
TOWER AND TOWN



Looking Up in Lockdown



TOWER AND TOWN

THE MAGAZINE OF MARLBOROUGH'S COMMUNITY AND CHURCHES

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**"Our streets are not empty. They are filled with the love and the care we have for each other."
HM Queen Elizabeth II (May 8th 2020)**

Tower and Town is the magazine of Marlborough's community and churches, and it seemed appropriate and important that, given the unique times we are living through, some recognition and record should be made of our response to the current circumstances in which we find ourselves.

In particular I wanted this to reflect all those many positive and uplifting experiences which have raised our spirits - our "Captain Tom" moments. In doing so I do not wish to deny or belittle the anger and anxiety, the pain and the grief that this pandemic has caused and is continuing to cause. But I also hope that, in celebrating the remarkable resilience, generosity of spirit and resourcefulness of the people of this town, we might be able to alleviate some of those negatives.

It is a very incomplete, and therefore imperfect, account of how we are coping with and coming through these strange times, so my apologies if what has been written does not reflect your experience. However, I am confident that some of what follows will strike a chord with everyone.

I am very grateful to those many people who wrote in, and apologise to them for having to cut out so much of what they contributed. In places you will see an asterisk which indicates that a fuller version of this piece, or additional information, can be found on the Tower and Town website. There you will also find some photographs which relate to some of these accounts. There are contributions from the churches, from the town and from the people - it is your magazine and this is your story.

David Du Croz

Cover photo: pressed flower rainbow by Mary Du Croz, and painted stones.





Good News from the Churches

Peace in Anxious Times:

Paul's letter to the Philippians chapter 4, verses 6-7

We live in anxious times: Isolation; having enough supplies; money and our job; home-education; cancelled exams and qualifications; catching the virus itself; vulnerable people we love; and the wider world. Every headline is more frightening than yesterday's. Every glance at social media rubs it in.

At Emmanuel Church we reflected recently on the Apostle Paul's words to the Philippians:

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Paul says, "Don't be anxious!". And we might think, "It's easy for you to say that, but try being me - try living with the fear of the new coronavirus!". This virus multiplies our fears in extraordinary ways. We can't see it, we can't control it, we can't understand it. It's taken a grip on the whole world in ways that terrorists could only dream of. But Paul and his readers faced anxious times too. Paul was locked up in Rome, awaiting trial and execution for his faith. Paul's readers were also being persecuted for their faith. And yet Paul writes, "Don't be anxious!". Sometimes I've read that and I've got anxious about being anxious! But it doesn't just say, "don't be anxious", and leave us hanging. It gives us a solution to anxiety. It says, "in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God". Focus on our anxieties – and we might drown. But pray to God – and what does Paul say will follow – as carriages follow an engine? Peace.

What if my children are worried about something, what's the best thing they can do? The best thing is to talk to me – and to their mum about it. How much more as children of God! I realise that it's relatively easy for me to talk about anxiety. Some readers have a lot more to be anxious about than I do. Yet sometimes I pray – but I'm still anxious. Maybe I'm anxious that my prayer won't work. What if we're still anxious after prayer? Let's keep talking to God about it. Sometimes I'm treating God more as a slot-machine than a heavenly Father. I need to say "sorry" to God for that and to ask him to line up my priorities with his. Sometimes the reason my prayers don't shift my anxieties is because I've forgotten that Paul says to pray, "with thanksgiving". And there are silver linings to this dark cloud to be thankful for.

The theologian Don Carson writes: *None of this should be misunderstood as a Pollyanna-ish' approach to life. Christians are not ostriches, heads carefully buried in the sand.*

There is no hint that we shall live above the pressures of other mortals because we escape them. It is precisely in the context of the pressures all must endure that we find our rest in God. This passage does not deny the existence of anxieties. It tells us what to do with them. It tells us where to find strength and grace to help in times of need.

This verse doesn't promise that God will necessarily give us immediately what we asked for. But it does promise peace. And the reason we can have peace from God – is if we have peace with God. God's plan, in the Bible, is not only for blessing on this earth. It concludes with God's plan for a whole new creation where God, "will wipe every tear from our eyes" and where, "there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain".

Yes, let's pray for a cure to the new coronavirus. But let's also pray that people will find the cure for sin - it's called Jesus! Maybe, if we're honest, we don't know this peace with God, because we've been going our own way, not God's way. Please don't always chase after empty carriages. Won't you come as it were to the engine today, come for forgiveness to the Lord Jesus, and so find true peace with God.

Reuben Mann, Pastor, Emmanuel Church Marlborough

Whilst there are no services with a congregation present in church, there have been phone calls, letters, emails and Zoom to enable "contact" with one another at this time - everyone vulnerable with the vulnerable. For the Catholic Church in Marlborough with Pewsey, there are Zoom meetings three times a week for opportunities to unite in prayer and social greeting. It can be a time of struggle, loneliness and being overwhelmed by the virus and the daily news. All this brings a challenge of listening and time - listening to God in prayer and listening to each other - carving out God-centred time in listening, prayer, solitude, contemplation and thought. It is a "GIFT" of generosity, of stillness and hope, of the presence of God who loves us through these moments, hours, days, weeks, months and all our lifetime.

Father John Blacker

Over the last few weeks my world has become both smaller and greater at the same time. Time is more fluid and days merge; but as part of this, there's been more time to listen, to appreciate and to value all that is precious. One of my children works in a London hospital where there are 'wobble rooms' on each ward. These are rooms where people go to pray with others and to cry and reflect. It's brought people together in a depth almost unknown before, recognising that time to be with God and others, even on a busy ward, offers vital comfort and support.

