

Watch Stories from the Society

Catch a movie at mmhs.org.uk – the start of a new series of films about residents and friends by Peter Wooding Productions



roof 'n' roots

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Ambushed by God

A DRIVER FOR AMERICAN PRESIDENTS, MARTIN SWAN TRAINED TO ESCAPE AMBUSHES. BUT THERE WAS NO GETAWAY ROUTE WHEN HE FELT AMBUSHED BY GOD.

Martin Swan used to be a driver for the State Department of America. That meant he drove for past US presidents Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan and George Bush Sr on their UK visits.

His life took the equivalent of a sharp handbrake turn after disturbing dreams in the early 1990s. 'I was in bed asleep and I woke up just like somebody had turned the light on,' Martin recalled. 'The thought came into my mind, if I died tonight and never saw my wife again, does that make sense?'

The thought worried him. However, he went back to sleep. 'The next night the same thing happened again, I woke up at midnight,' said Martin. 'The thought came, if you died tonight and never saw your children again, does that make sense?' He was so shaken by these night terrors, his wife Marilyn thought he was having a nervous breakdown. It was unlike him. After all, Martin worked with the great and powerful – his job brought him in

...if I died tonight and never saw my wife again, does that make sense?



BIG WHEEL: Martin used to drive for past US presidents, including Ronald Reagan

regular contact with the Queen, Margaret Thatcher and others.

But this experience was something else. It all came to a head while getting ready for work one day. 'I just cried out, "If there's anybody there, can you please help me, because this is driving me mad?";' Martin remembered.

From that moment, he felt he became a different person. Others also noticed a change in him. One of his two daughters had been invited to Sunday school. Martin took her along. It happened to be held at a Methodist church. He heard a simple gospel sermon delivered by Revd Philip Seaton. Martin shocked the minister by confronting him with the

plea, 'Is what you preached this morning true? Because if it's true, I've got to do something about it'.

Martin started attending church. He asked about the meaning of such terms as 'hymns and psalms', 'prayer at the manse' and 'the noticeboard in the vestibule'. He soaked up everything he could about faith. Eventually he felt called to Methodist ministry. Martin had left the American diplomatic corps and was working for Deutsche Bank. His boss gave him space for his ministerial training.

Martin was ordained at Ipswich in 2001. He became an unorthodox figure in the Church, questioning convention and rethinking tradition. Martin made news

A message from Mairi



There are times when people ask me – what *exactly* is it you do in your role?

Being MMHS's CEO means spinning many large plates continuously. It also means regularly bending down to pick up some of the medium-sized and smaller plates lying in a pile by my feet that don't need to be in the air all the time!

What are these large plates, you might be wondering? I'll name four:

- working on MMHS's financial sustainability;
- ensuring our properties are being managed well;
- creating, varying and releasing ministerial equity;
- and handling diverse pastoral needs.

I have some great people supporting me, so the task is not a lonely one. However, it is hugely demanding.

We serve a community who are good at praying and will know well the words of James 5:16 – *'the prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective'*! Do pray for us all, staff team and trustees, as we seek to work out what is best for MMHS.

Ambushed by God

headlines when he called for Christmas to be banned.

Just months after his ordination, the BBC reported on his condemnation of the festive season as a time of 'madness' that brought sadness and misery. The Samaritans tell us that over the Christmas period more people attempt suicide than at any other time, more families break up, there are more arguments,' Martin told the media.

He made news again six years later, this time calling for church to be a 'gossip-free zone'. Describing Martin as 'the controversial cleric', the *Manchester Evening News* reported him as saying, 'I

want to highlight that we can really hurt each other with our words'.

A lifelong fan of Chelsea, Martin served as club chaplain for six years. He led the memorial service for team legend Peter Osgood in 2006. He made a presentation to Chelsea's oldest living player Reg Williams in 2011. 'I've had more conversations about God at football than I have at church,' Martin explained.

He and wife Marilyn became MMHS residents in 2019. They moved to one of our properties in the East Midlands. 'We're in a lovely house and we're being very well looked after,' said Martin. 🏡

Call the contractor!

