St James the Great Wrightington with Heskin

PARISH MAGAZINE



OCTOBER 2026 - NOVEMBER 2026

Useful Numbers

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by the 16th of the month to ensure inclusion in the next issue.

COVER SHOT: Muscle power at St James

Churchwarden's Message

The Gift of Gathering In

Dear Friends,

Not so long ago, in these pages, I wrote about beginnings - about September's particular gift for making all things new, about the child with the blank notebook and the unmarked pencil case, about the God who is always, somehow, starting again. If you were paying attention (and I suspect many of you were, because you are that sort of parish), you will have noticed that the mornings since have grown rather less gentle about proving the point. The frost has arrived. The evenings shut down not long after the school run. The heating has gone on, been turned off again in a fit of optimism, and gone back on for good.

Autumn, it turns out, does not linger over its beginnings. It gets on with things. And what it gets on with, in October and November, is the harvest.

There is something wonderfully honest about harvest time. All that quiet, hidden growing - the months of rain and root and patience that nobody saw and nobody applauded - suddenly has something to show for itself. The fields that looked like nothing in February are now heavy with grain. The allotments are groaning under marrows nobody quite knows what to do with. And in our own church calendar, we pause to give thanks for it: for bread and fruit and tins on the harvest table, yes, but for something larger too - the truth that growth is real even when it is invisible, and that in God's economy, very little sowing goes to waste.

Saint Paul knew this. Writing to the Galatians - a congregation, like most congregations, prone to weariness - he did not tell them to try harder. He told them something gentler and, I think, truer: "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up." Notice that the harvest comes at the proper time, not our time. It comes after the waiting, not instead of it. September's beginning and October's harvest are not two different stories. They are the same story, simply further along.

But autumn has a second gift for us, and it is a harder one to write about cheerfully, because it involves the leaves coming down.

There is no dressing this up: the trees along the lane are losing exactly what made them beautiful all summer, and they are doing it without apparent grief, scattering gold and copper across the churchyard as though it cost them nothing. It is, if you think about it for more than a moment, a strange kind of confidence - to let go so completely, trusting that what looks like an ending is only the tree's way of making room for what comes next.

Churchwarden's Message continued...

Jesus once said something remarkably similar about a grain of wheat: unless it falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single grain; but if it dies, it produces many seeds. Autumn is the season that takes this most seriously of all.

Which brings us, as autumn always does, to All Saints and All Souls.

At the start of November, we remember those who have gone before us - the great, uncountable company the writer of Hebrews calls "so great a cloud of witnesses," which includes not only the saints of old but every soul who has ever knelt in our own pews at St James, sung our own hymns a little flat, and gone home afterwards to Sunday dinner just as we do. And we remember, too, more particularly and more tenderly, those from among us who have died this year. All Souls does not ask us to hurry past our grief or to dress it in brave language. It simply asks us to bring it to church, to say the names out loud, and to trust that love does not end merely because a life on earth has.

A week or so later comes Remembrance Sunday, and the whole village gathers - not only the regulars among us, but neighbours who may not cross our threshold from one November to the next - to stand in silence at the war memorial tablets and remember a different kind of cost. It is one of the few moments left in national life where a community still gathers wordlessly, together, on purpose. There is something of the Gospel in that too, whether people would call it that or not.

So here is what strikes me about this run of autumn weeks: harvest, All Saints, All Souls, Remembrance - each one, in its own way, is an act of gathering in. We gather in the grain. We gather in the names of our dead. We gather in silence, side by side, at the war memorial. And underneath all of it, quietly, God is gathering us in too - drawing His scattered, harvested, grieving, remembering people back into one body, one table, one hope.

It will not be long, after all this gathering in, before Advent asks us to start looking outward and forward again, toward a different sort of beginning. But that is a message for another day. For now, there is harvest bread to bake, names to remember, and a silence at the eleventh hour worth keeping properly.

Come and gather with us. Bring your thanksgiving and your grief in the same pair of hands - God is quite used to receiving both together.

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us run with endurance the race set before us." - Hebrews 12:1

With every blessing,

Jonathan

Mothers' Union

August was a break from Mothers Union meetings so it was more than welcome to meet again in September and see friends and members we had not met for a number of weeks – a time to catch up on events. It was particularly good to see our Enrolling Member Marie back in action and looking so well.

Marie thanked everyone who had helped during her period of illness. Currently we have no minister to lead our annual communion service so Marie read from Mark's Gospel chapter 12 verses 28-31 followed by the Collect and Prayers. The Lord's Prayer was said by all before the Mothers Union Prayer and then Grace.

Pauline thanked everyone for the beautiful flowers and card presented for her 80th birthday and a thank you card was read out from Margaret Walsh who had also received a bunch of flowers.

Marie announced

A meeting of Wrightington Mothers Union members to take place in the church on Monday 28th September at 2pm to discuss the future of Wrightington Mothers Union with Susan Willougby who is the Diocesan President and Marian Barlow the Diocesan Treasurer. The number of members, age profile and numbers attending meetings had already been presented in advance of the meeting.

A bring and buy sale then took place raising a total of approximately £30 followed by a cup of tea, biscuits and a piece of cake.

The next monthly meeting will take place in the Church Hall on 13th October when Pauline Chapman will demonstrate how to make homemade Christmas cards.

HESKIN PEMBERTON'S C OF E PRIMARY SCHOOL

Let all that you do be done in Love.
1 Corinthians 16:14

A school family built on Love, strengthened by Faith and enriched by Joy.

Hello from everyone at Heskin Pemberton's School.

At the end of July, we waved a tearful farewell to our Year 6 children who have now moved on to their various high schools. We've already had many reports about how well they've settled in, how they've made new friends and how they're missing Heskin.

We wish them the very best of luck in this new and exciting chapter in their lives.

At the start of September, we were joined by 18 new Reception children and our pre-school provision, The Pemberton Pups, has also had many new faces join them this year. All of the new children have made a great start to their time at Heskin and our older children are doing a fantastic job of making sure the pupils are looked after and feel at home at Heskin Pemberton's.



The Autumn Term is always a busy time in our school with lots of exciting events, but we were particularly excited when we were joined by four members of St. James the Great's PCC. Our visitors joined in the afternoon lessons in all of our classes and had a wonderful time chatting, playing and learning alongside our fantastic children.

