
TOWER_{AND}TOWN



AND COUNTRY

MARCH 2024

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TOWER^{AND}TOWN

THE MAGAZINE OF MARLBOROUGH'S COMMUNITY AND CHURCHES

NUMBER 745 MARCH 2024



AND COUNTRY

Tower & Town we may be, but also tower and country just as much. No one who lives in and around Marlborough can fail to be aware of the closeness of our connection to the surrounding countryside, something that I suspect many of us during those long dark lockdown months became acutely conscious of.

So, this edition is a celebration of that countryside and aims to provide a little insight into what makes it so special, and the good people and groups and organisations and businesses who help to keep it that way. I quickly discovered soon after I set off down this editorial road that I could fill half a dozen magazines with country related material, so if I have not included your favourite bit, apologies - but do write and tell us about it, or indeed comment on what's here.

To my many contributors, grateful thanks for the articles, and above all for what you all do to give us a countryside that we can enjoy. Dr Jemma Batten (Project Director, Marlborough Downs Nature Enhancement Partnership) writes about the Making Space for Nature project. Kirstine Bowen from the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust writes about the Bay Meadows Nature Park. Matt Prior writes about wildlife conservation on the downs, and river-keeper John Hounslow talks to me about the River Kennet. David Pegden writes about his love of the local countryside through his camera lens (the cover and other lovely images in this edition are his); Nikki Morgans tells us about Forestry England's work in Savernake; Jamie Horton gives us an insight into the life of a dairy farmer; and I take a walk.

In addition to which we have our army of wonderful regular contributors, including something from a local textile group. So much to enjoy, and so much to be thankful for.

David Du Croz, Editor

Cover picture: *Harvest From Milk Hill* by David Pegden
Photos on pages 6, 7 and 12 also by David. For more information
email d.pegden@btinternet.com or phone 07792 349062

Following the 2010 publication of Professor Lawton's report *Making Space for Nature*, Marlborough Downs farmers were horrified to learn that countless native wildlife species were in decline or, at best, just about holding their own. Consequently, when Defra launched a competition inviting proposals to pilot new ways of working for wildlife, the group were able to secure funding to show how a farmer-led, bottom-up approach could result in real gains for the habitats and species found on the downs.

We were determined to show that by being allowed to make our own decisions about wildlife management on the downs, together we could accomplish great and wide-reaching benefits. When the initial funding ran out, the farmers were determined to continue and are still going strong today, funded partly by the farmers themselves, and partly by various grants and donations.

The *Space for Nature* project is owned by the farmers and their supporters. We have invested a lot into it and are therefore committed to the responsibility of ensuring that our achievements are sustainable. Wildlife conservation is not all about money and we have shown that it is undertaken far more enthusiastically and effectively by people who are genuinely motivated at a personal level, rather than merely incentivised by financial reward.

We have also discovered that by working together we can create a vibrant community that is able to achieve so much more than we would alone. We've seen how what started out as a fairly straightforward wildlife project has grown into something that has social, health, and economic benefits as well as bringing about better awareness, understanding and management of our local biodiversity.

'Space for Nature' achievements:

- Over 150 acres of chalk grassland habitat created/undergoing restoration, with seven new sites identified as being of local importance for wildlife.
- Over 600 acres of rough grassland managed for small mammals, owls and raptors, and over 30 sites planted with flowering bulbs or shrubs to create habitat for pollinators.
- A necklace of 18 new or restored ponds across the downs.
- More widespread populations of tree sparrow, corn bunting and other farmland birds due to scrub planting and winter feeding programmes.
- The Space for Nature Reserve, showcasing our work for research, demonstration and education purposes.
- Improved public access on 47 miles of footpath and bridleway, and 8.5 miles of permissive access for disabled carriage drivers.

Bay Meadows is Wiltshire Wildlife Trust's newest nature reserve, located on the edge of Marlborough. The River Og, a beautiful chalk stream, runs through the middle of the reserve's water meadows. Purchased in 2022, the trust saved the site from the threat of development that would have destroyed its value for wildlife.

Thanks to great support from the trust's members, the National Lottery Heritage Fund, The Hills Group, Dyson, Fish in Need, Marlborough Area Board, the Town Council and other generous donors, the trust has completed a transformative project to improve the habitat for mammals, birds, fish and pollinators. The trust has also created a nature park which is now open for everyone to enjoy.

Bay Meadows is crucial in helping wildlife move seasonally through the chalk landscape along the River Og. Surveys have revealed that more than 300 species call Bay Meadows home, including otters, water voles and wild brown trout; habitat restoration in the nature reserve's wildlife refuge area has been geared toward attracting even more.



© Richard Clarke

Shallow scrapes have been created, which will fill with water seasonally, providing ideal habitat for wading birds such as lapwing. The scrapes are also a clever way to mitigate the impact of climate change, allowing water to be released slowly during dry periods to help sustain nature. In the Og's channel, the water flow has been varied to improve fish spawning habitat.

More than 6,000 trees have been planted, including hawthorn and crab apple, to provide food sources and nesting habitat for birds. Many snakeshead fritillary bulbs have also been planted to establish a beautiful, rare wildflower meadow.

