

Highlights

John & Fiona Earle

At a recent sixtieth birthday party, a dentist/drummer friend spoke of "The Ten best days in my life". He quoted three: an occasion when he was drumming in the Royal Festival Hall at full bore, with a full symphony orchestra in front of a full house; the time he was awarded a doctorate, a Ph. D. for research in dentistry; and the day he completed the Coast to Coast path from St. Bees to Robin Hood's Bay.

This set us thinking of our "best" or "most memorable" days. We have had many, some together and some before we were married.

As a national serviceman in the R.A.M.C., John had been posted to Khartoum, and then to Gebeit. Gebeit is a village on the railway line between Port Sudan and Khartoum. There were two trains a week, providing the line was intact. One morning an Arab turned up on a camel, leading two others. He explained to the railway officer's wife (a trained nurse/midwife) that his wife had been in labour for three days and could not deliver her baby. Could she help? So the nurse (Joan Jackson) and I (John) packed up our kit in a couple of rucksacks, got on the camels and rode into the desert. Our plan was that John would give the anaesthetic. Joan would put on the forceps, which she had done many times before.

Chloroform can be administered without any special apparatus and is ideal for use outside a hospital. Unfortunately it can cause some liver damage, but it was all we had.

Joan found that she could not apply the forceps to the baby. Would John try? This was a "You and it" situation that can arise in remote areas. No help was available. The railway line was washed out and in any case, our patient's womb would probably rupture if she wasn't delivered soon. We were surrounded by a large number of anxious waiting women.

Anxiety breeds aggression. Either the baby came out or it didn't. Undelivered, the mother and baby would die, and we weren't sure how the women would react.

Somehow I managed to get a grip on the baby's head, it came out and so did the placenta. The memories remain fresh today.

This happened over fifty years ago, but I remember riding back to camp on the camel. There was no sense of achievement or pleasure, just enormous relief. It was the first time that I had applied the forceps. As our Editor remarked with a grin "It was a good time to find out". Someone was looking after us all that day – and since then I have been involved in a number of coincidences when I was available and needed to deal with an unusual medical problem, single-handed. Well single-handed in human terms!

First Aid in Nepal

Early one evening we were in camp in a remote area of Nepal, whilst visiting some schools. A man came to see us. He had burnt his foot in the fire a week previously, and the wound had become infected.

It was a straightforward problem. The man needed the wound cleaning, a fresh dressing and some antibiotics.

What happened was that he sat on a low bank between two rice fields. Birri, one of our guides, brought over a bowl of boiled water. Fiona removed a filthy rag which was bound round his foot, washed the wound and applied a clean dressing. This was on Maundy Thursday!

We gave him some of the antibiotics that we usually carry and Prakesh, our guide, explained the dosage. (We saw the man again last March: He'd survived our ministrations!) Without this the infection would have spread. The nearest hospital was about

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six hours walk away, for an uninfected man, and, meanwhile, he was the breadwinner and needed to work in the fields.

We both felt privileged and glad to be able to help in this country where we have enjoyed so much fun and kindness.

There have been other memorable days, walking in Scotland, leading walks in the Alps, sailing. We have been very lucky.

What makes days/events really memorable? In medicine, it seems to be linked to an unexpected event. If you get it right, fine. If not, someone suffers or dies. All the training and experience you ever had is being examined for real. A written paper or oral examination may feel severe at the time, but only the candidate suffers if things go wrong.

Who else has had memorable days that you would like to share? Did you realise at the time that the episode would become memorable? Did it just stick and a year or two later you find you can remember trivial details that would easily get forgotten?

Do the memories haunt you or do you have a good feeling about what happened?



Electoral Roll

This year a new Electoral Roll has to be prepared. Forms for this purpose have been given/sent to all existing members. We hope you will want to renew your membership.

If you are not on the electoral roll then you will be unable to vote at the APCM. You are welcome to join. Simply complete a form (there is a pile of them at the back of the church) and either place it in the box at the back of church or send it to our Electoral Roll Officer, Mrs Gillian Harman, 2 Valley Close, Hertford SG13 8BD.

The new roll has to be completed two weeks before the Annual Meeting to enable formal nominations to be accepted for membership of the PCC and Churchwardens. This means forms need to be in by April 1st please.

If you are not able to meet this date do complete a form when you can.

Meetings, meetings

Our Annual Vestry Meeting (to elect Churchwardens) will be held on Sunday 22nd April at 11.45 a.m. It will be (swiftly!) followed by our Annual Parish Meeting. Please do come along, hear about what has happened, what we are currently doing and what we plan to do over the coming months and also take the opportunity to ask questions and comment on our spiritual life together.

If the above isn't tempting enough, the meeting will be followed by a 'Bring and Share' lunch.

We look forward to seeing you all!

Feedback please!

This is my sixth edition as 'stand-in' editor. A few of you have been kind enough to say some nice things – but what do the rest of our readers think? Please let me know
...The Editor