

WELCOMING EVERYONE TO LICHFIELD WITH RESPECT AND KINDNESS

ISSUE 4 DECEMBER 2024

LICHFIELD DISTRICT CITY OF SANCTUARY

Another year is drawing to a close, and as you read this, many of you will be preparing for the Christmas festivities - although I respectfully recognise that many amongst our diverse community will have honoured their own respective religious festivals during the year. Interestingly, I find that whilst our Ukrainian residents celebrate Christmas in their native country, this festival was actually celebrated each year in Ukraine on January 7th, in accordance with the Julian calendar, until 2017, when it was changed to 25th December as per the Gregorian and revised Julian calendars. Christmas continued to be observed on both of these dates until 2022, but is now officially celebrated on 25th December only. Howsoever you may intend to observe/spend the Christmas period, my simple message, which is - I hope - universal, is to wish all who read this newsletter peace, safety and security, within a community which embraces inclusion, understanding, tolerance and compassion - sentiments which I truly believe transcend any differences of belief and religion.

This fourth newsletter will reminisce upon - and indeed celebrate - the close of an eventful year in which we saw, amongst many memorable events, the appointment of our first employee, Abigail Parkes, who has swiftly embraced the role of Community Co-ordinator. A warm welcome to Abigail, and many congratulations upon your worthy appointment. We also celebrated our fifth Birthday this year, with a visit to Middleton Hall our fifth Birthday celebration at Middleton Hall. This event took place in the aftermath of the appalling demonstrations of violence, senseless prejudice and hatred seen in the race riots which swept across the country only a week or so earlier, and was therefore particularly important to all of us, in bringing people together with warmth and laughter, and showing how, through kindness, compassion and tolerance, we may all live alongside each other in peace and harmony, irrespective of race, creed or beliefs, in the cause of non-judgemental support and inclusivity, to achieve a supportive, welcoming and open-hearted community where all are welcomed and treated with respect, understanding and sanctuary, irrespective of race, gender, poverty or disability, violence or abuse. To this end, I am pleased to yet again report an increase in our membership to one hundred and one. Sincere thanks to you all, for your commitment and generosity of time and funds. This remains sadly so necessary, so please continue to help us to co-ordinate vital services, practical help and advice for those who might otherwise remain isolated and marginalised.

Happy holiday, and all the best you all for a happy, healthy 2025.

ROSEMARY BISHOP
Editor

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Francis Barber c1742—1801

Due in no small part to the sterling work of Ann Hughes and Pam Tomlinson during 2022, plans for a Lichfield City Council plaque on Cruck House honouring former resident of Stowe Street, Francis Barber, were approved in January 2023. Cedric Barber, 4x great-grandson of Francis, who now lives in north Staffordshire, played an active part in the celebration of this landmark event, and also subsequently joined us on our Penance for Slavery march last December.

With Francis Barber justifiably given long-overdue recognition as friend and trusted aide to Dr Samuel Johnson, and one of the first black headmasters in England, Cedric was earlier this year approached by the local press, who wished to write an article about this esteemed, but sadly overlooked Lichfield resident. An abridged version of the moving story which Cedric subsequently submitted is now set below for the benefit of our readers -

‘As a direct descendant of a black slave boy who could easily have died in oblivion over 200 years ago, but instead became famous by his intimate association with Dr Johnson, Cedric Barber is both honoured and proud to acknowledge and to make known his African/Jamaican roots

