

Moravian Women's Association Home & Overseas Paper - June 2020

The disappearance of cash!

When lockdown was looming, one of the “essential” things I did was to withdraw enough cash from the hole in the wall as I thought necessary for quite a few weeks. Almost all of it is still sitting there. For me, cashless is the norm. I rarely need it, and find it easier to keep track of my spending without it. My last regular weekly cash payment (to my doggy daycare) switched to Bank Transfer just before lockdown.

The limit for paying contactless is now £45. ATMs are disappearing, along with Bank branches. The Government proposed (pre lockdown) to protect access for cash, but lockdown uncertainty means we don't know if that will happen.

Card spending had increased sharply over the past 12 months anyway, and lockdown has further accelerated it, so that there is minimal contact even in small corner shops.

The benefits of disappearing cash

I feel safer not carrying large amounts of cash. Paying rent in cash disappeared many years ago, because collectors were mugged as they knocked on tenants' doors. Wages snatches happened when workers were paid in cash. Small shopkeepers are less likely to suffer theft if there is nothing in the till. Elderly frail shoppers are less likely to be mugged if it becomes the norm that they have no cash to hand over. Pensioners who still demand their pension in cash may be encouraging a raid on their sub-Post Office.

A great deal of criminal behaviour is fuelled by cash, including mugging, theft, modern slavery, prostitution, gambling, dog fighting, tax evasion, benefit fraud, money laundering, and the whole underground drug economy.

Cash is literally filthy stuff, it may harbour germs and viruses.

Is there a downside to the disappearance of cash?

Yes, cash is anonymous and so can be acquired and spent in ways we might prefer the world does not know about. Some people like to give to Churches and charities anonymously which is easy using cash. Some domestic

violence victims secretly build up a cash hoard which their abuser does not know about. It gives them security and the possibility of eventual escape.

If the Banking network goes down, it might be temporarily impossible to pay for goods and services - but now that almost all cash tills are electronically controlled, it might also be impossible to use cash.

The biggest group at risk from a cashless society are not the elderly, as many think, but actually the poorest. 1.8 million people in the UK do not have a Bank account. Most debt charities advise those with money problems to cut up their cards and use cash to control their spending, so disappearing cash puts all that at risk.

How will Churches and charities deal with the disappearance of cash?

Some of our Churches now have card readers for giving, and that will increasingly become the norm. There is something ridiculous about passing round a plate during a religious service - judging the correct time to "catch" as many people as possible. Look at it from the point of view of a stranger in Church who doesn't know what to expect and may not be carrying much cash - causing embarrassment all round. A lot of time is wasted counting, checking, bagging, and paying cash into the Bank. We don't think about it because the plate is part of our tradition.

The problem is that discontinuing cash collections will, in the short term, I am sure, mean less money coming in.

For Churches and charities, it will affect fundraising events such as coffee mornings and bring and buys, unless they are structured differently - but that requires an effort of will, and it's easier to just carry on as we have always done - until something unprecedented like the corona virus forces change. Some people will always refuse to engage with new ways of paying, and then complain that cash is not catered for. They will use that as an excuse to give less.

Do you think the disappearance of cash is a good or bad thing?

Naomi Hancock - June 2020