The nature park provides a wonderful place to explore, relax and connect with nature, easily walkable from the town of Marlborough. Along the new circular paths and connecting bridges, there's the chance to see and hear many birds, including reed bunting, and yellowhammer. You may even see the iridescent blue flash of a kingfisher darting along the channel. In summer, why not sit on the riverbank listening to the trickling waters whilst watching dragonflies?

With the help of an amazing group of volunteers, the trust has created a den building area, an enchanted tunnel and a wellbeing area, whilst several chill-out areas mown into the meadow provide a place to picnic or enjoy the view. Visit: www.wiltshirewildlife.org/nature-reserves/bay-meadows .

The Tree Sparrow Story

Matt Prior

The tree sparrow is the country cousin of the more familiar house sparrow. They have declined by 94% across the UK over the past 40 years, mainly due to intensification of farming. They are sadly extinct from most counties in southern England. I started the Wiltshire Tree Sparrow Recovery Project in 1999, when there were only about 30 pairs on the Marlborough and Pewsey Downs.

Initially, we researched where tree sparrows had historically been recorded. We then installed nest boxes on trees and buildings on farmland across North Wiltshire. Tree sparrows are seed eaters, so we put up some bird feeders at the same sites and provisioned them with a mix of white millet and high energy seed mix.

Tree sparrows took to the nest boxes in the first year, and numbers built steadily year on year. We monitor the nest boxes and count and record all the eggs laid and young hatched. We are very careful doing



© Nick Upton

this because tree sparrows are very wary around the nest. We are trained and qualified to do this to ensure that there is no risk to the birds or the nest contents.

We use bird ringing, for which we are licensed, as a tool to learn how tree sparrows disperse and use the landscape. This has helped us to plan where to install the next phase of nest boxes and feeding stations, and we now have 1,200 nest boxes. Working with other groups, we have planted lots of elder trees that seem to be beneficial to tree sparrows. There has been a suite of other habitat enhancements including improving field margins, planting conservation cover crops, and creating dewponds.

The number of pairs varies from year to year. They had increased to a maximum of 258 pairs using our nest boxes, but over the past 5 years there has been another nationwide decline, the cause of which is currently unknown. In 2023, 110 pairs used our nest boxes, and they raised 1,100 young to fledging. The average of 10 young per pair is a record over the normal 7-9 young per pair. This shows that nesting success and availability of insects for nestlings is not an issue - the issue is related to winter survival. Tree sparrows are extinct across most of southern England with fewer than 250 pairs south of the Midlands. With 50% of the population of southern England, it is vital that we are successful in conserving them in Wiltshire.



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The Way I See It

David Pegden

I have lived in Devizes for the past 30 years or so. The 'day job' is in engineering. Photography is the complete opposite - your imagination can run wild. If it works, great; if it doesn't, then no worries - delete that image and think again.

I first got into photography in the early 90s, shooting on transparency and negative film, both in colour and black and white. I did a lot of walking then, still do, and photography was the obvious way of capturing light, landscapes and interesting bits of detail in those landscapes, either natural or man-made. I soon discovered the Marlborough Downs and the Vale of Pewsey - brilliant, and right on the doorstep. Steeped in history that even for this country goes back so far - Avebury and Silbury Hill, 4,500 or so years old - wandering these places really makes you think. I love these ancient sites and landscapes, but at the same time I'm really interested in the patterns that modern farming leaves in the landscape, ploughed fields, tramlines, bales, mowed fields, swathes of straw and such like.

After a number of evening courses, I soon realised that really the only way to learn was to get out there and learn from your mistakes. Back then you had to wait for a few days to see the results, and try and work out why some things worked and others didn't. After a while I started selling a few images. I booked stalls at fairs and shows, and gradually was selling a sizeable number of photographs, and getting work from various local companies, councils, magazines and charities, but the best bit was the people I met.

Fast forward to July 2020 and lockdown. I found I had a little more spare time, time to just stop and look, time to explore places locally that I had not been to for years. I kept saying to myself, 'that might make a shot', so I dug



out the Nikon and a couple of basic lenses, and started looking again. I think you can only get the best out of place if you keep going back to it, time and time again, all seasons, different times and different lights. To do this, it really has to be local, and the Marlborough Downs and Vale of Pewsey offer so much. I have no interest in travelling miles to find a shot - everything I take is no more than 10 miles or so from home.

On a recent visit to the Slimbridge Wetland Reserve in Gloucestershire I listed an impressive range of wader species: golden plovers and lapwings by the thousands, a flock of black-tailed godwits, redshanks, curlews, avocets, ruff, dunlin, snipe and oystercatcher.

Back in Wiltshire we cannot compete with that variety and number of birds, but with the advent of spring in mid March we do have one or two special wader species returning to their favoured haunts, year after year.

The stone curlew is perhaps the most iconic of our downland species, arriving from Southern Europe and Northern Africa to nest on barren, flint-strewn fields along the Pewsey and Marlborough Downs and on Salisbury Plain. Seventy-three pairs were confirmed breeding in Wiltshire in 2021, making it scarce, but increasing after a former decline. It is not a bird of marsh and wetland, the bill is short and stubby, so how can it be classified as a form of curlew? The answer lies in its eerie calls of ‘coor-lee, coor-lee,’ often heard at dusk and at night when it is most active. With its cryptic, oatmeal-brown plumage and secretive manner it is difficult to pick out against a background of broken earth, flints and low vegetation.

