be completed shortly. This is definitely 'essential maintenance' and I look forward to the work being completed soon.

I have now started work on the second (and hopefully last) part of the Covid 'loss of hirer's income' claim. The insurers contacted me to explain that as now we can - and have started to - open the Church, hall and annexe buildings again, it was time to complete the claim from beginning of January to the end of May. The claim involves submitting detailed financial figures on both the income and expenditure of the Church for that period, which are then passed on to the loss adjusters. Watch this space!

If anyone has a question or query regarding finances please let me know and I will do my best to answer.

Finally, as always, my usual and heartfelt thanks to all those who continue to support the church financially each month. I endeavour always to ensure that any money spent is spent wisely.

Alan Beckley

Mature Movers



With the lessening of restrictions so that people may mix a bit more in line with the guidelines, Mature Movers opened for business from Tuesday 18th May.

There is no excuse anymore for us all not to keep a bit fitter. Want to know a bit more about mature movers? Please contact Denise.

From: The United Reformed Church Finance Committee

May 2021

**To: All members and adherents of United Reformed Churches
and our Local Ecumenical Partnerships**

It would be fair to describe the year-and-a bit-since March 2020 as having been 'different', wouldn't it? Lots of us have experienced loss of loved ones, loss of income and perhaps jobs. All have experienced periods of lockdown; periods without 'non-essential' shops; and continuous and extensive disruption to our 'normal' social interactions and relationships. The world we thought we understood and could take for granted has been utterly transformed. How many of us imagined at the start of 2020 that we could go months without a haircut or without people not in our 'bubble' entering our homes.

As members of United Reformed Church congregations ourselves, we understand much of what your church community has experienced since March 2020. The absence of what is now regularly labelled "in-person worship" for much (or all) of this time has compelled us to turn to other ways of being church. Buildings in which we used to praise God regularly have been shut, both to regular worshipers and others who might have sought solace within their walls during these desperate and troubling times. It has been hard to maintain close fellowship with people we only meet over Zoom (or the like) – if we are digitally enabled.

Financially, things have been extremely tough too. Plate offerings have collapsed; some regular givers have had to reduce or entirely stop giving to support God's work; and those churches which hire out their premises have seen income from that source disappear.

At denominational level, we feared that these financial troubles would spell disaster for the URC's Ministry and Mission ('M&M') fund through which the URC has always supported and developed our stipendiary ministers and Church Related Community Workers. It would have been all too easy for congregations to forget that for almost 49 years this fund (under various names) has provided stipends, pension contributions and training for all ministers throughout the three nations in which the URC operates: so that ministry reaches where synods judge it to be most needed and is paid according to each congregation's ability to contribute (though the ways of determining that vary from synod to synod). It was all

very well to remind ourselves that the M&M fund is meant to be the first call on every congregation's resources if the undertaking to financially support our ministers is to be honoured. We feared that drastically reduced income would make that impossible and that, because the need was less visible than the other calls on your diminished resources, payments to the M&M fund would have stopped first.

We are sorry if we ever doubted you.

It quickly became apparent that, although some congregations have to reduce their pledged giving to the M&M fund, many more of you were continuing to meet the 2020 commitments you had made during better times, despite the struggles that required. At the start of that year we had been expecting churches and synods to contribute around £18.5 million to the fund. By the year end, all but half a million pounds of that had been received. Since Church House staff and committees managed to reduce their budgeted expenditure by almost £1 million, your money enabled us to meet full costs of our Ministries, Education & Learning, Children's and Youth Work and Mission departments in 2020 as well as covering amounts spent on safeguarding, denominational governance and communications.

What is perhaps even more amazing is that, collectively, you have pledged to give £17.3 million during 2021 despite the financial problems caused by the pandemic being fully apparent well before your offers for this year were made.

We are always grateful for the financial support given each year to the M&M fund by all of you; but this past year has been phenomenal.

Thank you to those of you who have been able to maintain or increase financial support for your church congregation through this difficult time. That has enabled those responsible for your congregation's finances to keep more money flowing to the M&M fund than we expected.

