
TOWER AND TOWN

THE MAGAZINE OF MARLBOROUGH'S COMMUNITY AND CHURCHES



SOME UKRAINIAN STORIES

No. 767 | MARCH 2026

Single Issue: £1
Annual Subscription | 11 Issues: £7

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March Edition Front Cover:

Ukrainians gather in St Peter's Church May 2022

Credit: David Du Croz

TOWER^{AND}TOWN

Some Ukrainian Stories

Four years ago Russia invaded Ukraine - as Kateryna says, "5am on February 24th 2022 is a bleeding scar that can never be forgotten by Ukrainians".

This issue is dedicated with compassion to those Ukrainians who fled the horrors of that war for the safety of their families and arrived in our midst back in early 2022, and with gratitude to those many people who responded to their need and who continue to help them.

It is hard for the majority of us living in the tranquillity of a market-town in Wiltshire to fully comprehend the pain and fear of having to leave one's home under such terrifying circumstances - the uncertainty of a foreign country, an alien culture, and a strange language, let alone the journey itself. And all of that in the full knowledge of what has been left behind and perhaps lost and gone forever - friends, family, community, country.

Like so many towns and villages across the United Kingdom (and indeed across

much of the rest of Europe), people in and around Marlborough opened their hearts and their homes to Ukrainian families - those with room to spare offered space to stay; schools created places to provide a degree of normality for the children; employers found jobs to enable the mothers to begin to establish at least a sense of independence.

It would be quite impossible to do full justice to the vast range of experiences over this four year period, but I hope this small selection of Ukrainian stories will serve to remind us of what has been endured and achieved. Two mothers and two children tell their stories, and two host families tell theirs. We hear of language teaching and of the work of two charities providing aid to Ukraine. None of this could have been achieved without the great help of Colin and Maria Fraser and Tony Michael and the generous response of the Ukrainians themselves.

David Du Croz - Editor

March Edition No. 767

Compiler: Sarah Bumphrey

Proof Readers: Julia Peel, Diana Foster Kemp

Marlborough Churches
Together



Irina's Story

It was freezing outside. Everyone looked lost and panicked. Trains were running chaotically and to unknown destinations; each train would simply head somewhere west, just moving people out.

We stood in the freezing cold for two hours because we couldn't get on a train. They were all overcrowded. People were pushing and running, trying to squeeze in anywhere.

Eventually a train came and people managed to pull my son, Illia, inside, but the crowd pushed me far back. I couldn't break through to reach the train. Illia was terrified and crying. Thank God for the one kind conductor - he wouldn't let anyone else board until he found me. With great effort, I pushed through the crowd and was reunited with my son. But that moment left a deep scar on his heart - for months after, he wouldn't let go of my hand.

The train ran without its usual stops. Once, it stopped in the middle of a field, and we were told it was for safety due to ongoing shelling. We travelled in total darkness the whole way. I decided to get off in Lviv, where complete strangers took us in for three days, and then to Poland. A Polish family met us there—very kind young people. We were in such a state of stress that we hardly left our room for a week. Friends in Germany then offered us a room in Berlin, but there were difficulties with staying there which we weren't ready to face.



Kyiv Station

Photo credit: Irina

In a moment of despair, the "Homes for Ukraine" program opened in England. It provided housing for six months and the right to work and study from day one. We found a sponsor and applied for a visa. We waited for a month and a half. I am deeply grateful to the people in Germany who let us stay while we waited and didn't turn us out onto the street.

We had left our whole lives behind in Ukraine. There I was someone, had a profession, a circle of friends, places where I studied and improved. There I knew where to turn and where to find solutions to my questions. It was easier with medicine and dentistry. And it didn't take so much effort and energy. In Ukraine, the school was located next to the house. It specialised in English and Maths, and there was a swimming pool in the school grounds. Illia had a

wonderful teacher. Illia left his friends, familiar places, toys, books, and he hasn't seen his grandparents for 4 years.

I am infinitely grateful to everyone who opened their doors and hearts to us. While we have built a new life here, my heart remains partly in Ukraine, where my parents and relatives still fight to survive every single day in inhumane conditions. Safety is a gift. Kindness is a lifeline. Thank you!

Illia's Story

Tony Michael talks to **Illia** about his experience:

What was it like in Kyiv in the few days before you left? We lived on the 19th floor in an apartment block. We were trapped there. The bridges near us were blown up, and there were bombs dropping and our building shook. My mum moved my bed into the corridor. Anti-aircraft guns were in the woods next to us and Russian helicopters flew around us.

How old were you when you left Ukraine? I was 7. I didn't mind leaving my school because it had horrible food, but I was sad at leaving my friends.

Describe the first part of your journey leaving your home. It was very cold. A volunteer took us to the station to catch a train to Lviv. The train was packed and it was very dark. We couldn't put on a light in case the Russians saw us. The trip took over twenty hours. I was really upset leaving. I had left my home and

country, all my stuff, everything. I left my best friend and I still don't know what happened to him.

What did you feel like when you arrived in Marlborough? I didn't know the country or the language. I didn't know what to do. I knew no-one and I was very lonely. The only person I knew was my mum. I was very frightened. When someone came to the door, I hid as I thought England was dangerous.

Describe going to School for the first time. I cried. I didn't want to leave my mum. I was scared. In St. Mary's there were other Ukrainian children who looked after me and the Headteacher was a sponsor of a Ukrainian family, and it got better. Now I'm in St. Johns which is good, 'though I don't like French.