Its companion in this habitat is the lapwing or green plover, but this is now a decreasing breeder. This is especially sad, for the display flight of the male is an entertaining sight on cold bright mornings in early spring. The bird rises slowly from the ground then quickens, rising at an abrupt angle before suddenly plunging downwards, turning and twisting with wings thrown about as if out of control. As well as the characteristic ‘peer-weet’ call, another sound is created by its beating wings - a strange, vibrant throbbing noise.



A few oystercatchers and redshanks breed in the Cotswold Water Park and they're joined by another special bird, the little ringed plover, a diminutive summer visitor that favours a drained or working gravel pit as a nest site. Like the lapwing its courtship routine is eccentric - a butterfly-like display flight involving endless circling on slow wing-beats, followed by steep ascents or plunging dives. Injury-feigning is another of its tricks, dragging a faked broken wing to draw a potential predator away from the nest-site.

They are all a bit bonkers these Wiltshire waders: the snipe with its bleating flight, caused by the vibration of its outer tail feathers and the ‘roding’ woodcock marking out its territory at dusk, calling with comical grunts and squeaks!

The River Kennet

The Kennet is like an artery - a channelled lifeforce through our bit of Wiltshire. I met John Hounslow, a man who has spent more than 40 years tending to sections of the river, to find out more about this vital element of our local countryside.

John is a fish-farmer and river-keeper for the stretch of the Kennet from Marlborough down to Axford. His role is the overall management of that river corridor for angling and for conservation generally. His work is principally general maintenance such as bridge-building, bank repair and tree-cutting, and although his focus is on the quality of the fishing, as he points out, the whole ecosystem of the river is essential to fish health, and *vice versa*.

About 60% of the river that he looks after is fairly heavily managed, 20% only mildly so, and a further 20% left wild - these are the parts he enjoys the most and especially in May when every aspect of the river is bursting into life. Conservation of all the many diverse habitats along the river is so important to maintain and sustain that rich variety of flora and fauna that make it such a vital part of our local countryside.

John says that the first ten years of his time working on the Kennet were the best because the river was in good health with an abundant population of wild fish, but increased human activity and development have put intolerable pressure on that environment, and water quality has declined significantly. This is largely the result of the failures of the sewerage infrastructure, agricultural and road run-off. During the last 35 years, for example, there has been a near fourfold increase in the discharge of treated sewage into the river, let alone those occasions of untreated discharge.

John remembers well the chlorpyrifos pesticide contamination of 2013 and says that the river is only now recovering back to the state it was before then. That contamination destroyed the invertebrate population, which in turn did huge damage not only to the fish but also to all others in that ecosystem. He comments for example on the massive decline in swallows, swifts and house martins deprived of the insects necessary for their health and breeding.

We all benefit from a rich and healthy river system in our midst, and need to be aware of the pressures that our existence and human activity put on that ecology. Housing developments, for example, add to the demand for water and increase the amount of effluent. If there is not sufficient investment in the infrastructure to support those developments, it is not only John's fish and his fishermen who suffer - we all do.

The Forest is often mistaken for a ‘natural’ or ‘wild’ place. In fact, the forest we know and love is the product of centuries of human intervention. This management has created Savernake’s mosaic of veteran trees, wood pasture, grassland, and pond habitat, which is bursting with scarce flora and fauna. Today, Savernake is still a working woodland, producing sustainable timber for the UK.

How is Savernake managed? Our management of the Forest is guided by a land management plan, which sets out Forestry England’s long-term vision for the forest and its Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). This is supported by a forest plan, which describes how we will work towards the vision during the next 10 years. Our vision for Savernake is that, 100 years from now, it will be a vibrant blend of ancient veterans and younger trees, the landscape and ecology will have adapted successfully to the future climate, and people will find joy in the forest’s biodiversity, history, and beauty.

How will we get there? Caring for Savernake Forest is a complex, year-round job. Just at the moment, we are opening up space around veteran trees; removing invasive birch from cattle grazing enclosures to support woodland pasture restoration; clearing vegetation to conserve scheduled monuments; planting willow to support the purple emperor butterfly and preparing for tree harvesting.

Savernake Forest is a stunning and satisfying place to work but comes with challenges. Scheduling work is a delicate balancing act, and we are at the mercy of the weather. Last year’s dry spring killed many of the new trees we planted in 2022, while the extremely wet autumn forced us to postpone harvesting work to protect the ground.

Pests and diseases are an ongoing threat to the forest. Excessive deer browsing can reduce biodiversity and productivity, while grey squirrels can damage broadleaf trees in high numbers. The changing climate is bringing new tree diseases to the UK at an increasing pace. Sadly, there are few cures or treatments for these; our best way to protect the forest is to continue increasing its tree and plant diversity.

Contacts: Forestry England westengland@forestryengland.uk or Facebook at facebook.com/ForestryEnglandSavernakeForest.

Post script: Thirty years ago there were at least six full-time on-site foresters and nurserymen; today there are none. There is however a small team of local volunteers that meets once a month to tackle some of the maintenance tasks. It’s fun and good exercise, and you also develop new skills and learn much about the forest. If you think this might be for you, then please give Peter Noble a ring (01672 519034) and he will advise Nikki.