As a slave son of slave parents whose family, like many other African families, had been forcibly transported to Jamaica, Cedric’s 4 x Great Grandfather was sold to a gentleman who subsequently returned to England, taking the boy, now 8 years old, with him, where he was subsequently educated, ‘Christianised’ and renamed Francis Barber. The year was now 1752, and family friend Dr Samuel Johnson was in the middle of compiling the first comprehensive English dictionary. He was vehemently opposed to the slave trade at a time when the monarchy, government and church at the time were generally in favour of it. In the course of this acquaintanceship, Francis was ‘given’ to Dr Johnson - a willing gesture on his part to demonstrate his strong views upon the Slave Trade. Under the doctor’s care and guidance, Francis was treated as a son, expensively educated, and officially granted freedom from slavery at the age of 16. After two subsequent years of adventure and travel in military service, Francis became trusted confidant, secretary, friend, carer and indeed son to Johnson, living in Dr Johnson’s house where he later married and raised a family. In December 1783, when the doctor was 74 and failing in health, he made a will leaving Frank as his main beneficiary and providing for him financially. He passed away a year later, having previously advised Francis to move to Lichfield where he would be free of those who sought to deprive him of his inheritance. In 1794, Francis set up a school in Burntwood which he led as headmaster, and undoubtedly the first black headmaster in England, until his retirement to Lichfield where he lived in Stowe Street with his wife, Betsy and his children, Elizabeth, Samuel and Ann until his death in 1801. It was during this time that Francis provided the most detailed information to James Boswell, Johnson’s biographer, for his acclaimed ‘Life of Johnson’. His son, Samuel Barber (named after the great man) went on to be the first black preacher in the highly significant ‘Primitive Methodist Revival’ which began in North Staffordshire in the beginning of the 19th century. Two historic milestones – the first black headmaster and the first black preacher. As Cedric movingly says, “It is true that man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart.” 200 > years on, Francis finally succeeded in being included in the 2003 ‘100 Great Black Britons’.

Cedric has ensured that his own children are made aware of their roots and to make them proud of their African/Jamaican origins. And in an ironic turn of events, he has adopted into his own family a young man from Nigeria.

In a happy postscript to the above, LDCoS recently extended a unanimously supported offer of honorary membership to Cedric and his wife, which was swiftly and willingly accepted





The Children's Country House Museum | Sudbury Hall

Back in the summer of 2023, a group of more than sixty friends and members of LDCoS enjoyed a memorable day at the National Trust's Children's House Museum at Sudbury, where they were warmly welcomed by David Longford, programming and partnerships manager, and his team, and enjoyed touring the house, picnicking, playing rounders and eating ice cream in the sunshine. So, we were particularly delighted when David subsequently contacted us to suggest an LDCoS/National Trust collaboration to create artwork on the theme of Cinderella as the story appears in cultures and traditions worldwide. David and Sudbury storyteller, Lynne, met members at Curborough Community Centre on 13th October to launch the project and to share ideas, inspiration and a lot of laughter. Art Tutor, Mariana, along with Luba and Abi then led an art workshop where representations of glass slippers, pumpkin coaches and mean sisters began to take shape.

We now hope that the Sunday Art Group's work will feature in the Children's House Museum's Christmas Exhibition (7th December 2024 - 6th January 2025), which will complement this year's 'Once Upon a Time' festive theme at Sudbury Hall which launches on 30th November 2024.

Once upon a Time at The Children's Country House at Sudbury

Step inside a fairytale as The Children's Country House transforms into a Cinderella story this Christmas.

"From 30 November 2024 to 6 January 2025, be transported into a tale as old as time at The Children's Country House at Sudbury as mice, clocks, pumpkins and more, take over the property and tell the story of Cinderella. Admire Christmas trees in the Hall, meet Father Christmas (on selected dates), follow Cinderella's journey to the ball and be enchanted in the gardens. Cinderella is the beginning of our new 'Once Upon a Time' festive theme. This Christmas, The Children's Country House at Sudbury transforms into a fairytale, inviting visitors to explore a captivating Cinderella story throughout the property. Discover what the mice are up to in the Hall, immerse yourself in enchanting tales of Cinderella from around the world, and enjoy displays that bring the beloved story to life.

Wander through beautifully decorated rooms, each depicting a different Cinderella scene, and don't miss the magical garden where you can spot the pumpkin carriage, discover and play. End your visit with a cosy visit to the cafe, complete with warm treats and hot chocolate.