Our visitors also joined us for our Celebration Worship at the end of the day, telling all of our parents and children about the amazing events and activities taking

place at church and in our local community to celebrate the 100th Anniversary of Blackburn Diocese!

Later this term, we will be returning the favour when we attend St. James the Great Church in order to deliver our Harvest Service, which will take place at 9:15am on Wednesday 30th September. The children will be collecting food in order to help people in our local community, and they will be singing songs and leading prayers so please join us if you are able to do so. Class 2 will also be delivering their own worship at the end of this term. They will be planning, practising and leading this special worship at 3:00pm on Friday 23rd October and everyone is welcome to join us in school for, what will surely be, a wonderful experience.

I hope you've enjoyed reading about the fun and enjoyment we all share at Heskin Pemberton's and please feel free to visit our website if you would like to know more about our school. www.heskinpembertons.co.uk

Love, prayers and best Wishes,

Alan Brindle - Head Teacher

36 Club Draw July 2026

PRIZE	TICKET NO	NAME
£50	125	Pauline Chapman
£40	112	Mary Swire
£30	3	Pat Wellby
£20	14	Lorna Chesterton
£20	91	Ann Mitchell

36 Club Draw August 2026

PRIZE	TICKET NO	NAME
£50	86	Joan Crompton
£40	99	Rachel Dodd
£30	76	Nigel & Clare Clemenson
£20	92	Philip Walters
£20	131	Les Richardson

Please see Sue Wild if you wish to join the scheme

From our Remembrance Book for October

In Loving Memory of

1st	Mary Norris
1st	Janie Halliwell
3rd	James Chadwick
4th	Walter Richardson
4th	Edith Emily Blades
4th	David Woodman
6th	Margaret Mather
8th	Ena Mitchell
8th	Gemma Douglas
10th	Betty Garner
12th	Margaret Somers
13th	Frank Bennett
13th	Joe Stringfellow
13th	Edith Emily Freeman
14th	Ellen Ormesher
14th	Dorothy Percival
15th	William Andrews
15th	Elsie Barton
16th	Heather Sutton
19th	Robert Gill
20th	Albert Christie
20th	Elizabeth Norris
20th	Joseph Johnson
20th	James Houghton
22nd	Cyril Dunsby
28th	Ethel Green
28th	Dorothy O'Rourke
28th	Andrew Strange
30th	Annie Dean
30th	Jean Norris



From our Remembrance Book for November

In Loving Memory of

2nd	Thomas Macdonald
5th	Michael John Wellby
6th	Mary Ann Jackson
8th	Marion Abram
12th	Bill Nuttall
14th	Doreen Jackson
14th	Bill Grundy
16th	Derek Herterich
17th	Susanna Halsall
17th	Brenda Manchester
18th	Eric Ingham
18th	Harry Abram
19th	James Walsh
20th	Marion Abram
21st	Michael Hunter
22nd	Clifford Cook
23rd	Bill Rofe
24th	Jack Tate
25th	Margaret Kershaw
25th	Claire Hodgson
26th	James Gaskell
27th	Tom Chapman
28th	Abigail Sharrock
28th	Helen McCrone
28th	William Dean
29th	Elizabeth Ashurst
29th	Michael Wilding
29th	Joseph Mather
30th	Margaret Lowe
30th	Ann Watson

If you would like a name added to the Remembrance Book, please contact the Vicar or Churchwarden

Family Purse

DATE	STEWARDSHIP	GIFT AID	S.ORDERS	LOOSE PLATE
26 Jul	173.50	95.40	1215.69	39.22
2 Aug	220.00	70.00		13.88
9 Aug		73.00		38.44
16 Aug	105.00	120.00		18.90
23 Aug	44.00	92.00		18.03
30 Aug	154.10	140.00		95.52
6 Sep	87.00	83.00		39.44
3 Sep	65.00	37.00		31.20

Acknowledgements

The PCC would like to thank all those who have kindly made donations to St James' Church

21 July	In Loving Memory of Albert Norris from Margaret, Tom and Stuart – 50.00
21 Jul	36 Club – 1851.00
26 Jul	Baptism of Sylvie Richardson – 28.00
28 Jul	Funeral of John Fox – 10.00
2 Aug	Donation from Craft and Chat – 71.00
30 Aug	In Loving Memory of a Wonder Mum, Marian Shaw, from her daughter Christine – 20.00
7 Sep	L Richardson – 20.00
7 Sep	D Smith and family – 20.00
7 Sep	Brenda Carr – 10.00
7 Sep	Maxine and Steve – 36.00
13 Sep	In Loving Memory of my husband James from Margaret Walsh and family – 25.00
13 Sep	Mary Taylor – 10.00

Acknowledgements

Donations to the Churchyard Fund

8 Jun	Attic Sale – 200.00
8 Sep	Attic Sale, Sue's driveway – 1075.00
19 Jul	In memory of Karen Ball from Karen's family, God Bless – 40.00
19 Jul	Kathleen Worthington – 40.00
3 Aug	Attic sale – 200.00
23 Aug	Attic sale – 100.00
7 Sep	Phyllis Waring – 20.00
7 Sep	Evelyn Grundy – 10.00

From the Registers

HOLY BAPTISM
"We welcome you into the Lord's Family"

26 July	Sylvie Richardson
26 July	Francesca Pearl Barclay

CHRISTIAN BURIAL
"May the Souls of the Faithful Departed Rest in Peace"

19 Aug	Barbara Banks
1 Sep	Isabella Lowe
4 Sep	Alice McGrath

Donations for Flowers

The church always looks beautiful with fresh flowers in the windows or on the altar. If you would like to donate towards the cost of flowers for special services during the year, this would be gratefully received. If you would rather donate a bunch of flowers to go in church on the anniversary of a loved one, then this would also be welcomed. We have plenty vases in church and the flowers could be displayed on the table by the chancel steps with a card to say who they are in memory of.

Please contact Maree one of our our church wardens or bring early to a service.

Here is the next thrilling episode of the History of our area by Jonathan Ormesher

FAITH AND VALOUR REBUILDING THE HOMELAND

Chapter 4 – The Five-Mile Shadow

"The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?" – Psalm 27 (KJV)

The year 1665 crept into Lancashire beneath a low sky and a deeper unease. News from London spoke of plague carts and shuttered streets, of death tolls nailed to church doors. Though the pestilence had not reached so far north, its shadow carried in every traveller's tale. In the farmsteads of Tunley and Heskin, people spoke in whispers, as if loud voices might draw the sickness nearer.