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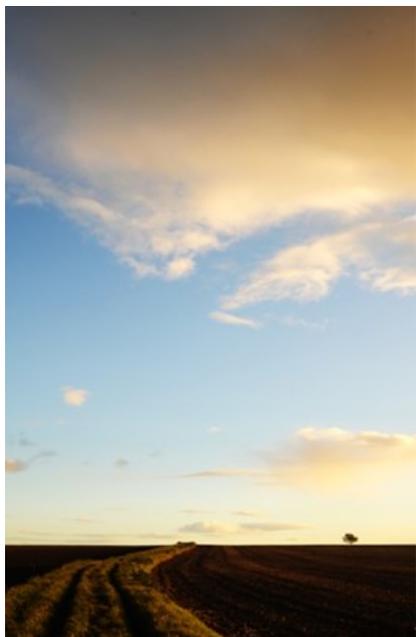
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They say it was the coldest night of the winter so far but the sun is out, so gloved and scarfed I head into the bright blue yonder.

I am immediately hit by a cacophony of starling chatter - they are everywhere, hundreds if not thousands in the fields and in the highest branches of the trees, facing the early morning sun for warmth. Suddenly a group of them head off and swoop low to feed in a neighbouring field.

Gerard Manley Hopkins' *Windbover* comes to mind - "I caught this morning morning's minion" - but there is no falcon here; a buzzard, yes, perched on a fence post and then off hunting along the hedgerow, while a pair of red kites soar overhead. The chalk path climbs away ahead of me towards the

skyline, and on I stride leaving the starlings behind.

The ground is rock hard and the ice from the smashed puddles is up to two inches thick. In *Next to Nature* Ronnie Blyth writes of hard frosts at his home, Bottengoms Farm. The ice on his ponds is "mere thin crackles around half-furled marsh marigold leaves, nothing extreme - a sunbeam would see it off". No chance of that here. The sun may be bright but the temperature is still well below freezing, and the puddles remain frozen solid.

I reach the crest of the rise and stop to take in the vastness of the landscape. Miles of downland stretching as far as the eye can see - the whole of North Wiltshire laid out before me in a 360 degree panorama, and not a human being in sight. Time for coffee so I sit on a nearby stone. An information board tells me that what I am sitting on was transported to the area through glacial action during the ice age - I feel connected with the past.

My journey home takes me past the grey wethers (so called because from a distance the stones look like sheep grazing); gallops and exercising racehorses; dips and hollows where the sun has not reached and the grass is laid flat by the cold and frosted white; and a copse called The Warren. I pass a woman and her dog who berates me for not wearing a woolly hat - she is quite right, I left it on the hall table!

Jamie farms 1750 acres at Broad Hinton with a herd of 800 cattle of which 400 are milkers.

‘Oak before ash, in for a splash; ash before oak, in for a soak.’ Well, I am guessing the ash trees beat the oak by some distance last year. We have had a record amount of rainfall on the farm, pretty much double the annual average. Farmyards and cottages battled floods, fields swamped, crops rotting, and landslides on the banks. Conversely, remember the record heatwave and humidity we had back in September? The cows did not like that and milk yields took a nosedive - it was such a massive change from the wet, cool August and they took weeks to recover fully.

The herd is now settled and performing really well. All of the cows have names, pedigrees, eartags, movement books and passports. I was on milking duty the other day and moving them to the milking parlour. Cow number 82 is greedy, and will stay eating whenever she can, stubbornly refusing to move. After an age of gentle persuasion 750kg of Holstein cow still hadn’t moved and I was beginning to wonder how this was going to play out, when she moved forward, gathered some pace and with a hop, skip and a jump aimed a kick at my vitals. We met again the next night and I was a little more alert this time! Our cows are very individual with very different personalities!

One of the joys of working on the farm is being amongst nature, seeing lapwing chicks in the spring on nesting plots, a grey partridge in the wild bird food areas, boxing hares on the grass margins, clouds of butterflies on the pollen and nectar strips, and glorious bee orchids on the banks. We have been in various stewardship schemes since their inception many years ago and we thoroughly enjoy farming for nature. And I feel that there may well be more of this to come - in many ways it is part of diversification and makes good economic sense, but something does worry me. We farmers are being persuaded to become more like park keepers; meanwhile we import cheaper food from the other side of the globe - food that often has a big negative environmental impact, is not produced to the same welfare standards, and racks up huge food miles. Surely this is not joined up thinking at a time when carbon footprint and local food miles and produce should be a priority, and alarmingly the UK self-sufficiency in food is at 54% and falling! Oh well, I don’t want to get political; instead I will be keeping my fingers crossed to see the oak leaves soon.

To 26th (Tuesday)

Spring Workshops at The White Horse Bookshop. The White Horse Spring Workshop programme continues for 2024. A range of one-day classes including Fun with Watercolour, calligraphy for beginners, a silver ring workshop (materials supplied!), life drawing, landscape studies and acrylic abstract painting. To book, please call 01672 512071, or pop in.