Bring the whole family to experience the magic of Christmas at The Children's Country House."



'Let's Imagine' 2024



Following the success of our Christmas Brunch 2023, which was sponsored by HCB Solicitors and ValeFresco Fine Foods, we are delighted that once again - due largely to the sterling efforts and passionate commitment of xxxx xxxxxxxx - HCB have generously agreed to support this year's festive-themed 'Let's Imagine' event, which is to be held on 22nd November 2024, with the kind assistance and participation of Waterstones bookstore in Lichfield.

Refugee children and their families will be invited to join us at a local venue for a warming drink and snacks after school, and will be given a brief for the evening's events, together with an empty gift bag which they will be invited to fill up during the event with items which will unleash their imagination. They will then be escorted to Waterstones bookstore where they will be invited to relax and enjoy an after-hours story telling session from local historian, tour leader, and accomplished storyteller Sarah Dale. Each child will then be invited to select a book of their choice (a limit on price will once again be set, dependent on the number of attendees). Each family will also get a printed copy of a refugee story written specially for the event by xxxx xxxxxxxx, bearing LDCoS and HCB branding.

And finally - time to go home, with gift bags supplemented by sweet treats, and imaginations hopefully unleashed.



Reflections , experiences and mutual learnings shared by a local host and his Ukrainian house guest



As the situation in Ukraine escalated in late 2023, LDCOS Vice-Chair and his partner took the decision to extend the hand of friendship and hospitality to one of the many displaced people seeking sanctuary in our country, and indeed in our City. Twelve months on, Neil and his house guests have very kindly agreed to share with us the experiences and learnings which they have each gained as a result of this mutual life-change.

Neil -

"It really was a no-brainer for Mike and I to become hosts under the HomesforUkraine Scheme. We are extremely fortunate to have a large house in central Lichfield, very well suited to share with others. We also had experience of having single lodgers live with us in New Zealand. We started off with the idea of taking in a single man, both because that was what we had previously been used to, and also with the knowledge that single men from Ukraine had fewer options in finding hosts. So Andrii arrived, a very active 40 year old young - to us ! - man. Suddenly, the back yard was swept, things got mended and we were sampling delicious Ukrainian food. After a few months in this vein, we began to realise how difficult it was for Andrii to be separated from his wife Kate and 10 year old daughter Ania, as indeed it was for them, and that we had to do something to help. So after a little reorganisation of room space and the sacrifice of a much loved study, Kate and Ania arrived in March, and it has been a great success and joy for both us as hosts and for our guest family. We all still have our personal space, as well as the opportunity to join together on occasions, We remain supportive, but encourage the family to develop independent lives. It is a happy, normal home, welcoming to all who may wish to visit—indeed I teach ESOL English, so there have been many Ukrainians popping in to visit ! We also enjoy meeting friends who may call to Andrii and Kate, and also Ania's play companions, - although two weeks ago, Ania came home from school carrying a trombone, so our one house rule now is that if she needs to practice, she should go to the top of the garden. I'm not sure what the neighbours think of us yet !

Kate -

"This is my oasis. That's how I would describe our life with Neil and Mike. It's hard to put into words what it's like to be forced to flee your home in an attempt to save yourself and your child from war. You step into the unknown, not knowing if you will ever be able to find a home again. We tried to build a new home in several countries, often living with people who weren't necessarily friends or even acquaintances. And had to adapt to that reality, find compromises, create new rules for living, and continue searching for our place. Then, around September 2023, on a platform for finding sponsors in the UK, Neil reached out to my husband. After a few exchanges and video calls with him and his partner Mike, my husband was invited to apply through the Ukrainian sponsorship scheme and become their guest. At that time, my daughter and I already had experience living in England with sponsors and, accordingly, we had our BRPs. So, we decided that my husband would go ahead and settle in, and we would join him later, as I was still working in Germany. In October, my husband arrived in Lichfield, and just before New Year 2024, Neil and his partner invited our daughter and myself to join them. We were deeply moved by this because they sacrificed their own comfort to free up another room for our daughter, so that the council could approve our move.