Yet even pestilence was not the only shadow abroad. In February Parliament passed a fresh law against the godly - the Five Mile Act - banishing every ejected minister from coming within five miles of the parish he had served unless he swore never again to preach. To Reverend Schofield it was exile decreed in ink. To the Wilsons it was the slow tightening of a noose already about their necks.

On a bleak afternoon Thomas Wilson unfolded a copy of the new statute by the hearth while Elizabeth, Mary, and James Standish listened. The parchment crackled like fire. " 'No Nonconformist shall come within five miles of any corporate town or former benefice, upon pain of forty pounds fine or six months' imprisonment,' " Thomas read aloud. He lowered the sheet, face drawn. "They would drive the Lord's shepherds into the wilderness."

Elizabeth's hands trembled as she refilled the kettle. "Where will he go, Thomas? He has nowhere beyond these parishes."

"He stays," Thomas answered quietly. "Until God Himself moves him."

Mary looked from one to the other. "Then we must be wise as serpents."

That night Thomas carried a spade to the barn loft and prised up two boards. Beneath the straw he dug a shallow pit and lined it with sackcloth. "Here," he told James, "the Bibles and sermons shall sleep if they come searching. The Word buried is still alive." James touched the hilt of his old sword hanging by the wall. "And if they come for you, old friend, they'll find me standing first."

The search came sooner than expected. It was a clear April day when hoofbeats clattered up the Tunley lane. Elizabeth glimpsed the gleam of a red plume through the orchard branches. "Thomas - "

He was already moving. Within seconds Schofield and the two Rigby boys he was tutoring were bundled into the pantry, the door drawn to, and Mary pressed a finger to her lips.

Sir Edward Redmond strode in without invitation, his constable at his shoulder, both smelling of wet leather and authority. "Good day, Mistress Wilson," Redmond said smoothly. "We ride on His Majesty's business. Rumour reaches me of conventicles in this district - unauthorised meetings, prayers said without the Book. You'll understand we must inspect."

Thomas bowed slightly. "This house harbours no sedition, sir. Only labour and family devotions."

Redmond's gaze flicked to a man's cloak and hat hanging by the door - Schofield's. Mary's heart thudded in her throat.

"A traveller's," Thomas said evenly. "A cousin from Rufford. He left early this morning."

"Ah." Redmond trailed a gloved finger along the mantel. "Cousins are numerous among the godly, it seems."

He wandered the room, eyes everywhere, the constable prodding open cupboards. From behind the pantry door came the faint creak of a floorboard; Mary closed her eyes, praying. Redmond paused, head half-turned, then smiled thinly. "You keep your house in good order, Mistress Wilson. See that it stays so."

He accepted a token cup of ale, untouched, then departed with a rustle of cloak and iron-shod boots. Only when the hoofbeats faded did Elizabeth sink onto a stool, face white. Thomas exhaled shakily. "The Lord hath blinded the eyes of the unjust." When the pantry door opened, Schofield emerged pale but calm, a hand raised in thanks. They knelt together on the stone floor, giving silent praise for deliverance.

After that day Schofield insisted he must move between several sympathetic homes to lessen their danger. The conventicle scattered like seeds on the wind - meeting in barns, in copses, even in the hollow of an old quarry where water echoed their psalms. At Tunley Hall, silence became habit; every visitor's footstep brought the same question: friend or informer?

Summer ripened, heavy and airless. Stories of plague in London multiplied; prayers for mercy rose nightly. Elizabeth kept a posy of lavender above the door "against corruption of the air." The Rigby boys were sent home, and the Hall stood quieter than it had in years.

One evening in late autumn, Robert Standish came riding through the dusk. He found Mary outside by the drystone wall, gathering rushes for the hearth. Overhead, the sky was deep violet, stars just kindling. "My rounds take me south for some weeks," he said, tying his horse. "Sir Alexander sends me to collect rents near Ormskirk. But before I go - "

He took her hand; rough work had not hardened its gentleness. "Whatever laws they make, whatever distance they set between us, know this: I will stand by you and yours. As the Lord lives, I'll return."

Mary's eyes glistened. "And I will wait. If the King's men shadow us, then God's angels shall shadow them."

They stood together in silence while the evening star brightened over Heskin. In the far lane an owl called, soft and solemn. Mary thought of all they had endured - the raids, the lies, the prayers whispered through fear - and felt a strange calm. Love, like faith, had learned to breathe quietly in the dark.

Winter returned, and with it new decrees and taxes, but the pit in the barn kept its secret. By the fire one night Thomas told James, "If ever Tunley Hall is burned to ash, dig here first. Beneath these boards the living Word sleeps." James nodded gravely. "Then the fire will only warm it."

Outside, snow fell thick over the fields, smoothing the scars of wagon ruts and hoof-prints. The land looked clean again, though danger still walked it. Within the Hall the Wilsons prayed softly before the shuttered window, and the candlelight trembled like faith itself - small, defiant, and unextinguished.

Diary for October 2026

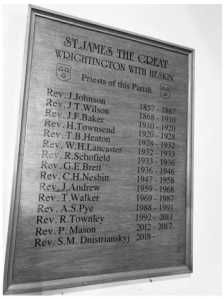
3	Sat	10.00am	Decorate Church for Harvest
4		**THE EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY**	
		9.00am	Holy Communion – David Long
		10.30am	Holy Communion - David Ward
		12.00 noon	Harvest Lunch in the Church Hall
		5.00pm	30@5
5	Mon	2.00-4.00pm	Craft & Chat in the Church Hall
7	Wed	10.30am	Play & Praise Toddler Group
11		**THE NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY**	
		9.00am	Holy Communion – David Gaskell
		10.30am	Family Service
		5.00pm	30@5 (last before half term break)
13	Tues	7.30pm	Mother's Union – Make-up for the Mature Lady – Jean Cox
14	Wed	10.30am	Play & Praise Toddler Group
18		**THE NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY**	
		9.00am	Holy Communion – Helen Coffey
		10.30am	Holy Communion – Mike Hatton
		12.00 noon	36 Club Draw
		12.15pm	Holy Baptism – Edward Alan Joyce
		5.00pm	No 30@5
19	Mon	2.00-4.00	Craft & Chat in the Church Hall
19	Mon	7.00pm	Vineyard at 398 Mossy Lea Road
21	Wed	10.30am	Play & Praise Toddler Group
21	Wed	7.00pm	PCC meeting in the Church Hall
23	Fri	3.00pm	Heskin School closes for half term
23	Fri	7.30pm	Chris Bannister Concert in Church
24	**Sat**	**BRITISH SUMMER TIME ENDS – CLOCKS GO BACK**	
25		**THE LAST SUNDAY OF TRINITY**	
		9.00am	Holy Communion – David Gaskell
		10.30am	Holy Communion – Mike Hatton
		5.00pm	No 30@5
28	Wed	10.30am	No Play & Praise Toddler Group

