

Diary dates for December 2010

2 nd December	10.30 Bible Study on Ruth chapter 4
15 th December	11.00 Julian Meeting George Dobinson
18 th December	17.00 Carol Service
24 th December	17.00 Crib Service
25 th December	11.00 Christmas Day

Prayer of the month

Beloved in Christ,

Let it be our care and delight to prepare ourselves again to hear the message of the angels and, in heart and mind, go to Bethlehem and see the miracle of the Baby lying in a manger.

Let us, therefore, read and mark in Holy Scripture the story of the purpose of God from the beginning to His glorious redemption through the birth of the Holy Child and let us make this place glad with our carols of praise.

But first let us pray for the needs of the whole world; for peace and goodwill over all the earth and for unity among all Christians regardless of our different denomination. Let us remember, too, the poor and the helpless; the cold, the hungry and the oppressed; the sick and those who mourn; the lonely and the unloved; the aged and little children; all those who know not the Lord Jesus or who love Him not or who by sin have grieved His heart of love. Lastly, let us remember those from whom we are separated by death but who rejoice with us on another shore. These prayers we offer humbly up to the Throne of Heaven in the words of the Lord's Prayer:

Bidding Prayer from the Carol Service

Prayer focus

Refugees; the homeless; those far from home in distance or in mind.

Newsletter - December 2010 The Christmas Edition St Bartholomew's Church, Dinard



Services

Sunday 11.00 Holy Communion (with hymns)

Thursday 10.00 Holy Communion (said)

A warm welcome to all who worship with us.
After the service coffee is served.

Priest-in-charge: The Revd Gareth Randall

For further information concerning baptisms,
marriages or funerals:

☎ 02 99 46 77 00

e-mail : gareth.randall@nordnet.fr

Website : www.stbarts-dinard.org.uk



December, 2010

Dear Friends,

'The Boy with a Frog'

On holiday in October, we chanced on this statue as we rounded the old Venetian Customs House from the Giudecca Canal. There on the Punta Del Dogana stands a contemporary, two-metre-high statue of a boy holding up a frog in his right hand. Guarding the mouth of the Grand Canal, he seems heroically vulnerable sheltered by a Perspex box.

The sculptor, Charles Ray, has created a work of art which asks questions of the viewer without providing answers, just clues to make the spectator curious. Imagine, then, being an outsider and hearing the Christmas story for the first time, what questions would you ask?

The story of a woman's pregnancy and birth is natural. The conception anything but. Being subject to laws and taxation is normal. The visits by shepherds and wise men anything but. Sharing a stable with animals, people and angels crowd round the manger where a vulnerable child is laid, a baby who seems to be radiating light in a darkened world. What on earth's going on?

The story has a touch of 'magic' about it with the natural and supernatural blending in an interface between God and Man, the baby Jesus, born of the Virgin Mary.

Perhaps the best Christmas present I could give you would be the desire to ask questions of what we see.

Father Gareth



➤ **Notices**

- **Sunday School** will resume on **27th March**.
- **Tournebride Monthly Lunch 4th December** at the Relais de Tournebride - a good opportunity for British and French folk to meet. 14€ includes an aperitif, a four course meal, wine and coffee. **Mike Baber** 02 99 73 56 06/annebaber5050@aol.com
- **Christmas cards:** Why not write just **one** card to all your friends at St Bs, post it on the notice boards in the Transept then donate the money saved to our Advent appeal in aid of the British Diabetic Association.
- **Remembrance Sunday** £420 was raised and sent to the Hedley Court Rehabilitation Centre. £311 was raised from the sale of poppies for the British Legion of which 288€ was collected from the church. Many thanks!
- **Shoebboxes** Thanks from Andrea Banyard at St Jude's, Val and Geoff's daughter, for our contribution to children in Romania. 85 shoebboxes in all will be sent at the beginning of December, what a wonderful way to begin Christmas with a gift of love.
- **Coffee morning** 11.00am on 11th Dec at Diana Wilson's in support of Church Funds and the SPA - do come if you can.
- **For Sale – Dolo Jugon Les Lacs**
Breton house and manoir with land and outbuildings. A rare opportunity to buy a whole hamlet.
Two properties 140,000€
Further house and land 80,000€
Contact Elaine Dunstan elainedunstan@yahoo.fr
02 96 83 39 35 or 06 83 51 98 57
- The report of the Council Meeting in November and the Diary Dates for 2011 will appear in the January 2011 Newsletter.
- **Deadline** for submission of material for the January Newsletter is **midday on Thursday 23rd December**
- **Church Finances for October**
Income: 4799€ Expenditure: 3594€