It was, of course, nerve-racking to start over again, and to learn to live with new people, but everything turned out to be much easier and simpler than expected. Our hosts turned out to be people with incredibly open souls and very kind hearts. We feel their support every day. They have become very dear to us. Their home has become a cosy haven, one that you always want to return to. Neil and Mike are people who truly care about you, and they are always ready to listen, help, and offer support. And it is not just about us. They are always willing to help to people in need. Neil's wisdom and experience often help. We even have traditional family dinners together now. We want to celebrate family holidays with them because it feels like family. "





Trip to Stratford Upon Avon, birthplace of William Shakespeare



It was the perfect Autumn day for our day trip to Stratford. The sun was shining and the air was crisp. Upon arrival in this historic town, we enjoyed Nigel Gann's interesting and highly apposite reading of "The Strangers Case" – a surprisingly contemporary attitude towards immigration, thought to be written by William Shakespeare, but never actually performed, as it was banned by the Queens censor. You can read the speech and more about why it was written here, <https://myshakespeare.com/hamlet/the-strangers-case-speech-sir-thomas-more>. The reading of this speech was interpreted by our Ukrainian translator for the day, Marina. Whilst the majority of our guests were Ukrainian, we were proud and delighted to welcome friends and members of the LDCoS from Afghanistan, Hong Kong, and Syria, demonstrating a diversity and strength of community which transcended barriers of language and culture as we all came together to immerse ourselves in the life and environs of the great bard.

Everybody was made aware of the options available to them, and from that point onwards, it was up to each of us to choose how we spent our day, with all activities well and appreciatively attended - indeed our only regret was that we did not have the time to see and do more! As well as admiring the history and tradition of the buildings and streets on guided town walks, we were also given the opportunity to visit the Shakespeare birthplace museum and the Royal Shakespeare Theatre. For a welcome, and much needed lunch break in between all the fun, we were warmly welcomed into the Holy Trinity Parish Centre with the Holy Trinity Church just opposite. By the time we regrouped at the end of our day, the coach was filled with warm, positive, animated chatter, and with uplifted spirits, and new friendships made.



Sincere gratitude must be expressed to both guests and organizers alike, without whom this memorable day would not have been such a success, with particular thanks extended to our volunteer translators Iryna Komazova (Ira) and Kateryna Borovska (Kate), and of course to professional interpreter Marina, from **thetranslationpeople** love language.

It seems only appropriate to end this account of such a happy day with a truly beautiful quote from Shakespeare's 'Romeo and Juliet', which we were invited to recite whilst standing near to the stage where so many of the great man's plays have been performed.

Act 3, Scene 2

*Give me my Romeo, and when I shall die,
Take him and cut him out in little stars,
And he will make the face of heaven so fine
That all the world will be in love with night
And pay no worship to the garish sun.*

This memorable speech, in which Juliet speaks of her star-crossed lover Romeo, inspired Brighton-based artist Steven Follen's extremely moving installation, entitled 'For all time' which hangs in the Swan wing exhibition space, of the theatre, and is made from 2,000 handmade stars suspended sequentially to represent a human face, surrounded by further stars reflecting the position of the constellations on Shakespeare's Birthday, with the title taken from Ben Jonson's eulogy to Shakespeare, 'He was not of an age, but for all time' (it is interesting to note that the piece is also nicknamed 'Starman', after David Bowie, who died during the year in which it was created !)



Abigail Parkes

Community Co-ordinator (aka roving reporter extraordinaire !)