November 2026

1		**ALL SAINTS DAY**	
		9.00am	Holy Communion – Pat Belshaw
		10.30am	Holy Communion – Helen Coffey
		5.00pm	No 30@5
2	Mon	9.00am	Heskin School re-opens after half term
2	Mon	2.00-4.00pm	Craft & Chat in Church Hall
4	Wed	10.30am	Play & Praise Toddler Group
7	Sat	5.00pm	**BONFIRE & FIREWORKS AT ST JAMES**
8		**THE THIRD SUNDAY BEFORE ADVENT (Remembrance)**	
		9.00am	Holy Communion – Pat Belshaw
		10.30am	Holy Communion – David Ward
		5.00pm	30@5
10	Tues	7.30pm	Mothers Union – Christmas Cards and Decorations with Pauline Chapman
11	Wed	10.30am	Play & Praise Toddler Group
14/15	Sat/Sun		Art Exhibition in the Church Hall
15		**THE SECOND SUNDAY BEFORE ADVENT**	
		9.00am	Holy Communion – TBC
		10.30am	Holy Communion – TBC
		5.00pm	30@5
16	Mon	2.00-4.00pm	Craft & Chat in the Church Hall
18	Wed	10.30am	Play & Praise Toddler Group
18	Wed	7.00pm	PCC Meeting in the Church Hall
21	Sat	12.00 – 2.00pm	**ST JAMES CHRISTMAS FAIR**
22		**SUNDAY NEXT BEFORE ADVENT**	
		9.00am	Holy Communion – TBC
		10.30am	Holy Communion – TBC
		5.00pm	30@5
23	Mon	7.00pm	Vineyard at 398 Mossy Lea Road
25	Wed	10.30am	Play & Praise Toddler Group
29		**THE FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT**	
		9.00am	Holy Communion – TBC
		10.30am	Holy Communion – TBC
		5.00pm	30@5
30	Mon	2.00-4.00pm	Craft & Chat in the Church Hall

The Night the Vicars Came Back

A light-hearted ghost story from St James the Great from Jonathan Ormesher



The board that started it all

St James the Great had survived more than a century and a half of Lancashire weather, several generations of churchwardens, the occasional reluctant boiler and enough PCC meetings to test the patience of a minor saint. It had endured gales that rattled the windows, weddings that began late, funerals that began early, and harvest displays containing marrows of frankly alarming proportions. It had even survived the interregnum, which was going rather better than some people had expected. What the church had not previously experienced, at least as far as anyone knew, was an emergency meeting called because the old incumbents' board appeared to be changing its own mind.

Sue Crawford had first noticed it on a wet Tuesday afternoon. She was standing beneath the wooden board headed 'Priests of this Parish', carrying a folder thick enough to stop a draught, when she saw that the name of the Revd J. J. Johnson had moved half an inch to the left. Sue was not a woman given to wild imaginings; as PCC secretary, she preferred apparitions to submit their apologies in writing and ideally give seven days' notice. She leant a little closer, looked again, and discovered that the dates 1857 to 1867 were slowly fading into the wood. 'That is not on the agenda,' she said firmly, which was how the emergency meeting came to be arranged.

Anne Sharples arrived first, although Sue Crawford was already there, which was the sort of contradiction St James's had learnt to accept. Anne brought the church keys, the hall keys, two spare keys nobody could identify, and the expression of a woman who had already decided where everyone ought to sit. A former churchwarden and the natural commander of any room containing more than one chair, she took one look at the gathering darkness and moved the chairs into a sensible semicircle. 'If we are going to be haunted,' she announced, 'we shall at least be haunted in an orderly fashion.' She then checked the heating, because there was no point facing the supernatural while paying to warm an empty vestry.

Sue Wild came through the door with earth on her boots, secateurs in one pocket and three carrier bags from her never-ending attic sale in the other hand. Nobody knew where the attic sale began, where it ended, or whether the attic itself had once been sold and quietly replaced. As head gardener, Sue could make almost anything grow, with the possible exception of enthusiasm for weeding among other members of the congregation. She also ran the 36 Club with such cheerful persistence that people occasionally joined simply to stop her asking. 'I've brought a brass candlestick, six hymn books, a china spaniel and a fondue set,' she said. 'I don't suppose any of them will help, but somebody might buy them.'

Maree Fiddler, the current churchwarden, arrived last with a torch, a packet of chocolate biscuits and the calm look of somebody accustomed to discovering that a small church problem had quietly become a large churchwarden problem. She had checked the doors, the lights and the weather forecast before entering, because ghosts were one thing but rain coming through an open porch was quite another. 'Jonathan is tied up at the garage,' she said, setting the biscuits beside Sue Crawford's folder, 'so we are to investigate, avoid anything dangerous, and let him know if the former clergy require an MOT.' Anne gave a short nod of approval. Sue Wild wondered aloud whether a spectral MOT could be raffled.

The four women stood before the board and read the familiar names. There was Revd J. J. Johnson, 1857 to 1867, followed by Revd J. T. Wilson, whose remarkable ministry stretched from 1868 to 1910. Beneath them came J. F. Baker, H. Townsend, T. B. Heaton, W. H. Lancaster, R. Schofield, G. E. Brett and C. H. Nesbitt. The later lines named J. Andrew, T. Walker, A. S. Pye, R. Townley, P. Mason and S. M. Dnistrianskyj, the last date still ending in a rather expectant dash. 'That dash needs sorting,' Anne observed. It was typical of Anne that, even in the presence of possible paranormal activity, an unfinished piece of administration could still offend her.

