

The Rector writes:

"I have every confidence that your final Rector Writes really will be a blockbuster!" So wrote Christopher Bell, our esteemed Editor, adding by way of encouragement *"Oh could we have it on time for once?"* So no pressure there, then. Of course the secret to a good letter or sermon is a good opening. I did think of borrowing, as I have done in the past, a famous opening from English literature. So how about: *It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife.* Well maybe, but perhaps not in my case. I am certainly now single but a clergy pension, though adequate, is hardly a fortune and in any event I don't have Colin Firth's thighs, displayed to such advantage in the TV adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*.

So instead, why not, in Dickens' bicentenary year, from *A Tale of Two Cities*: *"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times. it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to heaven, we were all going direct the other way."*

Actually I think almost any parish priest would echo those words, but they would certainly sum up much of what I feel at the end of my time here. It has been an amazing roller-coaster of an experience. There have been times when I have seldom felt less valued and times, particularly recently, when I have seldom felt more valued. I have seldom felt more frustrated: I have seldom felt that I had achieved more. I have seldom felt greater personal happiness: And for obvious reasons I certainly have never felt more wretched. Over the past twenty one and a half years all of this has been true and a great deal more. Twenty one and a half years! Golly, one third of my entire life and a half of my adult life!

So what do I regret? Well I certainly wish that wealthy parishes like Compton and Shackleford & Peper Harow could be on a slightly sounder financial footing. There is really no excuse for some people's appallingly low level of financial commitment. I wish we

had been able to do more for the young people of the Benefice, not necessarily doing it ourselves but tapping in a more structured way into the work undoubtedly going on in Godalming. I wish I had been able to come up with a solution to the Jubilee Field problem at Shackleford. And I certainly wish the issues surrounding the relationship between Shackleford and Peper Harow churches could have been resolved once and for all, both within the PCC and beyond, whereas I fear that they are merely on hold, waiting for the new incumbent. There is real work to be done there.

And the things I look back on with pleasure? Well, the children's chorus of "*Good afternoon, Mr Fellows, good afternoon, Mrs Roberts, good afternoon, ...*" and so on naming all the staff of St Mary's school, which was the invariable start of my weekly assembly there. The baptisms, weddings and in their own way the funerals that I have taken and the enormous privilege that they offer of being allowed a degree of personal intimacy with people, some almost complete strangers, all these have given me a great sense of worth and purpose. And of course the people: I have made some very good friends here; I have met many whom I admire and respect enormously, and some whom it has been humbling to know, some regular churchgoers, some not. I hope I have been able to give something to this benefice. I know that I have received much more in return. To be honest it may have been both the best and worst of times but there is so much, so very much, to look back on with unalloyed pleasure,

But above all has been the weekly worship. Joining the faithful in this place as week by week we do what Christ commanded us to do and so enabled us together to become the holy people of God. To those who have broken bread with me and so become both literally and figuratively my companions, my heart felt thanks

I didn't quite start with Dickens, but I will certainly end with him. To all reading this Tiny Tim's final benison in *A Christmas Carol*: "*God bless us, everyone.*" To which I can only say: Amen! and Amen!

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "John Fellows". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.