Meanwhile, more locally, through being in contact with parishioners by phone

and Skype and Zoom, I've been conscious of a deep care for one another. People have sent kind words for me to share within funerals, others have expressed the joy of sharing in our audio services and having time to reflect on their faith. It's been a time of sharing our concerns and fears, too, and through this many have recognised God working around us, in this community. More personally, I have been particularly grateful to two people who have shown their care by phoning me, regularly. Jesus listened closely to those he spoke to and they listened to him. Even in lockdown, we really can reach out and walk alongside others.

Sarah Musgrave

Today we held our 8th weekly Zoom Quaker Meeting for Worship with an average of 15 attending each week. It was set up by one of our tech minded younger members and it was a steep learning curve for most. People have looked in amazement to hear that we sit in silence, with the occasional spirit led contribution, for 45 minutes. We are absorbed in our own thoughts but in the Spirit of the Meeting together, and it has been a great source of strength, much looked forward to. After 45 minutes we go round asking each person 'How is it with you?'. It has been very supportive and moving as we share news, personal, family (often from around the world) and of friends.

Rachel Rosedale

The Anglican churches in Marlborough have responded imaginatively to being locked down. Each Sunday there is a service podcast available online. Various meetings now happen via zoom and a new initiative 'Love Marlborough' was born to put volunteers in touch with those in need. It buys and delivers food, picks up prescriptions and so on. Facebook and Instagram were embraced and the team's website overhauled. Everyone has done wonderfully well getting up to speed with new technology, but we do miss actual church worship.

Many members are very good at ringing round to see how people are. Some of the most touching interactions have been between young and old. Hearing teenagers on the phone patiently walking octogenarians through Instagram's sign up has warmed the heart; young and old working hard to keep everyone connected. Many have taken the time to beef up their own life of prayer and soon Alpha begins online taking the good news of Jesus out into cyberspace. We are praying that God will bring good from this pandemic.

The Rev Chris Smith

Easter celebrations in the Upper Kennet Valley Benefice this year were new and unfamiliar, but for me it was one of the most special Easters I can remember. Our

Rector encouraged each of the eight church communities to create something for their village to meditate on, be inspired by and enjoy as they walked around. So there was a cairn representing a hill of hope which became an Easter garden, stations of the cross round a churchyard and environs, a lonely walk of witness by the Rector on Good Friday, and in West Overton, in addition to an Easter garden, we made a cross, and then "flowered" it. I have seen this done before, but only inside a church with less hot sun and plenty of water to hand ! So there were challenges, but it was a great experience.

My husband Stuart made the cross from our old kitchen floor, Simon a local builder fixed the post to which it was attached, and then on Holy Saturday Susanne the chief flower lady wired it and started the decoration with greenery and blossoms. We carried on through the day, Becky (young enough to shop!) bought flowers from Waitrose to add a bit of colour, and since we had put notices round to encourage people to contribute a flower or a bouquet on their daily walk, many came through the churchyard to add their offering. For me the most moving moment was going up in the evening and seeing it all covered, and right at the top, someone's gift of a large bunch of deep red roses carefully arranged.



Our cross is another example of the many wonderful instances of communities sharing a new and positive experience because of lockdown. I feel privileged to have been associated with it.

Sibella Laing

The Covid Street Volunteers

Sara Holden

A call went out – the Town Council is asking for volunteers to support the self-isolating with shopping, prescriptions, dog-walking and anything else that’s needed. What can I do? I’m definitely in the self-isolating category myself but I have a phone and a computer. So I made my offer and immediately found myself as the designated “key contact” for Zone 11, the High St.

The Town was skilfully divided into 16 such zones by Assistant Town Clerk Clare Harris. Rod Cleasby, from Zone 1, describes how his volunteer band has been working:

From Rod Cleasby, Zone 1:

We knock on the door and stand back, in our face masks and blue gloves. Alien to our usual way of living, but the new normal. We are quickly on first name terms, joking about politicians and the weather, and remarking on the supermarket queues and the empty High Street. First it was food, but soon it will be gardens and hedges, grass and weeds. Our volunteers are amazing, uncomplaining, resourceful and caring. Even those with busy lives of their own.

Anxiety can be destructive, so volunteering is medicine to the isolated. Who imagined that contactless payments would be so useful? We can avoid cash and keep our clients safe.

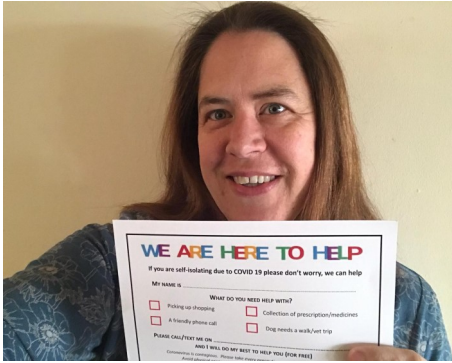
We keep in touch through WhatsApp and share the jobs roughly based on where we live. “Anyone going to Boots?” “Did you get the scones for Mary?” “I’ve done the hedge trimming at no7.” “Can you do the shopping for Alice?” “Done: 3 prescriptions and one electric key.”



With over 150 different jobs completed, we also keep in contact with those we know who are living on their own. Apart from shopping, our volunteers also help with dog walking, prescriptions, newspapers, gardening and passing the time of day. Chatting is also therapeutic for the lonely. When you’re over seventy and isolating, the world can seem very scary. A simple kindness from your neighbour can be life changing.

Volunteering on a residential estate, where we live, is surprising and rewarding. We have 30 customers and growing. We seem to have made new friends with our





neighbours - those who can't go out in the current circumstances. Getting told to stay at home for safety is one thing, but you quickly run out of food and medicine. We were delighted at the speedy response of our new volunteer team. One day we

had no-one, the next there was a dozen people willing to shop and share time with our neighbours in need. Motivated by compassion, and our faith, we are blessed by the love returned to us by the people we help.