I have been in England now for three and a half years. I can speak English fluently, I have lots of friends and I'm more confident. I want to stay in England.

Kateryna's Story

When the invasion started my father was taken to the front line straight away. For nine days my mum and I, along with our neighbours and friends, helped people evacuated to our city of Dnipro.

We were collecting essential items and medicines for hospitals and schools, as they were overwhelmed with wounded people, and cooking meals for the local territorial defence forces. Helping other people helped us to be strong and resilient.

On the morning of March 4th, my father phoned us and asked us to leave Ukraine. The front line was moving fast towards Dnipro, and Russians were prioritising capturing Ukrainian military family members, putting them in filtration camps where they were tortured, raped, and interrogated to their death. We had five minutes to say goodbye to him for the very last time.

[Katerina and her mum and their two dogs travelled by car to Lviv hoping to get to Poland where they were promised shelter by a friend of a friend of a neighbour] Arriving in Lviv, standing in a random small street, trying to find somewhere to stay with two dogs if only for one night to be able to rest - that was when I fully realised the loss of our home and family. I let myself burst into tears for the first time since the 24th of February -

it was just impossible to stay calm and resilient anymore.

When the UK launched its "Homes for Ukraine" program in the middle of March 2022, we decided to go, mainly because of my fluent English. We had to stay in Poland for the next 4 months, preparing documents for the dogs to comply with the rules. Finally we succeeded and were granted the UK entry for our two old ladies. Our journey from the eastern part of Poland took us 5 days by car.

We crossed into the UK on July 14th 2022, and our acquaintance with British politeness and friendliness began right at customs, and the same day we finally arrived in Marlborough. The most outstanding experience was to meet kind, friendly and smiling people! It felt like they knew us all our lives already. Unfortunately, we don't smile in Ukraine as much, so it took us a couple of days to get used to smile back, and months of muscular pain in our not-trained-to-smile cheeks. I can't count the number of supportive hugs we received when locals found out that we are from Ukraine.

I am really grateful and want to thank Marlborough residents and the whole UK for keeping being supportive from day one and helping all this time. Seeing Ukrainian flags all over the whole kingdom means a lot to us as Ukrainians, and warms our hearts.

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Photographs at the top of the page and middle left: Ukrainian choir and hospitality (see the article on page 10); credit: Colin Fraser.

Middle right: Anton, Svitlana and Vladik; credit: Colin Fraser.

Bottom left: The Smiths and their Ukrainian guests; credit: Chris Smith.

Hosting Ukrainian Families

Two families share their experiences.

Alison and Martin: March 2022: Russian tanks are trying to encircle Kiev. A million Ukrainians are seeking refuge in Poland. “We must do something!” Eight weeks later we collect Svitlana and sons Rostik (15) and Vladik (8) from Stansted. Two years later, Anton, medically unable to fight, finally joins his wife and family. With lots of support from neighbours, friends and other hosts, our Ukrainian family start to settle into this unfamiliar culture, making new friends, and negotiating complex bureaucracy.

We adapt to having less space, and so do they. We share the kitchen and the dining-room. Miraculously, there is no friction; quite the reverse. It is a blessing to be sharing our home with people so caring, considerate and generous, who intelligently anticipate and forestall potential problems. Chatting over meals reminds us that the war is on-going; that their parents often have no electricity or heating; that their friends are being bombed and killed.

If you had asked us in 2022 to share our house for 4 years with a foreign family, our answer would have been “Sorry, but no. It just won’t work”. But it *has* worked and our lives are enriched and blessed by their company. Whatever happens, peace or no peace, we hope we will stay friends for life.

Catherine and Chris: As we were waiting at Heathrow, I remember very genuine nerves about who our Ukrainian family would be and how we would all manage. Those nerves dissolved quickly. Lilia arrived with a natural warmth, while her two children looked understandably shell-shocked, having left their home and their father.

The welcome they received locally was remarkable. The St Mary’s community, in particular, was extraordinarily kind and supportive, offering friendship, practical help and a sense of belonging from the outset. It made a daunting transition feel possible.

There were times when the war felt very close. Once Lilia showed me an app on her phone tracking drone and missile strikes and advising when to take shelter – I sensed her war weariness. One day I vividly remember finding her standing in our utility room, staring out over Marlborough. When I asked if she was all right, she simply said she was enjoying looking at a place at peace.

Hosting was sometimes tiring, but it never felt like a difficult decision. We had the room, and they were a family in need. We prayed about who might come, and we believe Lilia and her family were God’s answer and will be lifelong friends. Knowing these lovely people has only deepened our horror at what they – and so many others – have had to endure.

From War to Caltech - Yuri's Story

When I left Ukraine in May 2022, I thought I'd be gone for a few months. The war had just started. I was sixteen and convinced it would end quickly. I would spend the summer in England, improve my English, make some friends, then go home. But unfortunately the war is still there.

St. John's School in Marlborough took me in first. They put me back a year because I'd arrived during GCSE exams. I was frustrated at the time, but it turned out to be a gift. The work wasn't overwhelming, so I could focus on learning English. And unlike in Ukraine, where I'd studied fifteen subjects at once, here I could choose what I wanted to study. That small bit of freedom meant everything.