For full details see website: <https://www.whitehorsebooks.co.uk/art-workshops?sort=created>

3rd (Sunday)

Prospect Hospice Spring Run at Coate Water Country Park, Swindon. 9.30am to 12pm. Step into Spring on a healthy note! This event has something for everyone. Featuring time-chipped 5k and 10k routes, the run aims to raise funds for Prospect Hospice's end-of-life care services for local people. All levels welcome, come and be a part of a memorable day filled with community spirit.

Learn more and register at www.prospect-hospice.net/springrun

7th (Thursday)

Marlborough Floral Club. Mildenhall Village Hall, 2pm. Treat yourselves to an enjoyable afternoon out on the first Thursday of each month. This month features a demonstration by Arnaud Metairie, entitled 'Garden in the sky'.

For more information, please call Micky Graham on 01672 514301.

13th (Wednesday)

Marlborough Gardening Association, Marlborough Town Hall 7pm for 7.30pm. 'Creating A Downland Garden' with Robert Harvey.

Further details: <http://www.marlbga.org.uk/index.htm>

16th (Saturday)

Marlborough Folk-Roots. St Mary's Church Hall, 8pm. Kathryn Roberts and Sean Lakeman, long established as one of the UK folk scene's most rewardingly enduring partnerships. The Dartmoor-based husband and wife have twice won the coveted 'Best Duo' title at the BBC Radio 2 Folk Awards, mixing traditional folk with self-penned compositions.

For Details + Booking Information see website: <https://www.marlboroughfolk-roots.co.uk>

23rd (Saturday)

Marlborough Concert Orchestra. St Mary's Church, 7.30pm. Beethoven Symphony No 3 (Eroica), also Beethoven Coriolan Overture and Mozart Sinfonia Concertante for Four Wind and Orchestra. *Details page 17.*

26th (Tuesday) at 7.15pm and 31st (Sunday) at 2pm

The Parade Cinema, Marlborough 'Event Cinema' – Madama Butterfly. Presented by The Royal Opera, with a score that includes Butterfly's aria *Un bel di*

vedremo (One fine day) and the Humming Chorus, Giacomo Puccini's opera is entrancing and heart-breaking. Moshe Leiser and Patrice Caurier's exquisite production takes inspiration from 19th century European images of Japan. Asmik Grigorian performs the role of Cio-Cio-San with Joshua Guerrero as Pinkerton. Full details: <https://www.theparadecinema.com/movie/the-royal-opera-madama-butterfly-2>

Events at St Peter's Church, High Street, Marlborough:

2nd (Saturday)

Spring Craft Fair. 8am to 5pm. Join St Peter's for their Spring Craft Fair. Selling a wide range of products from candles, wax melts and infusers to cakes and treats, beauty products, handmade textiles and jewellery. All perfect gifts for Mother's Day!

Chuckle at the Church Comedy Night 7.30pm to 10.30pm. St Peter's first ever night of comedy. Tell your friends, bring your laughter and enjoy a pop-up bar. Featuring Greg Windfield, Walter Jack, Michael Kholweg, Graeme Coulamand and headliner Andy Askins. *Tickets* £10-£15.

10th (Sunday)

Brilliant International Musicians Series 7pm to 9pm. Ikuko Inoguchi (piano). Described as "a brilliant pianist between worlds" (Der Kessener), Ikuko Inoguchi is an internationally-acclaimed concert pianist and performer-scholar. His repertoire explores cross-cultural influences and the music of Japanese composers. *Tickets* £10-£15.

Full details of all St Peter's events <https://stpetersmarlborough.org.uk/events>

21st (Thursday)

Marlborough History Society 7.30pm. 'The Strange Death of Marlborough Union Workhouse' by Nick Baxter. The Marlborough Union Workhouse from its founding in 1837 to its redevelopment as a very pleasant retirement setting.

School Dates – please see school websites for any updated information.

St John's School, Marlborough St Mary's and Preshute Primary: Term 4 ends Thursday 28th March (St Mary's ends Wednesday 27th March), Term 5 begins Monday 15th April.

Marlborough College: Term ends 12 noon Friday 22nd March. Summer Term begins 6 to 9pm Monday 15th April.

More countryside information

Some websites additional to those mentioned in articles:

kennetcatchment.org
wiltshirebirds.co.uk

riverkennet.org
spacefornature.net

With government legislation due by the end of the year banning the use of peat by amateur gardeners we can no longer delay the transition to a peat-free future.

For many years peat extraction has been putting at risk fragile peatland ecosystems and destroying one of the world's most efficient carbon sinks. Exposing peat results in the oxidation of the carbon which contributes to climate change.

For quite a while I have tried to garden peat-free and have noticed its increased availability from garden centres, plant nurseries and even builders' merchants. It is worth saying the compost varies from one manufacturer to the next, so do try some out until you find one you like. Most contain a mix of composted bark, coir, wood fibre and green compost. Some also have added grit, sharp sand and perlite.

If you are a beginner, take some time and see what works for you with the plants you want to grow. Things worth considering:

- Water thoroughly, but test pots with your finger as the top inch can look dry, but underneath it may still be wet. Tilting pots to check their weight will tell you if they need watering.
- If you see fungi growing in pots, do not panic. Just pick them off and put in your compost or green waste bin.
- If you find clouds of tiny flies on indoor plants (which live on the surface compost) and they annoy you, cover the soil with a thick layer of grit.
- Peat-free compost can be free draining so nutrients are soon washed out, so feed during the growing season (March-October).
- Sieving compost can help when planting seeds or taking cuttings, or use a peat-free seed/cutting compost.
- A 50:50 mix of peat free and homemade compost is great for greenhouse and salad plants such as tomatoes, cucumbers and peppers as it improves the soil texture and provides nourishment.

