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Music and Worship

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THE MAGAZINE OF MARLBOROUGH'S COMMUNITY AND CHURCHES

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Music and Worship

I remember a former vicar of ours preaching a sermon using the then popular Double Diamond advert *I'm only here for the beer* as his text, but adapted to *I'm only here for the hymns*. His point was that a lot of people go to church for a good sing-along, and come away quite probably humming a good tune rather than remembering the more important message of the sermon.

So my challenge to our principal correspondents this month was in a way to confound that notion, and to show how for them music is an integral part of faith and worship, and that far from distracting from the message music actually enhances it. What is fascinating is how personal their responses have been, showing how for them in a particular place at a particular time and in a particular way music was and is in fact the key to their own spiritual understanding.

Stephen Skinner takes us through his Methodist Wesley-inspired upbringing. Michael Reynolds marvels at the richness of the musical experience. Christopher Rogers remembers the impact Bach had on him. Stuart Laing retells times in different places when music meant so much. Rod Cleasby tells how music has been an inspirational foundation to his own faith journey. Pete Sainsbury shows the integral link between music and worship. My thanks to all of them for rising to that challenge and sharing special memories and moments with us.

Elsewhere Sue Tulloh has drawn up a 'Top of the Pops' of sacred music - you will all have your own versions but this list may encourage you to look a bit further afield. And then there are lots of goodies to warm the cockles of your heart as we exit winter and look forward to a better year.

David Du Croz, Editor

Cover picture: Angels choir window, Brussels cathedral

The first time I heard *The Hallelujah Chorus* I got the giggles and couldn't stop laughing. I was six or seven years old, in school assembly, and I had never heard anything so wonderful and joyous. A few years later I came into the sitting room one day to find my mother and her sister sitting by a log fire listening to *I know that my Redeemer Liveth*, also from *The Messiah*. They weren't talking but enjoying each other's presence, lost in the beautiful music. A decade later, a school friend of my wife, Jane, sang it at our wedding. A few weeks ago, we played it as we left the crematorium after my mother's funeral. Such glorious music is timeless and touches us at different times in our lives. At this time of Lent, when we are in another lockdown, it is so uplifting and encouraging to listen to music and with Handel's *Messiah* to know that our redeemer, Jesus Christ, lives and is with us in this trying time.

Music has always been important to me and a vital expression of my faith in Jesus. My maternal grandparents were Methodists in North Devon and worshipped in a little chapel just on the Hartland side of the boundary with Clovelly. They were always singing folk songs and hymns as they went about their work on the farm. Gran loved her hymn book, and often if she was too tired to pray, she would read a hymn as a prayer. How right she was. Sometimes the words of a hymn will express just what I want to say, when I haven't got the words. It is just like the *Book of Psalms* in the Old Testament.

The Psalms are the hymns and prayers of the Jewish people. They would have been the prayer book of the early Church. I love the Psalms and have found them a great help throughout my life and especially during the pandemic. They cover every human emotion and situation. The Psalmists are not afraid to bring their true feelings to God. So, one might be praising God for the wonders of creation, whilst another is crying out of the depths of despair. One is angry with God, whilst another thanks him for his loving goodness. One asks why God has abandoned him, and another thanks him for always being there. However we are feeling, or whatever we are thinking, there is a Psalm which expresses just that. Throughout the centuries, the Psalms have been set to music, helping us in our worship and encouraging us in our faith.

The Methodist Hymn Book of 1933 states in the introduction that 'Methodism was born in song'. The founders of Methodism in the eighteenth century, John and Charles Wesley, understood this. John preached the good news of Jesus and Charles wrote hymns – more than six thousand of them – often setting them to the catchy, dance tunes of the day. Every line of all Charles Wesley's hymns relates to a verse in

the Bible, so that the Christian people known as Methodists, like all Christians, are singing their faith. Today's Methodist hymn book is called *Singing the Faith*, reminding me that when we leave church after an act of worship, the words of a hymn are usually going round in our heads, rather than the words of the sermon.

Singing the Faith is more than a book of Wesley's hymns. It does contain such gems as *Hark the Herald Angels Sing*, *Love Divine, all Loves Excelling*, and *O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing*. However, it also includes ancient hymns, such as Aurelius Clemens Prudentius' fourth century hymn, *Of the Father's love begotten*, and St Francis of Assisi's twelfth century hymn, *All creatures of our God and King*. Numerous hymns and songs down through the ages to the twenty-first century hymns of John Bell, Graham Kendrick, the Taize community, Stuart Townend and others help us to worship God and express our faith. I love the mixture of ancient and modern hymns and music which helps and encourages us in our faith journeys, and which we find in all Christian worship, whatever the denomination.

During Lent, Marlborough Christians Together are holding a series of talks and discussions on Wednesday evenings on Zoom to explore *Finding God in the Arts* (the details are given on page 26). Alongside finding God in film, poetry, humour and fine art, we will be discovering God in music, which is such a rich resource and powerful source of inspiration, touching our lives in so many ways.

I am looking forward to what will be an encouraging time on Zoom, as Christians Together, but I am also eagerly anticipating the time when we can meet safely for worship and sing our faith together again. We might not manage *The Hallelujah Chorus*, but we will sing our praises with gratitude and gusto, from the bottom of our hearts.