Then my host family, Catherine and Chris Smith, helped me get a full bursary to Marlborough College for the sixth form. Walking into that school felt unreal. I kept thinking how am I here, studying with some of the smartest students in Britain in one of the most prestigious schools of the country.

Reality hit fast. I was homesick. My English wasn't good enough to express how I felt or to keep up properly. I'd chosen four difficult A-levels Maths: Further Maths, Chemistry, and Computer

Science because I wanted to push myself. Everyone at school was kind and tried to include me, but I struggled to make friends at first when I couldn't find the right words. The subjects themselves were hard, but the real challenge was understanding the terminology I'd never learned.

The school saved me. They gave me extra English lessons. Teachers met with me in the mornings and evenings to explain things again. My classes were tiny (under ten students) so I could always ask questions. Bit by bit, it got much easier.

In Year 13, I did well on the Cambridge entrance exam but failed the interview, as the stress of this got to me. So I chose Edinburgh instead, loving the city and their excellent Computer Science programme. By then I'd fallen in love with the subject.

Now I'm in my second year, maintaining over 80% and I've just been offered a place at Caltech to spend my third year in California studying Computer Science. Another unexpected turn.

The war changed my plans. But England taught me something more valuable. I could adapt. I could rebuild. I could keep going even when circumstances change. Those lessons will stay with me forever.

Yurii Ilnytskyi

Teaching English to Ukrainians

Our first lessons began in May 2022, on the fringes of the busy coffee shop in St Peter's, and then at St Mary's, where we were offered the free use of their church hall.

Classes were made up of ten to fifteen Ukrainians, almost all of them ladies, all very cheerful and all very determined to learn. Inspired at first by the redoubtable Anastasia, they were taught by a mustard-keen team of volunteers - initially Rosanna and Clara Hope, Liz and Tony Michael, and myself, who were later to be joined by Claire and Nic Allott.

But it wasn't as easy as we had imagined. Our pupils were of different ages and levels of language; some were looking after children; some lived in host families miles out of town; some had unpredictable appointments at the job centre - and so it was that lessons became increasingly bitty and disjointed. And it didn't help that we amateur teachers of EFL were quickly finding out that we didn't really understand our own language.

For example, in Ukrainian there is no definite or indefinite article. And its English usage seemed to us almost impossible to explain. Why do we go to church but then go to the pub? Why do we speak of 'France' and yet of 'The Gambia'? And is 'Ukraine' or 'The

Ukraine' the correct way to speak of that country?

And let's not even mention the rules of pronunciation. Never ask a pupil to read aloud "Though I felt thoroughly rough with my cough, I thought I could tough it out through a storm so wild that it shook the boughs." And where do you begin when one of your most enthusiastic students (even after all those corrections on the mispronunciation of 'v' and 'w') asks whether a 'wov' has the same meaning as a 'promise'?

As fate would kindly have it, 'formal' group lessons began to dissolve, as one by one the ladies found employment; and ironically this is when they began to learn their English most effectively, in the commonplace exchanges of a working day, as well as with their hosts and with local friends. The children at St John's and St Mary's, meanwhile, developed their own language skills with miraculous ease... and began patiently (?) to teach their own parents.

Our teaching carried on, in different ways with different individuals. But now, for teachers and pupils alike, language skills no longer seemed quite so important as the fun and interest and wisdom we found in our friendships, and in coming to understand a culture so similar to - and yet so very different from - our own.

Colin Fraser

Two Charities Bringing Aid to Ukraine

British Ukrainian Aid (BUA)

For the past three years the Marlborough Community Choir have promoted and supported BUA through donations at their annual Christmas concerts. The Ukrainian refugee community have also participated by providing a cultural contribution in the form of Ukrainian carols and songs, traditional costume and a taste of their national cuisine (*see the photographs on pages 6 and 11*). Attendees have consistently shown their remarkable generosity and heartfelt support, not only by participating but also by making donations in support of the charity. The act of giving has become a meaningful part of the occasion, with people responding enthusiastically to appeals and offering what they can to help those in need.

BUA is a grassroots charity, united by a single goal: to see Ukrainians overcome the hardships of the war and to live in dignity and prosperity in an independent Ukraine. The charity provides immediate, direct support to war casualties and to those who are helping them on the ground. The charity also offers assistance and guidance to Ukrainian refugees in the UK, helping them to adjust with confidence and dignity to a life far away and very different to that in their own home country.

BUA provides direct, humanitarian, hands-on support and it makes an immediate and massive difference to the lives of so many. The Marlborough

community's response has truly demonstrated compassion and solidarity through their continued support both in spirit and in action to the vital work of the charity.

Maria Tepczuk Fraser

Help Ukraine Group Support (HUGS)

Formed shortly after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, **Help Ukraine Group Support (HUGS)** is a group of some 80+ volunteers, based in Hungerford. We care deeply for the plight of Ukrainians who find themselves in unimaginable and unsolicited circumstances. Headed by a committee of six, HUGS organises the supply of critical humanitarian aid to frontline communities.

We hold Donation Days in the Newbury and Marlborough areas, appealing directly to the local population using flyers and local media, highlighting aid that is needed. We also continually collect a range of essential items from sources - such as individuals, businesses, medical and dental surgeries, care homes and veterinary practices – who all donate a huge range of items. HUGS also receives cash donations which enable us to buy urgent supplies that have not been donated.