Thank you for all your previous financial support to those of you who, after prayerful consideration, have had to reduce or stop giving in response to your changed financial circumstances.

Thank you for the pledges your congregation has made about contributing to the M&M fund during 2021 even though you were by then aware of the impact the pandemic was having on your local congregation's finances.

Thank you in anticipation for what you agree to offer to the M&M fund during 2022 to enable the denomination to deliver ministry, education and learning, children's work and mission activity on God's (and your) behalf.

We are aware that synods have played a significant part in encouraging and supporting many congregations with their contributions to the M&M fund. We have separately written to Synod Treasurers to express our thanks to them and their colleagues too.

Of course, our giving for God's work is in response to the amazing generosity and love of God which we see in Jesus. Nonetheless, it is important for us to thank every one of you for what you do for God, your congregation and its and our denominational finances.

Thank you!

If you have any questions or comments arising from this letter, please speak to your church treasurer who has been provided with more details information. If they are not able to help directly then they can get in touch with the finance team at Church House.

Yours in Christ,

Ian Hardie (Treasurer) and John Piper (Deputy Treasurer)
On behalf of the whole United Reformed Church
Finance Committee



News of the Family

Over the past few weeks several of our members have been unwell and some had to spend some time in hospital. Our love and best wishes have been sent to them along with some flowers to give them some cheer.

We wish them a speedy recovery and look forward to seeing them back in church in the near future.

Robert Datlen writes on behalf of Margaret, "that she would like to thank all her friends at the church for their good wishes and the beautiful flowers delivered to her recently. Margaret hopes that everyone is in good spirits and keeping well."

A very happy event for Elaine and Berne, they have welcomed their grand-daughter, Eloise Josephine into the family - born a couple of weeks earlier than expected - Eloise weighed a healthy 7lb 2oz – both her and her mother are doing well. We send our love and congratulations to Dominique, Suzanne and Daniel.

Holidays – what are they?



The two of us decided to spend a week in the touring caravan – just to get a bit of a break. Nowhere exciting, just down the road to south Kent not too far to travel and not far from the sea.

It was a nice break, away the usual routine – it could have been a bit better if the sun had decided to shine a bit more and warmed things up. We were away whilst you could only eat outside (which we did once or twice). One occasion in the dry outside a pub at Dungeness and the other time in the pouring rain under an open sided marquee – feeling quite cold while we had a very good meal. It's not really a complaint but I think we all remember how last year at this time the sun wouldn't stop shining and we weren't allowed to do anything!!!

We are looking forward (fingers crossed) to all restrictions being lifted in time for our daughter's wedding at the end of June. So for the time being keep wearing the masks, wash the hands, and stay a reasonable distance from each other just to save us all from another lockdown.

Ed.

Re-opening in light of the Roadmap #2

The following seeks to develop what was shared with you in April's Silent Visitor, has since been discussed at elders' meetings (where we are at #5), and the input from our Dementia Friends Training.

Three areas of church life are the focus: worship, decision-making, and becoming dementia friendly. Worship is central to the life of a church and grounds all of the other aspects of church life that express our faith. Church meeting is where we gather to talk, explore and decide what it means to be Grays URC. Becoming dementia friendly will hopefully become a journey where we can find ways to better serve our community and live out Christ's way.

Throughout the elders' discussions we have held in tension our desire to 'get back' whilst acknowledging what went before wasn't totally working. As we re-open we have the opportunity to be reassured by each other's company but also to seek to address some of the underlying issues we have put from our minds for far too long. We wish to re-invigorate our worship and discover ways to better draw ourselves, and others, into God's presence. We want to transform our church meetings from dutiful business meetings to open, supportive and engaged gatherings to discern God's will and to then act upon it. We seek to engage with becoming dementia friendly, and collaborate with the Alzheimer's Society, to give new life to our fellowship and create opportunities for Christ to be met.

