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# TOWER AND TOWN

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‘Tower’ Stories

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MARCH 2022

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# TOWER<sup>AND</sup>TOWN

THE MAGAZINE OF MARLBOROUGH'S COMMUNITY AND CHURCHES

NUMBER 723 MARCH 2022



## **‘Tower’ Stories**

### **The worshipping community of Marlborough, its places and its people over time**

Following on from John Osborne's excellent edition of Tower and Town last month, this edition seeks to throw some light on some aspects of the worshipping community of Marlborough in the past. These are stories of our places of worship and some of the people associated with that history. It seeks to show what a rich heritage we have in this place and how a culture of faith has helped to shape us who we are.

David Sherratt tells something of the history of the church in Minal and the people who made it what it is today, and Jeremy York does the same for Preshute church. These are stories very much related to building and place, but the story of the Friends told by Chris Wheare focuses much more on the people. Sandra and David Wylie have a not dissimilar story to tell about the establishment of a Methodist congregation in town, but Nick Fogg's insight into the Catholic community takes us far further back in time. The church of St Peter and St Paul no longer supports a worshipping community, but one hundred and fifty years ago the reopening of the restored church was a day ‘unparalleled in the history of Marlborough’. Monuments and memorial windows in St Mary's throw light on some of the people who worshiped here in the past, and last but by no means least Niall Hamilton explains the importance of Marlborough College chapel to the evolution of that school.

To all those who have contributed in this way my grateful thanks for sharing some of their knowledge and their understanding of that rich past, as well as to others whose regular contributions illustrate what a rich present we also have.

**David Du Croz , Editor**

Cover picture: St Peter's Church, early 19th Century

# The Church of St John the Baptist, Minal

David Sherratt

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Minal Church is the oldest in the Anglican Team. Glastonbury Abbey acquired land at Mildenhalle in 804 but they were not a proselytising order and may have farmed the land and built a mill in support of their great Abbey and its works of mercy. The first stone building surviving is an Anglo-Saxon tower dated to the mid-11th Century. Domesday Book records William of Salisbury holding Mildenhalle with the Abbey as 'tenant-in-chief'. The Normans built a stone church - its pillars and arches still stand. A new chancel and larger tower arch were intruded in the 1220s. The upper stage of the tower was built in Henry VIII's reign.

The first recorded rector is John de Novell fined in 1301 and 1319 for being absent from the parish - he doubtless held several others. The first lay patrons - who presented the rector to the parish - were John and Mary Meriot in 1297. Richard, Duke of Gloucester presented in 1461 which might account for the large white rose in one of the chancel windows.

On the tower arch jamb are the words *Domine* and *Marie*, reminders of the Latin liturgy used until 1549. The remains of other medieval wall-paintings, dated from the 1200s to the late 1400s, still survive. In the North aisle is a large portrait of Robert Morley who held Minal rectory as a sinecure, being resident in Christ Church, Oxford. A Royalist, he was ejected from the College at the beginning of the Civil Wars in 1641, went into exile with Charles II and when the King returned was rewarded with the bishopric of Worcester, then of Winchester. Puritan Thomas Bayley who succeeded him in Minal was in turn ejected in 1660 when King Charles returned.

Patrons were responsible for the upkeep of the chancel and the Pocock family who provide three rectors lined the walls with 18th Cent. 'Strawberry Hill Gothic' panelling. In 1816 Rector Charles Francis installed the finely carved box pews, pulpits and gallery in the nave. The church and its curtilage are rated Grade One.



The relative isolation of St George's begs the question, "How come there is a church here at all?" The explanation is that Preshute was formerly a very large parish dating back to the Saxon period and serving a widely scattered rural population well before Marlborough and its Norman castle came into being. Even today the parish boundary extends almost to Hackpen and some two miles south-east to the northern part of Savernake Forest.

St George's Preshute (Anglo-Saxon for Priest's Cottage) is known to have been rebuilt as a church several times between the 13th and 18th centuries. Except for the 14th century tower the present building dates back to 1854 when it was largely reconstructed in the neo-Gothic style under the aegis of the diocesan architect, Thomas Henry Wyatt. Wyatt did nevertheless manage to incorporate a number of the features of the earlier church, including the font and the pillars along the nave with their different shaped capitals.

The massive 12th century font, one of only seven in the country made of black marble from Tournai in the Ardennes, was originally in the Chapel of St Nicholas in Marlborough Castle. Some of King John's family are said to have been baptised in it. It can hold twenty gallons of water, and lends itself to almost total immersion by any vicar minded to recreate a baptism in the River Jordan !