One volunteer said, "This helps me just as much. When everything else is out of your control this is something we can do to get that control back." We've promised ourselves a party when this vicious virus has passed, and we can

meet again without fear. Goodbye Covid, hello new friends, and a new future.



From Clare Harris

"We have been completely overwhelmed by the level of support we have received from volunteers within the community. We had an absolutely fantastic response to our plea for help from day one... and the volunteers just keep coming. We simply do not have enough jobs for everyone at the moment, but that may change as the lockdown continues"

From Mayor Mervyn Hall

"It is just fantastic that we got such a fast response, from so many people, when we asked for volunteers to help out during the crisis. This enabled us to put together a volunteer structure covering all areas of Marlborough that is helping out a lot of people. Special thanks go to Clare Harris for doing all the hard work in putting it together and of course, to the volunteers. The cash donations that we have received have paid for PPE equipment and hand sanitizer for the volunteers and for essential shopping for those in need."

Lockdown Scrapbook - our community's positive response to this crisis

Rainbows

For many the rainbow is a sign of hope - of sunshine through the rain as the storm passes. In the Christian world God put a rainbow in the sky after he had sent the flood as his promise that he would never again destroy the earth. My favourite story is from the Chinese for whom the rainbow represents a slit in the sky which was sealed by the goddess Nuwa using stones of the seven different colours. All around Marlborough we see images of rainbows - many in windows, and many more painted on stones lining the route of one of our favourite walks.



Plus ça change.....

If it's of any comfort, it's not the first time lockdown has happened, as Hilary Mantel noted in "The Mirror and the Light" on the birth of the future Edward VI:

“Now all the lords of the kingdom gallop to share the glory. They head to Hampton Court for the christening, but they must leave their retainers at home. The plague is in Kingston and Windsor. Movements are restricted. Strangers are barred. Delivery men must quit the precincts as soon as they have dropped off their loads, and the royal nursery be scrubbed out twice a day.”

And Samuel Pepys writing in his diary in 1664 noted something that might sound familiar:

“On hearing ill rumour that Londoners may soon be urged into their lodgings by Her Majesty’s men, I looked upon the street to see a gaggle of striplings making fair merry, and no doubt spreading the plague well about. Not a care had those rogues for the health of their elders!”

Good Neighbours

We're so much more thankful for simple pleasures, like a bag of flour, than in 'normal' times. A friend from church left a bag of flour on our doorstep. Another family took a bag of flour with them on their cycle ride up the old railway line, to give to a family in Ogbourne St George.

Some of us round here have developed a good habit of exchanging food. For example one neighbour who is still shopping in Waitrose often finds interesting bargains, particularly fish and meat, and I might find smoked trout on my doorstep, or a joint of beef under our adjoining beech hedge. The same neighbour also arrives with bundles of rhubarb, leeks, or lettuce from her garden.

I was confined to barracks about two weeks before the lockdown, and, dismal though it is, I have also experienced the most wonderful kindness during this period. One kind neighbour shops for me twice a week; another checks on me every morning and each evening, and that all is well with me. And my medication is delivered each month. Yes I hate the lockdown - or at least the reason for it - but I am staggered at people's kindness and concern. Thank you one and all!

The wonderful world around us

Home Thoughts from Abroad 2020 - with apologies to Robert Browning

Oh to be in England
Now that April's there,
And whoever wakes in England
Sees lockdown everywhere
They stay at home in silent towns
While nature romps o'er dales and downs
And birds still sing on orchard bough
In England - now!

My visits into Marlborough now are restricted to a once-a-week outing to shop. Starting out soon after 7 is the most peaceful time of the morning, little traffic and great birdsong. Such enjoyment derived from this sortie through the Forest, with the windows open, and the fresh air in my face. Before lockdown who would have believed that this short journey could have given me so much pleasure, that I do not want it to end? Until next week...!

There is a noticeable difference each week in the flora, with early Spring becoming early Summer. In the first week, the trees were bare; another, there's a hint of early leaf; now, a verdant hue, leaves in tight bud. After the cold and wind of March, now April has arrived, and the warmth of the sun has caused the wild cherry to bloom - the trees in their own time are bursting forth, and latterly, the horse chestnuts are in full-leaf and now, with blossom.



How blessed we are here in Marlborough, surrounded by beautiful scenery in every direction! From early morning walks on The Common to afternoons wandering along the River Kennet, or up in the forest, the variety, peace, bird-song and luscious greenery has been stunning. Then back home to sit in the garden reading a good book in the sunshine.

"Blue skies, smiling at me, Nothing but blue skies do I see." Irving Berlin had it right, particularly in Wiltshire, for we have lived under blue skies for almost two months since lockdown started. Is this pure coincidence due to unusual seasonal weather, a blessing of the Lord to help us through, or could it be a direct result of lockdown? The photograph shows high clouds, generated by an aircraft flying across the wind (mid left to mid bottom) its polluting condensation trail teased out sideways. Imagine if the usual procession of aircraft had flown across - there would be little, if any, blue to see. I'm sure those of us who 'played out' in the '50s will recall those blue summer days, now so rare. Maybe this wonderful blue is not God's blessing but his wake up call to stop us polluting our atmosphere.



Lots of positives

Yes, we have found several advantages: clear skies and no aeroplanes - peaceful! Being able to run straight across the road (with only the swiftest of checks); more friendly smiles, nods and waves when out for my exercise runs; making a new sawing bench - been meaning to do this for years! The garden has been cleared out and the worms on the compost heap think it's Christmas!

