

# Responsibility

*John and Fiona Earle*

Our Shorter Oxford Dictionary states that the word has been in use since 1599. Essentially, it is said to mean "Accountable for one's actions". Should we expand this to "Accountable for one's actions, and thinking of their impact on others".

Surely we should think about the care of others. That means doing our best by our family, friends, our pets, and we are all responsible for the state of the planet, where we live. This is a huge concept. It may focus on global warming and rather overlook our local responsibilities.

Do we put out food for the birds? Quite a lot of us certainly do, as we regularly sell bird nuts and seeds from our Produce Stall in All Saints Church. What about the insects that provide the food for swallows, just one species of insect-eating birds? As children we remember swallows gathering on telephone wires before migrating south. There might be a few hundred swallows. They live on flies. We humans have really attacked the insect kingdom. This is crazy, because we need insects to fertilise plants, especially our fruit and vegetables.

Can anything be done about this? Certainly. Roadsides often have a growth of dandelions – a stunning sight in full flower. Graveyards are a mini nature reserve in the midst of towns. The Council could refrain from cutting verges until the flowers are over and have seeded. The dandelions seem very important since they are yellow, and insects are attracted to yellow, also they come early in the season.

What about hedges and woodland? When fields were small, hedges acted as a link between two small woodland areas, virtually creating a single area. They also provided nesting sites for birds. The hedges should not be cut until the birds have laid their eggs, and the chicks have flown, under the present law. Now we prefer bigger fields since huge machinery is used. This makes economic sense, but at a cost to wildlife. Some farmers do leave the headlands for wildlife, particularly if they like a bit of rough shooting, as this is beneficial for partridges and pheasants.

## **The weather**

Certainly, we often listen to weather forecasts or see weather maps in newspapers. Fine. Helpful. However the maps are on an area basis. Certainly in Scotland, the weather may

be different in two adjacent valleys, particularly if they are separated by a crest that is 2-3,000 feet high. The only way to go walking safely, or cross-country skiing, is to check for oneself the direction of the wind, and to learn what various cloud patterns may mean, as well as checking the weather forecast.

## **Ourselves as children**

At home, when she was 6 – 8 years old, Fiona was responsible for gathering green food for the rabbits, which were kept to provide food, and grooming her brother's pony when he was away at school. Later, she was taught more advanced riding by an ex-Army Colonel. After riding he always stressed that it was her responsibility to attend to all the needs of her horse, that it was clean, dry, fed and watered, before going in for a cup of tea or a bite to eat herself.

Aged between 5 and 6 John would travel by bus, by himself, from his home to primary school. Coming home, there was little traffic so it was safe for him to cross the road by himself. He walked down to the bus station and waited there for the right bus to take him home.

Parenting children should include letting them make mistakes and learn from them. They need to take risks and assess risk, to do a bit of exploring by themselves. That is sometimes easier to do in the countryside than in towns, but there may be climbing walls or adventure playgrounds for the benefit of children.

## **Later in life**

At a teaching hospital, John could see that a consultant was responsible for seeing the correct diagnosis was made for each patient, that appropriate treatment was given and the patient's progress was being followed. The consultant would not do this himself but would delegate this responsibility to other more junior doctors.

Nowadays doctors get about ten minutes to listen to a patient, examine a part such as a sprained ankle (is it broken) and arrange treatment. An older person may have several problems. We are tending to live longer, though there was an account of the survivors of the Battle of Trafalgar in The Times recently. The last surviving Frenchman, who had been a powder-monkey, died when he was 100, and the last surviving Spaniard died aged 104!

However, within the older age group there will be some people with several aspects of ill health. About 40 years ago, the healthiest group in the country was (and still is) the healthy young. The second healthiest group was the healthy elderly! Some of us looked on the 50s and 60s as the minefield of human life. We ourselves found them very good decades. We did a lot of walking in Scotland, in the alps, the Dolomites and eventually got hooked on visiting Nepal. Sometimes we went trekking, sometimes birdwatching, sometimes riding elephants into the jungle, and often visiting schools in a remote area of Nepal. We support them still through the Produce Stall in All Saints Church.

There have been many social changes during the past 40 years. There are now many more cars on the road (and they are bigger!), fewer cyclists, children are much less likely to walk to school. Their parents may be (quite reasonably) afraid the children may be hit by traffic. More people live in towns and cities, so going for a country walk (with a dog) is less likely to happen. What about dogs? We certainly have responsibility here to give appropriate food, and a daily walk regardless of the weather, and suitable training. Also somewhere to sleep!

The television has invaded our lives, and we can see things that we would not previously see. However it does mean there is less time for dancing or communal activities like playing cards. It looks as if there are a lot of little arrows pointing in the same direction. We are taking less exercise. Exercise stimulates immunity.

Do we take responsibility for our own health? If we eat too much, drink too much or drive carelessly, then it actually is quite easy to convince ourselves that what we are doing is reasonable. We do have this curious outbreak of obesity in the country and no one seems to know precisely why it is happening or what to do about it. Possibly the obese have convinced themselves that they are eating sensibly and going easy on the alcohol.

### **A good turn**

About 80 years ago, John was a Boy Scout, then a patrol leader. He learnt to think of doing a good turn to someone, daily. The years have passed, but the idea remains.

Recently, in All Saints Church, a young lad aged 7 – 8 read the prayers really well. He handled the microphone correctly, wasn't in the least put off by the numbers in the congregation, and his phrasing was perfect. After the service John

walked up and sat down next to the lad and his mother. He told them he thought the lad had read extremely well. His mother was very pleased to hear this, coming from someone not in the family.

What will be the outcome from John's words? We don't know, but some people gain in confidence when praised and attempt something new to them. Surely we all have a responsibility to give praise for an act that is praiseworthy. There is another side to this. Someone may overhear what is happening and think – "I like that. The old guy is going out of his way to help the lad. Good." Praise is so much more positive than criticism.

We have not said anything about migrants. The reason is that we don't know enough about the action the UK is taking to prevent the need for emigration. Nor do we know enough about the politics. On a personal basis, many of us have migrant ancestors, and all of us surely have a responsibility to welcome and help any we come across, if we can. We do need to be able to converse, but a smile is universal, so is a frown and rejection.

## **Launch of new website**



On 22<sup>nd</sup> November (St Cecilia's Day) a new web resource [www.choralevesong.org](http://www.choralevesong.org) was launched. The website lists over 350 churches, chapels and cathedrals that regularly sing evensong.

Jo blessed a copy of the website during our Choral Evensong, just before the choir sang 'Hymn to St Cecilia' by Howells. There were blessing of the website at Choral Evensong services around Britain and Ireland, including Canterbury Cathedral & Westminster Abbey (England), Westminster Cathedral (Roman Catholic for Choral Vespers), Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin (Ireland), St. David's Cathedral (Wales), and St. Mary's Cathedral, Edinburgh (Scotland).