
TOWER AND TOWN



Manton: A Slice of Country Life

June 2024

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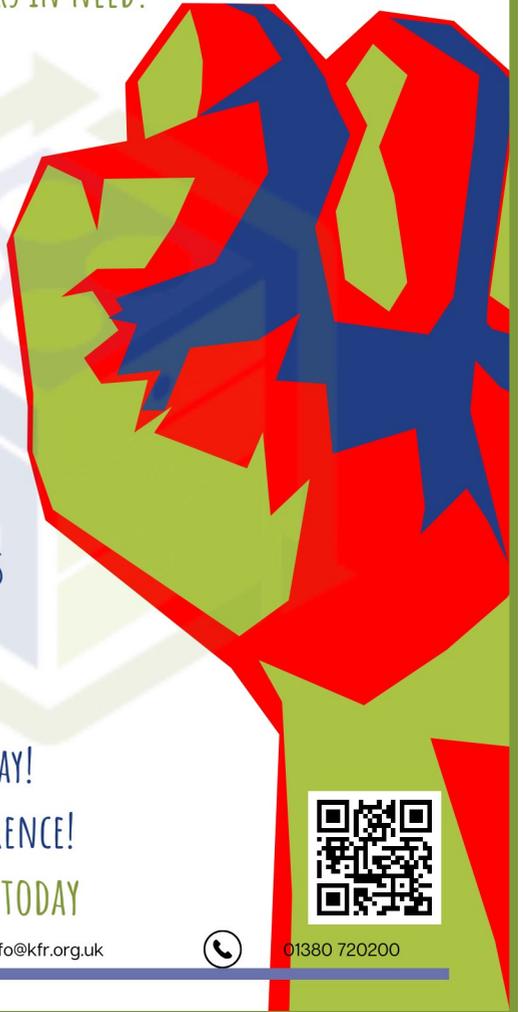
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TOWER AND TOWN

THE MAGAZINE OF MARLBOROUGH'S COMMUNITY AND CHURCHES

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EDITORIAL

My family can trace their roots back to Yorkshire, where Judy and I thought we had settled, in York. Our children were born there, and I was delighted at the prospect of either of them playing cricket for Yorkshire. However, 30 years ago, within 6 months of our now daughter Jaime being born, we had to move south.

It took us a few months to discover Manton with its pretty mixture of houses, a fantastic village school with sheep peering over the fence into the playground and, above all, a welcoming and accepting community where everyone wanted to say hello and chat. The view from our house across the water meadow is heaven on earth and a place to blossom.

Thirty years later to my surprise some regard me as capable of editing a T&T about the village - from its rich history (set in a landscape with continuous human settlement for well over 4000 years) to a thriving present: from the Manton Hoards through stories by senior villagers to the Village Hall, Preshute School, the Residents' Association and the views of a new resident family.

My thanks go to everyone who made this Manton edition of Tower and Town happen. I hope it gives you a sense of the place, its wonderful people and their warm-hearted spirit. 'Community' is alive in our pub, the Oddfellows Arms. Despite playing a vital role in the pandemic, the fate of the pub looked dark for a while. Rescued from closure by a new tenant, John Harrington, it is up to us residents to ensure it blossoms. The pub number is on the cover – so no excuses!!!

That Manton spirit is exemplified by MantonFest, the musical highlight in village life! I wish Chairman, Roger Grant, a very happy 'special' birthday. His energy, optimism and tenacity organizing the community has made MantonFest one of the most highly regarded festivals in the southwest. Let's raise a glass to him at MantonFest on the 29th of June - hope to see you there!

Rich Pitts, Editor

Front cover: see page 7 for photo credits

As recently as the 1960s Manton was a working country village, where residents would conduct their trade from the village or bike to work, and Manton families would take part in the harvest. Village amenities included the Post Office and Grocery store and two pubs: *The Oddfellows* and *The New Inn* (which became *Up the Garden Path*). There was also Matthews Builder's Yard - on Bridge Street where the flats are today - where you could take your wheelbarrow to buy just enough sand and cement for the job in hand. *The Oddfellows* had a 'Jug & Bottle' or off-licence where the kids would go to recycle lemonade bottles.