I have been baking more than usual and like to share my offerings locally where practical! My garden has never been so lovingly tended and vegetables all planted in anticipation of a bumper harvest. I have managed to keep up my yoga practice (perhaps not quite daily) but regrettably cannot remember the sequence of Tai Chi moves so look forward to resuming.

Lockdown has pushed many of us technophobes to discover that we can do more and get such pleasure from ‘new to us’ technology, and in particular face time and zoom. We have Sunday night gatherings with our children and grandchildren; we join the Quakers on Sunday mornings; we chat and share thoughts with our regular social groups such as our book club; we join classes, we do quizzes and play games.

Our new next door neighbours put on a VE party yesterday outside their house - all at a safe distance of course! The wonderful thing was meeting people we had never met before, even though they only lived two or three houses away. It was great fun getting to know each other and enjoying each other's company. It certainly felt that in this wretched virus, we are all in it together.

The Limerick Lady of Beckhampton

..... *"on March 13th she started writing a daily limerick detailing various aspects of Covid-19 as they unfolded. Like Captain Tom she won't give up until it's all over" - all can be found on Twitter (and the Swindon Choral Society website) @AnnaQuarendon*

A lockdown lim'rick a day
Won't keep the doctor away
But tho I'm no Ovid
Some rhymes about Covid
Might help to keep boredom at bay

In gardening shorts and a vest
No make-up and hair like a nest
She feels there's some doubt
That when she's let out
She'll remember quite how to get dressed

Enterprise

The Marlborough LINK scheme's volunteers normally spend most of their time driving clients round. Now trips with passengers became trips alone with only long client shopping lists for company. But what about payment?

Enter the hand-held credit-card reader. Within days, LINK had purchased three iZettle card readers, enabling the client to pay on the doorstep through the volunteer's smart phone. The success of this initiative has led to a booming volunteer shopping 'industry' – actually a pretty exhausting exercise when you are running round Tesco and Waitrose juggling three long lists from different clients!

After requests for 15 sets of cotton scrubs, a couple of extremely competent sewers got to work organising their manufacture, ably assisted by a master pattern-cutter. We put out a call for volunteers and after a great response from people I was



able to deliver many sets of cotton scrubs to Savernake Hospital (from Cotswold Ward at Savernake: "Thank you so much, they are great and much appreciated") and local Care Homes. And just got a request from Prospect Hospice, so we'll be starting on those very soon!

U3A is about learning, socialising and friendship for those who have finished full time work, but coronavirus has stopped face-to-face meetings and group events outdoors. However, many of the interest groups have restarted using video calls, phone calls and emails. We have also set up an "email buddy"

system so that those without email get key messages passed on by someone local who does.

Members are thinking laterally. Our Walking Groups cannot continue at the moment but one of them is not letting that get in the way of a weekly "catch up". Instead of meeting in the pub after a walk, they are now meeting virtually for a Zoom coffee, and sharing stories and pictures of walks done individually.



Unexpected consequences

As a vulnerable household it's certainly a time to be grateful for help. Our son has taken on the role of delivery driver, and this week there was the additional frisson of a gift of self-raising flour. Amongst the bags I noticed a tub of "Heroes", and after a moment of salivating and thinking "Oh how lovely!", I quickly returned it to his car. Later I had an e-mail from him. "I see that you sent your self-raising flour back to us again by accident this morning - it was in the 'Heroes' plastic tub!"

When I was about 10 years old I was given a small book containing maps of every county in the UK. This gift kindled in me a life-long love of maps. Recently I have noted, with some apprehension, the ever increasing availability of GPS data on mobile devices, to the detriment of an appreciation of maps amongst the young. My children and grandchildren recently went on a family cycle ride for a considerable distance over downland tracks south of Salisbury. Afterwards my son sent me a photo of my grandson intensely inspecting a map! Dare I hope...?!

On Palm Sunday I began to make up some Messy Church bags for a couple of local families from the resources I had gathered for our cancelled event. When I went to deliver them, I met some other children who also came to Messy Church and who I hadn't realised lived near us. Soon news of the bags spread.

I ended up making up 10 bags to deliver to local families, and it felt like a special surprise to meet these new people - as if God orchestrated meetings that Sunday and changed what had felt like a sad Holy Week into a kind of new community. I thought lockdown would mean not meeting old friends - I hadn't expected it to be a chance to make new ones.

New resolutions

I have taken the opportunity of lockdown to do something I've meant to do for many years: get to know the names of some wildflowers. It's more complicated than I thought because you almost need to become an amateur botanist to be sure you've got the identification right. But I've made a start!

One positive outcome from the current situation is that I have got back on my bike. It has lain unloved in our shed for the past two years, as I somehow never found the right time to ride it, but after a week or so of lockdown we decided to pump up the tyres and hit the road. The highlight has been riding through West Woods with the fresh green of the new leaves and the bluebells in all their glory. I must try and keep riding when and if we return to a more normal existence!

Strangely, while lockdown has been very confining, for me it has also been quite liberating! No longer the distractions of the pub, so I have turned my attention to my bookshelves and those dusty volumes which have been waiting for this moment. I have just embarked on the seven volumes of Gibbon's Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire. Given pubs appear unlikely to open before July at the earliest, I have a fighting chance!

New life

In 1910 John O'Regan fulfilled his ambition to recreate a Roman style house complete with an atrium and hypocaust. Later the fourth generation, Jane and Mike's daughter Cordelia Alice, played on the mosaic floor. Thirty three years later, this April in the midst of lockdown, the fifth generation of Marlborough O'Regans made an entrance when Cory's daughter Georgie spent the first month of her new life in Killycoonagh.