Action Group End of Year update/report

This year we have had a group of around sixteen Action Group members. Although everyone has not been able to join every meeting we have always had a core group of around eight or ten very effective and efficient participants. We very much like to think that we do 'as it says on the tin' and take 'action' on a variety of topics. It has been wonderful to welcome representatives from our Faith Places of Sanctuary and they certainly add a depth to our discussions and decisions.

We have welcomed several visitors to our meetings throughout the year. Julie Geer made a return visit to update us on the second very successful Pop up Ukrainian Restaurant in February. Andrea Horsnall PCSO and Megan McMulkin explained ways in which the police were working and could work in the future with Refugee families and Natalie Greening from the Alzheimer's Society and Burton and District Mind discussed ways in which Refugee families could access mental health support. More recently David Longford from Sudbury Children's House Museum attended our meeting to discuss the possibility of our families taking part in 'A Worldwide Cinderella Project' to be staged and displayed at Sudbury National Trust Museum this Christmas. David and his team have since been in to work with members of the Sunday Art group (see further details in this Newsletter).

We are very grateful to our Action Group members not just for the 'action' they take when volunteers are required to fulfil a particular role, but also for the ideas they generate. The Walk of Penance was such an idea and led to a public event in Lichfield to mark the International Day for the Abolition of Slavery. In July the Action Group worked alongside Ukrainians in Lichfield District to initiate, organise and stage the successful 'Books for Children' Fuse Festival Stall.

It's been an exciting year of getting out and about and sharing some fabulous locations, thanks to the hard work of members of the Action Group. Hopefully many of you experienced the delights of Beaudesert in May, the wonderful visit to Middleton Hall in August and our recent foray to Stratford in October. All events were organised by Action Group members and loved by everyone who attended. For each occasion, the sun shone, we learnt a lot and most importantly, the company was excellent! We plan to do it all over again next year.

We are looking forward to our pre-Christmas event 'Let's Imagine'. Our refugee family members will be invited to explore the shelves after hours at Waterstones, choose a book, engage with a storyteller and sip a hot chocolate! This stems from another exciting suggestion from one of our members, followed up with a bid for funding for this event and of course the hard work of the volunteers to get it up and running.

If you would like to get involved in the Action Group please do get in touch with us via admin@lichfield.cityofsanctuary.org. It would be lovely to see you at one of our meetings.

Pam Tomlinson

Chair, Lichfield District City of Sanctuary Action Group



Nigel Gann, Secretary and founder member of LDCOS, shares his comments and experiences of the last few months LDCoS activities/achievements.

Lichfield District City of Sanctuary reached the fine old age of 5 years in September. In that time, we have worked with hundreds of displaced people now living in and around Lichfield – and with dozens of community groups and other organisations sharing and respecting our aims to show everyone how welcoming Lichfield can be.

Much of this has happened against a background of a government that explicitly appealed to people's worst instincts, to fear and resent newcomers, and a local government starved of funds. Already though, I think, the national climate is changing. People are beginning to recognise that incomers bring new skills and new cultures. Already, businesses are noticing that those joining us from the most horrific war zones in Europe and beyond bring a resilience and a skill-set that we need so much here. They also show us that – even as Shakespeare recognised (see the account of our trip to Stratford) – some people will always react negatively to changing circumstances.

We saw that in England in August. We also saw some of our new friends and our long-term residents locking themselves indoors for days at a time.

Little has been said locally about the impact of widespread and very nearby disturbances aimed at – who? The man who drives your taxi or the woman who waits at your table? The people who staff the hospitals and the schools? The family in your corner shop? But do not be deceived. People living in 'peaceful Lichfield' *were* affected and many of them still are. The veneer of civilised behaviour can be thin, even here. For this reason, it would be good to hear a bit more speaking up for Lichfield as it is, with all its diversity of nationality, culture and skills, from our local political representatives.

Lichfield City Council has made a point of celebrating our progress towards a multicultural society. Can we hear more from our other councils and our local media?

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Nigel Gann". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending from the bottom of the name.

