

26<sup>th</sup> March 2021

## Shoes

**“Old friends are best.**

**King James used to call for his old shoes; they were easiest for his feet.”**

*John Selden, Table Talk, 'Friends' (1689)*

In 1877, Louis Staunton was convicted, along with his sister and brother, of murdering his wife, Harriet, by starving her to death. Integral to the Crown's case was the evidence of the deprivations the unfortunate Harriet endured, including having no shoes. Before her death, her feet were filthy and covered in callouses because of walking for months on bare earth.

When I worked in a deprived part of Edinburgh, a fifteen-year-old lad stopped coming to the youth club because he had no shoes. He shared the only pair of men's shoes in the house with his father.

A powerful symbol in the *Yad Vashem* Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem was the pile of discarded shoes representing the Jewish children who had lost their lives in the World War II concentration camps.

As a boy, my father wore no shoes in the summer, only wearing footwear – “tackety boots” – to combat walks to school and the rigours of West Highland winter weather.

We know the importance of shoes for our physical well-being. But we also know the worth and value, and the comfort, of wearing familiar *old* shoes – around the house, in the garden, on a walk – which make us feel good and, as my granny would say, “at home with myself”. Is it any wonder, therefore, that in 1689 a writer like John Selden could use the metaphor of familiar old shoes for the value of friendships? He related this to king James II in his “Table Talk” on ‘Friends’. But can it not equally well be applied to us all, even now? Just as our “old shoes” are “easiest on our feet”, so we are supported by good friendships, well worn, tried and tested, familiar and comforting, when the needs arise. We don't wear old shoes *all* the time, of course. But it's so important to know that they're there.

The next time I'm with a good friend, I don't think I'm going to greet them with, “Hello, you old pair of shoes!” But, there again, maybe I should say something more to them than I do about their worth and value to me, because they're always being there when I need them the most.

**A prayer for today**

*Comfort me, loving God, when I'm most in need of reassurance. Amen.*

*An original reflection by © Tom Gordon Also available at <https://swallowsnestnet.wordpress.com>*