If you are looking for a peat free soil improver, well-rotted animal manure and composted plant materials are very useful, while you can use, 'chop n drop' which simply involves spreading comfrey leaves (if you have them) grass and/or fallen leaves over the ground. This is especially useful in the winter months as it not only protects bare soil, but worms will gradually take the material down into the soil, thus enriching it.



MARLBOROUGH CONCERT ORCHESTRA

Saturday 23rd March - 7:30pm
St Mary's Church, Marlborough

Beethoven

Coriolan Overture

Mozart

Sinfonia Concertante for Four Winds

Beethoven

Symphony No 3, Eroica



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Textiles and Stitch Around Marlborough

Ann Louise Smith

Once a month Kennet Valley Hall in Lockeridge is the meeting place for members of the local textile group known as Textiles and Stitch Around Marlborough. The group has just completed its second year as an independent group and was formally a branch of the Embroiderers Guild for 45 years.

We now have over 40 members whose interests cover not only hand and machine embroidery, but also many other creative arts such as patchwork, quilting, felting, mixed media and printing to name a few. We are a friendly group and love to meet and share our skills and knowledge.

Guest speakers and textile artists are booked each month to give talks and lead workshops on their particular topic. To get the group off to an exciting start in the autumn of 2022 we welcomed some interesting speakers including Kirsten McCleod and her amazing Red Dress (*see picture*), followed by Ruth Smith who talked about the Miao tribe in China, Karen Lane who was a felt maker and two ladies from the Kennet Valley Guild of Spinners & Weavers. More recently we have had talks by Lizzie Godden on Eco Printing and for our Christmas meeting Michelle Carragher talked about her embroidery on garments for *Game of Thrones*. In addition, we have 'in house' workshops, members' stitch days and several outings each year. Last year we had a very successful outing to the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford where we had a private viewing of Robert Shaw's wonderful collection of Chinese robes.

Looking ahead, we have an inspiring selection of speakers and workshops already booked for this year and into 2025. Our programme is on our website if you would like to take a look, we welcome visitors at all our meetings. <https://textilesandstitch.co.uk/>

In the summer we will be holding a public exhibition of our members' work in Kennet Valley Hall, Lockeridge from Friday 7th to Sunday 9th June . We will also be serving teas, coffee and home-made cakes. As well as the main exhibits, there will also be various items on sale, and we hope to welcome Sewcraft, the textile shop from Swindon, so we can stock up on textile supplies.



The Red Dress—a 14-year project with 380 embroiderers from 51 countries. See <https://reddressembroidery.com/>

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FROM THE REGISTERS

Departed - we pray for the family of

9 January	Elaine Bower (91) St George's, Preshute	Edwards Meadow, Marlborough
13 January	Geoffrey Harrison (93) St Mary's, Marlborough	George Lane, Marlborough
21 January	Prue Groffman (81) North Wiltshire Crematorium	High Street, Manton
31 January	Pamela Dyke (75) St Mary's, Marlborough	Baylie Acre, Marlborough

Simplicity is quite complex when you think about it. To some people it can seem disturbing. But I'm getting ahead of myself. I ought to explain why it is my topic, why the title has "and stewardship", and why it is important to our lives today.

Quakers maintain a set of values, values which form the core of Quaker belief. Three of these may seem obvious; they are Truth, Equality and Peace. The fourth, my topic, may need some explanation. Quakers believe a simple lifestyle, freely chosen, is a source of strength. Quakers believe that we do not own the world and its riches are not ours to dispose of at will. There you have it, simplicity in life and stewardship in consideration of all creatures and maintaining the beauty and variety of the World.

George Fox founded the Religious Society of Friends or Quakers in the 1650s. Fox himself as a young man sought simplicity; for him it was a response to the turmoil, political and religious, into which he was born. Aged one when Charles I became king, his education had the King James Bible at its core. He then had to contend with "a world turned upside down" by revolution. Simplicity and the belief that nothing should come between him and his God provided a structure for Quaker society.

Simplicity is a source of strength, but by itself it is not enough. In our own turbulent times stewardship is important; a concern for the world in which we live, a recognition that, whilst we may limit our possessions, we cannot shrug off our responsibilities. In today's world this is often expressed by a concern for the environment.

I noted earlier that Quakers hold four core values: Truth, Equality, Peace and Simplicity & Stewardship. It is clear to me that you cannot achieve a life in accordance with any one of these alone. They are truly intertwined. To live simply and responsibly needs truth to be spoken, all to be treated equally, and peace as the only stable framework.

Not easy to live up to. But if on the global scale these values today seem lacking, individuals may find that they have relevance to themselves. Inner peace and peace in dealing with others, strengthened by a willingness to embrace equality and a truthful way of life are achievable goals and one can reach that state with simplicity and concern for others.

I said that simplicity was complex.