St Mary's Church Organ Restoration Appeal

Our **Pledge-A-Pipe** campaign is making excellent progress, and we are now just short of halfway towards our target of pledging each of the 1098 pipes in the organ at £10 per pipe. That means we need to find a few more donors to help us to get to that total of £42,000, which is the full cost of the restoration. If you would like to help us, please go to the St Mary's Church website and click on Organ Restoration Appeal on the left-hand side.

There you will find you have the option of a one-off donation, or setting up a standing order for monthly payments. £10 per month is not much more than 4 cups of take-away coffee or a bottle of wine a month, and for that you will be playing a huge part in preserving this historic instrument which has served this town for 140 years. Pledging that amount for just the next six months will make a big difference. Thank you.

It is wonderful that music exists, that its tunes, harmonies and rhythms can give such enormous pleasure. Where did it come from? Some may say it evolved, but I find this hard to believe; instead, I would prefer to think of music as part of the divine order of creation.

There seems to be an inexhaustible diversity in music. Each century, composers discover new tunes, new harmonies, new textures - which sound and feel quite unlike anything that has ever been heard before. One of my favourite composers is Delius - I have always been struck by the extraordinary and unique way some particular pieces of his are able to evoke the summer atmosphere, and all the life and colour of his garden at Grez-sur-Loing near Paris.

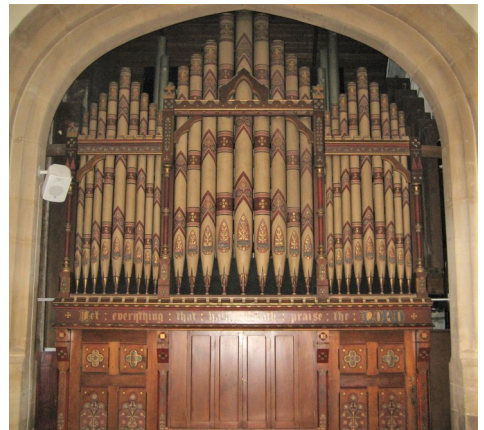
Another aspect of the world's extraordinary musical heritage is the sense of a link between a piece's original setting and the present day. When we sing Morley's madrigal *Now is the month of Maying* which was written at the end of the 16th century, I especially enjoy imagining these very same notes being sung so long ago, in a setting so different from our own.

I also cannot help reflecting on the commitment of those who wrote and performed music in previous centuries. When life must have been an enormous struggle, it is a testimony to the compelling power of music that it was considered worthwhile to devote so much energy to it. I think particularly of Bach working in the early part of the 18th century, and of all the copying out of parts he had to do - no photocopier or computerised music printing for him!

Thinking of Bach reminds me too of choral music and the amazing capacity of human voices; the ranges of female and male human voices seem to be perfectly designed for four-part harmony - a mystery that has given delight for centuries.

Lastly, music enables the expression of so many human feelings - elation, exuberance, joy, praise, worship, yearning, happiness, humour, solemnity, poignancy, sadness, grief, despair. More important than anything to me, as a church organist, is to try to choose music that is appropriate for each occasion, and to play it in a way that touches and speaks to individuals. And that music does speak in this way is, I believe, a miracle.

Music, truly, is a gift from God.



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An encounter with JS Bach

Christopher Rogers

I was brought up in the tradition of English cathedral music, both ancient and modern, and I sang both Bach's *Magnificat* and *Saint John Passion*. At school we had an ambitious and innovative music department with performances of Britten's *Saint Nicholas* and *Noye's Fludde*, as well as largely neglected oratorios of Handel, both *Solomon* and *Saul*, but no Bach. It was not until I was teaching in Birmingham that I joined the Birmingham Bach Society and was introduced to the *B Minor Mass*.

To singers like me this monumental work sits on the skyline like an awesome mountain, to be approached with respect and scaled with great care. We were to perform the work in the classical splendour of Saint Philip's Cathedral. Our president, Peter Pears, was among the distinguished soloists, and Philip Ledger, organist at King's College Cambridge, was the guest harpsichord accompanist. The afternoon rehearsal had passed without incident and it was only when we arrived for the performance did we learn that the orchestra was on strike and would not be playing. The building was crammed with an expectant audience who were greeted by the choir's chairman, who explained that the strike had occurred because of a demarcation dispute. Was the harpsichord a solo or an orchestral instrument? If the latter, then Ledger should have been a member of the Musicians Union. The union convenor, a militant member of the orchestra, was then invited to put his case to an increasingly hostile and vocal audience. In an enormous leap of faith, our conductor, Richard Butt, then announced that we would perform the work with Roy Massey, the Cathedral organist, accompanying the whole work on the organ. With increasing confidence, we began the *Kyrie*, with its enormous fugue, at the end of which the audience stood up and applauded. We never looked back and gave a truly memorable performance.