At precisely eight o'clock the church clock struck nine. The great door closed by itself, the lights went out, and every candle in the building sprang into flame with a soft blue glow. Somewhere near the organ, a single note sounded and went on for far longer than musical decency allowed. Sue Crawford opened her folder and found that the pages of the meeting agenda had turned themselves over to a clean sheet. Across it, in brown ink and elaborate handwriting, appeared the words, 'VISITATION OF THE PARISH, ATTENDANCE COMPULSORY.' 'Well,' she said, picking up her pen, 'at least they have provided a heading.'

The first name vanished completely from the board. A cold mist curled down the wall, gathered beside the pulpit and formed itself into a tall gentleman wearing Victorian clerical dress and an expression of deep professional concern. 'I am the Reverend J. J. Johnson,' he declared, which was no more revealing than the board had been. 'I served this parish when the roads were mud, the winters were merciless and nobody expected the sermon to finish in under forty minutes.'
Maree glanced at Anne. 'Now that is frightening,' she whispered.

A second mist appeared, bringing with it the Revd J. T. Wilson, who had the patient but proprietary air of a man who had occupied the same pulpit for forty-two years. He inspected the electric lights, the sound system and the stack of printed service sheets as if each were a personal challenge to the Book of Common Prayer. 'Forty-two years,' Sue Wild murmured. 'He could have completed forty-two cycles of the 36 Club.' Wilson heard her and took an instinctive step backwards.
Sue smiled, because centuries might change but the reaction of a prospective new member never did.

Then the church became crowded. Revd Baker appeared near the font, Revd Townsend beside the choir stalls, and Revd Heaton emerged through a wall before apologising and trying the vestry door instead. Lancaster, Schofield and Brett arrived in a confusion of cassocks, while Nesbitt materialised holding what looked like an ancient service register. Farther down the nave, the more recent names remained firmly carved into the board. Revd Townley and Revd Dnistrianskyj were, after all, very much alive, and even Victorian clergy understood that it was bad form to summon somebody before their time.

Revd Johnson raised one transparent hand and the murmuring stopped. 'We have been summoned by the vacancy,' he said solemnly. 'Word reached us that St James's had no incumbent, and that the parish might therefore be without order, leadership or proper pastoral care.' The four women looked at one another, not in alarm but with the shared expression of people who had just heard something very silly. Anne folded her arms. 'Whoever told you that,' she replied, 'has not been in the church hall on a Saturday morning.'

Wilson explained that the former priests intended to conduct a visitation and decide whether the parish could safely continue until a new vicar arrived. Sue Crawford asked whether they had circulated their terms of reference, declared any conflicts of interest or completed the necessary safeguarding requirements. This caused a silence not heard in St James's since somebody once suggested cancelling tea after the service. Revd Baker whispered to Revd Townsend that the afterlife had apparently become more regulated. 'Quite right too,' Sue Crawford said, without looking up from her notes.

The first inspection concerned administration. With a wave of his hand, Revd Johnson scattered service rotas, diocesan letters, invoices, notices and PCC papers through the air until the chancel resembled an office caught in a hurricane. 'Restore the records,' he commanded, 'and show that the parish is governed properly.' Sue Crawford did not flinch. She named every document before it landed, placed each one into the correct folder, identified two duplicated agenda items and reminded Revd Johnson that he had not yet signed the visitors' book. Within four minutes the papers were ordered, the coming services were accounted for, and the ghosts had been assigned provisional action points.

'Remarkable,' murmured Revd Townsend. 'She appears to know everything that happens in this parish.' 'Not everything,' Sue Crawford replied modestly, 'but if I do not know it, I usually know who forgot to tell me.' She then produced the latest minutes and read out the list of work completed during the interregnum. Services had continued, visiting clergy had been welcomed, the congregation had been kept informed, and the complicated machinery of parish life had not stopped turning. Revd Johnson looked at his colleagues and quietly withdrew the administration test.

The second inspection concerned leadership. Revd Wilson pointed towards the church hall, and at once there came a spectral crash of tables, a rattle of cups and the unmistakable sound of twenty people all asking where the teaspoons were. The hall doors flew open to reveal chairs piled at impossible angles, bookings written in invisible ink, a kitchen full of steaming urns and several phantom users claiming they had reserved the same Friday evening. Anne walked into the confusion and clapped her hands once. Even the ghosts stood up straighter.

Within moments, Anne had separated the chairs by size, found the missing booking sheet, allocated the kitchen, cancelled an imaginary duplicate reservation and told Revd Heaton to stop hovering near the fire exit. When Wilson attempted to explain how the hall ought to be managed, Anne handed him a cloth and directed him towards a sticky table. 'Leadership is not standing at the front looking historic,' she told him. 'It is noticing what needs doing and making sure it gets done.'
Wilson polished the table in respectful silence, while Maree hid a smile behind the biscuit packet.

The third inspection concerned stewardship. Revd Baker summoned a wind that rushed through the porch and covered the floor with leaves, twigs and the petals of every flower arrangement since 1910. Outside, the churchyard garden seemed to grow a year's worth of weeds in ten seconds.

Sue Wild stared at the devastation, took off her coat and handed secateurs to Brett, Nesbitt and a startled Schofield. 'Right,' she said brightly, 'you three can take the border by the path. Baker, since you made this mess, you can sweep it. Nobody goes home, corporeal or otherwise, until it is tidy.'

The dead clergy obeyed, partly because Sue clearly knew what she was doing and partly because Anne was watching. As they worked, Sue Wild explained how the garden was cared for, how the 36 Club raised funds, and how the attic sale converted other people's unwanted belongings into useful money for the church. She held up the china spaniel and asked whether anyone remembered donating it. Revd Lancaster looked guilty, although this seemed chronologically impossible. Ten minutes later the churchyard was immaculate, the leaves had been bagged, and Wilson had somehow paid a year's 36 Club subscription in Victorian coinage.

'I do not understand the attic sale,' confessed Revd Nesbitt. 'Nor do we,' Maree replied, 'but it has been going for so long that it may now be older than some of you.' Sue Wild opened one of her carrier bags and produced an embroidered kneeler, two brass vases and a gravy boat that nobody remembered seeing her pack. The ghosts edged away in case they were priced and placed on a stall. Sue assured them that clergy memorabilia had a limited market, although she might try the gravy boat at five pounds.