➤ **Readings in church**

Dec 5th - 2nd Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 11 v1 - 10

Romans 15 v4 - 13

Psalms 72 v1 - 7 p1183

Matthew 3 v1 - 12

Dec 12th - 3rd Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 35 v1 - 10

James 5 v7 - 10

Magnificat p94

Matthew 11 v2 - 11

Dec 19th - 4th Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 7 v10 - 16

Romans 1 v1 - 7

Psalms 80 v1 - 7 p1199

Matthew 1 v18-end

Dec 25th - Christmas Day

Isaiah 52 v7 - 10

Hebrews 1 v1 - 4

Psalms 98 p1221

John 1 v1 - 14

Dec 26th - St Stephen's Day

Isaiah 63 v7 - 9

Hebrews 2 v10 - end

Psalms 148 v7-end p1287

Matthew 2 v13 - end

Sybil Fagg



Editor's note

Sending me the readings each month was one of the many little things that Sybil did to make sure St Barts ran smoothly. With typical foresight and kindness, she made sure I had the readings for November and December before she went into hospital for her operation. Now is neither the time nor the place to pay due tribute to all she did to help our church to grow but it is right and proper to note that we do owe her so much.

The Crib

In the summer of 2007, we received the gift of a set of Edwardian crib figures from The Revd Donald Pankhurst and his wife, Heather. Their church in Windermere had purchased a modern crib set and these old and distressed figures were now surplus to their requirement. They were lovingly restored by Doreen Collier's daughter, Lesley, and an Art teacher friend, Catherine Todd, during that October's Half Term, ready for my first Christmas here at St Barts.

There are ten figures in all. The baby Jesus is suitably pink, plump and jolly; the young virgin mother is kneeling in prayer while a more mature bearded Joseph stands, his head slightly bowed, lantern in hand. There are shepherds: an old man now carrying a lamb; a mature man with a sheep-skin draped over his shoulder; a young man with bare left shoulder, enthusiastically on his knees, a lamb at his side. There are three kings: a bearded, bald-headed man kneels looking up to heaven in wonder; a handsome young man dressed in silver, wearing a steel helmet stands lost in meditation while the third, a turbaned African inclines his head in reverence. And of course there is an ox and an ass.

On Christmas Eve, we have a Crib Service at 17.00, a simple ceremony in which children bring up the crib figures to be placed on the main altar, the gift of our Reader, Sybil Fagg. Carols are sung and the Christmas story retold. At the end of the service lasting about three quarters of an hour, munching an English chocolate, people leave the our beautifully decorated church to emerge into the cold night air, ready to start their Christmas celebrations.

Overnight, the crib figures, minus the three wise men who will only arrive on the feast of the Epiphany, move to the William Channing altar where they will remain, spot-lit until Candlemas. If you can make the time this year, why not join us this Christmas Eve?

Father Gareth

Early years in Dinard

Just after I had arrived in Guernsey in 1965 with Frances and three children to take on the role of Chaplain of Elizabeth College and Priest-in-Charge of St James the Less, I received a mysterious invitation from the Curé of St Michel, St Brieuc: "Would I be prepared to go over to Brittany during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity to talk to the Catholic clergy about the Church of England?"