All aid is sorted, packed and transported to Ukraine using known and trusted groups and individuals who often provide videos of eventual handovers to

grateful recipients. To see people of all ages gaining independence using mobility aids sent by HUGS, is truly humbling. We are constantly reminded that donations, however small, can result in massive improvements to people's lives. A recent Christmas appeal for several orphanages in Ukraine raised clothing, toys, games and computer tablets for children and teenagers whose lives have been forever

changed by this war. Their joy, happiness and gratitude was clearly evident in the videos we received. Our frontline contacts report that sadly the need for aid is as great, if not greater, than when the war first started. So HUGS' work continues; and will do for as long as it is needed.

For more information please visit www.help4ukraine.co.uk

Chris Mellor



Photograph left: HUGS aid arriving in Ukraine; credit: HUGS/Chris Mellor.

Below left: Ukrainian cuisine; credit: Tony Michael.

Below right: Ukrainian national costume; credit; Tony Michael.





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Marlborough Players 20th Anniversary

Local amateur dramatic group The Marlborough Players are celebrating their **20th anniversary**, marking a significant milestone in bringing live theatre to the heart of Marlborough.

Founded in 2004 by the late Barbara Clauson, Jack Hawkes, and current Marlborough Players President Ian Philpott, the group was born out of the huge success of *“Wheels of Time”*—a strolling community play created to mark the 800th anniversary of Marlborough’s Royal Charter. The overwhelming response to that production clearly demonstrated that there was once again a strong appetite for amateur drama in the town.

The Marlborough Players staged their first official production, *“An Inspector Calls”* by J.B. Priestley, in July 2006, and have since gone on to produce 26 plays over the past 20 years. These have ranged from poignant and thought-provoking works such as *“A Day in the Death of Joe Egg”* by Peter Nichols, to classic comedies including *“Blithe Spirit”* by Noël Coward, and more contemporary productions such as *“A Bunch of Amateurs”* by Ian Hislop and Nick Newman.

With a healthy and diverse membership, actors young and old have trodden the boards at Marlborough Town Hall—one of the town’s most central and accessible venues—with performers coming from across Wiltshire and beyond to take part in productions.

Even during the challenges of the pandemic, The Players continued to innovate. When a planned live production had to be postponed, the group adapted by presenting a virtual “radio” comedy, ensuring theatre could still be shared with audiences during lockdown.

Alongside entertaining audiences, the group has remained committed to supporting the local community. Rather than charging for programmes, The Marlborough Players invite donations, with their main supported charity being Prospect Hospice. Over the past 20 years, the group is delighted to have donated around £6,000 to the hospice.

The anniversary year continues with the group’s next production:

“Absent Friends”

Thur 26 – Sat 28 March

7:30pm (doors open 7pm)

Marlborough Town Hall

Tickets: £10 from The White Horse Bookshop, Marlborough High St.

Online: www.wegotickets.com/MarlboroughPlayers

For more information go to www.marlboroughplayers.co.uk

Gail Sinden
Marlborough Players Media Contact

What's On in March

The Arts Society – Pewsey Vale

3rd Tuesday 2.30pm

Bouverie Hall, Pewsey.

Landscape architect, experienced writer, photographer and lecturer, Roger Butler, will speak on 'Canal History and Heritage' with particular reference to the Kennet and Avon Canal. Doors open at 2.00pm, refreshments available. Visitors always welcome - £7 on the door, cash or card.

Marlborough Floral Club

5th Thursday 2.00pm

Mildenhall Village Hall.

'Beside the Seaside' with Lesley Hunt. £6 to attend, everyone welcome. For more information contact Mickey Graham on 01672 514301.

Martin Simpson

6th Friday 8.00pm

St Peter's Church, Marlborough.

Widely acknowledged as one of the finest acoustic and slide guitar players in the world, his interpretations of traditional songs are masterpieces of storytelling. His solo shows are intense, eclectic, spellbinding and deeply moving. Tickets £23.50 from marlboroughfolkroots.co.uk or Sound Knowledge.

Marlborough College Concert Series:

Sinfonia Smith Square, with soloist

Jamie Cochran.

8th Sunday 3.00pm

Marlborough College Memorial Hall. Programme to include Beethoven – Piano concerto No.5 in E Flat Op. 73 'Emperor'. Tickets £25, student concessions £12.50 available from

www.marlboroughconcertseries.org

Parking and programme free.

Marlborough Gardening Association

11th Wednesday 7.30pm

Town Hall, Marlborough.

Bog Gardens with Duncan Coombs.

Visitors £3. For more information contact marlbgainfo@gmail.com

Marlborough Concert Orchestra's

Spring Concert

14th Saturday, 7.30pm

St Mary's Church, Marlborough.

Programme: Schubert – Symphony in C major – 'the Great'; Schubert – Overture to Rosamunde; Saint Saens – Cello Concerto no 1 – with soloist from the Yehudi Menuhin School.

Tickets at Sound Knowledge, on website (mco.org.uk) or on the door. Adults £15, students £5, under 18s free.

Mother's Day Afternoon Tea

15th Sunday 12.00pm – 2.00pm

Cardinal Coffee Shop, St Peter's Church, Marlborough.

Afternoon Tea for Two £25. For more information and to book tickets see stpetersmarlborough.org.uk

Marlborough History Society

19th Thursday 7.30pm

St Peter's Church, Marlborough.

The talk 'The Impact of Surgery on History through the Ages' will outline the history of surgery and how operations have altered history itself. Speaker Dick Glass, a Consultant Surgeon who was appointed to Swindon and Marlborough Health Care Trust in 1987.