I sang the work again with the Bach Society choir, this time without incident. It was summer and as we launched into the *Sanctus* with its rising triplets and massive octave leaps in the bass part, the setting sun lit up the great Last Judgement window by Burne-Jones in the baptistry. Flooded with dramatic red, flights of hovering angels, one blowing an enormous trumpet, arouse a startled crowd of people. At the top of the window a white draped figure of Christ sits on a throne, his right hand raised in blessing and assurance. With the swirling sound of the *Sanctus* filling the building with joy and expectation, no image could have been more spiritually appropriate. Both men had created these masterpieces within a year of their death. Only men of deep and unchallenging faith, as were JS Bach and Burne-Jones, could have created such valedictory statements, merged here in Saint Philip's into one awesome experience.

I have never sung the work since, and I do not expect to do so. That I have sung it and remember the musical and spiritual impact of these two performances is enough for me.

Music in Worship

Stuart Laing

Before coming back to base in Marlborough, Sibella and I lived and worked in a several places that placed us in wildly different churches with sometimes unexpected styles of worship. So we were exposed to, and came to appreciate, kinds of music in worship that lay far from our traditional Anglican upbringing. In this piece I ask you to accompany me across some strange borders.

To go back to the beginning: our parents brought us up in a musical and church-going household, so I was soon singing in the village church choir. Our regular service (I'm talking 1950s!) was Matins, so lots of psalms and canticles – and actually I came to love the genius of the 19th century English musicians who found this clever way (the Anglican chant) of perpetuating the wonderful poetry of David's psalms.

After University I started in the Foreign Office and, while working in London for a year, joined the Bach Choir. At my audition David Willcocks asked me why I wanted to. I answered that I had sung Bach's *B minor Mass* at school, and the Bach Choir offered the opportunity to sing the *St Matthew Passion*, Bach's other great choral work. He let me in! (Probably he was short of tenors.) Despite often being presented in performance, these two fantastic works reveal Bach's faith on every page.

My first Foreign Office posting abroad was in Saudi Arabia, where I served again 20 years later. 'Church' was a home-grown affair, all non-Muslim worship being illegal. Our congregations were small, organised in the meeting rooms or social clubs of Western embassies. Mostly we had no priest (and so no eucharist) and shared among ourselves the duties of leading services. We sang hymns and worship songs, accompanied on electric keyboards, so our music – while enthusiastic – was simple. But one weekend we did something special. British and American congregations got together for a camping weekend in the desert some miles out of Riyadh, where we would be out of reach of police. And at dawn in the sand dunes we had our service, with hymns accompanied by a scratch band of portable instruments, including my accordion. Wonderful!



Church service in the Saudi Arabian desert

Between these two postings in Saudi Arabia we were in Cairo in the 1980s, and in Prague in the early 1990s. The Anglican Church in Egypt was, and is, well organised. We worshipped in the hall of the British School, pending the completion of the cathedral building, and I was a regular parish organist for a while. We even organised a ‘sing-along’ *Messiah*, relatively unusual in those days. Prague offered wonderful opportunities for playing and listening to (mostly traditional) music in church settings, in those heady days following the Velvet Revolution, when the Communists’ restrictions on Christian worship were lifted.

The last few years of my Foreign Office career were in Oman and Kuwait, where (as in other Gulf states, but not – of course – Saudi Arabia), governments allocate generous places for Christian churches to operate. Because of the huge expatriate (mostly Asian) communities, there are dozens of congregations, using every imaginable style of worship, including dancing as well as singing. From there, in strong contrast, we moved to a place almost at the epitome of traditional Western church music – Cambridge. With two world-class choirs in King’s and St John’s Colleges, and over 20 other colleges having their own chapels and chapel choirs, there is endless opportunity for attending services adorned with beautifully-performed liturgical and other sacred music. How spoilt we were.

Back in Marlborough, I find I am as much involved in music in worship as ever, playing the organ in up to five churches in the Upper Kennet Benefice – and, once again, the accordion for carol services held outside because of Covid restrictions on services within churches. For worship, anything goes!

Music has been the heart of worship since the beginning. For the human experience, music has an incredible way of lifting the spirit and speaking to the heart. *The Songs of Solomon* and *Psalms of David* are key examples. King David especially:

David and all the Israelites were celebrating with all their might before God, with songs and with harps, lyres, timbles, cymbals and trumpets *1 Chronicles 13:8*.

This is not the sedate conservative music of Johan Sebastian Bach, beautiful as that is. This was energetic, excited praise, with loud instruments and dancing.

My whole family was musical. My mother played piano for the choir, my father led the Sunday school in worship, and as children, we all played an instrument or two. I remember my brother Geoff being asked to play guitar in church for the first time. What I remember most is not the song, but that people walked out in protest. But since then everything has changed and popular music has transferred its style and instruments into praise and worship. If we look back in time, across the pond to the USA, gospel music was already firmly embedded into church worship, especially in the southern states. Such a joyful, uplifting music with which to praise God.

My introduction to music was the sixties, lively, energetic and loud. So when I started playing in church myself, this was the style of music that I was drawn to. New songs were slow to emerge so we repurposed popular songs, emphasising the words that had a spiritual meaning:

The Beatles:

Help me if you can, I'm feeling down ... And I do appreciate
you being 'round ... Help me get my feet back on the ground ...
Won't you please, please help me?

Cat Stevens:

I was once like you are now .. And I know that it's not easy ..
To be calm when you've found .. something going on .. But
take your time, think a lot .. Think of everything you've got ..
For you will still be here tomorrow .. But your dreams may not.