Historic monuments abound in the church. One of the oldest is a brass plaque dated 1518 set into the floor of the south aisle and commemorating John Bailey, the Barton farmer, his wife, seven sons and three daughters. There are also memorial windows and tablets in memory of various members of Marlborough's Maurice dynasty. Commander Thomas Maurice RN is one of 24 war dead whose names are on the stone war memorial in Preshute churchyard. He, with all his ship's company, was killed in a catastrophic ammunition explosion in Chatham Harbour on 27th May 1915.

Visitors to St George's can purchase a most interesting booklet on the long history of the church, and are warmly invited to enjoy some of the features unique to Preshute: a wonderfully peaceful rural church and churchyard; the traditional procession around the churchyard on Palm Sunday; the annual alfresco service at the War Memorial on Remembrance Sunday. And then at Christmas there is the spectacular candlelit Carol service which is attended by people from far and wide. St George's Preshute can truly claim to have been a haven for worshippers and passers-by for over a thousand years.

A Quaker woman, Mary Goodman, walked into Marlborough one market day in 1658 and urged townfolk to ‘mind the fear of the Lord’. She was quickly hustled before the mayor, who ordered her to be flung into gaol. The next day she was tied to a pillar in the Market Place and whipped. There was a small, but committed group of Quakers in Marlborough at that time. A leader was William Hitchcock, the son of a previous mayor and a man of some wealth. He was a friend of the Society’s founder, George Fox, and of William Penn. George Fox visited Marlborough in 1656 and 1672 and spoke in William Hitchcock’s home.

Although Puritanism held sway under Cromwell from 1649 to 1660, there was little tolerance of any Friend who felt moved to exhort fellow townspeople to join their faith. In 1656, Daniel Smith of Marlborough was punished for preaching to passers-by from his shop door by being imprisoned in a close dungeon for nine weeks and his friends were not allowed to come near him. Friends shunned churches, ‘steeple houses’, and after their death their bodies were closely guarded lest they be taken away to be buried in the town churchyard. In 1658, William Hitchcock gave a piece of land at Manton Corner as a burial ground. When Charles II was restored to the throne in 1660, efforts were made to force worshippers back into the Church of England and Dissenters were punished. Robert Bryant was gaoled in 1660 for refusing to take the oath of allegiance, and afterwards the local militia pulled down the walls of the burial ground.

A chance for freedom came in 1681, when William Penn was granted a royal charter to set up his ‘Holy Experiment’ in the New World. In the same year Marlborough’s William Hitchcock bought 500 acres in Chester County from William Penn. His servants John and Amy Harding, and two others from Marlborough, settled there and set up a new Meeting and school in Marlborough village in Pennsylvania. Two years later George Chandler, his wife Jane and their seven children, along with John Chandler from Oare, set out for America. George died of smallpox at sea but John and Jane bought 100 acres in the new state.

An end to persecution in England came in 1689, when the Act of Toleration allowed freedom of worship. Marlborough Meeting became one of the wealthiest in the county and the Society of Friends bought premises for a Meeting House behind the High Street in 1721. By the end of the century, numbers were beginning to decline and the last meeting was held there in 1821. The modern rebirth began in 1957 when Friends began meeting in houses in the town and from 1978 in the Jubilee Rooms. The present Meeting House, in The Parade, was bought in 1986 and has been in regular use ever since.

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# Marlborough's Methodists Sandra and David Wylie

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Sandwiched between Majestic Wine and the Masonic Lodge is Christchurch Methodist Church. Followers of the revival movement started within the Anglican church by John Wesley in the 18th century. He visited Marlborough and preached from horseback in 1745 and again in 1747. Those who heard him and wished to take his new approach initially met in each other's homes; in that tradition a house-group still meets each Wednesday, currently on Zoom.

Christchurch is part of the Methodist North Wiltshire Circuit where Ministers and lay local preachers travel to preach in chapels from Gloucestershire to the edge of West Berkshire. Reverend Stephen Skinner is the current ordained minister who has responsibility for Marlborough along with three other Methodist congregations.

The current church grew from a small meeting house that was built in the gardens on the site. The Christchurch Concord of 31st January 1816 shows the site was purchased by George & Elizabeth Pocock, William & Anne White and eighteen others 'in consideration of £153'. A small chapel was built on Oxford Street. By the 1851 census, we know there were 225 people at morning worship, 50 in the afternoon and a further 125 in the evening. The chapel was extended in 1872.

A subscription begun in 1903 and the sale of the original chapel to the Masonic Lodge eventually raised £2,500 to pay the architects, Gordon and Gunton of London and the builder Mr S Cripps of Marlborough, resulting on 9th February 1910 of the laying of the cornerstone of the building "of an earnest Methodist type". The Sunday School on Oxford Street opened on the same day. This school in the Wesley Hall was the first freely available school to the children of Marlborough. It was commandeered through World War I as an Auxiliary Hospital. On Methodist Union in 1932, the Primitive Methodists and the Wesleyans joined together to form the Marlborough Methodist Church. Then in 1984, the church was renamed Christchurch, when the Marlborough United Reform Church merged with the Methodist Church. Initially Christchurch and Wesley Hall were separate buildings joined by an external wrought iron staircase to the schoolrooms. At the end of the last millennium the two were joined as the Crush Hall and a new kitchen was built to form one building. Many residents of Marlborough will have visited these as a space for many meetings and activities over the years.