Building a Ukrainian library

Back in January, we started working with the Ukrainian community and Staffordshire Libraries to get a stock of Ukrainian books available to the growing community here in Lichfield. A free stall at Lichfield Fuse – thanks to them – enabled a team of Ukrainian residents supported by members of City of Sanctuary to raise over £800. This has now been spent with a Ukrainian publisher based in Tamworth and the Library service has taken possession of over sixty books for children and adults. We look forward to seeing these on the shelves soon. Meanwhile, the Garrick Theatre is offering space for the community to place their own books available for loan and for story-telling. More news of this soon.



Calendar of LDCoS events October—January 2025



Sunday, 27 th October	9.30am-5.30pm	Guests trip to Stratford-upon-Avon	Coach to depart from Lichfield Bus station 09:30am	Information from nigel-gann@lichfield.cityofsanctuary.org
Wednesday, 30th October		Half-term storytelling session with Abi & Luba (see image below).	Lichfield library	
Wednesday, 6 th November	7.00-9.00pm	ACTION GROUP	Curborough Community Centre	All members welcome
Friday, 22 nd November	5.00pm -7.00pm	Let's Imagine	Waterstones, Lichfield	Helpers wanted
Sunday, 24 th November	5.00pm	Christmas Illuminations in City Centre, with Mayor & Sheriff of Lichfield in attendance.	Market Square, Lichfield	Do come along !
Tuesday, 14 th January 2025	12.00-3.30	Volunteers Fair	Lichfield Cathedral	Volunteers needed, please



Ukrainian storytelling with Abi and Luba, 30th October 2024

And finally -

A word from our most prestigious honorary member Reginald Gann Esq



Well, here we are at the close of another year, during which I have observed with interest (and occasional disdain), not only the shrieval elevation of my devoted cook and bottle washer, but also the continuing growth of Lichfield District City of Sanctuary within our historic city. I regret the sad lack of feline colleagues amongst our growing membership, but extend a warm and gracious welcome to all new members who have helped to swell our ranks during this last year. I continue to actively campaign for an additional question to be added to our membership form regarding feline preferences, but in the meantime, thank you to *all* members, both new *and* old, for your continuing loyalty and generous commitment of both time and financial contributions, no matter how small. This is sincerely appreciated, and may LDCOS continue to offer a supportive, open-hearted, inclusive welcome to all who arrive in our wonderful City, both on two feet and on four paws, as we go into 2025.

As I write this, many of you will by now have enjoyed a trip to the historic market town of Stratford-Upon-Avon, the home of Elizabethan bard William Shakespeare. I did apply for a ticket myself, but was for some reason overlooked. Being somewhat miffed at this, I spent the day instead rereading my well-pawed copy of the bard's works, and in researching the life of this great man, I was delighted to learn that he was a cat lover, and devoted servant to his own 'Tuxedo' cat. Indeed, in that great work of 1889 by cat-devotee Harrison Weir, entitled 'Our Cats', Mr Weir wrote the following words: "Like nearly all else of which Shakespeare wrote, he displayed both wonderful and accurate knowledge, not only of the form, nature, habits, and food of the cat, but also the inner life, the disposition, what it was, of what capable, and what it resembled."

It was also pleasing to note that Shakespeare mentions the word 'cat' over forty-four times in his plays and sonnets - although I am not so keen on the somewhat questionable line from Hamlet, which reads "*The cat will mew, and the dog will have his day*", hmmm..... Oh well, at least he acknowledges our acute powers of perception in Coriolanus, "*I would he had*"? *'Twas you incens'd the rabble; Cats, that can judge as fitly of his worth as I can of those mysteries which heaven will not have earth to know.*"

Enough of my soliloquizing, adieu, adieu, adieu, dear members, and "I wish you all the joy that you can wish." ('The Merchant of Venice' (1596-8) act 3, sc. 2, l. 191)

Reginald Gann Esq

