

# intouch

NEWSLETTER

Benefice of Clothall, Rushden, Sandon, Wallington, and Weston



## Welcome to the latest copy of In Touch.

I am sorry that they are not coming as regularly as they used to, but things have been busy with getting the churches operating safely again. It has been wonderful to be back in the churches and gathering to worship. I am so grateful to everyone who has worked so hard to get the churches ready and safe for us to use – you are truly unsung heroes and heroines! This Sunday sees the last of our churches (Weston) open for services. The choir are going to sing in the churchyard to celebrate and we are very much looking forward to hearing Hilary playing and the sweet sound of organ music surrounding us. So why not come along and join us – Weston is a big church and we can be safely distanced with ease.

There is some confusion about the wearing of masks. The government has now made the wearing of masks in church compulsory unless you are leading worship, doing prayers or readings and then you need to be socially distanced. Of course, there are people who for good reasons cannot wear masks. If you forget your mask there will be spare disposable ones in church. There are so many lovely masks around and I am sure we will all get used to using them as a matter of daily course. Protecting each other is very much a part of the Christian faith.

I hope that this better weather is allowing you all to meet up safely with friends and family. **With blessings Fiona**



Photograph by Hilary Bailey, the organist at Weston



## What is lurking in your garden?

Is there something alien in your garden which is beginning to worry you? Something that is growing too fast, spreading too fast, for you to keep up with?

Gardeners across the country are being asked by the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland (BSBI) and the University of Coventry to find – and report – the next Japanese knotweed before it 'jumps the garden fence' and causes havoc.

Japanese knotweed and Himalayan balsam both began innocently, as pretty ornamental garden plants. Then they escaped and have since marched across the UK like something out of War of the Worlds, causing immense damage to homes and waterways.

So now the question is: can you help a citizen science project to identify the next plant which could become a similar menace? The project is called Plant Alert. It offers you an easy way to report any ornamental plants in your garden that you suspect are becoming aggressive. Just go to: <https://bsbi.org/plant-alert>

Scientists say to look out for: vigorous growth, prolific self-seeding, longer flowering periods. Plants which are logged on the Plant Alert app will be studied by botanists, and potentially restricted from sale.

Kevin Walker, head of science at BSBI, says: "Bitter experience has shown that species that are invasive in gardens are also the ones that are likely to 'jump the fence' and cause problems in the wild."



## 1st August - Lammas Day

As the combine harvesters appear in our fields for the first time this year, we are reminded that the availability of new flour (hopefully not filled with weevils as the old stores often were by this time) and fine new bread to eat was a blessing not to be passed by.

This observance, traditionally observed on August 1, marked the beginning of the harvest, and especially celebrated the first wheat crop, or that of corn. It derives from the ancient English festival the Gule of August, a pagan dedication of the first fruits that the early English church later converted to Christian usage. On Lammas Day, loaves of bread were baked from the first-ripened grain and brought to the churches to be consecrated. The word "lammas"

comes from the Old English hlaf, "loaf," and maesse, "mass" or "feast." Through the centuries, "loaf-mass" became corrupted in spelling and pronunciation to Lammas.

To the Celts, this was Lughnasaid, the feast of the wedding of the Sun god and the Earth goddess, and also a harvest festival. In Ireland, baskets of blueberries are still offered to a sweetheart in commemoration of the original fertility festival. In Scotland, the Lammastide fairs became famous for trial marriages that could be ended without question after a year.

Much lore is associated with this day, including this proverb: After Lammas Day, corn ripens as much by night as by day.



## Jan Lievens: *Pilate Washing His Hands* (c.1625)

An opulent dignitary thickly-bearded, a prince in this land, holds us with his stare. Before him a young man, towel thrown over his shoulder, pours water from a jug onto his master's hands. The water falls across them into a shallow basin as they work off the dirt. We look, but the stare does not abate. This trial of strength with the viewer will never end. Jan Lievens was a close friend and competitor of Rembrandt. Through their early adult years the two shared their lives as painters, with the one-time child prodigy Lievens, his boldness of invention and composition much admired, considered at least as likely as his friend to take Dutch painting to new heights of international acclaim, if not more so.

The 18 year old Lievens conceived a Moorish Pilate backed up by the Spanish soldiery who were all too evident in the Netherlands of the 17th century, turning defiantly to ask 'What of it then?' as having sanctioned the crucifixion of Jesus he washes his hands to declare himself innocent of the death. Behind him, gauntleted and tipstuffed, stands an officer satisfied with the outcome. At the back, emerging chillingly from the shadows, another pair of eyes stare us down. 'Indeed, what of it?' they enquire, almost with a hint of amusement, but ready to back the verdict to the hilt.

When finally we look beyond this doubled dead-eyed menace we glimpse Jesus being urged through an archway into the harsh Jerusalem glare, and from thence to the cross.

But Pilate's stance is no more than defiant cowardice. Look and you detect his uncertainty as he tries to abdicate responsibility. He washes his hands of it yet he cannot wash his hands of it. No procession would have moved up to Golgotha that day had he willed otherwise. 'What else could I do?' his expression declares ... yet also 'are you sure you would not have done the same?' So now his face becomes a mirror held up to us, subverting our own knowing judgement of him, inviting instead self-examination.

Strangely, the most brightly-lit face in the painting belongs to seemingly the least important character, the clean-faced serving-boy. He refuses to dissolve into the background. Does not his simple work with jug, basin and towel offer ironic echoes of Jesus himself, at the Last Supper? And does not his face, looking but not quite looking at the hands and where the water is going, seem numbed to the point of distress by this glamour-struck but tawdry affair? Once we free our eyes from Pilate's possession of us, his is the face in which we find refuge.

### 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.*

PCC OF RUSHDEN  
LLOYDS BANK: 30-94-30 A/C 01845350

SANDON PAROCHIAL CHURCH COUNCIL  
BARCLAYS BANK: 20-73-26 A/C 53610802

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## FACE MASKS