The village has seen phenomenal changes in living memory with the 'filling in' of allotment gardens and the loss of houses, it being too expensive to install modern facilities.



We can play spot the difference between two photos of the PO taken some 35 years apart. The right hand picture is from c1950. The sarsen stones of the cottage on the right (in the left hand photo) became a wall on the bend to the High Street.



In this picture taken looking east from near the Manton Drove turn, the two cottages on the right in the foreground are no more. The Chapel and the house before it remain as does the school, and the New Inn cottages right of the road in the distance. However, their allotment gardens between the school and the cottages are now a carpark. The growing of food saw the village houses spaced out with

allotments.

Looking across from the Post Office you see what was 73, View Lane (renamed 'Emily's Cottage' by Lyn Whatley's mum) where Lyn spent her childhood; it is the iconic Manton Cottage. On the T&T cover you can see the Caldwells - Lyn, aged 6, on the right with her sister, mum, grandmother and dad. Mr Caldwell was a small holder keeping chickens and goats by the allotments on the land which is now Manton Hollow.

When the harvest was to be gathered in everyone would help. Bull's Farm at the end of West Woods would send down a tractor and trailer for the mums and kids with picnics packed to ride to the farm to gather the potato harvest. However, at the age of 15 generally children started work; Lyn left home to work at St Mary's School in Calne. She returned to Manton when she married Dave, moving into the house next door to where she spent her childhood.

Tony Waite was born in a house where the Fyfield Petrol station now stands. Fyfield, also a 'proper working village' at this end of the Kennet Valley, is set in the strange landscape of 'grey wethers' or sarsen stones. It was focused on the exploitation of the stone. Its cottages on both sides of the A4 were homes to farm workers and 'sarsen masons', or 'splinters', who largely worked at the sarsen stone business of Frees of Marlborough. Tony's father, Cecil, was a highly skilled mason, who had an eye for finding 'the line' in the stone that would allow it to be split easily. This industry finally closed in 1939.

In the 1960s, much communication was in person and travel was mainly by bicycle. Whilst Tony pedalled to work in Marlborough, also cycling to work from Overton was Sue Smith. One thing led to another and they were married in Overton church in 1962. The honeymoon was moving straight into number 64, High Street, Manton. Before the wedding Tony had cycled to the estate agents in Pewsey to put in an offer on the house. On his way back he was stopped by the estate agent just driving back from Bottlesford from where the owners had accepted his offer!

At that time there was only a telephone call box in the village - very handy for the Waites. Though their first two children were born at Savernake Hospital, 'Doctor Tim' decided a home confinement would be fine for their daughter. Her arrival was preceded by a 'Call the Midwife' call box moment, with Nurse Jean Nightingale being summoned.

How do I know all this? Well, I've had the delightful pleasure of talking to lots of people in the village particularly the senior residents. With that I must close this peek at country life stories, which could have filled many editions of T&T. But I hope this gives you a sense of Manton, a place with history rooted in the Downs.

Did you know that MantonFest was not the village's first annual music event? Back in the 1970s there was a proper Hoedown where everyone dressed up in country and western outfits and headed for The Grange Barn for an evening of dancing. Music is a big part of village life, even Bergamot Close has its very own band! The village hall also plays host to many children's disco birthday parties and the school Christmas Disco is a highlight of the Winter Term.

However, there is one event that brings the whole village together and that's MantonFest - amazingly 15 years young this year, with Radio Wiltshire as master of ceremonies. It began when Stuart and Tracey Whant decided to put a music-type festival in *The Oddfellows* beer garden (at the time *The Outside Chance*). It was cold, wet and windy but the music was great. Afterwards, Roger Grant asked Stuart "Why don't you put this on in a field?" His answer was "If you can do it, go ahead." The rest is history.

MantonFest is continually evolving and last year saw a line-up innovation. The music commenced at 1.00 p.m. and included a young talent development slot and an impressive array of performers who wowed the audience. This year, with a noon start, this exciting idea continues... Who knows, festival goers may be the first to see the next Ed Sheeran?

Stuart Whant is not only the Music Director but a bass player of the local band – Barrelhouse. Performing in the early evening, the jumping blues band always gets MantonFest up and dancing to a fantastic blend of reworked classics and their own material, whatever the weather.