Guests welcome, £5 entry.

Mayor's Gala Dinner

20th Friday 7.00pm

Town Hall, Marlborough.

Complimentary welcome drink, 2 course meal and live music. Auction and raffle in aid of Prospect Hospice. Tickets £50 from email civic@marlborough-tc.gov.uk or call 01672 512487.

Absent Friends

26th Thursday – 28th Saturday, 7.30pm

Town Hall, Marlborough.

This acerbic, poignant and painfully funny play by Alan Ayckbourn explores friendship, marriage and what it ultimately means to be happy. This production forms part of The Marlborough Players' 20th anniversary year. Tickets £10 from the White Horse Bookshop or at www.wegotickets.com/MarlboroughPlayers For more information see www.marlboroughplayers.co.uk

Marlborough Choral Society's Spring Concert

28th Saturday, 7.30pm

St Mary's Church, Marlborough.

Programme: Karl Jenkins, The Armed Man: A Mass For Peace.

Tickets at Sound Knowledge, online at www.ticketsource.co.uk/marlborough-choral-society or on the door. Adults £15, students £4 under 16s free.

Marlborough Cemetery Consultation – Ongoing

After more than 10 years of unsuccessful searching for suitable land it is, reluctantly, proposed to extend the Cemetery onto part of Marlborough Common to enable burials within the parish to continue beyond 10 years. DEFRA requires the Town Council to

offer alternative land to become common land and to gain agreement from the public. The proposed site is near Hawthorn Meadow, between the open space known as 'Tin Pit' and the Bay Meadows Nature Reserve. People can find more information as follows:

23rd Monday 7.00pm Town Council

Meeting, Town Hall, Marlborough

28th Saturday 10.00am-12 noon visit

either site where officials will be available to answer questions.

Online at www.marlborough-tc.gov.uk where there is also a 9 minute video explaining more about the background.

School Dates

St John's, Marlborough St Mary's Primary and Preshute Primary: Term 4 ends on Friday 27th and Term 5 begins on Monday 13th April.

Marlborough College: Lent Term ends 12 noon Friday 27th and the Summer Term begins 6.00pm to 9.00pm Monday 20th April.

Coming up in April

Vote on Cemetery Extension

Thursday 16th April, 8.00am - 8.00pm in the Town Hall.

Those unable to attend on 16th can call in to the Council Office to cast their vote **from Monday 13th April to Wednesday 15th April, 9.00am - 4.00pm**

In both cases, photo ID will be required and names will be checked against the electoral roll. Registered electors in the Marlborough Parish (both East and West wards) will be eligible to vote. They will not receive a polling card.

Linda Illsley - What's On Editor

A Good Read

I read a book recently because I felt I should. Not 'should read a book' you understand, just 'should' read that particular novel. Best seller, glowingly reviewed, garlanded with praise and prizes, altogether tremendously literary.

Well, dear reader, I slogged my way through it, teeth gritted, aware that it was, objectively, a very good, well written thing, just not enjoyable. I'm not going to tell you what it was, I don't want to be inundated with people telling me how wrong I am. But it was all about unhappy people being unpleasant, with a twist in the narrative which turned out to be, if not exactly predictable, not tremendously surprising either. The author kindly gave us sex scenes of industrial-laundry-steaminess, during which none of the participants seemed to be having fun, and altogether I was left feeling tired and glum, and vindicated in my view that Literary Prizes are often the kiss of death.

Another book full of unkind or suffering people is *The Rush* by Beth Lewis. *However*, I enjoyed this, because here the unkind people are actively relishing their villainy, and then receive their comeuppance, and the sufferers are taking steps to amend their sorry states. Set in Dawson City in the Yukon in 1898, the 'rush' of the title is of course for gold.

Three women are, initially unknowingly, linked by their connection to a murdered fourth. The country is dangerous, the work is dangerous, the men are mostly desperate and violent. We're given descriptions of the extraordinarily unforgiving landscape and the risks involved in travelling through it, let alone trying to exploit it. Landslides, fires, bar fights, tarts-with-hearts and a murderous local Mr Big all feature. It's exhausting and alarming but entertaining, not bleak and dreary.

The Mitford Sisters - amusing, unpleasant, trivial, tragic - delete as appropriate. The industry around this self-mythologising and far-from-dreary family is still going strong.

Troublemaker by Carla Kaplan is about renegade Jessica ('Decca') who rejected her aristocratic upbringing and the (extreme) right wing politics of her family. She became an activist, dissident, investigative journalist, and thorn in the side of the 'Establishment' on both sides of the Atlantic.

As an American Kaplan is able to take a dispassionate view of her subject's British background, and drawing on interviews and a vast archive of letters concentrates on Decca's role in opposing and reporting injustice in the USA in the second half of the C20th. It's a full and celebratory biography of a relentlessly committed, energetic and probably infuriating character.

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The March Chorus

After a rather damp and grey February, spring is finally on its way. Our spring migrants will soon return, with our first arrivals such as Wheatear and Chiffchaff turning up around mid-March, followed not long after by species like Willow Warbler, Blackcap and Ring Ouzel.

March is the time of year when I get excited as a standout moment in my wildlife calendar takes place. It's time to take a trip up to Savernake Forest to witness a true wildlife spectacle.