The final inspection concerned the care of the church itself. Without warning, the blue candles went out and the building filled with a freezing darkness. The porch door began to bang, a tap started running in the vestry, the sound system gave a howl, and a roof slate slid noisily towards the gutter. Maree switched on her torch, secured the porch door, turned off the tap and made a note to have the slate checked in daylight. She did it all with the unhurried competence of a churchwarden who knew that panic rarely repaired anything.

Then a silver communion vessel vanished from the Altar and reappeared high above the chancel arch. Revd Johnson watched expectantly, perhaps assuming this would finally defeat them. Maree fetched the proper steps, stopped Anne from climbing them alone, and asked two ghosts to hold the base even though their hands passed straight through it. When the vessel was safely returned, she checked it carefully and placed it where it belonged. 'Being churchwarden is mostly prayer, people and finding sensible solutions,' she said, 'with a surprising amount of keys, water and things that have moved since Sunday.'

The former incumbents gathered beneath the board for a whispered conference. Their expressions had changed from solemn concern to something like embarrassment. They had expected to find a parish drifting helplessly without a priest, but instead they had encountered four women who could organise its worship, manage its people, raise its funds, tend its grounds, run its hall and deal with a minor haunting before the biscuits went soft. Even the lettering on the lower half of the board seemed a little brighter. Wisely, however, none of its more recent occupants appeared in person.

Before the ghosts could deliver their verdict, however, the unfinished dash beside the last name began to lengthen. It crawled across the board like a crack, swallowing dates and names as it went, until the wood turned black and the church grew colder than any October night had a right to be. A voice came from nowhere and everywhere, low and joyless. 'No vicar,' it whispered. 'No future. No one in charge. Close the doors and let the light go out.' Even the Victorian clergy drew back, for they recognised the oldest haunting of every interregnum: the Spirit of Despondency.

It was not a ghost with a face, but a shadow made from every tired sigh, every anxious rumour and every sentence beginning, 'Of course, things are not what they used to be.' It slid along the pews and breathed doubt into the rafters. The candles would not relight, the organ keys sank without a sound, and the names on the board disappeared one by one. Revd Johnson tried a commanding prayer, but his words faded into the darkness. Revd Wilson attempted the opening of a forty-minute sermon, which nearly defeated everyone for a different reason, but the shadow only grew.

Sue Crawford closed her folder. 'We are not without a future,' she said, and her voice carried clearly through the church. 'People still come here to worship, to pray, to grieve, to marry, to be baptised and to meet God. The services continue because faithful people prepare them, lead them, read, sing, welcome and serve.' As she spoke, a tiny point of light appeared beside the lectern, like the glow of a pen moving across a page.

Anne stepped beside her and lifted the ring of keys. 'We are not without leadership either,' she said. 'The hall is used, the church is opened, the chairs are set out, the kitchen is cleaned and people are looked after. Some of us may occasionally have to be firm, because nothing useful has ever been achieved by hoping that the tables will put themselves away.' The keys flashed in her hand, and another light appeared by the church door. Several ghosts nodded vigorously, especially the ones she had ordered to stack chairs.

Sue Wild raised her secateurs in one hand and the china spaniel in the other. 'We are not without resources,' she said. 'We grow what we can, mend what we can, sell what nobody else wants, and persuade people to join the 36 Club. God has always been very good at doing a great deal with small offerings.' A warm green light spread from the harvest flowers to the windowsills. Somewhere in the darkness, Revd Lancaster asked whether his subscription included a chance of winning, and Sue promised to explain the rules later.

Maree moved to the centre of the four and held up her torch. 'And the light is not going out,' she said. 'This church belongs to God, not to one priest, one churchwarden or one generation. We shall welcome the right vicar when the time comes, but until then we shall keep praying, keep serving and keep the doors open.' She began the Lord's Prayer, and the others joined her. The ghosts joined too, their old voices weaving through the familiar words until the whole building seemed to breathe.

The Spirit of Despondency shrank towards the incumbents' board. Sue Crawford's careful faith, Anne's determined service, Sue Wild's cheerful generosity and Maree's steady courage pressed upon it from every side. With a final hiss, the shadow folded itself into the long unfinished dash and disappeared. The names returned to the wood, the candles burned gold again, and the organ released one relieved chord. Outside, the bell rang once, although nobody had touched the rope.

Revd Johnson stepped forward and bowed to the four women. 'We came because we feared the church had been left without guardians,' he said. 'We were mistaken. A priest may serve a parish for a season, whether ten years or forty-two, but the Church is carried from one generation to the next by all the faithful people who quietly give their time, their gifts and their love.' Wilson looked at Sue Crawford's folder, Anne's keys, Sue Wild's secateurs and Maree's torch. 'Though I confess,' he added, 'there is nothing particularly quiet about some of them.'

Anne accepted this as a compliment. Sue Crawford asked whether the visitation had now concluded and whether the former incumbents wished their observations to be recorded. Revd Baker proposed that the parish was 'in excellent hands', Revd Townsend seconded it, and the remaining clergy signified approval by glowing in an orderly fashion. Sue wrote the resolution into the minutes: 'The former priests of the parish attended without apology and expressed complete confidence in the present arrangements.' She paused, then added, 'Revd Wilson joined the 36 Club. Payment requires verification.'

The ghosts began to fade as midnight approached, but Anne stopped them before they could leave. Since they had made such a mess, she said, they could at least put the chairs back, take the rubbish to the correct bin and leave the hall as they had found it. Sue Wild gave each of them an attic-sale leaflet and told them to mention it to anyone they met in eternity. Maree asked them not to interfere with the electrics on future visits, while Sue Crawford requested that all subsequent apparitions be notified to the PCC secretary in advance. The clergy obeyed with the meekness of men who had finally recognised the true structure of parish authority.

One by one, they returned to the board. Johnson became a name, Wilson a line of dates, and Baker, Townsend, Heaton, Lancaster, Schofield, Brett and Nesbitt settled back into the grain of the wood. The more recent names remained firmly carved where they belonged. For a moment, beneath the list of priests, four new lines appeared in faint golden script: 'Sue Crawford, Anne Sharples, Sue Wild and Maree Fiddler, who kept the light burning.' Then the words vanished, because none of the four women would have wanted their service carved on a board.