The present congregation have inherited the call from those who first heard it 206 years ago. We pray we will grasp the present and live it to his glory.

# The Catholic Community in Marlborough

Nick Fogg

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As far as I know, there are only two places in the world where the Catholic Faith has begun in a stable. Well, yes, you've got the first one. That was pretty easy, but what about the second? Give up? The answer's simple. In the inter-war era, a stable on the Manton Estate was converted into a chapel for the Irish stable lads, who would otherwise have to go to Swindon or Devizes to attend mass.

In 1937, Marlborough got its own priest for the first time since the Reformation when the Salesian fathers opened a chapel in the presbytery in Elcot Lane. It was not until 1947 that a humble Nissen hut in George Lane became the place of worship, but the history of Catholicism in Wiltshire goes back long before that.

Sometime around 909, St. Oda the Good was consecrated Bishop of Ramsbury. The scattered rural community of Marlborough would have been part of his *Cura Animarum*. The four churches of the Marlborough Anglican parishes all date from the Middle Ages when two thriving monastic communities were established here: the Gilbertine Canons, probably endowed by King Henry II, built St Margaret's Priory, and the Carmelite Friars also established a religious house.

Yet, at the Reformation all this was swept away. In 1594 it was reported that there were only two papists in the borough, but this wasn't exactly a time when Catholics would declare their faith publicly. The Hyde family at the Hermitage in the lane that bears their name had a resident Benedictine chaplain. In 1778, James White, landlord of the noted Castle Inn, was also identified as a Catholic recusant.

There was still a great deal of anti-Catholic sentiment in the area, however. The Marquis of Ailesbury was a fervent opponent of the Duke of Wellington's Catholic Emancipation Bill of 1829 and presented a petition to Parliament against it from the Marlborough Corporation. With the passing of the Act, it became possible for Catholics to build their own churches, but it was not till 1959 that the church of St. Thomas More was built on the George Lane site.

As is appropriate for a church which can claim to be represented in virtually all the nations of the world, the community of St Thomas More enjoys within its fold people of a number of different nationalities. Many of the storms of the past are over, although the Catholic faith continues to present a challenge to those aspects of contemporary society that fall short of Christian values.

# St Peter's Church

David Du Croz

St Peter's church, despite being redundant, has a richer history than almost any other building in town. The Norman church with its close association with the castle, or the mid-15th century rebuild, would each warrant an article all to itself. But if you want to understand why the church you see today looks as it does, you need to focus on the mid-19th century and the Victorian restoration managed by the Revd Townley Ward Dowding, and designed by the diocesan architect, Thomas Henry Wyatt.

Dowding and Wyatt had already worked together on the restoration of St George's in Preshute where Dowding had been vicar before taking up the post of Rector of Marlborough in 1859. When Dowding arrived in Marlborough he found his church in a parlous state: the roof was rotten and leaking; some of the stonework was structurally unsound; the high Georgian box pews were damp and uncomfortable and took up too much space. Within three years Dowding set about raising the money needed to rectify these problems.



Before

After

The work started in 1862 and cost in the region of £3,000, a huge sum in those days. The main changes included the removal of the gallery at the west end of the

nave, the removal of the old barrel-shaped roof and raising the pitches of the nave and aisle roofs, and the narrowing of both the east window and the chancel arch to strengthen the structure of the building. The old pews were stripped out, the lectern and pulpit replaced, and the font installed in the baptistry.

The completion of the restoration one year later was a great event. The Marlborough Times noted: 'Thursday was altogether a day unparalleled in the history of Marlborough. The announcement that the Church would be re-opened on the 25th was hailed with unfeigned joy and satisfaction.' Over the next ten years new stained glass windows were installed by Lavers and Barraud, glass which still today frequently delights visitors to the church, and a large new organ placed on the north side of the chancel.

But this was only half of what the Rector had in mind for his refurbished church. One of the other things that visitors comment on today is the extent and strength of the decoration in the chancel. This is unusually rich and full of religious symbolism. There is little doubt that the overall decorative scheme in the chancel was commissioned by the rector. Dowding had been an undergraduate at Oxford in the 1840s when the university was riven apart by the rise of the Oxford Movement, the Tractarians. This movement gave rise to ritualism and consequently a revival of pre-Reformation liturgy and furnishings in churches. Dowding was undoubtedly influenced by this as the decoration of the chancel walls shows with its consecration crosses and liturgical symbols all shown in painted medallions.