Waiting for a dry, sunny day, I head up into the forest, strolling through the arboretum and onwards towards Thornhill, one of the larger ponds in Savernake. As I approach the pond, I'm greeted by a remarkable, loud chorus of low-pitched, soft, repeating "croaks"

mixed with high-pitched "qwark-qwark-qwarks." The first time I heard this fascinating sound a few years ago, I assumed it was birds singing, but I couldn't figure out what could be making such a song. It wasn't until I reached the edge of the pond and saw the water teeming with movement that the mystery was revealed.

Frogs and toads were scattered throughout the water and along the pond's edge, and I had to tread carefully to avoid stepping on one. The frogs seemed to stick to the left-hand side, while the toads kept to the right. It's the males that call out, singing to attract females and establish their territories.

Incredibly, neither species will remain in the pond over winter. Both toads and frogs, hibernate in damp sheltered spots such as under a log pile or a stone. Each spring, they migrate from their overwintering grounds, faithfully following the same routes year after year to reach their ancestral breeding ponds. Whether that pond lies in a garden or within the forest, I find it amazing that they know exactly where to go.

Male toads often arrive at the pond before the females and will aggressively compete to secure a grip on a female. Sometimes unattached males form "mating balls," with multiple males clinging to a single female. On one visit, I counted eight males attempting to attach themselves to one poor female, with more



Photo credit: Helen Llewelyn

Common Toad (*Bufo bufo*)

incoming. The sheer weight of the males, their constriction, and the time spent underwater can overwhelm the female, sometimes causing her to drown or be crushed.

Eventually, as the morning subsides, the frenzy settles. The pond is now filled with toad and frog spawn, and the chorus has faded. I make my way back through the forest, carrying the memory of the hidden wonders and the remarkable spectacle of nature that fills the pond each spring.



Helen Llewelyn

Common Frog (*Rana temporaria*)

Marlborough Church Contacts

Fr John Blacker

513267; marlborough@catholicweb.org.uk
Parish Priest, St Thomas More RC Church

Reuben Mann

07894 048146
 office@emmanuelmarlborough.org
Minister, Emmanuel Marlborough Church

Canon Sarah Musgrave

511286 sarahmusgrave99@hotmail.com
Lay Minister, St John the Baptist, Minal

The Revd Tim Novis

892209; twgn@marlboroughcollege.org
Senior Chaplain, Marlborough College

The Revd Pete Sainsbury

512364; revpetesainsbury@gmail.com
*Team Vicar and Worship Director,
 St George's Preshute & The Marlborough
 Anglican Team*

The Revd Stephen Skinner

512457; rev.stephen.skinner3@gmail.com
Minister, Christchurch Methodist

The Revd Chris Smith

514357; revcjsmith@outlook.com
Rector; Marlborough Anglican Team

Rachel Rosedale

512205; rachelrosed1@gmail.com
Member, The Religious Society of Friends

Karolina Bull - Parish Administrator

marlb.anglicanteam@tiscali.co.uk
 Church Cottage, Silverless Street, SN8 1JQ
 01672 512357
 Mon-Fri 9am to 1pm

Helen Slater - PA to Rev Chris Smith

01672 514357
 teamrectorpa@gmail.com
 Mon-Thurs 9:30am to 12pm

Penny Reader

St Mary's Children and Families Worker
 penny.families@gmail.com

Methodist Office Coordinator

07564 082092
 office@christchurchmarlborough.org.uk

My Footprints to Marlborough

Pete Davies, owner of Marlborough Photo Services on the High Street, talks to **Matt Gow**.

1. Where were you born, and where did you grow up?

I was born into an RAF family at the air base in Akrotiri, Cyprus. As an "RAF kid," I moved frequently to wherever there was a hospital base, roughly every three years due to my father's postings.

2. What was your early life like?

Looking back, I realise how wonderfully naive I was and how simple life felt. My father was hardworking and inspired me to start running, while my mother paused her nursing career to raise us before eventually returning to work. Our second tour in Cyprus was a highlight for family and friends. The armed forces provided a fantastic, tight-knit community for us growing up.

3. What kind of work have you had?

I never explicitly planned a career in photography, but I love what I do. I consider myself part of the last generation of photographers who had to put a blanket over their heads and cameras to frame and focus a subject. Outside of work, my passion is running; it is a wonderful pastime that allows me to explore the Wiltshire Downs.

4. Had you ever heard of Marlborough before moving here?

No, not really. As a young teenager, I would occasionally cycle over from RAF Wroughton, mainly to get a glass of lemonade from the Polly Tea Rooms

because a girl I 'admired' worked there.

5. What brought you to Marlborough?

I returned from boarding school to discover my parents had moved to Marlborough following my father's retirement from the Air Force. They purchased and ran Marlborough Lodge, a residential care home in the early 1990s. My first impression of the town as a teenager was probably the huge number of drinking establishments you could visit in a single night...

6. Why did you decide to make it home?

I went off to boarding school in Nottinghamshire with a view to starting my own Forces career, but injury brought me back. Initially I could not afford to live in Marlborough so purchased a house in Calne, then Pewsey and eventually back to Marlborough.

7. How has living here shaped your life?

I married a Yorkshire girl, and we spent a long time debating where to settle. We eventually agreed on Marlborough and have raised our family here. I love it, though my wife is still keen to return to Yorkshire at some point! One of my most enduring roles has been working as a photographer for Marlborough College (since 1996), and I am very proud that my son attends the school.