Clergy Letter: Freedom and Joy

Janneke Blockland

It may sound odd, in the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic, to title a clergy letter ‘Freedom and Joy’. Are those two not precisely the ones of which we are rather short at the moment? Don’t worry, I am by no means denying that this time has been hard for most of us, for a variety of reasons. Some find it hard to cope with the loneliness, whereas others can’t wait to escape their busy household. Some have been furloughed and lost their sense of purpose, whereas others are working tirelessly at the frontline.

No matter in which situation we find ourselves, it has been different from ‘normal’ and most of us don’t like to be out of control. However, I would like to suggest that our freedom and joy cannot be taken away by the current restrictions, nor can they be found by taking back control of our lives. Here, I’d like to say a few more words about freedom; joy will get a little more attention in a book review elsewhere.

A few weeks ago, in one of my classes, we were looking at George Orwell’s famous work ‘1984’ and the pupils started discussing what freedom meant. Their consensus was that we are freer now, despite our restrictions on movement, than in the world sketched in the novel. Our freedom lies in the ability to be who we are, rather than to go where we want. Freedom is not the same as control.

Of course, some may object that to be fully who we are, we need to be able to travel, to see others and to live in community – and I agree. However, maybe the communities to which we belong momentarily are different from those before. Many of us will be spending more time talking to family and friends living far away, and at the same time we may have met neighbours who we had not seen before, offering help or asking to do the shopping.

Life is certainly different at the moment, and we can feel hopelessly out of control. Yet, our freedom remains and these months may even become an opportunity to learn a little bit more what that freedom entails.

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.*

Luke 4.17-21

Book review: The Book of Joy – Lasting Happiness in a Changing World

The Book of Joy, published in 2016, is the record of a week of conversations between the Dalai Lama and Bishop Desmond Tutu on the occasion of the Dalai Lama's 80th birthday. In their introduction they express their hope that this book may “be a blessing for all sentient beings, and for all God's children – including you.” It certainly has been a blessing for me, changing my perspective on the last couple of months.

Both the Dalai Lama and Desmond Tutu have had their share of pain and suffering, both personally and on behalf of their people. The Dalai Lama has lived in exile for over fifty years, and Desmond Tutu was part of the painful process liberating South Africa from the Apartheid regime. Yet, the book itself exudes a sense of joy that is undiminished. I would say it is even magnified by their experiences, giving their words credibility and depth.

The fact that the two men are good friends gives the conversations a lightness and honesty, which are well captured by the author, Douglas Adams. He gently steers the conversation and punctuates the conversations by asking the questions that are on our own minds too.

I would warmly recommend this book as an antidote to the endless statistics and news reports as a way to reminding us of the joys of life. I'd like to finish with a quote from the concluding chapter:

“So all of us, spiritual brothers and sisters, have a special responsibility, have a special role to make clear that the ultimate source of a meaningful life is within ourselves. If you live in this way, until your last breath comes you will be a happy, happy person. That's the goal of human life—to live with joy and purpose.”

Nick Maurice, founder/patron of the Marlborough Brandt Group brings news from Marlborough's linked community in Gunjur

The Marlborough Brandt Group (MBG) has appealed to many friends to support an Emergency Fund with which to provide sacks of rice, their staple diet, to the poorest families in Marlborough's linked community of Gunjur in The Gambia, who are really suffering as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. In the past month alone some £20,000 has been raised, 900 sacks of rice have been bought by MBG's partner organisation in The Gambia, TARUD (Trust Agency for Rural Development) and the rice distributed to 430 families i.e. two sacks per family, which it is estimated will last two months. **Go to the following for the full story:**



<https://www.gunjuronline.com/post/tarud-distributes-420-bags-of-rice-to-families-in-gunjur>

At the time of writing (1.5.20) there have only been eleven reported cases of coronavirus in The Gambia and one death but the land and sea border with Senegal is extremely porous and there have been many more cases in that country, 1024 with 9 deaths. The outlook for The Gambia is not good.

The Gambian Government has demanded the appropriate measures of lockdown, hand washing and keeping one's distance from other people. But in a predominantly Muslim country with large families (a man is entitled to marry four wives) living together in compounds often without piped water, the water having to be fetched either from a nearby tap or well, and in a community where social gatherings and five times daily communal prayers at the Mosques in Gunjur are all the norm, it is almost impossible to persuade people to lockdown and keep their distance from friends and extended family in neighbouring compounds.

Food supplies are becoming limited and of course it is the poorest who suffer most. 25 years ago 80% of the rice consumed in The Gambia was 'home grown'. Climate change has meant less rainfall and therefore a requirement for irrigation. But the combination of the reduced amount of rain and with sea levels rising, this has resulted in salination of the Gambia river a further 50 miles upstream. The riv-

er bisects the whole country and was a vital source of water for crops in neighbouring fields, but that salt water cannot now be used to irrigate crops.

It is now estimated that 85% of rice is imported from India, Pakistan, Thailand, Japan and USA. But the pandemic has meant firstly that less rice is being produced in those countries and therefore less available for export and, secondly, that with no flights now coming into The Gambia and few ships, the amount of imported rice has drastically diminished.

Fortunately there are currently sufficient stocks of rice for the distribution to the poorest families in Gunjur and there is no question that this going to make huge difference to their lives.

Baai Jaabang, the Director of TARUD who some may remember for his excellent presentation in St Peter's Church in 2018 when he talked about the potential for the development of the mango industry in Gunjur and The Gambia, expresses his really sincere gratitude on behalf of the families in Gunjur to the many donors to the MBG Emergency appeal. The appeal is still very much open (the rice so far distributed will only last an estimated two months) and if there are others who would like to donate to the fund please go to the MBG website for details. Do please consider making a donation, you may well be saving a life.