It was a tempting offer but on reflection, I thought that it would be much better to take a choir to give people the opportunity of hearing Anglican music which must count as the finest liturgical music in the world. The then Director of Music at the College was Eric Waddams, one of four brothers who had been choristers then choral scholars at King's College, Cambridge. He jumped at the opportunity. The headmaster was persuaded and in January 1966, the choir made the first visit to sing at Mass in several Roman Catholic churches in and around St Brieuc and St Malo. At that time, visiting choirs from the UK were rare and it came as a surprise that we appeared on French television when we sang the Mass at Paramé. For me, it was the start of some thirty-five or six annual trips to Brittany with a choir.

In 1966, we did not know that St Bartholomew's existed though then it was closed in January being only open at Easter and then for some three months during the holiday season. The early years were interesting. At first, the French clergy were polite and cautiously interested in Anglicanism but we were fortunate that it was the time of Vatican II and, within the Roman Communion, there was a great emphasis on renewal as well as ecumenism. At that time, unknown to me was the fact that Fr Geoffrey Curtis, son of Sir George Curtis, who was such a strong supporter of St Bartholomew's, had already begun an ecumenical enterprise which led to the founding of the Groupe Oecuménique de la Rance. Very soon we were introduced to Elizabeth

French Proverb of the Month

This month's proverb from 'Almanach du Marin Breton 2008' would not apply to the Incarnation:

A ta naissance tout le monde rit et tu es le seul à pleurer

Last month's might be paraphrased as follows:

The ladder of hierarchy allows rubbish to be dumped on those on the rungs below



Quotation of the Month

Bryan Larkin, Irène Bishop's brother, reported that 'The Daily Mail' had identified the following as the worst cracker joke in 2009:

What Pizza would Santa order?

Deep pan, crisp and even!



Church Notice Board

Happy Christmas to our Christian Friends
Happy Chanukah to our Jewish friends
And to our atheist friends – good luck!

Marjorie and Stafford Crane



A pearl of humour for the cultured

A lot of money is tainted: taint mine and taint yours!

Ronald Frankel, MBE

Yorkshire Christmas

Christmas in t' farmhouse
All fettled and clean:
Ther's a feast on yon table
'At's fit for a queen:
A gurt buxom turkey,
Wi't trimmins ter come,
An' a champion puddin',
An't sauce laced wi' rum;
Aye, ther's cheese, and ther's spice-cake
By gum, lad, tha'll bust
If tha doesn't give up!

Christmas in t' mistal,
All shabby an' bare,
All stinkin' wi cow muck-
An' cattle just stare,
'Ther's nowt 'ere fer thee!
But over in t' corner
Na then – dosta see?
Ther's a lass wi a babby,
All snuggled in t' 'ay –
Yon grand little Jesus
On t' fust Christmas Day!

Dr. Arnold Kellett

Glossary	Gurt	- Great	Tha	- You
	Spice-cake	- Christmas cake		
	Mistal	- Cow shed	Dosta	- Do You
	Grand	- Wonderful or Great	Fust	- First

Hannay when she turned up at various churches in which we were giving concerts and singing the services.

Thus in 1970, we began the annual visit to St Bartholomew's during Holy Week and Easter as well as singing Mass and giving concerts in other Roman Catholic Churches and Cathedrals in the area. It was a punishing week for the choir as we performed something every day from Palm Sunday to Easter Day. From that time, we always stayed in the then Monastère St François at the Vicomé, where we were richly welcomed and entertained by the jolly Capuchin Friars. We were the first to arrive each year when St Bartholomew's opened for the summer season. Holy Saturday was spent cleaning and tidying aided by Julian and Audrey Thompson, Ida Beau and one or two others, always supervised by the indomitable Elizabeth Hannay. Holy Week ended with the singing of Mass in one of the local Roman Catholic Churches for the Veillée Pascale. During the whole week, I was invited to concelebrate with the local priest and any Anglicans present were invited to receive the Holy Communion.

In due course, the Abbé Michel Leutelier of St Servan came over to St Bartholomew's during the winter months to celebrate an Anglican Holy Communion for the local community.

