

Dear Friends

As some of you will know, the Haskett household is currently a hive of activity and excitement as we make the final preparations for our daughter Beth's wedding later this month. Obviously, the church, the reception venue, marquee, caterers and photographer were all booked some time ago, so now we are addressing all the extra little bits and pieces like table and marquee decorations and various activities and games for folk to amuse themselves with during the course of the day.

What, we wondered, could we get that would keep people happily and safely occupied even after a few glasses of beer or wine? Well, there was one thing that immediately sprung to my mind. You see, I have always wanted a croquet set and now I had an excuse to buy one. However, it couldn't be any old croquet set, it had to be the right croquet set – a proper vintage one, made by Jaques (the ultimate croquet manufacturers) and it had to be in a wooden box.

For several weeks Graham and I scoured ebay trying to find something suitable that we could afford, to be honest we hadn't realised how expensive they were and were just about to resort to buying a brand new set of inferior quality when another appeared on the auction site. Not only was this one vintage with mallets made of English Ash and in a wooden box, but it also had the bonus of being specially made for sale by Harrods with the "Harrods" name emblazoned across the top.

Well call me shallow if you like, (Graham most certainly did) but I just had to have it and I was prepared to pay whatever it took to get it. We had to wait over a week for it to be delivered – Graham was convinced that when it arrived it would be beaten up and useless – I was more hopeful. So it was that we unwrapped the parcel with a certain amount of fear and trepidation when it arrived yesterday – had I really wasted my money?

Well, although it was clear that the set had been the source of a great deal of enjoyment in the past, I don't think I had. Everything was complete, intact and in good order so needless to say, we were both very anxious to have a game. The problem was, neither of us could remember the rules properly and when we checked them on the internet they seemed more than a little confusing. Thus it was that, armed with a set of basic rules that we had downloaded, we laid out the wickets and started to play. Do you know what? we had a super time, and the rules which had seemed so confusing before, suddenly fell into place and seemed very straightforward as we started to play.

Well all this got me thinking (surprise surprise). People often think about church and religion in much the same way as I originally thought about my croquet set – they seem to focus on the box (the building) or it's age and history (Tradition). As vicar of some very ancient and beautiful listed church buildings I would be the last person to say that there is anything wrong with valuing the history and architecture that they contain or the traditions that have been handed down throughout the generations.

However, this should not be the be all and end all. Just as the important thing about my old and well used croquet set was the fact that it enabled us to come together and enjoy taking part in the game, so, I believe the important part of any Church is it's ability to draw people together and enable them to help each other get the best out of life. There are of course also rules which we should try and keep as we do this, however, unlike croquet, they are very simple and easy to understand rules. Love the Lord your God, appreciate how much he loves you and love your neighbour as yourself. If only we could all do this I believe we would be able to live far happier and more affirming lives.

Please feel free to contact me if you would like to know more, or you are always welcome to join us for one of our services and hopefully really experience what being part of Christs family here on earth is truly about.

With many blessings for the coming month.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a curved line above the word "Hana".

Hana