

## **Good King Wenceslas – the planet's friend**

Good King Wenceslas looked out of the triple-glazed windows of the royal palace. Outside snow lay round about, deep and crisp and even. Inside however all was warm and bright, thanks to the loft insulation (16 inches minimum) and wall cavity filling that had been installed over the summer, assisted with a 70% grant from the Royal Exchequer. In the distance the king noticed a man who seemed to be gathering fallen branches from the trees and throwing them into a dilapidated Transit van.

There was a polite cough behind him. It was his page come to draw the thickly lined curtains, to prevent further heat loss. 'Hither, page,' said the king, 'and stand by me, if thou knowest, telling. Yonder peasant, who is he, where and what his dwelling? And what is he doing here?' 'Sire,' said the page, 'his name is Kevin, and he lives a good league hence. Thanks to housing benefit he rents a one-bed flat on Fountain Court from the St. Agnes Housing Association. Doubtless he is gathering wood to sell as winter fuel to his mates or as yule logs to gullible shoppers in the town. He is also trespassing. I'll call security.'

'Stay your hand, good page,' said the king. 'Did I not designate the palace grounds as a People's Park earlier this year? This man is but exercising his right to roam, and by recycling estate products his actions are entirely virtuous.'

'Your majesty is most magnanimous,' replied the page, 'but with due respect may I draw to your majesty's attention that the wood will be burnt, and that van looks so old, it cannot have any environmentally friendly features. The carbon emissions resulting from the activities we are witnessing will be vastly in excess of the levels promised by your majesty only last week at Copenhagen. I'll call security.'

'Nay!' said the king, 'all they will do is serve him with an ASBO. What he needs is re-education in the actions and behaviours required of our citizens in this age of heightened environmental awareness. We'll go and talk to him. Come on!'

Page and monarch, forth they went, forth they went together; through the rude wind's wild lament and the bitter weather. By the time they reached the peasant's van, although the king was in good spirits, the page was blue with cold. 'Now my man,' said the King, 'I trust you do not intend to burn the wood you have gathered?' For fear of giving offence, the exact words of Kevin's reply have been omitted, suffice to say the gist was the wood would be burnt, bringing warmth and good cheer to many, and that this was regarded by Kevin as legitimate self-employment. 'Not beggin' but workin', your majesty.' 'And,' he went on, 'your page looks as if he's about to drop dead with cold. I could light a fire now to warm him up and brew some tea, but it seems that's against the law around here.'

'This is truly a dilemma,' said the good king. 'How can I help both you and my page and yet still fulfil our international obligations and save the world's climate?' He thought for a moment. 'My dear Kevin, your entrepreneurial spirit has shown me the way. The palace is already well below its carbon-emission quota. We can exchange or trade from our surplus to overcome your deficit. Light the fire, honest peasant, brew us some tea, restore warmth and life to my page, and sell your logs with impunity – well until the end of the carbon-year at any rate.' 'Thanks your majesty,' said Kevin. 'You're a real saint!'

And so it was that, restored and refreshed, they went back to their respective abodes, treading as it were in the saintly king's carbon footprints, which had yielded warmth to the needy.

'Therefore Christians all be sure  
Wealth or rank possessing,  
Carbon trading helps the poor  
And brings all a blessing.'