It has to be emphasised that between the end of the Second World War and the establishment of the priest-in-charge in 2000, St Bartholomew's was kept open and alive by the lay people of the congregation who, led by Elizabeth Hannay, were very active in the Groupe Oecuménique. Chaplains, including myself, came and went each month and we had a great variety from the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand Scotland and Wales as well as England. For Frances and me, it has been a great contact and we are enjoying our time here some 45 years after my first nervous visit.

The Revd Alan Charters

Keeping Christmas
A short sermon for Christmas
by the Revd Henry Van Dyke (1852 – 1933)

The following was sent to me last Christmas
by *the Revd Mervyn Kingston*.

‘He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord’
Romans XIV v6

It is a good thing to observe Christmas Day. The mere marking of times and seasons, when men agree to stop work and make merry together, is a wise and wholesome custom. It helps one to feel the supremacy of the common life over the individual life. It reminds a man to set his own little watch, now and then, by the great clock of humanity which runs on sun time.

But there is a better thing than the observance of Christmas Day, and that is, keeping Christmas.

Are you willing to forget what you have done for other people, and to remember what other people have done for you; to ignore what the world owes you, and to think what you owe the world; to put your rights in the background, and your duties in the middle distance, and your chances to do a little more than your duty in the foreground; to see that your fellow men are just as real as you are, and to try to look behind their faces to their hearts, hungry for joy; to own that probably the only good reason for your existence is not what you are going to get out of life, but what you are going to give to life; to close your book of complaints against the management of the universe, and look around you for a place where you can sow a few seeds of happiness – are you willing to do these things even for a day? Then you can keep Christmas.

A little humour

The following was sent to me by the Revd Malcolm Cherry with the kind permission of the editor of SANTIAGO, the St. Edmundsbury Cathedral News

A little girl asked her mother: ‘How did the human race start?’ The mother answered: ‘God made Adam and Eve and they had children - and so all mankind was made.’ Two days later the girl asked her father the same question. The father answered: ‘Many years ago, there were monkeys from whom the human race evolved.’ The confused girl returned to her mother and said: ‘Mum, how is it possible that you told me the human race was created by God and Dad said they developed from monkeys?’ The mother answered: ‘Well, dear, it is very simple, I told you about my side of the family and your father told you about his.’



St Bartholomew’s Book of Cakes

We are currently collecting recipes for a new church recipe book to be published to coincide with next year’s Garden Party on 6th August.

If you would like to share one of your recipes in what we trust will be a popular publication, then please send it/them (type written if possible) to Doreen Collier c/o of St Bartholomew’s Church, 6 ave Georges Clemenceau 35800 Dinard or e mail it direct to doreen.collier@wandadoo.fr.

Please include your name and address so that the editorial team can contact you if necessary.

Closing date: 30th April, 2011



Recipe of the month
'Boxing Day Christmas Pudding'

One year, I had a lot of Christmas pudding left over from our Christmas lunch. so I experimented with this – it was a great success!

- ✓ *Cold Christmas pudding*
- ✓ *brandy*
- ✓ *¾ pint of milk*
- ✓ *3 large eggs*



- Cut the pudding into slices
- Put into an oven proof dish
- Sprinkle with brandy
- Warm the milk and vanilla essence
- Whisk the eggs
- Stir the eggs into the milk
- Pour the mixture through sieve onto the pudding
- Bake for approximately 1 hour (until set)

Serve with single cream

Victor Pumfrett



Personal Column

Congratulations to should have gone to Dominique and Emily on their marriage here at St Barts on 2nd October. A Freudian slip on my part had Dominique married to his mother-in-law, Carol!

Are you willing to stoop down and consider the needs and desires of little children; to remember the weakness and loneliness of people who are growing old; to stop asking how much your friends love you, and ask yourself whether you love them enough; to bear in mind the things that other people have to bear on their hearts; to try to understand what those who live in the same house with you really want, without waiting for them to tell you; to trim your lamp so that your shadow will fall behind you; to make a grave for your ugly thoughts, and a garden for your kindly feelings, with the gate open – are you willing to do these things even for a day? Then you can keep Christmas.