The Bachelors:

I believe, above the storm, the smallest prayer will still be
heard ... I believe that someone in the great somewhere, hears
every word .. Every time I hear a newborn baby cry, or touch a
leaf, or see the sky ... Then I know why ... I believe.

This was particularly useful when Kymee and I ran a youth club on a council estate on the west edge of Southampton. These were un-churched kids, mostly from families who had no history of going to church. In fact we were well aware that half of the children who came were probably chucked out of the house and told not to come back home until the streetlights came on. Their connection with music was simply what they heard on the radio. But when they heard us using popular songs to express our faith, it struck a chord and they wanted to join in. A particularly powerful song; *Love can Build a Bridge*, had amazing words:

I'd gladly walk across the desert with no shoes upon my feet ...
To share with you the last bite of bread I had to eat ... I would
swim out to save you in your sea of broken dreams ... When all
your hopes are sinking, let me show you what love means ...

These kids did not have the experience of someone giving unconditional love. But they certainly understood the message.

In 1992 we were given some advice from Steve Chalk. If you're going to run a youth club for the church, do not apologise for the message; shout the Good News loudly. Start with a prayer, sing songs of praise and worship, read the bible, talk about morals and finish with songs and prayers. It was the best advice we could have received. These young people were so hungry for the message of love and forgiveness. The good news of Jesus and the idea of making a commitment.

And music was right at the heart of their experience. We would sit in a circle on Sunday night, and hand out copies of Spring Harvest's song book and bibles. They could choose any song, or read any verse. Or they could read the lyrics to their favourite pop song. Suddenly they saw God's love reflected in everything around them. The words jumped off the page and they spoke them with confidence and sang them with heart. These wonderful Sunday nights became a building block into our journey to Spring Harvest, and the joyful, energetic music was the focus of each day. Worship leaders like Matt Redman, Brenton Brown, Paul Baloche, Graham Kendrick, Noel Richards. Big songs, with a big message. The glow of excitement on their faces, the wonder, and need for answers kept us up late, talking. The words sank deeply into their hearts and new Christians were born every day.

Years later, we are still in touch with some, and their faith has not diminished. David's example with the 'ten stringed lyre and trumpets' shows us how uplifting music can be, and at Big Church Day Out, you can still find me dancing ...

I grew up in a musical family in Dublin, very much engaged in the local church and so music and worship have always been part of my life. However, as a teenager, I went on an Easter holiday organised by Scripture Union Ireland. That was the beginning of my committed Christian faith and I've been playing the piano, acoustic or electronic, in worship ever since. For me, faith and music are intertwined though evidently distinct, too.

'Worship' is derived from the old English word *weorthscipe* which means 'to give worth to'. I began to realise as a teenager what God was worth in terms of my life, and I've been working this out ever since. Baptist theologian Paul Fiddes writes about *event and process*, which marks the life of all Christians. There are some moments in our lives which are literally crucial (cross-shaped, or pivotal) and the rest of it is working out what it means to follow Jesus in the everyday, and doing it. Although I struggle sometimes, He is worth my whole life!

The New Testament Greek word usually translated worship in modern English translations of the Bible is *proskuneo*, meaning 'to come forward to kiss'. This gives us a whole new dimension of meaning as we consider Jesus' invitation to regard God as 'Abba, Father'. To be loved and held in and by God, with closeness and affection. This is the work of the Holy Spirit within all those who are seeking God or have a sense that God is seeking them.

Another dimension of worship is that which we gain when we worship with others. The Bishop of Coventry, Chris Cocksworth, in his book *Holy, Holy, Holy*, says that "worship is like the great cheer echoing around a football stadium... which tells us that something has happened which has made a difference to the way things are." Engaging in worship, opening yourself to God with an open heart changes you, because He is already there, waiting for you. Early Methodists amongst others called this the prevenient grace of God. I love this.

For me in this past year, corporate worship without singing has been really quite hard. It was odd to sit in church at Christmas and hum the carols! But things have changed, they are changing and they will change, and we will be back to the privilege of heartfelt prayer, praise and sung worship alongside others, soon I hope.

In the meantime, know that God is with you no less in the present.

In Christ, with you in Marlborough,



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Top of the Pops

Sue Tulloh canvassed some of her friends to find out what was their top choice of sacred music. You can probably find recordings of these on the internet. What's your favourite?

What a Beautiful Name by Hillsong Worship chosen by Jill Moss
....a reassuring rock during lockdowns - it reminds us of the awe and wonder that Jesus evokes in us when we consider all that he did for us, bringing life in all its fullness.

St Matthew Passion by J.S.Bach chosen by Gill Mackichan
....in particular the silence after the Crucifixion, followed by the centurion singing *Truly this was the Son of God* then more silence, before the music starts again.

Psalm Prelude (for organ) by Herbert Howells chosen by Andrew Brown
....played at Choral Evensong in Ely Cathedral - the long melodic lines and impressionistic harmonies convey a beautiful sense of peace, with a central section which flows like a river.

Spem in Alium by Thomas Tallis chosen by Dick Whitfield
....first heard in Winchester Cathedral - this extraordinarily moving work starts quietly and builds as voice after voice is added towards a proud and majestic climax.

Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of Creation chosen by Gill Morgan
....sung in four different languages in a Norwegian stave church while on a Scandinavian cruise - a truly uplifting experience which made a lasting impression on all who were there.

St Nicolas by Benjamin Britten chosen by Mary Flecker
....in particular the seventh movement, *Nicolas and the Pickled Boys*, with its transition from appalling tragedy to euphoric triumph and Britten's genius in describing it.

Vespers of 1610 by Monteverdi chosen by Robin Nelson
....in particular the opening *Deus in adiutorium* - the bold almost operatic nature of some of the music, its enormous energy, opulence and vitality make it irresistible!

Cornerstone by Hillsong Worship chosen by Louise Seddon
....the words remind us that our hope is in Jesus, and that He alone is the cornerstone for our faith - in these difficult times, that hope is a real comfort.

Lobet den Herrn by J.S.Bach chosen by Amanda Brown
....a sublime seven minutes of exuberant praise! - a setting of Psalm 117, thanking God for his generous love, and a perfect antidote to the current climate.

L'Enfance du Christ by Berlioz chosen by Jane Nicholson
....*The Shepherds' Farewell* - first heard at Christmas in Bucharest soon after the birth of my son, reminding me of celebrating the birth of Christ in a glittering, frozen Romania.

The Lord Bless You and Keep You by John Rutter chosen by Pat Cutforth
....deeply important to our family, as it was sung at the weddings of our three children - the final words, *And give you peace*, are extremely comforting in sad as well as happy times.

Family News

Jessy Pomfret

Ian and Tina Mellor of Farrar Drive are delighted at the birth of their 4th grandson, Jasper, on 28th January 2021, to son Ewan and daughter-in-law Sara, in Warwickshire. Ewan and his younger sister are former pupils of the old Kingsbury Hill House School on Kingsbury Street.

Anthea Haydon died on January 10th at the age of 101. *Rosamund Stokes writes:* Anthea was born in 1919. Her life was devoted to her loving family and to what she called her extended family, a community of friends. She found great pleasure in having those friends around a table, breaking bread together well fortified by the grain and the grape, exchanging news and views, perhaps followed by a couple of rubbers of good natured, but very competitive bridge.

Her well-nurtured garden in Marlborough was an ongoing source of colourful inspiration, productivity and peace; as was Fowey, the seaside retreat much loved by Anthea and her husband Peter over many decades.

Apart from humankind, she had a unique affinity with dogs, both her own and those she befriended, especially Pekingese, the imperial dogs of China. "Little faces like pansies", she said. Above all Anthea loved life and the living of it which she generously shared with so many during her long life's journey.

Simon Eveleigh died on January 29th at the age of 74. *David Du Croz and Rob Dean write:* Simon was widowed young, and was absolutely devoted to the two young daughters, Sophie and Emma, he raised alone. He was proud of his achievement and the successful women they grew into. He was especially delighted to become a grandfather and regaled anyone he could with photos of his grandson.

After a successful career as estates bursar at Marlborough College, Simon devoted much of his time in retirement to two local charities: The Kennet and Avon Trust as branch chairman, boatmaster, and boat manager; and St Peter's Church as trustee and surveyor.

In the former, Simon's energy seemed never ending and he was often at the boatyard or in the Trust sheds, checking and organising equipment and paperwork. He was always generous with his time and when thanked for the immense effort he put in would reply with a grin, "it fills the time between getting up and going to bed". Simon was fun to be with and few could resist the wide-beam smile of this gentle giant. But he also took his professional responsibilities as a skipper and boat manager very seriously. His immense charm ensured a day on his boat was serious fun. He also loved a social occasion and could be relied on to organise great events.

In the latter, for the past ten years he has been an invaluable member of council, providing expert advice about the maintenance of the building, its fixtures and fittings, on the back of his vast experience in his previous job. Whether it was finding scaffolders, dealing with contractors, or shinning up a twenty-foot ladder to clear a blocked gutter, nothing was too much trouble for him. Just as importantly, he did it always with such easy good grace that made the task seem far less onerous than it actually was. The annual trustees' spring-clean between Christmas and New Year became an enjoyable chore in Simon's company.



Richard Clapp lost his life following a heart attack on February 1st at the age of 90. *Alison Galvin-Wright writes:* Richard studied for an engineering degree at Imperial College, London, followed by a PhD in nuclear power, and then worked for CEGB developing power stations. He married Susan and they had four sons and a daughter.

In 1991, following early retirement, Richard became involved with the Merchant's House Trust and, with Sir John Sykes, worked for the following thirty years on the programme of conservation of the iconic 17th century house on the High Street, belonging to silk merchant, Thomas Bayly.

Richard used his skills on many projects and his practical involvement, advice and ready help were greatly appreciated. He started as a shop volunteer, became a trustee, shop director and guide, and keenly preserved the authenticity of anything done to the fabric of the Merchant's House. He will be greatly missed by all who knew him.

Wet February is not my favourite month, and windy March isn't much better, but the days get longer and there are moments when the air begins to smell different as the earth dries out, and we sense nature's gradual awakening. There are catkins and pussy willow in the hedgerows, and on sunny mornings brimstone butterflies flit by and maybe an orange tip too.