# Marlborough Concert Orchestra

Saturday 26 March at 7:30 pm St Mary's Church, Marlborough



Guest conductor Malcolm Webb  
Leader Karen Sancto

Cimarosa Overture 'The Secret Marriage'

Mozart Horn Concerto No. 4  
Soloist Laurence Davies

Grieg Symphonic Dances

Grieg Peer Gynt - Suite No. 1

Tickets £12 adults, £2 students, from Sound Knowledge, Hughenden Yard, or on the door. Bar and Raffle.

The crosses have their origin in medieval times. When a bishop consecrated a church he would mark several places in or outside the building with a cross, dipping his fingers in chrism consecrated at Easter. A mason or a painter would then mark these places permanently with symbols such as these which we find in St Peter's:



In addition the sanctuary, the area at the very east end of the church around the high altar where only the priests could be, was also decorated with symbols of greater liturgical significance, as in the case of the three medallions from St Peter's shown below. The first shows a cross with sprouting leaves. There is the spear which pierced the dead Christ's side, and the sponge filled with vinegar which he refused to drink. The foliage around the cross may be a reference to the resurrection - the dead wood of the cross bursting back into life.

The second contains a cross of nails and the crown of thorns. The four nails in the shape of a cross are the nails which fixed Christ's hands and feet to the cross. The Roman soldiers who carried out the crucifixion mocked Christ as the King of the Jews by crowning him with a 'crown' made of thorn twigs. The third medallion refers to the incident in St Mark's gospel where the Roman soldiers took Christ's clothes after they had nailed him to the cross, and threw dice to claim them.



All of this highly symbolic decoration is very much in tune with Dowding being a product of the Oxford Movement. It marks the completion of his restoration of St Peter's, and has left us today with a legacy that throws light onto that worshipping community about 150 years ago.



Memorial plaques and commemorative windows in churches are often able to tell us something of the people who worshipped in these places before us. One such window in St Mary's dedicated to Thomas Baverstock Merriman (1802-1867) introduces us to two families who dominated life in Marlborough in the late 18th and much of the 19th century. It depicts the Annunciation, and sits alongside a matching window of the birth of Christ dedicated to Thomas' son, Edward Baverstock Merriman (1839-1915).

There are plaques to both families, Merrimans and Baverstocks, in St Peter's. The former, strong supporters of non-conformity in Marlborough in the eighteenth century, claimed descent from a Captain John Merriman who came to Marlborough as one of the commanders of a troop of horse in the Parliamentary army in the civil wars. John Merriman was one of those entrusted with the custody of the king while he was a prisoner at Carisbrooke Castle, and it is said that he carried out his job with "so much consideration and good feeling that His Majesty gave him several tokens of his favour and regard".

By the nineteenth century the family was clearly well established in



the local community, as attorneys, doctors and grocers, maltsters and cheesemakers. In 1835 Thomas Merriman is described as 'the head man of these selected gentlemen' in a list of twelve 'corporators' presumably drawn up as part of the reorganisation of local government enacted by Parliament that year. He was a solicitor and a tenant of Lord Ailesbury, as well as being his steward. His father had been a cheese factor, and gave £100, the income from which was to buy bread for the unrelieved paupers of the parishes of both St Mary's and St Peter's. Running the borough with Thomas was his brother, Benjamin, and his two sons, Thomas Baverstock Merriman (as commemorated in the window in St Mary's) and William Clark Merriman. The former name shows the coming together through marriage of two of the most powerful families in the towns - there was one Baverstock who was the senior member of the corporation for 30 years. Both families feature frequently in local affairs throughout the rest of the century, and are mentioned in conjunction with many others, such as the Maurices and the Halcombs.

### FROM THE REGISTERS

#### **Baptisms - we welcome:**

20 February Molly Dorothy Meade and Milo Frederick Bobby Meade  
at St George's

#### **Wedding - we congratulate:**

15 January Donna Fern and Andrew Whitcher at St Mary's

#### **Departed - we pray for the families of:**

27 December Roy Gee (95) Suthmere Drive, Burbage  
*St George's, Preshute*

31 December Kathryn Louise Maulik (57) Redlands Close, Highworth  
*North Wilts Crematorium*

18 January David Norman Hearson (69) Old Spey Bridge Road,  
Grantown on Spey *St Mary's Marlborough*

20 January Pamela 'Margaret' Crump (92) Highfield, Marlborough  
*St George's, Preshute*

30 January David John Harding (96) Hyde Lane, Marlborough  
*St George's, Preshute*

1 February Sidney John Green 88 Merlin Court Care Home,  
Marlborough *St Mary's Marlborough*

# What's On

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## March calendar

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### 2nd (Wednesday)

10am-12.30pm The Panelled Room, Merchant's House. Spring Study Series (also 16th and 30th). 'An Age of Expansion: the mid-late 18th Century. Great Britain: Foundations of Greatness'. Tickets from [themERCHANTSHOUSE.CO.UK/events](http://themERCHANTSHOUSE.CO.UK/events)

### 3rd (Thursday)

2pm Mildenhall Village Hall. Marlborough Floral Club. Stephanie Cornell: Contained Delights. Treat yourselves to an enjoyable afternoon out on the first Thursday of each month. There is a Guest Demonstrator and the arrangements are raffled at the end of the demonstration. For more information, please call Micky Graham 01672 514301.

