



Getting rid of Cliff Richard

A month ago, for my 40th birthday, a friend of mine bought me the 2015 Cliff Richard calendar. It was, I hasten to say, an 'ironic' present: it made me laugh to receive it; it made him smile to give it, and it probably only cost 99p, as nobody can sell any calendars after the Christmas present season. And since then, this A3 binder of the Peter Pan of Pop in various poses, including on a sun lounger, has been hanging around the sitting room.

I didn't put it up at first. It seemed a bit weird to do it: okay, it has the 2015 dates on it, but what if people thought I actually was a fan of Cliff? I knew it was ironic; my friend knew it was ironic, but would the average visitor to the vicarage appreciate it was ironic? After all, clergy can be pretty odd: maybe they would think I actually was a Cliff Richard fan? And I can just about sing along to "Living Doll", so maybe I am. He's also a Christian, so that's another link, but, still, putting up a calendar places you in a different league of fandom.

Then last month there were new allegations that Cliff was involved in a child abuse incident in the 1980s, so it seemed actively inappropriate to put up the calendar. But then I thought, he hasn't actually even been charged yet. So is not putting it up pre-judging justice? I was bypassing the 'innocent till proven guilty' principle. I hesitated.

Then finally (I thought) I made a decision and put it in the recycling box. This morning, as I was about to take the box out, my five year old son, picked it out

and brought it back into the kitchen affronted:

"But this is new. This can't be for recycling."

He doesn't know anything about Cliff Richard, he wouldn't know irony, but by his own lights, he was on a rescue mission. Of course, it *is* new. And as parents, we have succeeded in inculcating a "don't encourage waste for the sake of it" policy.

I could have tried to explain the various implications of being a Cliff fan in general, but that was not going to work. I certainly didn't want to bring up the recent allegations: he's only five; he can keep his innocence on this one for a bit. So I feigned surprise: "Oh, yes, you're right, how did that get in there?" I said.

So I've got the calendar back. It's now in my study. I could always, I suppose, just put it in the ordinary bin without my son realising, but that really would be a waste of the paper and the card the calendar is on. I'm going to have to smuggle it out again.

But then I really am looking suspicious. Not only does the vicar have a Cliff Richard calendar, but after the abuse allegation comes out, the vicar tries to smuggle the Cliff Richard calendar into the Council's recycling in a brown paper bag or whatever. What possible motive can there be?

I'm beginning to wish I'd been given the Kelly Brook calendar. I'd have to face the questions about cheap objectification of women in bikinis, but anything has to be easier than this.

Thought for the Train is a short column written by the Reverend Robert Stanier, the vicar of St Andrew and St Mark, Surbiton, for people to read on the train, or elsewhere. www.surbitonchurch.org.uk