From my neighbour's garden I begin hearing strange purring croaks in the twilight hours. I am told it is the male common frogs trying to attract the attention of females to their pond and intimidate other males.

In early spring wild flowers add some much-needed colour to the drab countryside: snowdrops, celandines, violets and wood anemones. Soon kingcups begin to emerge in damp meadows while garish daffodils are everywhere in private and public gardens. Rarer and subtler is the wild daffodil, with narrow, grey-green leaves and a flower with pale yellow petals surrounding a darker yellow trumpet. They are shortish and form clumps in favoured localities in the Marlborough Downs and some local woods.

It's in March that hares go a bit loopy: the amorous buck seeks out the doe, and when he starts chasing her across fields and becomes too persistent she will turn around and fend him off in a fierce boxing match.

Some of our birds are just as daft: the male lapwing wobbles, zigzags, rolls and dives while calling to attract a potential mate, while in April a displaying snipe makes weird bleating sounds as it flies in a downward, swooping motion. Numbers of inland breeding lapwing and snipe have drastically declined in recent decades, while those of the stone curlew have increased. This special, rather secretive bird is a summer visitor to local downland sites, and the first few pairs already appear in March.

February and March are the best months to see the scarce and elusive goshawk, which resembles an outsize sparrowhawk. Almost extinct as a breeding bird in the 19th century. there are now over 500 breeding birds in the UK, including a few in Wiltshire. Their display involves slow flapping circular soaring, sometimes followed by a dramatic plunge dive.

These are some of the signs of natural renewal and regeneration, a source of reassurance in these uncertain times for the human race.

Head for the canal halfway between Great Bedwyn and Crofton - there is space to park off the road by the railway line. Cross the railway line (taking care) and the canal, and head south-west along the towpath towards Crofton. This is a nice and relatively quiet stretch, and the reed beds on the far bank are great places for spotting reed and sedge warbler in the early summer - sightings of kingfisher and wagtail are also possible.

Go past the Crofton lock and turn left off the towpath across a low bridge which takes you over the outflow from Wilton Water. Follow the path that runs along the edge of the lake where you will catch sight of a range of waterfowl - heron, egret, cormorant (often perching in the branches of a dead tree on the opposite bank), all sorts of duck and, if you're lucky, little grebe.

Halfway along the lake the land on your left becomes open field. This is corvid country and wood pigeon land, where you will often see red kite and buzzard circling overhead, the former sometimes swooping down quite low looking for carrion or small mammals. In winter time flocks of linnets can be seen, perching in lines on the power cables overhead, or flying acrobatically backwards and forwards across the open field.

Ahead of you are the outlying houses of Wilton. Head for the tree at the left-hand corner of the hedge in front of you, and there pick up the path leftwards up across the field to a gap in the hedge at the top. Drop down onto the lane, turn right, and after about fifty yards take the path off to the left up through the hedgerow and straight across another open field, heading for a way-marked gap in the hedge.

As you leave the field you come into an area of rough scrub where you might well see the likes of stonechat, whitethroat and blackcap. Head straight to the woodland ahead of you (this is Wilton Brail), and after a short distance in the wood the path opens out into a wide track leading downhill, a good place for woodpecker. Where the track sweeps round to the right and heads uphill, head half left through a gate out of the wood. Follow the divide between two fields straight down to the canal bridge and railway crossing where you started, probably about 90 minutes earlier.

Sometimes when a book receives a lot of publicity my reaction is a grumpy adolescent resistance to reading it. It's very silly and childish, but there you go, still trying and failing to be 'cool' and stand out from the herd. Sorry. It's why I came late to *Such a Fun Age* by Kiley Reid, now out in paperback, and deserving, I think, the plaudits heaped upon it. As you probably know, it's a book that skewers liberal guilt and smuggerly about race, class and economic status. When a (black) girl babysitting a (white) child is challenged by supermarket security it sets off a wincingly recognisable and convincing look at power dynamics in a range of relationships. The writing is deft and objective, with sharp and believable dialogue, and characters I loved and was exasperated by in equal measure. It's warm and funny and sad and a lesson about checking one's assumptions.

Another of my pet hates is 'beautiful writing' as a description. It so often means, in my not remotely humble opinion, 'flowery and bathetic'. But forgive me while I describe *A Thousand Moons* by Sebastian Barry as beautifully written by which I mean distinct, descriptive, lyrical and evocative. A sequel to *Days Without End*, this is the story of Winona, the unofficially adopted Lakota daughter of Thomas McNulty and John Cole. In the aftermath of the American Civil War the family try to make a home and a living on a small farm in Tennessee. In the broken and resentful south, the characters, of varying race, sexuality, and complex morality, struggle with brutality, political conflict, forgiveness and love.

Talking of political conflict – *UnPresidential* is the third book about reporting from the USA during the presidency of Donald Trump by Jon Sopel, the BBC's North America editor. This is his diary of the presidential campaign during the coronavirus pandemic. It's personal, informally written and immediate, very much a first draft of history. Sopel maintains BBC impartiality, but can't disguise how very unusual the past four years and the campaign were. All right, more than unusual: bonkers. The book ends two days after the election which as we know is before the story does. There's bound to be an extra chapter when the paperback comes out.