All this will require commitment, patience, choices and a general willingness to go on the journey and see where it takes us. It is a journey we embark upon together, towards points on the horizon that we spot together, encouraging those with faltering steps and embracing those that would leap too far ahead. For us to best discern God's will for our fellowship, we need all of us to share in this journey together. This is the journey of faith, stepping out trusting in God and in each other, to discover God's kingdom.

Re-opening for Worship

We have the opportunity, as restrictions ease and as we decide to increase the frequency of our services, to remain flexible and open whilst also reassuring. Also the relaxing of the rules will eventually allow us to sing together and be more collaborative.

Our current plan is to have until Step 4 (no earlier than the 21st June) socially-distanced worship; for young families on the first Sunday and then for everybody on the third Sunday. Also on the first Sunday we will have a Zoom communion service. (We have added Sun 27th June and Sunday 4th July (as our ACM including worship) and will confirm returning to every Sunday later this month.)

Our lay preachers have confirmed that they now feel comfortable leading future worship services.

Sharing in communion together is possible with additional care and risk. We are provisionally looking to Sun 4th July for our first in-person communion.

We are looking to Remembrance as the first parade back and will ask the uniformed groups how involved they'd want to be in any Christmas one nearer the time.

A key restriction being removed will be when we can sing together again. This would immediately change the subsequent service content from reading and listening to the two hymns, to singing them. It would be appropriate to include a 'songs of praise' service as soon as practicable after that.

At Step 4, no earlier than the 21st June, restrictions will end, or at least become less burdensome or optional. e.g. we may be able to have refreshments and be closer and interact with each other more, but mask wearing, increased ventilation and hand washing may still be prevalent. As this coincides with the summer months, hopefully good weather and a sense of liberation will grant us the goodwill to enjoy being together and explore what it means to be Grays URC to discover new ways of worshipping and organising our life together.

Whatever we decide to do will be planned in advance and the congregation shall be informed and introduced to it through church meeting, SV and notices.

There is no intention of making drastic changes just for the sake of it. Our desire is to create opportunities for us to experience ways of worship, that may be new to us, to discover what future patterns of worship may better draw ourselves, and others, into God's presence. We are seeking to evolve our worship rather than drastically alter it.

There is a balance to be struck between the comfort of certainty and the challenge of change, but for us to deepen and broaden our fellowship we must be open to venturing out of our comfort zones.

The following questions are offered to aid our reflection:

- How can we remain flexible and open by offering a range of worship experiences as well as what our existing folk have grown to expect?
- How can we involve other people in sharing in the leading of worship and work more as a team to deliver it together?
- What other patterns of worship could we explore?
(e.g. Taize, café style, discussions, craft, Bible study, meditation, silence, testimony (telling our stories), practical (gardening, litter picking, decorating, cleaning), activist (Christian Aid, Amnesty International), prayer walks, films)
Any other suggestions?
- Would you be willing to share in leading one of the above?
Can you think of someone we should invite to lead one?
- In what ways could we rearrange our worship space to better enable worship?
- What post-covid special services should we consider? e.g. thanksgiving / celebration / memorial at Harvest, All Souls, Remembrance or some other time.

Re-opening for discussion and decision-making

We do need an Annual Church Meeting to adopt reports and accounts for 2020 and 2021, and to elect elders and appoint officers. There will also be matters that we need to place before the membership for decisions. It is unlikely that any in-person meeting, prior to Step 4 (no earlier than the 21st June) would be effective or productive given the limitations of social distancing and that Zoom would exclude a significant number of members.

We will look to holding an ACM from 10.30am on Sunday 4th July. (This will follow the Young Families service. The agenda and structure will follow.)

As well as the unknown pressures that we will face as we restart in-person church life there are the pre-existing issues we had when it came to finding volunteers for roles, tasks and rotas.

However much we wish it were not so, it is unlikely (without resorting to the subtlety of a pressgang) that we will receive nominations for eldership to increase our number let alone replace Alf and Denise as their term / co-option ends. After the last year it is even more crucial that our pattern of a Sabbath year after six years of elders' service is honoured. To continue with a further reduced number would increase the burdens already being carried and be detrimental to the conversations about the essentials of our life together, what our priorities should be, how we organise ourselves going forwards, and experiencing different patterns and ways of worship.

