

30th April 2020

History

**“If history records good things ...
the thoughtful hearer is encouraged to imitate what is good.”**

The Venerable Bede, Ecclesiastical History of the English People

When I was a young minister in the 1970s, full of enthusiasm and energy, I did things at a million miles an hour. Visiting? Spending time with people? Too tedious for me! Thankfully, I worked with an experienced Deaconess who knew better. Maureen Hutchison taught me to slow down and listen. “It’s not just the person you visit who benefits from your time,” she said. “If you listen to them, you’ll get a lot of benefit too.”

The next day I was visiting an elderly lady who was housebound. She was an inveterate knitter, and, to the click-clack of her knitting-pins, I asked who’d taught her to knit. “Ma auld granny,” she said, “born in 1837.” 1837, I thought. *That’s ... quite a few years ago!* But before I was focussed enough to enquire further, she continued, “She taught me to knit socks for the soldiers coming back from the Boer War in 1901.”

1837 ... Boer War ... 1901 ... My head was spinning. But I was then treated to stories stretching back 140 years. Living history, in a ninety-year-old’s home – and she never dropped a single stitch as I listened.

I’m recording my own early memories just now in which my own granny, my mother’s mother, figures regularly. She died when she was ninety-five. I can recall many of her tales, but I regret that I didn’t ask her about more things. I should have listened more and written things down. There was living history in her home, but so much of it died with her.

In this time of reflection, aren’t there so many stories to be told, questions asked, memories recorded before they’re lost? Maureen Hutchison was right. What benefit we get from living history!

And if I’d listened to more elderly ladies, I might have learned how to knit socks too! Now, *that* would be a story to tell, wouldn’t it?

A prayer for today

God of the past, help me to learn from the people of old.

God of the present, help me be an example to the people of now.

God of the future, may I be one of those whose story will be worth the telling. Amen.

An original reflection by © Tom Gordon

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