I caught up with Roger and Stuart to get the latest for this year and a quick look back at MantonFest history. Stuart's view as a performer is quite an eye-opener. He told me "This year, more than ever, the sound crew and the behind-the-scenes team will be working hard to keep the show rolling along whilst you relax, eat, drink and dance. They are the unsung team of volunteers and sound professionals. Literally tons of gear are lifted on and off the stage by way of the infamous and tricky stage steps. We work to a crazy time schedule all in the interests of you, the audience. Plugging and unplugging all day and night long."

The lineup this year sounds just awesome. When talking to the organising Chairman, Roger Grant, he told me "This is our most ambitious MantonFest and tickets are selling well. The event is managed by a volunteer committee, supported by wonderful helpers who help set up, steward, and break down the festival. Without them we would be lost. It's amazing that we have hosted the likes of Toyah, The Animals and Friends, The Swinging Blue Jeans, Katrina of the Waves

and Dr Feelgood across the years. As ever profits have been donated to good causes; this year Cancer Research is our chosen charity. My primary aim is to provide a great day out for those attending from near and far”.

Stuart went on to say “On a lighter note, Roger has worked his magic again this year. Headlining are The Bohemians, a world class Queen tribute act. Badness returns by popular insistence, after wowing everyone last year. Forever Elton and The Fab Four will get the whole field singing across the afternoon and evening. Jose and the Radio Tones plus The Bergamots and the **development of young musicians slot** will get the afternoon mood set.” A big ‘Thank You’ to Stuart and Roger, may your festivals never be wet...

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Having lived in Manton for just four years, our family are still counted as 'newbies' in a village so good that no one ever seems to move out.

We moved here at the end of 2019, after a decade of city life in Birmingham. We had always wanted to live in the countryside. One day, as we drove out of Birmingham, our son asked, 'Where have the pavements gone?' It was time to move.

So, what made us choose Manton? In all honesty, it wasn't our first choice although the first house we viewed was in the village. We were initially seduced by a striking house in Ogbourne Maisey but when that fell through, we decided to go with the Manton house. The pull of the welcoming primary school, St John's, a village pub and walking distance to Marlborough were all key factors – although not necessarily in that order!

What we hadn't expected was just how welcoming and social the village would be. This was despite moving in just before lockdown – social distancing not being an ideal time for making new friends. But when rules allowed, we were invited to open air drinks, walks and Coronation Street celebrations and were made to feel so welcome by our neighbours and families in the village. Our boys quickly made brilliant local friends through the Primary School, and we have followed suit. There have been many memorable nights in the village hall, *The Oddfellows* and *The Burj* - having such an amazing group of friends on our doorstep is brilliant.

We also love being right in the middle of such beautiful countryside – our dog is particularly pleased with the local walks! And the wildlife is incredible. We are still surprised when we see a deer or a pheasant wandering past our house.

As for downsides, there honestly aren't many! The internet connection is a bit worse than it was in Birmingham and the train links could be better – excellent if you want to go to London or Bristol but heading anywhere else directly is trickier. After 15 years in Birmingham, we also had to get used to having no Ubers!

We feel very lucky that we landed in such a wonderful village, and like many of the residents, we expect to be here for a very long time indeed.

Cover photo credits: Villagers by the pub (top left) – Sue and Tony Waite; The Caldwells (top right) – Lyn Whatley; St George's sign (middle left) – Rich Pitts; 'Love your Neighbour' (middle right) – Preshute Primary School; The pub (bottom left) – Sue and Tony Waite; Pub information board (bottom right) – John Harrington

Cover design: Laura Lerwill

Country Life photo credits: The post office (top left taken by Piper Didcot) – Lyn Whatley; High Street – Sue and Tony Waite

Like many village halls across the country, we have a rich and chequered history but always at the heart of everything we do is the concept of meeting the needs of the villagers of Manton and the residents of Preshute Parish. ‘Manton Rooms’ was indentured to the village in 1908 and became known as ‘Manton Reading Rooms’ for ‘purposes of Recreation or Instruction or for Meetings or other like purposes’. The current building which was once described to me as looking like a very large shed, because it is wood clad, was built by soldiers returning from World War I and offered them a meeting space, a place to come together, and hopefully that is a role it still performs today.