In the past a reference group was formed as a way to supplement the role of the elders' meeting, but given the uncertainties and the opportunities of our present situation a deeper engagement is required of us all. The following is suggested, to be discussed at the ACM on Sun 4th July, as a means of ensuring awareness, engagement and ownership of our life together moving forwards:

- We look to holding monthly church meetings as we re-establish and re-invigorate church life.
- We do so with the intention of enabling church meetings to be engaging, informative, decisive, and well attended.
- From September, and running to the next ACM in April 2022, church meeting will be our only decision-making body. (Effectively suspending the elders' meeting for this time.)
- After an initial agenda, mainly based on this document, further ones will be set by matters arising and new business raised by members.
- We solely rely on volunteers from church meeting to undertake tasks and activities on its behalf. (e.g. completing a single task, forming a team to undertake an activity or implementing any decision of church meeting.)
- We discern together the scope of roles that need to be undertaken and how we balance the delegation and oversight of them.
- We look to bring proposals to the 2022 ACM for how we wish to organise and facilitate our life together.

It is hoped that in this way we can all gain a better understanding of the content, priorities and possibilities of our life together and move forward in a more intentional, effective and supportive way.

Re-opening to be Dementia Friendly

As a way of re-envisioning and rejuvenating Wednesday coffee mornings is the possibility of collaborating with the Alzheimer's Society to set up a Memory Café and Singing for the Brain.

A Memory Café offers an informal and welcoming space to people seeking particular support, but also provides for the general needs we all have for refreshment, conversation, activity and friendship. Singing for the Brain brings people affected by dementia together to sing songs they know and love, in a fun and friendly environment.

Could we explore creating a day a week (10am-2pm?) where we offered refreshments throughout and at different times offered previous and new activities? For instance, people could just drop in for a drink or to seek dementia support. Others could pop along at set times for lunch, to sing, for gentle exercise, to play bowls, to play board games, to knit, make crafts, share in a dementia friendly act of worship, or something else. In this way we could concentrate our efforts, and also mutually support previously stand-alone activities.

The following initial action plan is proposed by elders:

- We invite the Alzheimer's Society to undertake a review of our site to advise on how dementia friendly our physical space is and then consider what actions to undertake.
- We invite the Alzheimer's Society for an elders' discussion about the possibility of collaborating on setting up a Memory Café and a Singing for the Brain session.
- We consult with the congregation and wider church family to determine the preferred weekday and which groups could be duplicated or moved into this activity.
- We look to launching in September.
- We advertise this as widely as practicable? (Alzheimer's Society, Facebook, leaflet drop, newspaper?)
- We look to running in-person Dementia Friends training when practicable.
- We explore how we could become involved with Thurrock Dementia Action Alliance.



Thurrock Food-bank - from Pete Newell, Operations Manager

The largest ever study into hunger and food bank use in UK, "State of Hunger" reveals the latest findings on the drivers and scale of poverty in the UK and that things are worse than ever. Research carried out by Heriot-Watt University, shows that 95% of people referred to food banks in our network are living in destitution – unable to afford to eat or stay warm and dry. In addition, disabled people, people with mental health issues and single parents are over-represented at food banks across the country.

After 10 years of cuts and global pandemic, more people than ever are facing extreme poverty. We need the UK Government to develop a plan to end the need for food banks which ensures the UK social security system provides everyone with enough to afford the essentials. This should start with making the £20 weekly increase to Universal Credit permanent and extending it to legacy benefits.

A plan is needed that ensures local lifelines are available to get people the right support at the right time. This should start with committing dedicated long-term funding for local welfare assistance schemes in England.

Another plan would involve food banks and people with lived experience in shaping the plan, to end the need for food banks. The plan should be developed across UK government departments, recognising the interconnected issues which drive people to needing support from food banks.

No one should be forced to use food banks because they can't afford essentials.

Thank you for being part of our movement. Change will only be possible as we raise our voices together to call for the end of food banks.