At the start of January, I saw *Backstairs Billy* at The Duke of York Theatre in the heart of London's West End. *Backstairs Billy* is the unusual story of the infamous William Tallon, who, as *Tatler* rather nicely put it, was the 'fabulously camp, larger-than-life character in a dashing tailcoat and starched white shirt, who was the Queen Mother's devoted servant for 51 years'. The Welsh singer and star-of-the-screen Luke Evans played Billy opposite acting legend, Dame Penelope Wilton, as the Queen Mother. Set in 1979, the play is loaded with internal friction, as well as political, social and economic tension. The story spotlights Billy's duty and companionship to the Queen Mother, but also exposes his vulnerability and questions of loyalty when he suddenly finds himself on the brink of being ousted from Clarence House. Evans and Wilton performed these roles with style, grace and panache. Wilton's performance was tender, articulate – and funny! Evans commanded the role of Billy with equal amounts of tenderness and humour, but also certainty, fortitude and authority. The play was risqué, but not vulgar or obscene. It wasn't shocking, but it was, to a certain extent, daring. The pacing at times seemed a little hesitant but overall this was a focussed, sharp production that had at the centre of its story a tale about friendship and forgiveness. It also had real corgis! Despite its fairly short run, this is a production that should it return or go on tour is one to watch.

Blockbuster exhibitions and some shows to see this year:

DIVA: V&A South Kensington. Closes Wednesday 10th April 2024.

Fragile Beauty: Photographs from the Sir Elton John and David Furnish Collection – V&A South Kensington. Opens Saturday 18 May 2024.

Women in Revolt!: Art and Activism in the UK 1970 – 1990. Tate Britain. Closes Wednesday 10 April 2024.

Sargent and Fashion: Tate Britain. Thursday 22 February – Sunday 7 July.

Van Gogh: Poets and Lovers: The National Gallery. Saturday 14 September - Sunday 19 January 2025.

Othello: Sam Wanamaker Playhouse. Running from Monday 22 January – Saturday 13 April 2024.

Fashioning Our World: The Salisbury Museum. Saturday 10 February – Sunday 12 May. Featuring work by yours truly, *Venus Millinery*.

Do you remember *Meet Me at the Museum*, which came out a few years ago and was hugely, deservedly, award-winningly popular? Anne Youngson's latest novel *A Complicated Matter* is every bit as good, a thoughtful tale of identity and integrity. The narrator, Rose, tells her story of the civilian evacuation of Gibraltar in 1940, about which I confess I was completely ignorant. Transported, initially to Casablanca, then London, Rose and the women and children of her family and neighbourhood find themselves the object both of charity and resentment. Youngson is such an intelligent and compassionate writer about human interaction and motives, and the steady, unshowy narrative keeps driving the characters and the reader to look at the assumptions they and we make about class, friendship and romantic attachment. The attraction of opposites and the nature of friendship all feed into a story that quietly considers what it means to belong somewhere and how much it matters. It's a warm and wise book, faintly melancholy in parts, but with small flashes of wry humour. I don't like to categorise a novel as 'a good book group choice', but it is one that gives a lot of food for thought and discussion, and I loved it.

To actual food now. My new favourite cookery book is *A Whisper of Cardamom* by Eleanor Ford - it's just glorious. Described as 'a love story between sugar and spice' it's a baking book, and more. The history of the spice trade, the romance and the darker side, is laid out with timelines and maps, and the chapter on 'Understanding Spice' gives colour-wheel style descriptions of flavours, aromas, and best matches in cooking. It's beautifully illustrated, with photographs of the cakes and desserts and lovely endpapers and chapter headings like C18th Chinese painted wallpapers. There's a pretty map of rice puddings of the world – every culture has its own version, with preferred spice flavouring. And the recipes! If I don't appear in these pages for a while it will be because I'm featuring in a Channel 5 documentary. *Voiceover: As her obsession has taken hold, Debby has had to give up her career as a bookseller. At her last weigh-in she tipped 53 stone and is currently investigating fork-lift truck hire to enable her to leave the house in order to purchase more cardamom, nutmeg, cinnamon, star anise and caraway....*

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News from the Churches

Marlborough Anglican Team with Christchurch Methodist Fellowship



**Marlborough
Anglican Team**

Welcome Wednesdays *Flyer below.* Weekly 10:30am in St Mary's Church – do join our friendly group for coffee and doughnuts in the warm with a Thought for the day. All welcome.

Energize Children's church Part of the 5pm Informal Worship service. Weekly during term time apart from the first Sunday of the month when it's all age – all welcome. *Flyer below.*

Sunday 10 March Mothering Sunday

St George's All-age service for Mothering Sunday – 10.30am
 St John the Baptist All-age service for Mothering Sunday – 9am
 St Mary's services for Mothering Sunday – 10.30am and All-age Informal worship at 5pm, with Children's tea at 4.30pm. *Flyer below.*

ENERGIZE

St Mary's is delighted to invite you to Energize Children's Church alongside the 5pm Informal Worship service.

Bible teaching
 Crafts, Games
 Music, & prayer in friendly groups
 Everyone is welcome

Children stay with us for the start of our family-friendly service, then go out to their groups.