We are fortunate that the hall operates at almost maximum capacity. Various activities are run either by individuals or groups; we currently have three different Pilates teachers, yoga, Scottish dancing, Rainbows and Manton Preschool. The organised activities are important but equally as important is the fact that the hall is a local venue that all villagers can use for social gatherings, be they private parties, village quizzes and drinks parties, St George’s Church functions or Preshute Parish Council meetings. Information can be found on our website <https://mvhwilts.org.uk>.

To say that the hall is just a building is to devalue the work that the hall committee members carry out because they are involved, and often the instigators, of so much in the village. We have quarterly village newsletters, with articles written by a wide variety of contributors covering local issues, gardening, medical advice and social events, edited, produced and distributed to every home by members of the committee. We run a monthly village lottery which raises funds to maintain the fabric of the hall, allowing us to redecorate most summers and ensure that the building is energy efficient and environmentally friendly.

Lastly, a lot of people probably associate Manton with our summer music festival – *Mantonfest*, which is in its 15th year and was the brainchild of then chair of the hall trustees, Stuart Whant and a committee member, Roger Grant. Little did we know that the concert that we organised in the pub garden all those years ago would become a popular Wiltshire music event attracting hundreds of festival-goers.

Manton is a small village and has been part of the Marlborough civil parish since 1934 but it retains that ‘village’ feel which is what makes it a great place to live.

The Residents' Association in Manton goes back several decades. Manton used to be part of the wider Preshute parish, but in 1932 the village found itself 'absorbed' into the Marlborough town parish. Over the years, however, Manton has grown significantly from a tiny rural hamlet to a bustling modern community with its own strong character.

The Residents' Association is an engaged and enthusiastic band of volunteers who are involved in keeping Manton a special place for its residents and many visitors. One of the more important tasks is to advocate Manton's unique rural needs and village community and work to ensure we achieve proper value at parish and county levels.

As well as links with the local farming and internationally renowned equestrianism businesses, we maintain links with key local agencies such as the AONB, Forestry England and ARK. This is in recognition of the village being a popular hub for visitors and tourists exploring the Manton and Clatford Downs and west to the World Heritage Area of Avebury. Last year MRA registered our pub, *The Oddfellows*, as an Asset of Community Value in recognition of the role it has in keeping Manton extra special. Our links with Preshute Primary ensure the school remains the heart and future of the village.

The detail doesn't get overlooked either. We contribute to relevant Planning Applications, Highways issues (including such subjects as improving street lighting, considering traffic and bike calming measures and improving footpaths) and keeping up the attractive appearance of the village generally. We are represented on the town's new Flood Working Group as the Kennet flows through the village.

If you haven't been to Manton recently, do drop into *The Oddfellows* – you'll be sure of a warm village welcome!



*Manton Bridge
Street in winter
by Peter
Morgan*

Preshute CE Primary School

Mrs Claire Hann Perkins, Headteacher

Preshute Primary School can be found nestled in the heart of Manton village where it has stood proudly since 1845. Parts of the original building including the bell (which has been recently refurbished thanks to a successful community fundraising project) are still standing today, integrated into our recently expanded site

Preshute is home to over 180 pupils across seven classes who come from Marlborough and its surrounding villages. We pride ourselves on providing a nurturing teaching environment, where children are encouraged to 'Live Life, Love Learning' and embody the ethos of 'Love your neighbour'.

Our Governing body is involved in all areas of the school and its development and parents and families have the opportunity to be involved in the children's learning through a multitude of volunteering opportunities in both the classroom and outside activities. Our relationship with St George's Church and The Reverend Pete Sainsbury is intrinsic to building upon our Christian values. We collaborate regularly with the Church to connect our Christian values to our curriculum learning and by sharing in services at St. George's.

As a village school, we benefit from strong connections with our local community and we have all the character and opportunity that a bigger school might offer. Our parent committee, the PPSA, is very active in raising much needed additional funds. Our 'Green Gestures' team of volunteers (including grandparents, parents, students and friends) help us maintain and improve our outdoor spaces.

Our long-standing relationship with Marlborough College provides further opportunities to our children, such as sports activities and science lab sessions and the use of the Chapel and sports track for our events throughout the year. More recently we have willingly accepted the generous offer of a neighbouring family to share in their garden, offering the children a range of immersive outdoor experiences such as minibeast hunts and den building. We also extended this opportunity to our prospective students during one of our 'Stay & Play' sessions.