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At a time when the world seems remarkably lacking in old-fashioned statesmanship, I would like to share with you the story of a truly outstanding individual from 100 years ago who embodied all those fine political attributes of integrity, non-partisanship, vision and efficacy which seem to be missing in our leaders today. Richard Haldane is that man, and his biography *Haldane: the forgotten statesman who shaped modern Britain* written by John Campbell and published by Hurst has recently appeared on the shelves.

Here I must declare an interest as John Campbell is my brother-in-law, but I hope that will not deter you from reading on, because the story he tells is fascinating, instructive and inspiring. Richard Haldane played a pivotal part in the politics of this country at the turn of the last century, yet as so much of that was behind the scenes rather than front of stage he barely rates a mention in the histories of that period. Politicians of every hue, however, turned to him for advice and for his ability to make things happen.

He reformed the British Army and saved it from defeat in the first five months of the war in 1914. He revitalised the British education system and was instrumental in the establishment of many great universities. He contributed to the reforming transformation of administrative and legal systems in this country. He was the midwife to the birth of the Canadian nation. In all of this he was a tireless and devoted public servant, never once putting himself or his own interests above those of the country, but serving with an intellect, a depth and breadth of knowledge, and a comprehensive understanding you would be hard pushed to find these days in an entire cabinet, let alone in a single politician.

It was as much the way in which he did things as what he did that makes him remarkable, and not only does that make this book an invaluable instructional manual for any would-be politician in the 21st century, but it also makes it an inspirational read.



Cooking for a Rugby Fan

Karen Osborne

A busy Saturday for husband. Three rugby matches to be watched.

I have to fit a meal in somewhere, but it'll have to be quick. It's a miserable day and I don't feel like shopping. So a shepherd's pie? Can I manage with what I have in the house? I'll try. Here are my ingredients:

500 grams minced lamb	1 onion	1 red pepper	2 sticks celery
4 mushrooms	2 tomatoes	tomato puree	coriander
Salt, pepper & pinch of cayenne	cinnamon	500 ml chicken stock	
2 sweet potatoes	breadcrumbs	butter	

Cook in same way as normal shepherd's pie, and see what you think.

Dessert? Yes. Plums stewed with cardamom, served with Greek yoghurt, to follow. Then back to the rugby!

Cake for a Racing Fan

David Du Croz

One of the joys of lockdown for any racing fan (horses that is!) has been the increased coverage on television. And as that coverage comes to an end, it is time for tea and cake. Try this one - it's jolly good!

200g unsalted butter diced	175g dark brown sugar	3 level tbsp black treacle
150ml milk	2 large eggs beaten	300g self-raising flour
4 balls of stem ginger*, drained and chopped	1 tbsp ground ginger	

For the icing: 150g golden icing sugar 70g unsalted butter, softened
3 tbsp ginger syrup*, drained from the jar 1 tsp lemon juice

1. Preheat oven to fan 140C. Butter and line base of a 23cm round cake tin with greaseproof paper. Melt the butter, sugar and treacle in a saucepan over a very low heat. Stir, cool briefly, then pour in the milk. Stir well and gradually beat the eggs into the melted mixture, then add the chopped stem ginger.
2. Sift the flour and ground ginger together, then add to the warm mixture, beating gently as you add it to avoid any lumps. Combine thoroughly to a soft dropping consistency.
3. Spoon the cake mixture into the tin. Bake for 30-35 minutes or until firm and risen. Remove and leave in the tin for an hour, then carefully decant onto a wire rack. *(You can freeze the cold cake for up to 2 months at this point)*
4. For the icing, beat together the icing sugar, butter, 1tbsp ginger syrup and the lemon juice. Skewer the top of the cake all over; then pour 2 tbsp of syrup over the cake. Allow to soak in, then spread over the icing. *N.B. the original recipe has double the quantities for the icing, but we found this too much!*

There are two wonderful local Arts Societies (previously known as NADFAS): The Arts Society Pewsey Vale (TASPV), and The Arts Society Kennet and Swindon (TASKS). They have kept going throughout all the lockdowns with zoomed lectures on a regular basis, virtual tours and visits to places far afield (see page 13), and online study days on specific topics. Through links with area (Wessex) and national organisations, members can also access a whole range of fascinating subjects.

Local societies also run projects of their own such as church recording, heritage volunteering, and promoting art in our local schools through the auspices of Young Arts, such as the recent displays in the waiting room of Pewsey Station.

These societies usually meet monthly. TASPV meets on the fourth Tuesday of each month for lectures in the Bouverie Hall, North Street, Pewsey, SN9 5ES. The doors open at 7pm (refreshment is available before the meeting), with the lecture starting at 7:30pm for an hour followed by an opportunity to ask the lecturer questions relating to the topic. Under normal circumstances TASKS meets at the Ellendune Centre in Wroughton on the third Monday morning of each month except July and August. Coffee is served from 10.30; the meeting begins at 11.00.

Both societies are renewing their memberships at this time of year, so now is an excellent opportunity to join up. Go to their websites for information. Membership of TASPV costs £35 pa, and of TASKS £45 pa. For that you get all of the above and the chance to enjoy international experts, who are quality lecturers nationally vetted, giving beautifully illustrated talks about such things as:-

TASKS: Monday March 15th: *Sculpture in Steel*: The Art of European Arms and Armour, given by Adam Busiakiewicz. Such arms reflect the skill of this art form during the age of chivalry, and became an embodiment of strength, power and style.