Emergency supplies ready for distribution



Post Covid-19 recovery for our planet and health

Jo Ripley

A growing global chorus of politicians, economists, campaigners and businesses are calling for stimulus packages to “shape policies” in line with climate action, shifting to low-carbon energy and transport systems and accelerate a lasting shift away from polluting fossil fuels. With governments pouring money into the economy, the chief executive of the Climate Change Committee has said that gigantic stimulus packages to prop up the world economy during the coronavirus crisis should be designed to tackle climate change.

At the recent online two-day climate change international conference, Dominic Raab said that when the threat from coronavirus recedes "it will be the duty of every responsible government to see that our economies are revived and rebuilt in a way that will stand the test of time... investing in industries and infrastructure that can turn the tide on climate change." We may need to remind our government of this!

The pandemic highlights the interdependence and vulnerability of many of our systems, and how the far greater climate and ecological crisis makes the threat of future pandemics more likely with scientists warning that the separation of health and environmental policy is a dangerous delusion and our destruction of biodiversity is creating the conditions for new viruses and diseases. Empty shelves show how vulnerable our “efficient, just-in-time” food system is. For years campaigners have warned that “society is 9 meals and 2 days of water away from tensions and instabilities” including climate shocks - all worse for poor communities.

Good news!

Parliament’s pension fund has made record investments in renewable energy and cut its exposure to fossil fuel companies to bring MPs’ pensions in line with the government’s climate action targets. Oxford University recently announced it would divest its multi-billion pound endowment from fossil fuel assets.

New rules could end our "throwaway" culture with regulations applying to many everyday items - mobile phones, textiles, electronics, batteries, construction & packaging - to ensure products are designed and manufactured so they last and are repairable as part of a worldwide movement, the Right to Repair.

The government recently published an ambitious plan for how it will revolutionise UK transport to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and fight the climate crisis, welcomed by The Campaign for Better Transport as being an unprecedented vision

of modal shift with fewer car journeys, many more by bike and on foot. (No mention about aviation emissions, however.)

Proposed big change is afoot everywhere because of Covid-18, eg Paris & Milan announcing ambitious schemes for freeing up largescale road use for cycling, and looking to maintain this post-virus. Even the President of the AA has said that "People travelling up and down motorways just to hold meetings is inefficient, expensive and not good for the environment ...We remain generally supportive of measures to encourage more cycling and walking both during and after lockdown." The number of new renewable energy projects applying for planning permission reached a 4-year high in the UK last year and the clean energy revolution is global.

Green Hydrogen: The British gas industry have plans to be the world's first carbon-free gas grid, from a mix of green hydrogen produced by surplus solar, wind and bio-methane from farms and waste food, saying it's technically possible and one of the less expensive options in solving the problem of heating UK homes, offices and factories.

Encouraging announcements and commitments reflecting more ambitious climate targets from Oil Giants BP and Shell – campaigners and shareholders will maintain firm pressure on these as it's not the first time but times are a-changing!

Barclays, the top European financier of fossil fuels in the last four years and the 7th largest globally, has bowed to investor pressure, announcing plans to shrink its carbon footprint to net zero by 2050.

A mutant bacterial enzyme that breaks down plastic bottles for recycling in hours has been created by scientists. Originally discovered in a compost heap of leaves, it reduced the bottles to chemical building blocks then used to make high-quality new bottles. The company behind the breakthrough aims for industrial-scale recycling within five years.

Scientists say there is now the knowledge to create an ocean renaissance for wildlife by 2050. The climate crisis must be tackled to protect oceans from acidification, loss of oxygen and the devastation of coral reefs but there is growing awareness of the ability of oceans and coastal habitats like mangroves and salt marshes to rapidly soak up CO2 and bolster shorelines against rising sea levels. A review in the journal Nature found that global fishing is slowly becoming more sustainable and the destruction of habitats such as seagrass meadows and mangroves is almost at a halt and, in places, the habitats are being restored.

Why we need action:

The US is facing as bad a mega-drought ever recorded, exacerbated by climate change.

Antarctica has recently experienced a record-breaking heatwave. The Great Barrier Reef is suffering its 3rd mass bleaching with scientists trialling cloud brightening

experiments to shade and cool to provide respite while stressing the need to tackle global temperatures for any long-term hope of protection. Methane levels are at an all-time high. According to a new study, tropical forests now emit more carbon than they can absorb.

But as Greta Thunberg says: “If one virus can wipe out the entire economy in a matter of weeks and shut down societies, then that is a proof that our societies are not very resilient. It also shows that once we are in an emergency, we can act and we can change our behaviour quickly.”

Family News

Jessy Pomfret

On May 9th **Anne and David Norman** held a Zoom first birthday party along with their daughter and her family for their grandson, Theo, who lives in Singapore. A giant singing Thomas the Tank engine balloon and Happy 1st birthday banner were the backdrop from the Marlborough end while over in Portishead Abigail (aged 5) and Jacob (aged 7) showed baby Theo the colourful birthday cards they had made for the cousin they had only met online. Locked down in a 7th floor apartment in Singapore with daddy James Norman and mummy Ediana, unable to even go out for walk in his buggy, baby Theo showed off his new teeth and burbled happily.

Chris Horril has sent in this additional piece about his mother: **Pamela Horril** was the fourth of five children of Mr. Alfred Stedman, headmaster of Marlborough Grammar School, and Mrs Stedman, of Greenlands, London Road Marlborough. After training as a nurse at the Radcliffe Hospital Oxford she married Peter in St. Mary’s church (where her two children, Alison and Christopher, were also later christened). Although she never returned to live in Wiltshire (she spent the rest of her life in Nottingham), her heart was always in Marlborough and the surrounding countryside. Her memories of her childhood remained very vivid. She kept in close contact with some of her classmates all her life.