8. What would you say to someone considering moving here?

It is a wonderful place that serves your needs whether you are young or old. It has great schools, a High Street to be proud of, and beautiful countryside right on the doorstep.

Clergy Letter

Jesus tells us not to worry about tomorrow but that doesn't let us off the hook for being concerned about the things over which we have some control and that present as 'justice issues' today.

For Jesus, 'Justice' is the biggest issue. It's a huge matter of human concern, because we have the opportunity to emulate God most, as we are called to do, when we commit to real, solid, concrete justice, and to get it right by our neighbour, in our world, with all of our might, by not using people; by respecting the integrity of everyone; by being kind; by being fair; by being generous with the gifts not of our own creation, but of which God has been the generous provider.

There are many things in life about which we should **not** worry. But in this century there is a goodly share of things about which we **should** concern ourselves.

Erroneously attributed to Thomas Jefferson is the saying, 'The price of freedom is eternal vigilance'. Freedom needs to be protected, constantly, lest it be lost to complacency or 'encroachment' from those in society who might gain advantage from taking our freedoms.

The 21st century has seen the rise of many in political leadership doing their best in scurrying away our rights and freedoms for their own despotic advantage and aggrandisement.

If you want something to worry about, this is truly it. Maybe better than worrying and

distracting and paralysing ourselves with that worry, we should invest our energy in doing something about it.

I'm done reading 'The Nazi Mind: 12 Warnings from History' by Laurence Rees – but I'm **not** done with the impact that it has had on my thinking and upon my sense of Civic Responsibility.

In the words of Rees: 'Everything is fragile – often a great deal more fragile than we think ... the essential values of Nazism – hatred, scapegoating, anti-Semitism, racism and violent nationalism – are still very much with us ...'.

To paraphrase Rees: Authorities seeking despotic power foster a 'them and us' false dichotomy; promote a leader to whom we abdicate decision-making; connive with elites and the mega-rich; attack human rights even through Courts; exploit religion; make enemies amongst the populace; escalate racism; kill at a distance and stoke fear.

Jesus said: 'Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?'

But, as found in numerous other places in the Gospels, when it comes to defending Fundamental British Values, Jesus shows he would agree – we need to be worried – and we need to take action. **Amen.**

The Revd Tim Novis

The Thing About Spring

The joys and challenges of gardening in the UK are shaped by the seasons. Despite changes in climate we can still recognise, with some surprises, which season we are in and thus the relative needs of our gardens.

Following on from the dark, wet winter Spring with its new signs of life and brighter colours brings an abundance of joy. It is a very special time of the year. The fresh green of leaves, trees and lush new grass are worth savouring too. It is a period to enjoy and a time to implement plans made in front of the fire in winter. Make that construction project a reality, revise faded planting schemes and experiment with new seeds and cuttings.

Snowdrops (sometimes known as Wiltshire's weeds) are the first flowers that tell us winter is on the way out and by March they are ready to be moved as they have finished flowering but are still in leaf. Source a large clump, split it into smaller groups and replant in a shady, dampish area to create a swathe for next January. This might be the last chore on your mind when other plants need immediate attention but that is the thing about Spring. It is a juggling act with the need to prepare for Summer, whilst also thinking about the rest of the year and of course soaking in the moment.

Spring is the season for bulbs to show off. Daffodils and alliums are amongst the most popular, and a vibrant source of colour, regularly returning year after

year. Camassia bulbs, also known as wild hyacinth, put on a good show in late Spring, looking good either naturalised in long grass or planted in the middle of a border. They can be untidy after flowering so try growing them around a broad leaved Hosta which will cover the fading leaves.



Credit: Anna Marsden

Many shrubs too provide a show in Spring and look good surrounded by bulbs. A flowering currant with its deep magenta blossoms and typical currant scent works well with *Leucojum* at its feet (*as in the photo above*). This bulb resembles a snowdrop but is taller and flowers later. This combination is hardy and frost tolerant. Chalky soil is not conducive to growing Magnolias but choosing *Magnolia Stellata* will work if protected from frost.

Whilst buying new plants and looking forward to planting them in warm soil remember at this time of the year the weather can be frosty with cold winds or suddenly dry and hot but that is Spring!

Anna Marsden

Marlborough Gardening Association

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Marlborough Churches Together

Usual Sunday Services Times

Society of Friends, Friends Meeting House, The Parade

10.30am Meeting for worship

St George's Preshute (Anglican)

8.00am Holy Communion (1st & 3rd Sundays)

10.30am Worship

St Mary's with Christchurch Methodist Fellowship (behind the Town Hall)

8.00am Holy Communion (2nd, 4th & 5th Sundays)

10.30am Worship

5.00pm Informal Worship

St John the Baptist, Minal (Anglican)

9.00 am Worship

St Thomas More, George Lane (Roman Catholic)

11.00 am Mass

Emmanuel, New Road (Free Evangelical)

10.00am Worship

4.00pm Worship

Marlborough College Services are shown at the college chapel

For more information and updates please check the individual church websites.

FROM THE REGISTERS

Departed - We pray for the families of:

27/01/26 Ian Shaw (88), Herd Street, Marlborough Kingsdown Crematorium

28/01/26 David Scoble (68), Cherry Tree Court, Calne St John the Baptist

News from the Churches

Emmanuel Church

All are welcome to join us every Sunday for our weekly church services on New Road, Marlborough.