Our recent OFSTED and SIAMS (Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools) inspections have highlighted our clear ambition for all pupils. SIAMS noted a 'deeply nourishing culture where people feel loved and cared for and consequently flourish' and added that 'every pupil is treasured for their uniqueness'. Preshute Primary is an integral part of the community here in Manton and we remain steadfast in our commitment to providing a nurturing and empowering educational experience for every child who walks through our doors. Those doors are always open; why don't you come and see for yourself? We'd love to meet you!

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Locations of the Hoards



Map courtesy of Dr David Dawson

Hoard and Burials: the Archaeology of Manton

Dr David Dawson, Director, Wiltshire Museum

Manton has more than its fair share of exciting archaeological discoveries, revealing a long and important past. The story begins with the excavation of a rich Early Bronze Age woman's burial in a mound close to the A4 at Preshute. In around 1,800BC the Marlborough Lady was buried with objects made of gold and amber including an ear-ring, a miniature axe and a miniature dagger. This is one of the richest Bronze Age burials in Britain, including objects similar to those from burials close to Stonehenge. The gold may have come from Cornwall, but the amber came from far away across the North Sea, in Denmark or the Baltic. Her barrow is in sight of the Marlborough Mound, which we now know is Prehistoric, and it is possible that there is a Neolithic henge below modern Marlborough.

In around 1,200BC, during the Late Bronze Age, a hoard of 10 bronze axe heads was buried near Manton Copse, in the south of the parish. Close to the top of the hill, the axes may have been buried as an offering to the local spirits, perhaps at a sacred grove, until they were found in 1914. In 1999 another 10 axes were found, which may have been part of the same hoard, while metal detecting by David and John Philpotts, along with Paul Hart. They promptly reported their find, which meant that it could be excavated by archaeologists.

In the Roman period, four different hoards were carefully deposited near Manton House, on the northern edge of the Parish. The most impressive was a hoard of 12 pewter dishes and four bowls. One plate, decorated with an engraved interlace design at the centre, is inscribed with the name of its female owner – 'Justinae'. Close by was found a hoard of 12 Roman silver coins. These date to the very end of the Roman period, and the edges of the coins have been 'clipped', meaning that some silver could be melted down and re-used, perhaps to strike more coins. New research suggests that these coins may have carried on being used long after the official Roman withdrawal in AD 410, in the shadowy 'British' period before the arrival of the first Anglo-Saxons.

Many of these finds are on display at the Wiltshire Museum in Devizes, which is always worth a visit! On now is a special exhibition 'A Wiltshire Thatcher – a photographic journey through Victorian Wessex', until 31st August. This features the iconic image from the cover of the Led Zeppelin IV LP, which has sold 37 million copies worldwide.



1st (Saturday) to 2nd (Sunday).

The White Horse Bookshop Annual Open Art Exhibition (last two days)

5th June (Wednesday)

Marlborough WI: Marlborough Town Hall, 7.30pm (doors open at 7.10).

Meetings held on the first Wednesday of each month. For membership info email marlboroughpres@wiltshire.or.uk.

6th (Thursday) to 8th (Saturday) New dates

The Marlborough Players present 'Blithe Spirit' by Noel Coward:

Marlborough Town Hall, 7.30pm.

Tickets £10 online: www.wegottickets.com/MarlboroughPlayers and from The White Horse Bookshop

This is the rescheduled production that had to be postponed due to a last-minute cast change and technical difficulties. Information line only: 07928 122030

7th (Friday), 8th (Saturday) and 9th (Sunday) (See poster p19)

Textiles & Stitch Around Marlborough Exhibition 10am-4pm in Kennet Valley Hall, Lockeridge.

A wide-ranging display of textile art by members, both independent work and group challenges, demonstrations of different techniques and tea, coffee and home-made cakes available. Entrance £4.00 – children free.

8th (Saturday)

The Lifeboat Concert in Aid of the RNLI: St. Peter's, Marlborough, 7.30pm

Local chamber choir Dodecantus present seafaring songs and verse celebrating the Bicentenary of the RNLI. Licensed bar and raffle. Tickets £10 available from <https://RNLIILifeboatConcert.eventbrite.co.uk> and The White Horse Bookshop.