The next morning, Jonathan found the church unusually tidy, the paperwork perfectly stacked and a Victorian sixpence resting on top of the 36 Club book. The four women told him that the meeting had been productive, although Anne mentioned there had been some difficulty with former management. Sue Crawford handed him the minutes, Maree gave him the torch, and Sue Wild asked whether anyone at the garage might like a fondue set. Nobody mentioned the cold shadow, the blue candles or the forty-minute sermon. Some experiences are too strange to explain before coffee.

Since that night, there have been occasional rumours. A chair left out in the hall has been found stacked neatly by morning, weeds have disappeared from the path, and missing papers have turned up in the correct folder with a faint smell of candle wax. Every now and then, a new name appears mysteriously in the 36 Club, although the handwriting is old-fashioned and the subscription is never in decimal currency. Sue Wild accepts it anyway. Money, she says, is money, even if it has crossed the veil between worlds.

So, if you are ever alone in St James's and the old board gives a soft creak, there is no need to be afraid. It may only be the former incumbents checking that the church is still in good hands, and they already know the answer. The life of a parish is not sustained by names and dates on a wall, but by living faith expressed in rotas, keys, gardens, minutes, fundraising, friendship, prayer and countless unnoticed acts of service. At St James's, much of that faithful work is carried by Sue Crawford, Anne Sharples, Sue Wild, Maree Fiddler and many others. Even the ghosts, after a little instruction, have learnt to be grateful for them. The End.

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We are now in possession of an impressive Marquee on the Church Field, you may have spotted it when passing.

We have a great team of volunteers to thank who came on a very wet Sunday evening to erect said marquee – it did not stop raining until they had put the roof on! But by then everyone was wet through. Thank you so much guys, not forgetting Liz as well. It was wonderful to see you all – some from 30@5, some from the congregation and some Young Farmers all working together as a team. Have a look at the picture on the front of the magazine to spot who was there.





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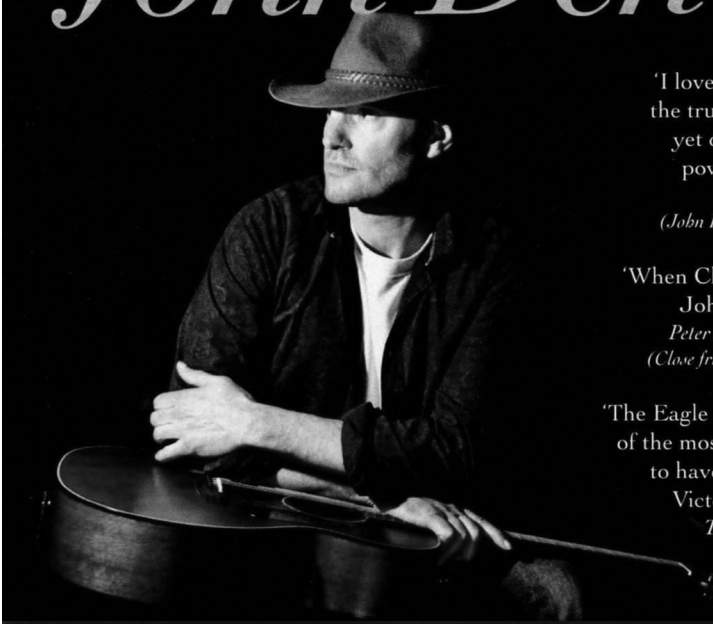
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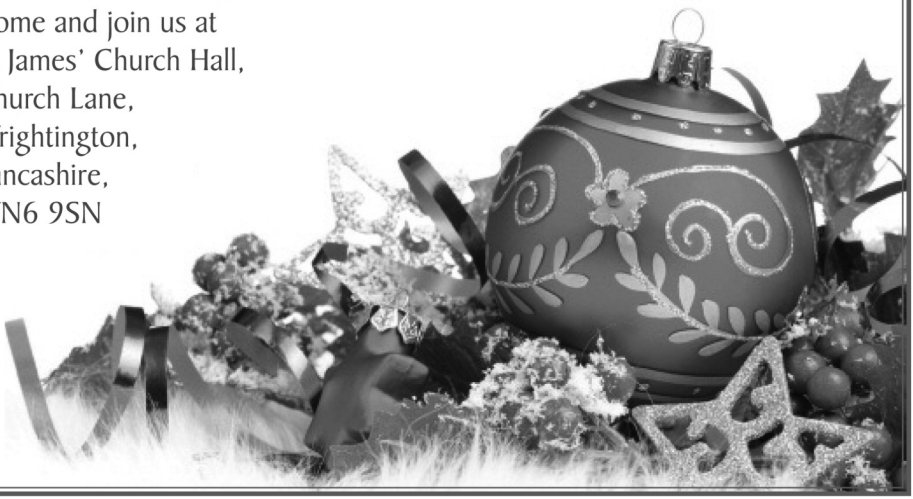
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RECIPE FOR OCTOBER AND NOVEMBER

Lemon Drizzle Cake

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INGREDIENTS

100gm soft margarine

175gm castor sugar

175gm self raising flour

2 teaspoons
baking powder

2 eggs

4tbls milk

finely grated rind of a lemon

METHOD

Preheat oven to 180 degrees and line a round or loaf tin with greaseproof paper.

Mix all the ingredients for the cake in a large mixing bowl and beat well for about two minutes until soft and well blended.

Turn the mixture into the prepared tin and level the surface.

Bake in a preheated oven for about 35-40 minutes or until the cake has shrunk slightly from the sides and springs back when lightly pressed.

Crunchy top:

Juice of a lemon

100gms castor sugar

Mix together until blended and pour over the cake when still warm.

Leave in the the tin until cold and then turn out and enjoy.

Mission Thanks

A huge Thank You to everyone who joined in with our Mission Weekend activities which started with Sue C, Pauline, Maree and myself spending a pleasant afternoon with the children at Heskin School in their classrooms and at the celebration assembly.

A fantastic Ceilidh was attended by 80 people including a Play and Praise toddler and a parishioner in his 90's! It was lovely to see young families there too and everyone joined in with the dancing. It's a night we will hold again!