HOMES ARE BEING TRANSFORMED ACROSS THE COUNTRY – AND OUR RESIDENTS ARE LOVING THE RESULTS

Retired Deacon Kathleen Hutton was surprised when her house in Gloucestershire was inspected, as part of our external decoration programme.



Deacon Kathleen Hutton

However, our contractor found issues with the brick path to Kathleen's back door, which is the main entrance to her home. 'Without being asked, they re-laid it, and it's smashing,' she said.

Despite a dreadful winter, the workers did a similar job on another path, tidying up the slabs. Amid freezing conditions, they repainted facias, cleaned windows and frames and smartened up the garage door.

'They seemed to do everything they could to make the place look great,' said Kathleen. 'They went above and beyond. And they were nice. They were good to have around – especially in lockdown.'

Aged 85, Kathleen has been an MMHS

WHAT YOU CAN DO

If you need external decoration work, phone **020 3848 6020** Option 1.

resident since 1999. She had been a deacon for 11 years, and before that, she was a nurse and midwife. She spent part of her 33 years with the NHS in London in the early 60s.

'Everybody says to me, "Do you watch 'Call The Midwife'?" said Kathleen. 'I say, no, I don't, because I was a midwife in the East End...I've done it all!'

Retired Presbyterian Revd Steph Jenner and husband Peter found contractors to complete much needed work on their home in Dorset. That included pulling out a massive 60-foot-long hedge and tree that dominated their front garden, replacing it with a new fence.

'The hedge was four foot wide in places, so we've got three foot of garden back and our nextdoor neighbour has a foot of garden back, so he's pleased,' said Steph.

'The tree at the bottom was known as "the poison tree" because various children who'd played in the garden used to get rashes from it.' Thankfully, that is



Revd Steph Jenner and husband Peter

How to enjoy free mail with email

Email is free mail that fixes broken connections. That's what computer support group AbilityNet have found.

Volunteer Scott Thomas told us of an AbilityNet client who had lost contact with an old friend. The client and his friend used to exchange letters, but hadn't been in touch for a long time. Then the client discovered his friend had an email address.

'I said, "Why not send her an email?" Scott recalled. The client was a little sceptical. But we sent it. The next session a week later, you could see it had an impact on him because she had replied! It led to a phone call – and they carried on exchanging emails.'

So how do the rest of us join this journey? The first thing you need is access to the internet, the global system of interconnected computer networks.

being replaced with a lavender bush. So 'the poison tree' is now 'the healing tree'.

Workers also re-laid the path that ran alongside the front garden, and replaced a rotten kitchen door. The Jenners are delighted with the external decoration work. 'A lot of people walk past and admire the garden now,' said Steph.

The couple moved into the house in autumn 2020. At 52, Steph took early retirement through ill health. Before she was a minister, she worked as a civil engineer for British Rail and a fund-raising officer for Methodist Homes. 'This is a lovely part of the world,' said Steph. 'We have great support and a lot of family here. It's very good of MMHS to provide us with a property here'.

MMHS Property Director Paul Gillam said, 'We're thankful for residents' feedback. While we're inspecting as many properties as we can, get in touch if something needs attention at your home'. 🏡



Photo: Shutterstock
WONDERFUL WEB: email is any time, anywhere, immediate, environmentally-friendly, cost effective and safe when used with general safety principles

You can get internet access straightaway – at your local library. Chat with the librarian, to make sure they have a suitable multiuser policy in place, and ask if any other users can see your data. Librarians can also give tips on using the computer.

A number of companies offer free accounts. These include – Gmail, Outlook, Yahoo!, iCloud – and even the old America Online or AOL.

How do you set it up? Scott said most email services offer a 'pretty standard' sign-up process. Usually you provide your name, date of birth and phone

number – and choose a password. Scott recommended using a short phrase of 14 to 30 characters that only makes sense to you.

Choosing four – or more – random words that have no connection but are easy to remember is a good place to start, eg 'pencil roof mummy water'. The key thing is to never use your name, date of birth or anything people can link to you. Be random!