23rd (Sunday)

Marlborough Open Gardens, 1-5pm

A collection of wonderful gardens will be open this year, all within easy reach of Marlborough High Street; it's a great opportunity to explore these hidden gems. Tickets: £8 per adult in advance (£10 on the door) at The Merchant's House or www.themerchantshouse.co.uk.

28th (Friday)

Marlborough LitFest National Love Books Competition: deadline for entries. Open to anyone in three age groups: 13-15 years, 16-19 years and 20 years

and above. Winners in each category receive £300. Entries can be made on the LitFest Website www.marlboroughlitfest.org

29th (Saturday) 8.30pm

Charity Starlight Walk returns for a glowing night of fundraising fun!

This year introduces a fresh 10km and 15km route, starting and concluding at The Deanery CE Academy in Winchelstowe, with a stop at Town Gardens, Old Town, for reflection. Open to all. To sign up visit www.prospect-hospice.net/starlight.

29th (Saturday)

MantonFest: Manton Grange Watermeadow, Preshute Lane.

Line up includes: The Bohemians (Queen tribute band), Forever Elton and Badness plus bar, food, stalls and more. Compèred by Radio Wiltshire. Adults £40.50, 13-17 year olds £15, 7-12 year olds £5, under 7s free. Tickets from www.mantonfest.co.uk until 26th June and from Sound Knowledge and Elaine's Travel Co until 28th.

For background details and history of the festival see pages 4-5.

Coming Up:

12th – 14th July Marlborough Festival *(See poster p19)*

To include Live Music, Stand up Comedy, Shakespeare in the Park, Puppet Shows, Guest Chefs, Talks, Hidden History Guided Walks, Digital Workshops, Best Local Food and Drink with more to be announced. Tickets to suit every wallet available at marlboroughfestival.com and The Castle and Ball. Follow @marlboroughfest.

Dates For Your Diary:

22nd August to 2nd September – Gifford Circus Avalon Tour,

Marlborough Common. Tickets Adults £20 - £40, Children £10 - £30. For timings and bookings GIFFORDSCIRCUS.COM Phone 01453 800 200

October 2024 to June 2025 – Marlborough College Concert Series

13th October, 7.30pm Miles Karadagic – Classical Guitar

12th January 2025, 7.30pm Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra

2nd February 2025, 7.30pm Red Priest, Baroque Instrument Group

2nd March 2025, 3.30pm Southbank Sinfonia Smith Square

22nd June 2025, time TBA Wayne Marshall OBE – Piano

More information and booking details to follow.

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

St John's School, Marlborough St Mary's and Preshute Primary: Term 5 begins Monday 3rd June (ends Wednesday 24th July).

Marlborough College: Summer Term begins 6 to 9pm Sunday 2nd June (ends 12 noon Friday 28th June).

All Eng. Lit. graduates are used to being asked ‘what job does that equip you for?’ (Answer: absolutely anything and also absolutely nothing.) When I did A Level, we sneered at Mr Gradgrind’s purely transactional and capitalist view of the value of education, but now we seem to have come full circle. Certainly, Carol Atherton’s pupils ask her why she’s ‘just a teacher’, when her qualifications would seem to fit her for a much better paid career. In *Reading Lessons* she sets out to demonstrate the value in studying literature, requiring as it does that readers engage imaginatively with other lives and concerns, pushing beyond the confines of one’s own experience. In other words, to develop the eminently valuable transferable skill of empathy. Devoting chapters to the standard GCSE set texts and drawing on her experience as a teacher, the author ‘unpacks’ novels, plays and poetry, illustrating what we can learn from the classics and their relevance to current issues. Robert Browning on coercive control? Harper Lee on Brexit?