Roger Wise writes: In 1970 when I was 7 years old, a man called **Mr Pomfret** came to our morning assembly at St Peter’s junior school and said that he was looking for boys who could sing to join his choir in St Mary’s church. He was very enthusiastic and with parental permission I went along to the church a few days later for a choir practice with some other boys. It was harvest time and we sang, ‘Come ye thankful people come’, which is still my favourite hymn. After a while, we stopped and Mr Pomfret asked me which musical note lasted longest, the completely filled in note (a crotchet) or the one which wasn’t filled in (a minim). I could read no music at that time and so guessed the one which wasn’t filled in was

shorter on the basis that it looked less substantial. “Bad luck”, said Mr Pomfret, “It’s the other one”. This was the first lesson of many which Jesse Pomfret was to deliver to me and which I never forgot.

He had a great team of boys who were mostly older than me, some of the stars being James Cowley, Michael Mashiter and Richard Mundy. I went to practices on Monday, Wednesday, Friday evenings, and services twice on Sunday, regularly for the next 6 years for two reasons; the music, and the enthusiasm of Jesse Pomfret which seemed to be almost inexhaustible. His stated aim at each practice was to make it like a performance and he generally succeeded even when we were starting to learn a new piece.

He had a great sense of humour which he needed on one occasion when we decided to hide in the church so that when he arrived for practice the place seemed to be deserted. Jesse would tell us tales of his past, about seeing the Sea of Galilee from the back of an army truck during his national service, and how he shot his first pheasant. When a boy had a birthday, Jesse would bring toffees, and weddings were especially popular with us because we got paid. If you did something good, such as singing well or being first to answer correctly a question about music, you received a “Good point” which was rewarded with a little more pocket money, handed out every few months.

But we didn’t do it for the money. It was really fun. The music was superb and apart from hymns, Jesse taught us to sing psalms (performed at Evenson), and then anthems. Orlando Gibbons, Stanford, Stainer were all composers some of whose major works I knew by the age of nine, and I can still remember.

In addition, Jesse organised other events including a major choir festival attended by several hundred singers from all over Wiltshire (we all giggled when his music stand collapsed during the final rehearsal), and even ice skating trips.

Jesse was also my music teacher at school and his same enthusiasm swept me into a small solo part in Gilbert and Sullivan’s Trial by Jury, the school orchestra as timpanist, a music ‘O’ level and to several grades on the piano. I am sure now that I would never have achieved these things without him and I will be forever grateful for this musical education.

I found Jesse to be a person who was able to lead very ably through musical ability (we sometimes sang pieces which he had composed), enthusiasm, patience, humour and a strong Christian faith which saw him through some difficult times. He was able to bring the best out of people, and give them the confidence to perform well above their own expectations. He gave a generation of young people in Marlborough the gift of musical appreciation through teaching, being a first rate choir-master and by example as someone who was single-mindedly dedicated to producing good music through the young people that he taught.

Marlborough College Nature Trail

Sean Dempster

After three months of lockdown, many Marlborough folk will already be very familiar with Granham Hill and the beautiful views over the town and far away towards Four Mile Clump and Barbury Castle.

Less well-known is the College Nature Trail, much of which is accessible to the public (please note that the sections numbered 1-9 and 37-40 are not accessible to the public). Especially beautiful at this time of year, the well-marked trail leads you through various habitats including the lush water meadows of the river valley, semi-ancient oak woodland, wildflower-rich downland and a shady beech wood.

The trail, which takes about an hour to walk around, is indicated by 40 numbered posts, the majority of which mark different tree species. Using the map below, you can pick up the trail at various locations but the most obvious is the footbridge leading to Preshute Church where you will find Number 10. Children will enjoy the challenge of following the route using the numbered posts and arrows which indicate the direction to take. Adults can test their knowledge of trees by identifying those numbered 11-24 and 26-35.

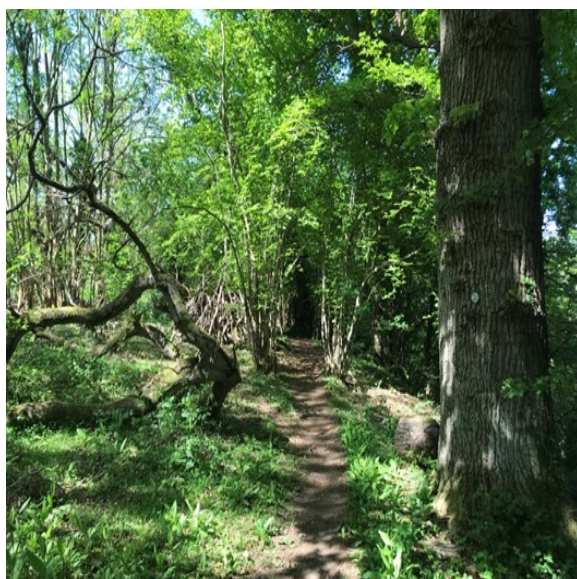
Another challenge is to find some of the thirty nest boxes, all of which are located close to the trail. These boxes are checked on a weekly basis; at present half of them contain Great Tit nests, nine are occupied by Blue Tits and one by a Nuthatch. The record number of eggs this year is 13 (Blue Tit) and the first chicks (eight Great Tits) were found on May 4th. In the next few weeks, the adult birds will be extremely busy delivering food to their insatiable offspring. If you pause in the vicinity of a nest box, it shouldn't be long before you see an adult delivering a tasty morsel.