For email at home, you will need a broadband or mobile connection. You also need a device such as smartphone, computer, laptop or tablet.

AbilityNet have helped create a magnetic postcard with their details. A free card should be with your *Roof 'n' Roots*. Place your AbilityNet postcard somewhere to remind you about help with email. 'It's an exciting world to be in,' said Scott, 'why not go for it?' 📧

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- **Call** AbilityNet on 0800 048 7642 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm)
- **Email** AbilityNet at enquiries@abilitynet.org.uk
- **Tell us** your current preferred email address by contacting data@mmhs.org.uk

Electrical testing powers up

As England's Covid restrictions fade, our electrical testing flickers into life again. Easing lockdown will spark a wave of inspections – as we continue with our vital five-year programme to keep residents safe and secure in their homes.

These important tests are usually arranged area by area, by our contractors, Essex-based HES Fire Protection Ltd. Backed by more than 24 years in the industry, they have a network of qualified engineers across the country who carry out inspections on the Society's behalf.

If you get a phone call from HES to arrange a test at your property, please do your utmost to accommodate them on the timescale suggested. HES are here to serve you. 🏡



Photo: Shutterstock

WHAT YOU CAN DO

For those continuing to self-isolate or shield for health reasons, we can make special arrangements so an engineer can visit. Someone would need to be present at the property for the duration of the test. If you have any concerns, contact the property team on **020 3848 6020** Option 1.



Photo: Shutterstock

Do you enjoy making a difference? If so, the MMHS Board needs you!

Help shape our future. We're looking to fill two ministerial resident vacancies on our Board. These openings have emerged since the untimely death of a trustee/director, and the completion of term in office by another.

You will join a friendly, effective Board committed to the vision, mission and values of MMHS. The Board is working through much change, as MMHS seeks to be the best it can be.

We are looking for people who are relational, with a good understanding of charity and company law – or a willingness to learn. We would love to hear from you if you have experience in property management or finance.

The Board meets regularly through the year. New trustees/directors would also be expected to join a committee. We hope future meetings will be a mix of

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- For an initial one-to-one chat, email CEO Mairi Johnstone mjohnstone@mmhs.org.uk
- For a recruitment pack, email Governance and Data Officer Alwyn Jones ajones@mmhs.org.uk

on-screen and in-person. Applications will close on 24 September 2021. Interviews with take place in October 2021. 🏠

Why post is precious in a pandemic

REFLECTION BY
REVD NEVILLE WHITEHEAD

First, the familiar rattle, followed by the gentlest 'plop' as the envelope hits the doormat. This is not manila, nor standard business white. This is personal. I fall on this scrap of paper like some caged creature seeking to devour a morsel. Hurriedly, I slice open the crisp fold to draw out the contents. I read the familiar, distinctive, handwritten script. As I come to the end of the two pages, I reflect on how much rarer is this experience these days.

During lockdown, devoid of physical contact, written communication is precious. It's almost a hug in writing.



Having surfed the lines and skimmed the content, I return to the beginning and swim through every word, savouring every nuanced phrase. Satisfied there is no further information to be extracted, I draw out a sheet of pristine white paper on which to respond, 'Dear...'

During lockdown, devoid of physical contact, written communication is precious. It's almost a hug in writing

As I think of the physical act of handwriting, I recall its complexity and expressiveness, as unique as fingerprints, it is comparable to writing music. The spaces between words are almost as important as the words themselves, like silence between notes of music.

Exchanging letters has operatic force. It gives us the means to express thought and feeling in a personal way – only a little short of touch. We should not let it die. Digital media is vital to keep us connected. But as we set up these electronic links, let's not forget its organic ancestor. 🏠

Revd Neville Whitehead is an MMHS resident. His article is adapted, with permission, from *Lockdown: Lexicon & Legacy*, published by Church in the Market Place Publications. Neville is among a number of MMHS householders who contributed to this book.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Share your story of lockdown. Your experience could encourage and inspire others. Email feedback@mmhs.org.uk