Sunday worship at 10:30 with Alex Baker was a very special service and very much child centred. The church looked beautiful with balloons, bunting, flowers and a super display of old photos which will remain until Harvest. A delicious Jacob's Join lunch was enjoyed in the hall followed by a game of rounders on the field, games in the marquee and a treasure hunt in Church. Lots of fun was had by all and it was lovely that Alex and his family stayed to enjoy the day with us.

Thank you once again to all who supported and all who helped to organise the weekend. We have a great team at St James'.

Cathy Pass (Mission Champion)



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DATE	SIDESPERSON	READER	STEWARDSHIP	TEA/COFFEE
4th October	G Speakman	C Pass	P Wellby	M Green
18th Sunday after Trinity **Harvest Sunday**	J Crompton	E Nelson	D Hoddinott	C Pass
11th October	M Morris	M Morris	E Gerrard	J Dearden
19th Sunday after Trinity	P Rowley	E Gerrard	P Rowley	M Barlow
18th October	H Orme	H Orme	M Taylor	D Hoddinott
20th Sunday after Trinity	P Britton	J Fowler	J Fowler	C Hayden
25th October	M Rowley	C Pass	D Hoddinott	J Robinson
Last Sunday of Trinity	M Barlow	A Sharples	A Sharples	S Wild
1st November	G Speakman	M Mason	P Wellby	M Walsh
All Saints Day	A Sharples	M Fiddler	J Crompton	S Crawford
8th November	M Morris	M Morris	J Fowler	J Crompton
3rd Sunday before Advent **Remembrance Sunday**	J Fowler	E Nelson	A Sharples	P Waring
15th November	H Orme	H Orme	M Taylor	**Art Exhibition**
2nd Sunday before Advent	J Crompton	S Crawford	S Crawford	
22nd November	M Rowley	M Mason	D Hoddinott	M Green
Sunday next before Advent	P Rowley	J Fowler	P Rowley	C Pass
29th November	M Morris	M Morris	J Crompton	J Dearden
1st Sunday of Advent	P Britton	E Gerrard	E Gerrard	M Barlow
6th December	H Orme	H Orme	P Wellby	J Robinson
2nd Sunday of Advent	M Barlow	M Fiddler	A Sharples	S Wild

If you are unable to undertake your task on the rota, please either exchange with someone else or contact Anne 01257 424105/07900 633905.

If you wish your name to be added to the list please see Anne.

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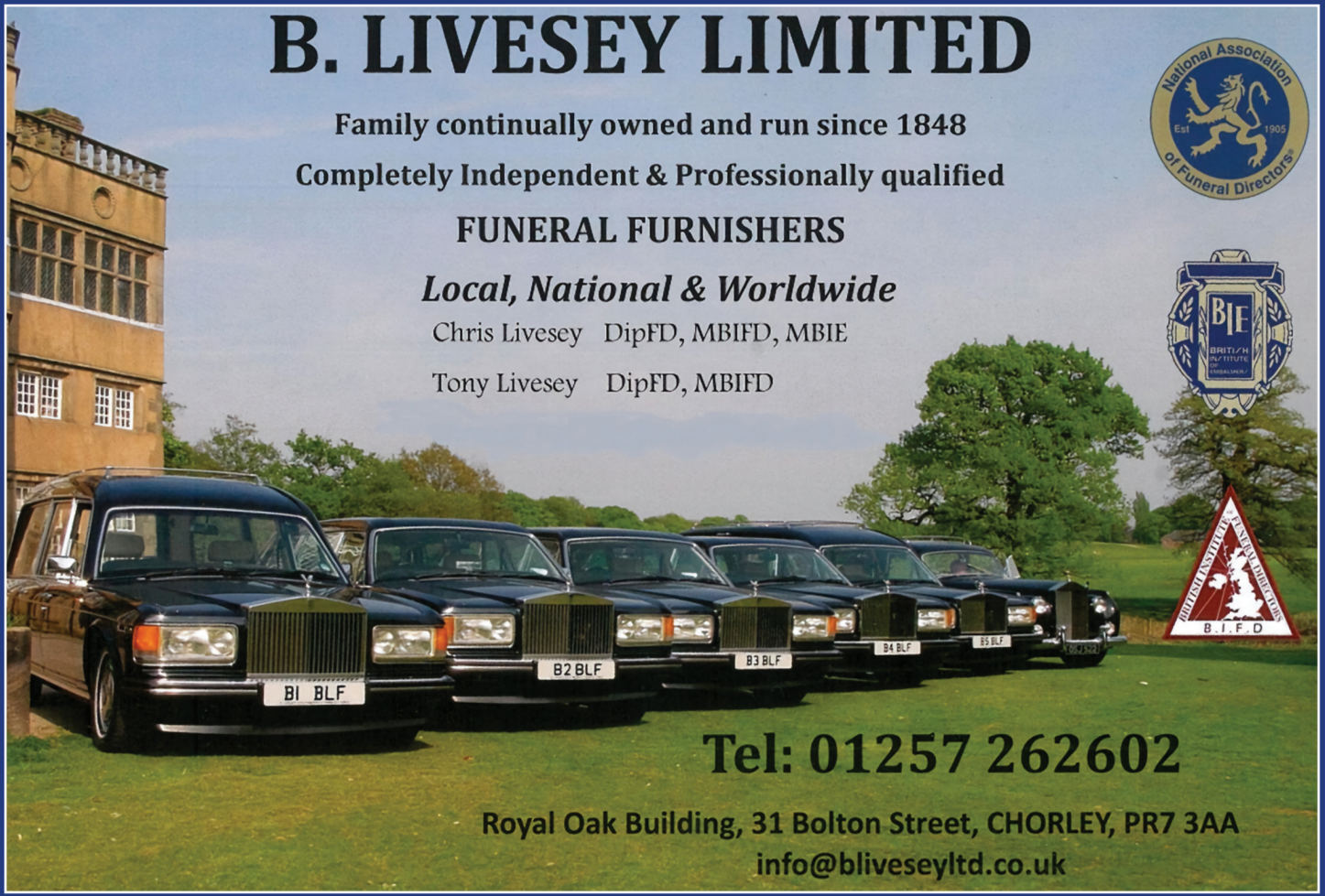
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