New children are welcome at any time, even if just visiting

ST MARY'S MARLBOROUGH
 WITH CHRISTCHURCH METHODIST FELLOWSHIP

Welcome Wednesdays

*Wednesdays at 10:30am
 St Mary's Church, Marlborough*

Please join us for a Thought for the day followed by coffee and doughnuts

MARLBOROUGH ANGLICAN TEAM

ST MARY'S | ST GEORGE'S | ST JOHN THE BAPTIST
 WITH CHRISTCHURCH METHODIST FELLOWSHIP

Kids@StMary's
 invites you to our
**All-age family worship
 for Mothering Sunday**

Join us for fun and informal activities, worship and prayer

5pm - 6pm Sunday 10th March at St Mary's Church, Marlborough and at 4:30pm for a children's tea beforehand.

All are welcome at our family-friendly service

ST MARY'S MARLBOROUGH
 WITH CHRISTCHURCH METHODIST FELLOWSHIP

PART OF MARLBOROUGH ANGLICAN TEAM

Holy Week We have an exciting programme for Holy Week. All are welcome to join in and come along. For more details, please see the church's website.

Friday 22 March 7:30pm St Mary's

A showing of the film *Shadowlands*, concluding the 'Lent with Lewis'.

Palm Sunday 24 March

Join in our dramatised readings of the last week of Jesus' life. Minal at 9am, St George's and St Mary's at 10:30am

Monday 25 March 7:30pm St John the Baptist, Minal

A quiet service of Compline as Holy Week begins

Tuesday 26 March 7:30pm St George's, Preshute

Further Holy Week reflections during a Compline service

Wednesday 27th 7:30pm St Mary's, Marlborough

Our third night prayer service marking the midpoint of Holy Week

Maundy Thursday 28 March 7:30pm St Mary's

The Methodists lead us in a Maundy Thursday Reflection.

From 9pm to 11:30pm St Mary's will be open for quiet prayer during *The Watch*.

Good Friday 29 March

At 10:30am in St Mary's we are holding an informal service considering Jesus' passion.

At 2pm in St George's. *The Last Hour* before the Cross. A meditative reflection.

Holy Saturday 30 March

Come and see the dramatised enactment of the passion along Marlborough High Street. Begins at 11am.

Easter Day 31 March

Sunrise Service 6:15am in the Martinsell car park for a 6:30am service on the hill.

Holy Communion at St Mary's at 8am and 10:30am, in Minal at 9am and at St George's at 10:30am.

In the evening come and join in as we rock up the celebrations at our informal service at 5pm at St Mary's.

What's on at Emmanuel Church Marlborough

Join us every Sunday at 4 pm for our weekly church service located on New Road in Marlborough, SN8 1AH. Our service includes crèche and Sunday School groups, followed by refreshments (for adults) and a sandwich tea for the children.

In addition to our Sunday service, we also offer various activities throughout the week including home groups in Marlborough, Pewsey and Ogbourne St George, as well as community groups. For more information and updates on our events, please visit our website at emmanuelmarlborough.org.

All are welcome to join us!



Weekly/One-off Events:

B.L.T (Bible Lunch Time), Monday, 11 March, 12.30pm – Pop in briefly if you're busy – stay & chat if you can. Light lunch + short Bible talk, meeting in the Wesley Hall, Oxford Street.

Sunday Morning Service, 17 March, (every 3rd Sunday morning), 10 - 11am. Main Church Hall. Join us for refreshments afterwards.

Christian Institute Meeting, Thursday, 21 March, 7.45 – 9.15pm. Main Church Hall. Defending family, faith and freedom.

Ladies Bible Study, Friday, 8th and 22nd March, 10 - 11.30am. Friends discovering God's truth in the Bible (All ladies welcome - onsite crèche available). For more details, email ladies@emmanuelmarlborough.org

Little Friends Toddler Group, Thursdays during term time, 10 - 11.30 am at the Marlborough Community and Youth Centre. Come and enjoy free play, singing and story time, snacks for children and refreshments for carers.

Explorers, Fridays during term time, 6 - 7.15pm at the Wesley Hall, Oxford Street. Our kids' club for school years 3-6. Fun, games, tuck and a short Bible talk (bring 50p for tuck)

Friday Nights, Fridays during term time, 7.30 - 9pm. Our youth club for school years 7-11 at the Wesley Hall. Friends, fun & faith – everyone is welcome!

Sparklers, Monday, 18 March, 2.30 - 3.45pm. A kids club for School Years Reception to Year 2 Games, snacks and Bible stories. Meeting in the Wesley Hall, Oxford Street.

Homegroups, Thursdays during term time. Pewsey 7.30pm, Marlborough 7.45pm, Ogbourne St George 7.45pm. Bible study, prayer and fellowship. For more details, email office@emmanuelmarlborough.org

Hope Explored, A 3-session short introduction to Christianity, from Luke's Gospel. All are welcome to come and ask any questions or just listen! For more details, email office@emmanuelmarlborough.org

Prospect Hospice together making every day count

Local charity Prospect Hospice is promoting a new initiative

'Find it for a Fiver'

With a diverse range of items including gifts, clothing, and toys, the initiative aims to make shopping both affordable and impactful.

Join the movement, shop sustainably and make a difference, all for £5. Share your discoveries on [#fiverfinds](https://twitter.com/fiverfinds). www.prospect-hospice.net/shops

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All items for the March issue by Tuesday 12 March please.

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