Please pray for those in our community that are in this situation, may they seek the help that they need and may we be in a position to point them to the relevant agency. Please continue to pray for the volunteers as they continue to work through the guidelines.

Items required: Rice puddings, sponge puddings, fresh fruit juice, tinned spaghetti, tinned fish, Nappies size 4,5,6. Toiletries for men and women's deodorants. Many thanks.

My Pandemic Experience

The pandemic has impacted us all. This guide helps you to reflect on your personal experience. Try to find a quiet place, and around 30 minutes, to use the questions and suggestions to explore what has been going on for you, and where God has been in the midst of it. You may like to start by praying the Lord's prayer, or lighting a candle.

THANKSGIVING

What are you thankful for? Think about small daily things, such as food, as well as bigger wider things, such as frontline workers.

Thanksgiving is embedded in Christian practice as a way of recognising all that God has given to us.

Paul writes 'Give thanks in all circumstances' (1Thess. 5:18). We don't give thanks for everything, but we do seek things to give thanks for in any situation.

Interestingly, neuroscience shows that the brain is like velcro with negative experiences (they stick and are hard to release) and teflon with positive experiences (they slip off too easily). Taking time to give thanks helps them to stick rather than slip off.

PRACTICE

- Keep a gratitude list. Write down three things each night you are grateful for from the day.

Lament is woven through the Christian tradition, rooted in the Psalms of lament, for example Psalm 42.

It involves honest recollection of how we are feeling, and a passionate expression to God of the pain and difficulty that we are experiencing.

PRACTICES

- Pray aloud the Psalms of lament (e.g. 3, 6, 7, 13, 17, 22, 28, 31, 32, 35, 42, 43, 51, 52, 54). Allow these prayers to become your own.
- Write your own prayer of lament, and pray it daily.

LAMENT

What are you missing, longing for? This may be people or things you have lost, hopes that have been dashed or longings for a better future.

LEARNING

What have you learned? What does God want you to learn through this experience that perhaps you can only learn at a time like this: about God, about life, about yourself? What will you do differently as a result of the pandemic?

God specialises in redemption. Out of difficult times, hard places, struggles and suffering, God longs to lead us to greater dependence on God, and deepening Christ-likeness (Romans 5:1-5, 2 Corinthians 12:7-10).

PRACTICES

- Journal to aid reflection. It doesn't have to be done everyday, or even written; take a look at this guide.
- Talk through your experience of the pandemic with someone, inviting them to ask questions and to listen carefully.

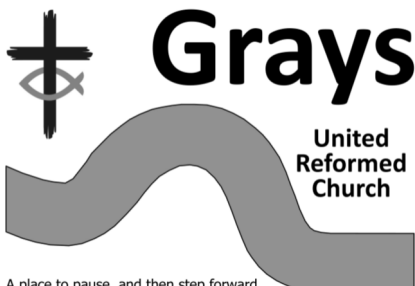
In prayer we bring all of who we are to all of who God is. We also bring all that is going on in our lives and the world around us to the one who is creator and sustainer of all things.

PRACTICES

- Take 15 minutes a day to read some of the Bible and pray. This can be done almost anywhere: in a quiet place, during your commute, out walking the dog.
- Try Bible in a year as a great way to structure your Bible reading.

PRAYER

What would it be good to think about in your praying over the coming weeks? People, situations, and concerns - local and global.



This was adapted from:

My Pandemic Experience - Church (cpas.org.uk)

<https://www.cpas.org.uk/sites/default/files/content/CPAS%20-%20My%20Pandemic%20Experience%20-%20Church.pdf>

H.R.H. The Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh. Some Personal Reflections

This month in 1921 Prince Philip was born in a villa on the island of Corfu, a child of Prince Andrew of Greece and Denmark and Princess Alice of Battenberg. The villa was called, 'Mon Repos' and one could say the birth was not an auspicious one as he was born on the dining room table. He was baptised in the rites of the Greek Orthodox Church. He was ultimately to become the longest-serving British royal consort.

