



Welcome to the latest edition of In Touch.

I am sure we are all glad to see the end of the bitter weather we have been having lately-it quite took one's breath away if you ventured outdoors. Of course, our Scottish friends are still blanketed by the white stuff and have sent us some lovely photos of the fun they have been having, apparently that old sledge you can see beat all the modern ones! Some of you have been busy learning new skills and we have two lovely paintings from a reader (who wishes to remain anonymous) but I think they are really good for beginner as I have never got out of the messy abstract phase myself. Jean Handley has been busy again with her wonderful investigative skills and has been finding out about an old vicar of Sandon. Over the next few weeks, we are going to be looking at Lent customs around the world, they are quite different from ours. Keep sending the pictures – signs of spring would be lovely to share. Take care out there and stay well.

With blessings Fiona

LOCAL HISTORY

Rev. Christopher Thomas Edward Birks, our former Rector

I was asked to do some research into the military details of C.T.E. Birks the son of a Kelshall vicar Edward Bickersteth Birks (1914-1923) but it has led to a coincidence and a grave in our very own All Saints Churchyard here in Sandon.

Christopher Birks was born in Kellington Vicarage, Yorkshire in 1895 to Rev. Edward Bickersteth Birks and his wife Laura Mary. Both his father and grandfather went to Cambridge Colleges and became eminent speakers and writers and indeed leading lights in their theological fields. As a family they moved around so that Edward could take up many positions around the country. In 1914 he returned to Kelshall, his birthplace to become the vicar of that small community.

Christopher himself was to follow in father and grandfather's footsteps but chose Selwyn College, Cambridge to study theology. War broke out in 1914 and we know that Christopher enlisted with the East Surrey Regiment in 1915 whilst at Selwyn. He later, as a Second Lieutenant was attached to the 7th Northamptonshire regiment but I can find no evidence of him actually going abroad.

Christopher T.E. Birks M.A. married Kathleen Marcia. He became the vicar of Sandon in 1935 having a daughter Mary Margaret in 1928 followed by a son John in 1932. Sadly Kathleen died in 1945 and Christopher left the village in 1949 to move to his mother's home in Cambridge to care for her in her final year. He died in Addenbrookes on February 13th 1961.

I discovered that they were buried in Sandon, so village friend Steph Moule and I undertook to find the grave and tend it, thus discovering that last Saturday was to be the 60th anniversary of his death. We therefore in a howling gale and with minus temperatures put some flowers on their grave to mark the day.

A socially distanced conversation with Eileen Garlick and Margaret Hatchett then revealed that they remembered him and that in fact they were christened by him. From all accounts he was a very kind and Godly man who when walking round the village would just stop when he felt the need and drop down on his knees to pray. R.I.P.



Snow fun in Scotland!



Scottish snow angel

A prayer for all those affected by coronavirus

Keep us, good Lord,
under the shadow of your mercy.
Sustain and support the anxious,
be with those who care for the sick,
and lift up all who are brought low;
that we may find comfort
knowing that nothing can separate us from
your love in Christ Jesus our Lord.
Amen.

If you would like to donate to any of our churches in the current crisis - details are below. We would be very grateful in your help to keep our churches going.

Thank you.

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HOLY DAYS

LENT CUSTOMS AROUND THE WORLD – part one

Denmark

The last Sunday before Lent begins is called "Fastelavn." Cream- or jam-filled buns are eaten and children dress up in costumes. A barrel filled with candy is beaten, much like a Mexican piñata, and the two children who break the barrel are crowned the Cat King and Cat Queen (because the barrel used to contain a live cat instead of candy.)

Greece

The Monday before Ash Wednesday, called Kathari Theftera, or Clean Monday, is a national holiday in Greece. Families go to the countryside and beaches for picnics and kite-flying. Greek Orthodox Christians give up all meat and animal products during Lent, and eat beans, orzo and pastas. Cookies and cakes are permitted as long as butter is omitted.

England

The arrival of Lent is marked by making pancakes and also holding pancake races. The British Isles also have one of the most beloved Lenten customs of eating hot cross buns to symbolize the Cross. During the Middle Ages, the English traditionally marked Laetare Sunday with the celebration of "Mothering" Sunday, so-called because apprentices were given the day to go and visit their "mother churches," the churches where they were baptized.

Newfoundland, Canada

Various items are baked into pancakes on Mardi Gras. The person who gets a coin will be rich; a ring, will marry; a nail, will become a carpenter; and a thimble, will become a tailor.

Poland

Shrove Tuesday is called "Śledziówka" ("Śledz" is the word for herring.) Various dishes of herring are typically served that day.

Goa, India

Catholics have their own version of Carnival with three days of music, dancing and feasting, culminating in a Mass. Notably, the Indian Catholics have traditionally been joined by Hindu and Muslim neighbors in the festivities. A similar festival is held in Kerala, where Catholics hold the Raasa parade on the day before Ash Wednesday. The name Raasa is derived from the Sanskrit for "fun," and the festival likewise includes music and dance as well as fireworks; it also ends with a Mass. There is no feast, although there is the Chembeduppu ceremony in which offerings of raw or half-cooked rice are placed in large copper vessels (chembu) at the churches. After the Mass, the copper vessels are carried in a procession, with golden and silver crosses, flags and bands.

Donatello: The Feast of Herod (1423-7)

The remains of a feast lie on the table with plates and cutlery; a napkin hangs loose over the edge. Time now for entertainment: the sinuous allure of the dancer, hands in movement before and behind, legs revealing their shape in motion beneath diaphanous garments, head inclined, gaze transfixing; all this is bewitching. Beyond the centre arch a seductive tune is bowed. A further row of arcading frames a servant bearing a basket of food, fruit perhaps, though the two faces nearby show signs of alarm.

In the foreground servant and basket arrive. It isn't food, but a severed head. The dismayed recipient lifts his hands to resist the gift; beside him terrified children try to escape. Figures to the right recoil in horror or look on in disbelief. One character controls the scene; left hand firmly planted on the table, right hand gesturing towards the basket to present and explain. Using the seductive charm of her daughter's dance Herodias has her revenge; John the Baptist, trenchant critic of her marriage to Herod, is dead, and here good husband, is his head for you.

Donatello's gilded bronze relief appears on the bowl of the font in the baptistery of Siena's cathedral. Requested to illustrate the moment

when John's head was brought to Herod, he did just that, incorporating the dance and the journey from prison of the macabre gift as well. There's a measure of artistic license in Herod's shocked appearance since, outwitted, he has been forced to order the execution and John's head has travelled via the daughter and her mother before reaching the traumatized king.

It may not look like a revolution in art, but it very much is. Donatello has set aside the static 'standing-waiting' postures of earlier art, concerned mainly with devising pleasing patterns of arrangement of often expressionless characters. He is a storyteller who plunges his audience into an emotionally intense scene in which people act realistically in extreme circumstances. It's all here from fear and revulsion through horrified fascination to smug triumph while the dance goes on and the servants passively do as they are bidden. No artist had dared to do chaos like this before, and to those who first saw it, the work must have looked eerily alive. That level of human realism would have been much less effective however, were it not for Donatello's mastery of perspective through the floor tiles, the table, and the walls between the two spaces beyond, which give an illusion of depth so convincing that we feel we could walk right into the scene – though we would probably want to turn around and walk out again.



Pool painting



Woodland painting