A detailed map appears overleaf after the photos.



Looking East through the beech wood at the top of Granbam Hill

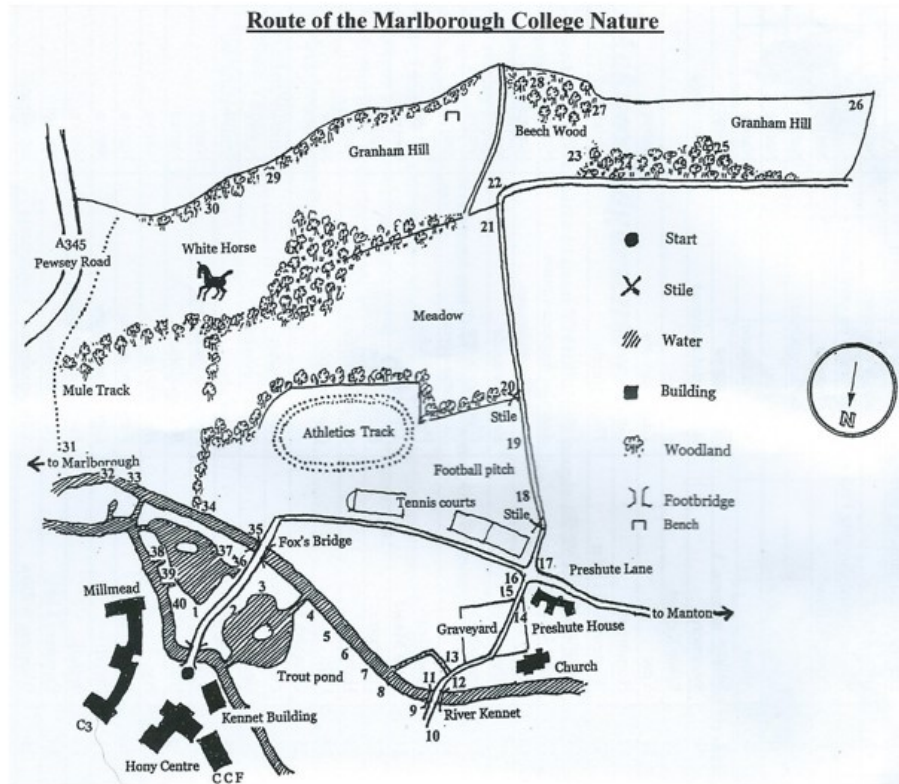
Heading South-West up the path to get onto Granbam Hill past tree number 24 (oak)



Marlborough College Nature Trail: Tree Identification and Map

- | | |
|----------------------|-----------------------|
| 11 Yew | 12 Hornbeam |
| 13 Western Red Cedar | 14 Rowan/Mountain Ash |
| 15 Horse Chestnut | 16 Cherry Laurel |
| 17 Silver Birch | 18 English Elm |
| 19 Elder | 20 Blackthorn |
| 21 Field Maple | 22 Hawthorn |
| 23 Hazel | 24 Oak |
| 26 Larch | 27 Beech |
| 28 Norway Spruce | 29 Ash |
| 30 Holly | 31 Ivy |
| 32 Guelder Rose | 33 Privet |
| 34 Spindle | 35 Lime |

Route of the Marlborough College Nature Trail



'What can you do with a man who says he "has read" [books], meaning he has read them once and thinks that this settles the matter?' C S Lewis said this, and I'm glad he did as I guess that this month most of us are having to trawl our bookshelves for old favourites. I'm a big re-reader anyway, and in this strange and scary time I'm happy not to be surprised by clever plot twists. Fear of the real unknown is quite enough at the moment, I'm happy to know what's coming in the book I'm reading.

For long sweeping narratives I've gone back to Olivia Manning's *Balkan Trilogy*, which I regularly recommend to customers. I've also dusted off Paul Scott's masterly *Raj Quartet*, equally huge, a complex and sophisticated, yet still very readable account of the end of Empire. I've just realised that these two, and another old favourite, *I Claudius* by Robert Graves, have all been adapted into highly successful TV series, probably because they are such great, immersive stories. For 'real' life I've been dipping in and out of Horace Walpole's letters, always good company, and I'd forgotten I had two volumes of Dorothy L Sayers' letters, a very clever (and didn't she know it?) woman, lively and opinionated.

The latent romantic adolescent in me remains a sucker for anything Arthurian, so after (yikes!) 40 years, I'm re-reading Susan Cooper's children's series *The Dark is Rising*. They've worn very well indeed, I'm thoroughly enjoying them. And every few years I go back to T H White's *The Once and Future King* – learned, funny, tragic in the true sense of the word, a vision of the middle ages as they never really were.

Of course in difficult times people feel they want to (or should?) return to the classics, or get some Great Works under their belts for the first time. I'm thinking about re-visiting *Tristram Shandy*, which I remember loving, and which, for narrative whackiness knocks some of today's bright young novelists into a cocked hat. However, when I went through a low period some years ago, I'm not ashamed to admit that Georgette Heyer saw me through. (Also *Tin Tin*.) So read whatever will keep you entertained and uplifted. The other stuff will wait for you.

What won't wait for me are the six shortlisted books for the Richard Jefferies/WHBookshop Prize for Nature Writing – so I must get on.....

.....and the short-listed books for this prize are:

The Hidden World of the Fox by Adele Brand (William Collins)

Journeys by David Barrie (Hodder & Stoughton)

The Nature of Spring by Jim Crumley (Saraband)

On the Marsh by Simon Barnes (Simon & Shuster)

Rebirding by Benedict MacDonald (Pelagic Publishing)

Working with Nature by Jeremy Purseglove (Profile Books)