He also became an enthusiastic pilot, completing his first flying lesson in 1952 and gaining his private pilot's license in 1959. He accomplished 5,956 hours of flying in 59 different aircraft. He was the first and only member of the Royal Family to fly solo in a single seat aircraft, a Druine Turbulent, manufactured for home construction by amateurs.

As a hobby he spent much time painting in oils and was fascinated by cartoons about the monarchy and the Royal Family. He maintained a collection of such.

In spite of his status as a royal he became well known for being able to put people at their ease in his company. This was sometimes at the cost of his reputation. For example, during a visit to the White House he was pleased to pour drinks for two butlers whilst engaging them in conversation. One can imagine in what high regard they held him. But his sense of humour was sometimes misinterpreted. He was well aware of this, once addressing the General Dental Council and telling them he had coined a new word for his so called blunders, "Dentopedalogy", or the science of opening your mouth and putting your foot in it. Later in life he suggested some of his comments contributed to the perception that he was, "a cantankerous old s-d."

There were other examples. He once told British students in China that if they stayed there much longer they would become slit-eyed. This seemed to upset a number of people but not the Chinese who remained unconcerned. A Chinese response was that if Chinese students studying in Britain stayed too long they would become round-eyed. The historian David Starkey described him as a kind of "H.R.H. Victor Meldrew." In 1999, at a pop concert in Wales, he was accused of insulting deaf children by

saying, "No wonder you are deaf listening to this row." However, he responded to this by saying that the story was an invention – his mother had been seriously deaf and he had been patron of the RNID for ages, so it was hardly likely he would say such a thing.

When he and the Queen met an army cadet blinded by an IRA bomb, the Queen asked how much sight the cadet had left. Quick as a flash, Philip quipped, "Not a lot, judging by the tie he is wearing!". The cadet took no offence. At one time he asked Australian aborigines whether they still threw spears at each other. It seems he refused to be harnessed by political correctness.

Janet and I were privileged to meet him when the Queen and he made a visit to Thurrock. At one point he asked Janet if she was the MP (at that time the MP was Dr. Oonagh McDonald). On explaining that she wasn't but would be happy to find her, Prince Philip said, "Don't worry I'll look for her myself." On the same occasion, when being told that the Mayor and Mayoress lived in Stanford le Hope, he asked, to a somewhat shocked company, but with a twinkle in his eye, "Isn't that where they do the wife swapping?" One could describe him as incorrigible but completely without malice.

I personally like to think of his having been very much a family man. This was exemplified when he visited Jerusalem on a private visit, to visit the grave of his mother, Princess Andrew-Alice of Greece and Denmark, who is buried in the Russian Orthodox Church of St. Mary Magdalene on the Mount of Olives. He accepted on her behalf Israel's Holocaust Museum's recognition of her as "righteous among nations," for her efforts to save three Jews during World War two.

George Semain

Mon Repos



St Nicholas Church *by Georgina Nottage*

The Church of St Nicholas sits on high
 spire high in the sky
Watching the generations go by
Seeing everything going on below
The people living in houses all
 In a row, beneath
The Church of St Nicholas

For generations couples have stood at it's altar
The Vicar wondering if the marriage will falter
The next time he sees them is at a
 Christening of a son or daughter.
A few of these babes will come when eleven
To confirm their belief in God in heaven, at
The Church of St Nicholas



Years have gone by and now they
come
To say farewell to a beloved one
Eulogies will be said
Tears will be shed, at
The Church of St Nicholas

And now the pattern falters
Few couples now stand at its altar
Few babes cry at a Christening
Few boys and girls come when eleven
 confirming their belief in heaven.
A few still come to bid a loved one farewell
And tears for years gone will be shed, at
The Church of St Nicholas

St Nicholas Church, Laindon is a 13th Century grade 1 listed church. It has two notable features, the timber frame bell tower is as fine as anything in Essex, whilst at the west end of the church is a unique 16th century timber framed priest house, which became a school for over 250 years. The church stands isolated on a small hill with a 360 degree outlook over the surrounding district. On a clear day Canary Wharf can be clearly seen.