Are you willing to believe that love is the strongest thing in the world – stronger than evil, stronger than death – and that the blessed life which began in Bethlehem nineteen hundred years ago is the image and brightness of Eternal Love? Then you can keep Christmas.

And if you can keep it for a day, why not always?

But you can never keep it alone.



From the mouth of a child

Little Girl: Who made me?

Mother: God did.

Little Girl: Who made you?

Mother: God did.

Little Girl: Who made Grandma?

Mother: God did.

PAUSE

Little Girl: He's improved a lot since he made Grandma.

John Marshall

Postcard from India - 4

We arrived at the Bagh Hotel, a series of buildings in gardens. The grounds were amazing, and we were to learn that as much of the food as possible came from the hotel gardens. There was also a good selection of reference books to check on any wild life seen in the vicinity. On arrival, Anand suggested that the following day, he should collect us at 6.30am to get to the park at the best time.

We relaxed in the grounds, the usual tea late afternoon and a walk through the grounds to the dining room. After dinner, one of the staff led us back through the lit paths. Sure enough, Anand was at the gate by 6.30 and off we went to the park where we collected a guide and transferred to a couple of cycle rickshaws. Both the guide and the rickshaw wallahs were knowledgeable and pointed out birds and other wild life in plenty of time for us to see. The site is home to over 300 species and we were able to see quite a good percentage. We also came across a small temple towards the centre of the area, and were greeted by the local 'holy man', (we still have to meet Gareth wearing a bright orange robe). The trip round the bird sanctuary was a 3 hour outing and then it was back to the hotel for breakfast. As at other times, we were surprised at the low cost of the guides etc. though I suspect that to them it was relatively good pay.

We were quite sorry to leave the peace of the Bagh but soon after breakfast we were on our way to Jaipur for a two night stay. This time, our hotel was on the outskirts of the bustling town but surprisingly peaceful. We were able to take tea and breakfast in the garden but dinner inside as darkness drew in. At Jaipur, we were to spend time in the Amber Fort where we rode on elephants to negotiate the long and steep entrance path. Later, we also visited the city palace where our guide kept referring to the fact that it was a very large complex for

Film Review of the month *'Joyeux Noël' – Christian Carion, 2005*

Pierre Payan recommended 'Joyeux Noël' to me. Christmas 1914. The Western Front during the First World War. In opposing trenches are ranged German soldiers fighting against French and Scottish infantry. This unlikely trio provide the context for an actual event which occurred that first Christmas when soldiers spontaneously stopped fighting and unofficially met in no man's land to play football.

'Joyeux Noël', 'Merry Christmas', is a good film to watch if you want to capture something of the spirit of Christmas. Shot in three languages with subtitles, it captures the cost of war. It conveys the essential truth summed up in one of Thomas Hardy's poems written during the Boer War, 'The Man I shot', that at heart we are all people and that whatever our nationality, we all share an essential humanity – if we met down the pub we would buy each other a beer! It shows that it is in the interests of those in authority who control our lives that we should hate our enemy and be prepared to kill him because he speaks a different language and wears a different uniform and he is ready to kill us if we don't kill him first.

There is death and the devastating effect on two friends when one of them is killed. There is love in the shape of a Danish soprano smitten with a German tenor conscripted as an ordinary soldier fighting in the front line. There is humour and optimism; tears and cynicism. The soundtrack underpins the action and mood. The photography is telling, embodying the cost of the conflict in the faces of the men.

'Joyeux Noël' captures something of the flavour of the season ; if you watch it, it could certainly add a bitter sweet sauce to the Twelve Days of Christmas.

Gareth Randall



Organist at St Barts

We are delighted to welcome **Amaury Rosa de Poullois**, Professeur of organ, piano and solfège at the Ecole de Musique de Dinard and organist at Mt St Michel who will be playing for services whenever his other duties permit

* * *

Grace of the month

The thirteenth and final of a baker's dozen from a former chaplain:

Lord set thy seal
Upon this meal
Which we shall soon be eating.
With Christmas Day
Not far away
Let's all exchange a greeting.