- At 10 am our service includes a group for children from age 3 to school Year 4, followed by refreshments.
- At 4 pm 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 services, we offer various activities throughout the week for children: **Sparklers, Little Friends Toddler Group, Explorers and Friday Nights.**

We also hold **Home Groups** on Thursdays during term time in **Marlborough, Pewsey and Ogbourne St George**, as well as community groups and **Women's Bible Study.**

Rooted, a discipleship group for Y7-9 and Y10-13 takes place on **Friday 13th March from 6-7.15 pm.** Through Bible study, training and discussion, we want to grow in love for each other and for Jesus. We'd love to see you there! For more details and the **location** address, please email:

ruth@emmanuelmarlborough.org

For more information and updates on our events, please visit our website: emmanuelmarlborough.org or email office@emmanuelmarlborough.org

Marlborough Anglican Team with Christchurch Methodist Fellowship

Mothering Sunday

All Age Worship, St Mary's Sunday 15th March, 5pm

If you're new to the area or thinking about the faith, please consider joining us at St Mary's. We are friendly, informal and open to God's Spirit. In March we celebrate Mothering Sunday. Further details in the poster below:



In March Energize, our young people's group, will meet on the 2nd, 3rd and 4th Sunday of the month during term time.

News from the Churches

Easter Services 2026

Palm Sunday, 29th March

Dramatised readings of the last week of Jesus' life.

9am: St John the Baptist, Minal.

10.30am: St Mary's, Marlborough.

10.30am: St George's, Preshute.

Monday 30th March

7.30pm: Compline (night prayer), St John the Baptist.

Tuesday 31st March

7.30pm: Compline, St Mary's.

Wednesday 1st April

7:30pm: Compline, St George's.

Maundy Thursday 2nd April

6.45pm: Fellowship Meal followed by Maundy Thursday service, St Mary's.

9pm - Midnight: The Watch, St Mary's.

Good Friday 3rd April

10.30am: Informal worship, St Mary's.

2pm: 'The Last Hour', St George's.

Easter Saturday 4th April

10-11.30am: Easter Banner making on the High Street.

11.45am: Easter Celebration Service on the Town Hall Steps.

Easter Day Sunday 5th April

6am: Sunrise Service, Martinsell Hill.

8am: Holy Communion, St Mary's.

9am: Family Communion, St John the Baptist.

10.30am: Family Communion, St Mary's.

10.30am: Family Communion, St George's.

5pm: Informal Worship with Chocolate Story, St Mary's.

Family and Midweek Activities and Social Events

The Ark Parent/Carer and Toddler

Group - Mondays in term time, 9:30am to 11am in the Church Hall, Silverless St.

Please contact Caroline Philips for more information: cphilps2@gmail.com

Welcome Wednesdays

A reflection, coffee and doughnuts every Wednesday, 10.30 am in St Mary's.

St Mary's Women's Group

Thursdays, 10am to 11am.

Join for coffee, chat, Lectio and prayer.

All welcome - for more details and dates, email marlb.anglicanteam@tiscali.co.uk

Faith on Tap

Thursday 19th March, 7pm

The Green Dragon

Pull up a barstool and join us for a new monthly social where open minds and good conversations flow as freely as the drinks. Faith on Tap invites you to explore big questions and Christian perspectives in a relaxed, friendly setting.

This month we will be discussing 'Suffering'.

Come curious, come questioning, or come for the company — all are welcome.

For more information please contact Louise Seddon seddonlouise@gmail.com or Rachel Maurice mauricerachel@yahoo.co.uk

Tower and Town Staff

Chairman	Sarah Bumphrey	chairman@towerandtown.org.uk	516862
	16 George Lane, SN8 4BX		
Advertising	Matt Gow	advertising@towerandtown.org.uk	
Distribution	Sue Tulloh	distribution@towerandtown.org.uk	288912
Subscriptions	Peter Astle	4 Laurel Drive, SN8 2SH	515395
Treasurer	Peter Astle	treasurer@towerandtown.org.uk	515395

Production Teams

April

Editor	Richard Sandall	apr.editor@towerandtown.org.uk	
Compiler	Sarah Bumphrey	apr.compiler@towerandtown.org.uk	516862

May

Editor	Raik Jarjis	may.editor@towerandtown.org.uk	527711
Compiler	Hugh de Saram	may.compiler@towerandtown.org.uk	516830

Every Month

<i>What's On</i>	Linda Illsley	whats.on@towerandtown.org.uk	
<i>News from the Churches</i>	Karolina Bull	church.news@towerandtown.org.uk	512357
		Church Cottage, Silverless Street, SN8 1JQ	
<i>Family News</i>	Naomi Painter	family.news@towerandtown.org.uk	
<i>Arts</i>	Gabriella Venus	arts.correspondent@towerandtown.org.uk	
<i>Books</i>	Debby Guest	books.correspondent@towerandtown.org.uk	
<i>Nature</i>	Helen Llewelyn	nature.correspondent@towerandtown.org.uk	
<i>Gardening</i>	Grace Hoskin	gardening.correspondent@towerandtown.org.uk	

Website, searchable article archive <https://www.towerandtown.org.uk>

Webmaster, IT hugh@towerandtown.org.uk

Contributions and comments from readers are welcome.

Please send articles and letters to the monthly editor or the chairman,
other notices or announcements to the compiler.

All items for the April issue by Tuesday 10th March please.

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