TASPV: Tuesday March 23rd: *The White Mantle of Winter*: Julian Halsby discusses some of the finest snow paintings in the history of art produced by the Impressionist Movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

TASKS: Monday April 19th: *A Brief History of Wine*: David Wright lectures about wine as an important element, not only of social development, but also a significant inspiration to art and architecture.

TASPV: Tuesday April 27th: *Treasures of the Fan Museum*: Jacob Moss tells the story of how The Fan Museum came into being, together with the fascinating biography of its founder, whose personal collection forms the basis of the museum's holdings.



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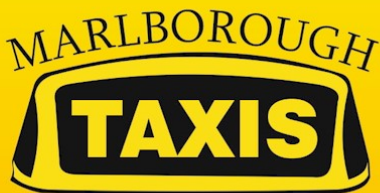
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(Fridays, 14:30 to 16:30)

FROM THE REGISTERS

Funerals - we pray for the families of:

- 10 January Anthea Emily Victoria Haydon (101) of River Park, Marlborough
St George's Church, Preshute
- 29 January Simon Bryan Eveleigh (74) of White Horse Road, Marlborough
St Mary's, Marlborough and Marlborough Cemetery

finding God in the arts

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Wednesdays 3rd, 10th, 17th and 24th March, 7.30pm

You are warmly invited to this year's Lent Course which you will be able to access via the Zoom account of the Marlborough Anglican Team. The number is 672 672 7777; you won't need a password. Details on page 26. marlb.anglicanteam@tiscali.co.uk

News From The Churches

Marlborough Churches Together



The Annual General Meeting will take place by Zoom on Wednesday March 3rd at 12.30 pm, followed by the monthly fraternal meeting. All are welcome to attend. To request a link please email Rachel: rachelrosed1@gmail.com

Finding God in the Arts

Our Zoom Lent talks continue on Wednesdays at 7.30pm:

- March 3rd Poetry presented by Rt Revd Andrew Rumsey, Bishop of Ramsbury.
- March 10th Music with Revd Pete Sainsbury, Marlborough Anglican Team
- March 17th Fine Art with Dr Beverly Lyle & Revd Stephen Skinner, Christchurch
- March 24th Humour with Revd Chris Smith, Marlborough Anglican Team

The first talk on Film with Revd Colin Heber-Percy was very rewarding.

You are very warmly invited to any or all of the sessions, which you will be able to access via the Zoom, meeting number 672 672 7777. No password is needed. Each Zoom session will open at 7.20pm, start at 7.30pm and finish by about 8.45pm. The presentation will lead into breakout discussion groups for about 20 minutes followed by a short Question & Answer session with the speaker, ending with prayer.

World Day of Prayer

Friday March 5th is the date set for the World Day of Prayer. The Day of Prayer this year will be different from any we have ever known. All over the world, people will be worshipping on the day as usual but in unusual ways. More details and information on their website <https://www.wwdp.org.uk/>



Easter

Palm Sunday is celebrated on March 28th, and Good Friday and Easter Day on 2nd and 4th April. Plans for services in March and Easter were not finalised so please continue to check the church websites and notice sheets.

Prayer support is available for individuals or for your loved ones. Please contact the clergy, in confidence; see page 25. Please do be praying for our world and the church at this time.

Marlborough Quakers

www.marlboroughquakers.org.uk/

continue to hold Meetings for Worship using Zoom. Contact Rachel Rosedale 512205.

Christchurch

christchurchmarlborough.org.uk/

For details of current services via Zoom please check the church website or the church office, see page 25.

St Thomas More marlboroughhandpewseycatholics.org.uk/notice-board/

Worship services continue at St Thomas More with live services.

Emmanuel Marlborough

www.emmanuelmarlborough.org/

Emmanuel continues to run regular Sunday afternoon services, with children's activities, and midweek groups for children and adults, either in person or online as the regulations allow. We are also planning a Christianity Explored course for enquirers to discover the person of Jesus in Mark's gospel (online or in person, as the regulations allow).

For more information, contact office@emmanuelmarlborough.org

Marlborough Anglican Team

www.marlboroughanglicanteam.org.uk/

St. George's and St. Mary's will continue with zoomed services for the present
St John the Baptist, Minal are continuing to hold live services.

All three churches will remain open for private prayer:

St Mary's 9am-4pm; along with prayer meetings on Wednesdays at 8am and in the afternoon via a Zoom meeting at 5pm.

St George's 9am-4pm;

St John the Baptist 9.30am-4.00pm;

MAPAG



No open meeting in March; The next open Zoom meeting on 12th April at 5pm.

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<i>News from the Churches</i>	Alison Selby	church.news@towerandtown.org.uk Crossmead, Kingsbury St, SN8 1HU	511128
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<i>Family News</i>	Jessy Pomfret	family.news@towerandtown.org.uk	519134
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Website, searchable article archive <https://www.towerandtown.org.uk>

Contributions and comments from readers are welcome. Please send articles and letters to the Monthly Editor or the Editorial Coordinator, other notices or announcements to the compiler. All items for the April issue by Tuesday 9th March please.

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