The Revd Donald Pankhurst

* * *

Banque Alimentaire

With Christmas and New Year on the horizon, let's remember the Banque Alimentaire and those in need. Each Sunday, Helen Morgan will be pleased to accept contributions of tins biscuits or sweets in addition to the normal donations.

* * *

Christmas cards available in church

A large selection of English Christmas Cards are on offer at a special price of 1€ each or 6 for 5€. Also available cards for all occasions / events, again at the special bargain price of just 1€. (*sorry no discount for multi-purchases but hey where else can you buy in this area good quality cards for just 1€*)

Cathy and Roger Saxton-Howes

20

seven people to live. Having experienced how many seem to live in a small home, we did agree. We were also taken to see the area of the royal tombs.

Jaipur is also known in part as the pink city as in this area, all buildings were pink for a visit of Queen Victoria and must remain so even now. It was at Jaipur that we had to become accustomed to meeting elephants and camels as part of the transport system. Here too, it was rather strange to see a totally naked man walking naturally among the people in the street. The Jain sect believes that their Sadhu or holy men should have no earthly possessions.

From Jaipur, we set off to the final stop on our mini tour. We were heading for the hill fort hotel at Kesroli. This is part of a small chain of hotels of converted hill forts. We had planned this as a chance to visit the tiger sanctuary. We were told, however, that the last of the tigers had died and our journey to Kesroli took us through the sanctuary, so that by the time we arrived at the hotel, we realised that we wouldn't be bothering to return the next day. However, we did walk through the local area and then relaxed on the roof garden area of the fort from where we could see much of what was happening around us and also watch the local wild life especially the green parakeets in the neighbouring trees. Both evenings we had 'entertainment' by a group of three locals. We think they were a family, father with the local string instrument (Ravanhasta), son, mid-teens with a drum, and mother with fleas. At least she seemed to be scratching some part of her torso, all the time and the second night she was missing.

All too soon, it was time to return to Tikli and again experience the delights of the Indian main roads. At one stage on the route, we passed through a small township which must have specialised in fixing tyre and wheel problems of the commercial vehicles as the roadside

from entering the village to leaving it was lined solidly by lorries being worked on. There seems to be little thought of safety for the workers, as they tucked under the trucks, their legs sticking out into the path of the passing traffic. Maybe we were jumping to conclusions without proof but it did appear that in many cases, a village or small town had a local trade speciality. We made it back to Tikli in time for lunch much to the delight of Anand and were soon back at home in our room. It really was like returning home as the staff greeted us as though we had been living there for years. So a couple of days to relax before returning to the Delhi flat for our last night in India. Here again, we were welcomed like old friends and Adam was warmly greeted by the young granddaughter of Angeli. Next morning, our last trip with Anand was to the airport to await our flight back to Heathrow.

And so farewell to India, for now, who knows, we may be fortunate and able to return some time in the future. If the opportunity arises, I doubt if we will turn it down. Charles does return in 2011 with a group of scouts to work in the school and so our fund raising goes on ad infinitum.

John Marshall



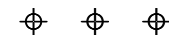
A question of giving

Our Advent appeal this year will be going to support the work of the British Diabetes Association.

The SPA receives untiring support from Diana Wilson not only in the form of coffee mornings and soup lunches but also when she opens her dog friendly home to 'visitors' and the SPA receive a cheque from their grateful owners.

'Put your finger here and see my hands' ***John 20 v27***

Doubting Thomas's criteria to test the truth
Was could he touch Jesus, touch his wounds,
Put his finger into his nail-wounded hands,
Put his hand in his spear-pierced side?
Paradox surrounds the resurrected Christ.
He can appear and disappear at will:
Locked doors cannot keep him out
But once inside, he can break bread
Or eat a piece of broiled fish.
Mary was not allowed touch him
But later Thomas is invited to do so,
Check out the facts by touching him
And touched, Thomas declares the truth
As he feels it to be: 'My Lord and My God.'
Jesus is incarnate both in life and after death;
He can touch us and we can be touched by him
But will we let him?