### 4th (Friday)

7.30pm Ellis Theatre, Marlborough College. Kempson Rosedale Enterprise Trust annual lecture. 'The toughest competition in the world?' by John Holley. Tickets £10, students free. Bar open from 6.30pm. *See further details opposite*

### 11th (Friday)

Marlborough College: Exeat starts (to Sunday 13th)

### 16th (Wednesday)

10am-12.30pm The Panelled Room, Merchant's House. Spring Study Series (& 2nd and 30th). 'An Age of Expansion: the mid-late 18th Century. Painting in Challenging Times'. Tickets and details from [themERCHANTSHOUSE.CO.UK/events](http://themERCHANTSHOUSE.CO.UK/events)

### 17th (Thursday)

7.30pm St Peter's Church. Marlborough History Society. 'The Partition of Ireland, Marking the Centenary' by Mike Bush. Guests £5

### 20th (Sunday)

3-5pm The Panelled Room, Merchant's House. Jazz at the Merchant's House. Tickets and details from [www.themERCHANTSHOUSE.CO.UK/events](http://www.themERCHANTSHOUSE.CO.UK/events)

### 22nd (Tuesday)

6.00pm St Peter's Church. The AGM of St Peter's Trust. Members only

### 25th (Friday)

Marlborough College: Term ends (to Tuesday 19th April)

### 26th (Saturday)

10am-2pm The Merchant's House Open Day including the Marlborough Museum and the Pelham Puppet exhibition. Free entry. *See opposite*



7.30pm St Mary's Church. Marlborough Concert Orchestra. Cimarosa Overture, Mozart Horn Concerto No. 4 (soloist Laurence Davies), and Grieg. *See page 10*

**27th (Sunday)**

**7pm** (*sic*) St Peter's Church. Brilliant International Musicians Concert. Katharine Gowers (violin) and Madeleine Mattar (piano) play Mozart, Beethoven, Fauré and Ravel. Tickets £13/£9 from [www.stpetersmarlborough.org](http://www.stpetersmarlborough.org). *See page 21*

**30th (Wednesday)**

10am-12.30pm The Panelled Room, Merchant's House. Spring Study Series (& 2nd and 16th). 'An Age of Expansion: the mid-late 18th Century. Arcadian England: An Age of Opulence'. Tickets and details from [www.themerchantshouse.co.uk/events](http://www.themerchantshouse.co.uk/events)



**Kempson Rosedale**  
ENTERPRISE TRUST

**Friday 4<sup>th</sup> March 7.30pm. Ellis Theatre, Marlborough College.**

**'The toughest competition in the world?'**

**Guest speaker John Holley**

John was inspired by Rupert Rosedale whilst at school at Marlborough. His latest challenge was to complete the Iron Man competition in Finland – known to be the toughest in the world.

Tickets £10, school students free, from White Horse Bookshop, on the door or visit [eventbrite.co.uk](http://eventbrite.co.uk)

Covid guidelines – please take an lft before the lecture and wear a mask whilst moving around the theatre. Should the event be cancelled because of Covid, the money paid for your ticket will be donated to the Trust.

**The Merchant's House Open Day.**

**Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> March 10am – 2pm. Entry free.**

This wonderful historic 17<sup>th</sup> Century House in Marlborough High Street will be open to the public as part of the launch for the new Spring/Summer Season. There will be the opportunity to see the Marlborough Museum including the Pelham Puppet exhibition and a collection of publications from the Archive. Mr & Mrs Bayly will be attending and the wonderful work of the Turkey Work volunteers will be on display.

Full details on the website: [www.themerchantshouse.co.uk](http://www.themerchantshouse.co.uk)

The College was founded in 1843 as a school for the sons of Anglican clergy, and for the first five years of its existence it gathered to worship in St Peter's Church. Numbers grew and it was decided that a private chapel should be built. In the 1840s very few schools had private chapels. Vicars were suspicious about other places of worship within their parish, and in an age when there were fears about the intrusion of Roman Catholicism and Nonconformity, private chapels were regarded as potentially dangerous influences.