The Revd Canon Ian Hardaker
a former locum chaplain at St Bartholomew's
died 7th November, 2010
RIP

Poem of the month

The twelfth and last in a series exploring the nature of the incarnation through the humanity of Jesus Christ, the Son of God is a pair of post resurrection poems.

'Don't touch me' *John 20 v17*

In tears, she didn't recognise him
Until he spoke her name, 'Mary'.
The way he said it, his tone of voice,
Told her clearly it was Jesus,
The man she thought was dead,
Whose death had left her desolate.
She wanted to hold him, to touch him,
To cling on to him, never to let him go.
But no. She was told not to,
Not yet, not here, not now:
There was more needing to be done
Before, a man of flesh and blood,
She might touch him again.
Having risen from the dead,
Jesus could enter a secure room,
Stand on the shore of the Sea of Galilee,
Appear on the road from Jerusalem,
Sit at table and bless bread in Emmaus
Then disappear again from sight.
How many times was he seen
Before ascending into heaven,
Defying the law of gravity,
Cloud-concealed from sight?

Modern Miracles 2 The three of us

"My electric fire's just said something.."

It was very early one December morning – and very late in her life, when Mother telephoned me.

I knew the fire well - only by sight, of course, not to speak to. *'Ever-ready, small and steady'*, we used to say, tightly coiled, heats up in an instant, and always there in the Salford flat... not unlike my mother, in fact, once upon a time.

And once upon a time the 3 of us had lived there together very happily: my mother, my father, myself, always talking. The wireless chimed in occasionally; then the television, more so. But basically we never talked to the furniture and basically the furniture never talked to us.

Till now, apparently.

I paused. Mother was eighty.

"What did it say?"

"It was... a reminder..."

"I thought you paid by direct debit."

I heard her sigh.

"I said you'd not believe me."

And the subject was dropped. Well, if Mother was spending her time listening to a domestic appliance, wasn't I spending mine lecturing on whether fish (for example) know they're fish...

"Let's leave it there then."

* * *

A few days later I went north for Christmas. For the first time it was just the two of us.

Despite the deadening, wintry cold of her flat, Mother seemed slow to put the fire on, and I was equally slow to suggest it. We sat there staring at the fire, saying hardly anything, chilled.

We were both thinking – I know we were – that there ought to be three of us.

"I've got you these," she said eventually, holding up a scarf and a matching pair of navy carpet slippers by their bobs. *"I hope you like them."*

"I'm sure I will." I noticed my hands were slightly blue.

"Are you going to be cold here?"

Instinctively I glanced back at the electric fire. But it was my mother who'd asked the question...

"Not when I get these slippers on..."

"I can't get warm."

"You need a fan heater. I'll get you one for Christmas."

"No, don't. I've got my fire."

I leaned down and clicked the fire on. In a few moments the filaments were red hot and my feet were thawing out. The fire was making a little tingling sound, a hum. But then it was very old.

"It's singing now." I joined in: *"...in the bleak midwinter..."*

"Peckish," I said, picking up the plastic bags – packed with two steaks of wild turbot... four deep-frozen medallions of venison... a large pack of petits pois à la crème... two two-for-the-price-of-one garlic dumplings... a tub of passion fruit sorbet... and - and all the rest... all that *Morrison's* customers *didn't* want for Christmas... all that was left. *"What about you?"*

"Well, you sit there," she said. *"And put your slippers on."*

I sat there for a few minutes contemplating my carrier bags while Mother was in the kitchen. I heard plates clatter.

Oh lord. I thought of the fridge – and shivered slightly. I waited to hear her open it. But nothing. Perhaps she's forgotten.

I was just rooting around for the dumplings when Mother came in, with a tray.

"Shall we have our Christmas here?" She put the tray down between us on the rug. Some slices of corned beef. A turkey twizzler. And mince pies. Three of them.

"This looks very nice. Is it Fray Bentos?"

"Mais oui," she said, looking at me, smiling, then at the electric fire facing us.

She gave me a mince pie. With my other hand I ate my corned beef - every slice, while my mother nibbled at her turkey twizzler.

"Go on," she said. *"Close your eyes and wish."*

I closed my eyes, remembering what I'd wished all those years ago, and feeling the fire come on.

David Norris

"Me - !" I said automatically - childishly, though I knew the voice. I knew it at once. I'd always known it. A nice voice, warm.

There was nothing in the fridge. Nothing. Nothing at all. Spotlessly clean. And empty.

"But there's nothing in it," I said to myself, aloud. *"Not a thing"*

* * *

I found Mother in *Morrison's*, holding onto a trolley – with no more than two or three things in the bottom. She was standing with her back to the checkout, looking around.

"Oh, right then. Have you got all you want?" she said.

They obviously wanted to close.

"No. Just wait there," I said and hurried off with my own trolley.

Of course I'd forgotten where things were in the store: it was months since I'd last been in there. So, of course, Mother wasn't there when I came back.

* * *

"Don't go out," she said when I got home. *"It's too cold to go out."*

The fire was off and the room was cold again.

She was exactly where she had been, as if she hadn't stirred. Except she was wearing her coat.

"No. I've just been in my bedroom, reading" I said, putting down my carrier bags.

"You've got your scarf on. Aren't you hungry?"

"Yes. Only sometimes it just goes off."

"Ah..." My dad would have put it right. *"Sorry, but..."*

Mother smiled slightly. *"Better get going"* Though she didn't seem to want to get up. She looked frail.

I settled back and stretched out, cosy now, almost, and drowsy...

"Everywhere'll be shut."

"Mmmm..." I felt my eyes shutting.

"What is it we want?" I heard her say.

* * *

My dad's wearing a big paper hat. Far too big it's slipping down over his face. But he doesn't notice because he's deep in a book. And holding a mince pie. He's been holding it for ages.

"Since when did you start not liking turkey?" my mum's asking me. *"Don't go telling everybody we've only given you corned beef."*

"Tell them it was Fray Bentos," my dad pipes up. *"Premier cru."*

"My taste-buds may be maturing" This is my first Christmas after starting college. *"I don't quite know... I like pintade."*

"Well I know. I know this much. I know everybody likes turkey," she goes on. *"It's Bernard Matthews."*

"Full of phosphorus, selenium and potassium..." My dad from behind his book.

"Give over."

"Not Bernard, the bird."

"It's bootiful," my mum warbles.

"He started with twenty eggs," my dad says, turning a page. "Now he's got two thousand men under him."

"Anyway, what's there not to like about turkey?" My mum hands me a mince pie.

"Where's mine?" my dad says.

"Don't eat yours yet," my mum says to him. Then to me - "Go on, love, make us a wish."

"Magic mince pies!" I'm laughing indulgently. "Oh dear."

"They do say it works," my dad says without looking up. "Whether you believe in it or not."

"Don't encourage him," my mum chips in. "Go on. It's Christmas. Close your eyes and wish."

I'm hesitating

"Who's turned the lights out?" says my dad suddenly.

"Put your hat on properly." My mum does it for him and my dad gives her a kiss.

I wish...

* * *

What?

I can smell burning rubber...

I opened my eyes slightly.

My slippers are smoking. Melting.

"My toes are scorched now." I looked round to blame my mother – as of old.

Silence. She must have gone out. Her coat's not there.

I leaned forward, pulled my slippers off and waved them at the electric fire.

"Say what you like, you've burned my toes."

The fire was humming away. The fridge, too. And the clock was ticking.

Nothing else...

Except the hot water thermostat clicked on. And my chair creaked as I moved myself further back.

Christmas Eve. It was dark now, inside, too. No light on, just the fire.

I squinted at the clock. What time is it? Must be five o'clock. Mother was still out. She should be back by now.

Then what? A silent night...

"Look in the fridge."

I heard it, I did. Just those words. *"Look in the fridge."*

Not loud, but distinct and faintly metallic.

I looked down at the fire, three bars of red, glowing in the dark...