It was the example of Thomas Arnold at Rugby (headmaster 1828-42) which made the great difference to the way school chapels were thought of. He showed that if a chapel was made central to the life of a school, its spiritual and moral life could be transformed, and 'godliness and good learning' would underpin the life of the whole community. In the wake of his example, other headmasters began to use chapels to steer their schools, and at Marlborough the arrival of George Cotton from Rugby resulted in a radical transformation. The College was in chaos after the great rebellion of 1851. Cotton realised that the way to control the turbulent community was by introducing organised school sport, and to extol the virtues of athleticism from the pulpit: muscular Christianity was born together with a new educational ethos. Between 1884-6 a splendid new chapel was built to designs by the great gothic revival architect, George Frederick Bodley, to accommodate this new purpose.

At the beginning of the twentieth century Marlborough shocked the public school world with the appointment of Frank Fletcher as master. He was not ordained and was described in the press as 'the first lay apple in the clerical dumpling'. The Bishop of Salisbury was concerned but he felt that since sermons in the vast space were generally inaudible, he could not do too much damage! Chaplains became increasingly important in the organisation of worship as the number of ordained teachers diminished. Although the ecclesiastical nature of the College may have become less pronounced, the power of the building continues to make a great impact on the College community and all those who visit it. John Betjeman immortalised the building in his autobiographical *Summoned by Bells*, describing how he felt safe in Bodley's greens and browns. To these colours were added the gold, blue and 'crushed strawberry', chosen by the great ecclesiastical decorator and architect Sir Ninian Comper when he refurbished the apse shortly after the end of the Second War.

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### New for 2022 – Discovery Day Trips on the Kennet and Avon Canal.

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£29 per person (including a carer). Group size is restricted to eight passengers. Please call Jen, bookings manager, on 01 380 721279 or go to [www.bruceboats.katrust.org.uk/discoverytrips/](http://www.bruceboats.katrust.org.uk/discoverytrips/)

*Registered Charity: CC209206*

# Nature Notes: Ring Ouzels on Liddington Hill

Robin Nelson

---

Liddington Castle is an Iron Age hill fort 13 miles due north of Marlborough: at 909 feet it is the highest point in the Borough of Swindon. Sited on a commanding high point close to the Ridgeway and covering an area of 7 acres, the castle was one of the earliest hill forts in Britain, with first occupation dating back to the 7th century BC. The earthworks consist of a relatively simple oval bank of timber and earth fronted by a ditch, with opposing causewayed entrances to the east and west.

Liddington Hill was a favourite haunt of local natural history writer Richard Jefferies, who spent much of his spare time walking through the wide chalk expanses of the Marlborough Downs. Nowadays, as well as attracting energetic hikers and intrepid hang-gliding people it has a special attraction for local birdwatchers, particularly in early Spring, when birds appear on migration. While wintering fieldfares are already flying north to breed in Scandinavia, Russia and Iceland another thrush species is stopping off on its annual journey from its wintering haunts in Spain and North West Africa: the charismatic ring ouzel - the 'mountain blackbird.'

From late March to early April a walk following a hedgerow of ivy-clad hawthorn and dogwood off the B road to Bishopstone is best undertaken before the hang-gliders arrive. As like as not a blackbird will fly off ahead of you and a yellowhammer appears on a bare branch. On the slope to the left a smart male wheatear shows its white rump as it flies to a chalky outcrop and a flock of meadow pipits rise up from the ground.

With luck another thrush, with a silver-grey wing panel, will suddenly shoot out from the middle of a seemingly empty hawthorn bush with harsh 'chack, check' calls. It flies strongly towards the castle, stopping on another bush before dropping briefly to the ground. It is then that the white crescent on its breast confirms what it is - a beautiful male ring ouzel.

It is primarily a bird of the uplands, where it breeds mainly in steep-sided valleys, crags and gullies from near sea-level in the far north of Scotland up to 1,200 m in the Cairngorms. National surveys show that numbers have decreased by 72 % since 1988, with a 2016 population estimate of around 5,500 territories in Britain.

Hikers, hang-gliders, over-enthusiastic birders take care: give this special bird a chance to rest and refuel!

*(Opposite)* Ring Ouzel

Lent – redeeming the days, one at a time.

*‘Even now,’ declares the Lord,  
‘return to me with all your heart,  
with fasting and weeping and mourning.’*

Rend your heart

and not your garments.

Return to the Lord your God,

for he is gracious and compassionate,  
slow to anger and abounding in love,  
and he relents from sending calamity.

(Joel 2.12-13)

We Christians are inclined to regard Lent primarily as a period of abstinence and ‘the performance of less’. We are tempted – yet again – to think that the depth of God’s approval depends somehow on us.

New York pastor Revd Dr Tim Keller addresses this head-on:

In religion we only are sorry for sin because of its consequences to us. It will bring us punishment - and we want to avoid that. So we repent. But the gospel tells us that sin can't ultimately bring us into condemnation (Rom 8:1). Its heinousness is therefore what it does to God - it displeases and dishonours him.

Thus in religion, repentance is self-centred; the gospel makes it God-centered. In religion we are mainly sorry for the consequences of sin, but in the gospel we are sorry for the sin itself.

Furthermore, 'religious' repentance is self-righteous. Repentance can easily become a form of 'atoning' for the sin. Religious repentance often becomes a form of self-flagellation in which we convince God (and ourselves) that we are so truly miserable and regretful that we deserve to be forgiven. In the gospel, however, we know that Jesus suffered and was miserable for our sin.

We do not have to make ourselves suffer in order to merit forgiveness. We simply receive the forgiveness earned by Christ... In religion we earn our forgiveness with our repentance, but in the gospel we just receive it.

It’s not that we aren’t called periodically to repentance, as in Lent – it’s just that our repentance doesn’t earn the forgiveness of God. This is what Tim Keller means by ‘religion’. Rather, God’s forgiveness is His gift to His children who wish to put

their relationship with Him right again.

The essence of Lent is not physical or emotional self-abasement but rather, a change of direction. This is brought about by our desire to align ourselves with God's will and way, and then to do so with His help. There may well need to be weeping and mourning; to deny that is to do ourselves harm. But the grace of God, free and actually a bit scandalous in its graciousness, shows us that this will give way to peace and joy. And fasting is not an end in itself – but rather a way of refocusing.

May your journey through Lent allow you to know that He loves you, and more than that, to know Him. Be blessed in these spring days and evenings.

In Christ, with you in Marlborough.

*Revd Pete Sainsbury is Team Vicar and Worship Director in the Marlborough Anglican Team*

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## **Brilliant International Musicians Concert**

**Sunday 27th March at 7pm in St Peter's Church**

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**PLEASE NOTE START TIME.** Concert to be followed by Q&A session.

This time of year always finds me with a shifty Sunday evening awareness of looming piles of undone prep. It's Richard Jefferies Prize shortlist time again, so I have six books to read and am responding with my annual whiny adolescent 'Don't want to...' I do want to really, and I will, but until I recover my grown-up equilibrium I'm procrastinating with all sorts of other reading. I've finally got around to a book that I've had my eye on for a while, *Starlings of Bucharest* by Sarah Armstrong. It's not 'a thriller' in the sense of tense stake outs, count-downs or explosions. A 'creeper' maybe? Set in the 1970s, our protagonist, Ted, is a gauche young pawn, an aspiring cinema critic sent to cover film productions and festivals behind the Iron Curtain. Interspersed with his story are the reports from the surveillance teams in Bucharest, London and Moscow, interpreting and misinterpreting his moves, wondering if and how to recruit him to their various causes. Halfway through reading I discovered it's a sequel to *The Wolves of Leninsky Prospekt*, so I plan to read that next.

I loved Francis Spufford's first novel *Golden Hill*, and have been waiting for his second *Light Perpetual* to come out in paperback. It's an exercise in what-iffery, a kind of narrative that can be irritating and contrived, but Spufford is masterly. His story of the unlived lives of five children killed by a bomb in 1944 is warm and poignant, without sentimentality. Full of rigorously described, though not overdone, period detail he draws the reader into lives which not only are completely made up – it's a novel, we know this – but which we are aware are made up *within* the novel. It's very clever, while being completely accessible. Do read it.

Reading Charlotte Mendelson's *The Exhibitionist* is rather like picking at a scab, or compulsively pressing on an aching tooth. It describes a grimly, hypnotically dysfunctional family with horrid, wincing realism. Ray, an artist, is a tyrannical bully, his family creeps around him, enabling his appalling behaviour through love or fear or weakness, while the reader (this one at least) watches the unfurling horribleness with appalled fascination. I'm not making it sound appealing, I realise, but trust me, it's rather brilliant.



  
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**The Arts Society** has two branches locally, The Arts Society Pewsey Vale (TASPV) and The Arts Society Kennet and Swindon (TASKS). Membership gives members access to monthly lectures by experts on a wide range of topics, visits to interesting places often not accessible to the general public, and study days led by highly qualified lecturers in their subject. In March for example TASPV have a lecture on 'Sacred Art in Ancient China', and TASKS have 'A Potted History of Britain'.



TASPV: [theartssociety.org/pewsey-vale](http://theartssociety.org/pewsey-vale)  
[tas.pewseyvale@gmail.com](mailto:tas.pewseyvale@gmail.com)

Meetings currently online at 7pm on the fourth Tuesday monthly

TASKS: [theartssocietykennet.org.uk](http://theartssocietykennet.org.uk)  
[info@theartssocietykennet.org.uk](mailto:info@theartssocietykennet.org.uk).

Meetings in the Ellendune Centre, Wroughton on the third Monday of the month except July and August.

## Bereavement in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

The way people deal with grief is unique to that person, but one of the most important factors in helping people to work through their grief is to share their story with others who really understand.



The **Bereavement Journey Course** is an ideal way of doing this. Each of the five sessions covers a different aspect of bereavement and enables participants to explore their own thoughts and feelings and hear from others who are going through the same thing. There is an optional sixth session which looks at faith questions relating to loss.

St Mary's church are planning a further course, starting on the 4<sup>th</sup> May, so if you or anyone you know has experienced a loss, contact Louise Seddon ([the\\_seddons@btinternet.com](mailto:the_seddons@btinternet.com); 07917 248339) or Mark Whitehead (07814 895127; [mjwhi1@gmail.com](mailto:mjwhi1@gmail.com)) for details of the course.

# News from the Churches

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## Women's Fellowship: 14th December

meets on Tuesday 1st, 15th & 29th March at Christchurch, New Road at 2.45pm for tea, coffee and chat.



## Marlborough Churches Together

The next Fraternal will be held on Tuesday 1st March at 21 St Margaret's Mead, 12.30 pm

## Marlborough Area Poverty Action Group (MAPAG)



The next open meeting will be held on Zoom on Monday 15th March at 5pm. Zoom link from Rachel : rachelrosed1@gmail.com.

## Celebrating Lent

Ash Wednesday is March 2nd. Please see the church notice sheets for service details.



Marlborough Churches Together will be promoting a study course in home groups based on Les Miserables (by Victor Hugo) written by Jonathan Meyer.



The sessions will comprise an extract from the film, bible readings questions and discussion. The Quakers will be running this lent course on Monday afternoons 2.30 - 4pm. Other groups will be organised, more info from church leaders.

## Might you Walk Against Hunger this Lent?

Walk 200km during the 40 days of Lent and help people around the world. Go to [cafod.org.uk/walk](http://cafod.org.uk/walk)

## What is God Saying to the Church?

You are invited to join Fr. James Mallon, Bishop Robert Barron, and Revd. Nicky Gumbel for a conversation on 'What is God Saying to the Church?' This is a FREE online event happening on Tuesday 1st March 2022 and starts at 6pm. Find out more and register: [www.divinerenovation.org/what-is-god-saying-event](http://www.divinerenovation.org/what-is-god-saying-event).

March 2022 marks two years since the pandemic hit. What is God saying to the Church throughout the last two years? What have we learned? What should be our focus moving forward?

As we slowly emerge from the pandemic, we believe that we have an incredible opportunity to recommit our energies to finding new and old ways to evangelise. But there are important questions many are wrestling with:

- What is the most urgent call for the Church?
- What have the past two years revealed about the Church and how she is fulfilling her mission?
- What are we being called to repent of, to turn from, and to turn towards?

## Christchurch

The Christchurch governing body have made a decision to look at how they can manage to survive as a worshipping community and let go of the building where they currently worship. They have funding for the next 2 years but not beyond. They have formed two groups, one to look in to the possibility of leasing or selling the building and the other Milk and Honey to look at provision of Worship in the town and see how they go forward as a church.

They are going through troubled times and having to live with uncertainty but alongside this there is a feeling of a new beginning. Please uphold and pray for them particularly at this difficult time.



## Emmanuel Marlborough

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We are grateful to meet for a weekly Sunday service at 4pm at Christchurch, New Road, with crèche and Sunday School groups. All are welcome to stay afterwards for refreshments and a sandwich tea for children. Mid-week we are also delighted to offer a variety of activities including homegroups meeting in Marlborough, Pewsey and Ogbourne St George and community groups as detailed below:

**Little Friends Toddler Group** Thursdays, 10-11:30am 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, 6-7:15pm at the Wesley Hall, Oxford Street, Marlborough. Our kids club for school years 3-6. Fun, games, tuck and a short Bible talk (bring 50p for tuck)

**Friday Nights Fridays** 7:30-9pm at the Wesley Hall, Oxford Street, Marlborough. Our youth club for school years 7-11. Friends, fun & faith – everyone welcome!

**Hope Explored** A 3 session short introduction to Christianity, from Luke's Gospel. All welcome to come and ask any question or just listen! For more details, email "[office@emmanuelmarlborough.org](mailto:office@emmanuelmarlborough.org)"

**Sparklers** Monday 28 Mar 3:45-4:45pm (Doors open at 3:30pm) at the Wesley Hall, Oxford Street, Marlborough. A monthly kids club for school years Reception to Year 2. Games, Snacks and Bible Stories! For more information or to join, please email [sparklers@emmanuelmarlborough.org](mailto:sparklers@emmanuelmarlborough.org).

# Tower and Town staff

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### **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 8th March 2022 please.

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