Of course, with a really Good Read you don't, at least initially, notice or want to analyse themes and narrative structures and meditations on whatever. *The Ministry of Time* by Kaliane Bradley is packed with ideas of identity and race, colonialism, power and bureaucracy, but it's no way polemical. It's a time-travel thriller romance – *I know*, but trust me – it's the best book I've read so far this year. The main premise is that the British Government has developed time-travel and is experimentally importing figures from the past. To what end is only gradually revealed, as we meet the characters who are assigned a civil service 'bridge' to support their adjustment to the C21st. It's written with springing, insouciant, fizzing energy, dramatic and gripping, very funny and absolutely heart-breaking. I won't be the only person who spends this summer painfully in love with a 177-years dead Arctic explorer. I really am coming over all Ancient Mariner about this book; I may not have a long beard, but consider yourselves fixed by my glittering eye. It's a terrific novel and will quite possibly be one of *the* books of 2024. You heard it here first.

Just enough room to urge you to read Liu Hong's first novel for a while, *The Good Women of Fudi*. Friendship, love and tensions between modern ideas and traditional values in Manchu dynasty China. Lovely understated and confident writing.

Congratulations to **FERMOIE**, sponsor of Marlborough LitFest. The company has won the King's Award for Enterprise 2024 in the International Trade category after growing exports by over 800% in just four years. It has built its success on original hand-drawn artwork, unique colours, an innovations in traditional printing, and the fact that all Fermoie fabrics are designed and made entirely in-house.



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Of the three Wagtail species occurring in the U.K. the **Pied Wagtail** is the most familiar. You might see him in a supermarket car-park, on a freshly mown cricket pitch or a barn roof, invariably searching for insects. John Clare's poem captures his character nicely:

“Little trotty wagtail, he went in the rain,/And tittering, tottering sideways he ne'er got straight again” There is something comical about its erratic gait, with the characteristic tail-bobbing and sudden sallies back and forth. I like the humorous nickname it has acquired, referencing its melodious call: “The Tchizzik Flyover!”

Grey Wagtails are rarer, with a population of just 38,000 breeding pairs in the UK. They breed in places adjacent to running water and this explains their patchy distribution. We are lucky in Wiltshire to have chalk streams and stretches of canal, with small weirs, mill-stream runs and lock gates. Above the sound of running water, the silvery calls and striking appearance of a male Grey Wagtail on a grassy bank offers the perfect complement to the scene: grey back, yellow underparts, a black bib and the long tail constantly flickering up and down.

On a local walk along the Wansdyke in late spring the birds are demanding my attention: the Skylark with its never-ending roulades of song, a Meadow Pipit perfecting his “parachute display” and a Corn Bunting “jangling” from the top of a hawthorn bush.

Then, suddenly, on the ground or on a fence-wire perch, a small, slim bird with an eye-catchingly brilliant yellow breast announces his presence with a soft “tslie” call - a **Yellow Wagtail**, my personal favourite of the wagtail tribe. It's a summer visitor, arriving in April and returning to its wintering quarters in Africa in September. The guide books will tell you it breeds on lush, damp meadowland, but in recent decades it has taken to making its nest in cereal crops, for example in our local Marlborough and Pewsey Downs and on the margins of Salisbury Plain. There may be manure piles providing insects and grubs and muddy puddles on the path, but this species is less dependent on the presence of neighbouring water.

On my walk I will encounter several pairs, for Yellow Wagtails often nest in small colonies, but only too soon the season is over and family groups will begin to appear on nearby barn roofs, searching for insects, the young ones paler than the adults, but still dainty and attractive alongside the commoner pied wagtails.



Yellow Wagtail by David White

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It never ceases to amaze me just how much ancient wisdom is forever applicable. Doctors are now prescribing ‘Nature Therapy’ for patients suffering from anxiety and depression. I was impressed to see that such a recommendation made it into American Psychologist Jonathan Haidt’s book, ‘The Anxious Generation’, published at the end of March this year.

The very high rates of mental illness the Western world is experiencing Haidt blames on the Smartphone and its revolutionary bursting onto the technology scene, from 2010 to 2015. No other new invention made its way into the hands, hearts and homes of the general human populace as quickly as the gadget we all have in our pockets and in whose company we spend a great deal of time.

The thesis is this, in Haidt’s own words, “My central claim is that two trends – overprotection in the real world and under-protection in the virtual world – are the major reasons why children born after 1995 became the ‘Anxious Generation.’”

Essentially, the Smartphone allowed access to too much information too soon. Developing brains can’t process so much, and the end result is Chronic Anxiety – so widely besetting today’s younger generation.

What really caught my attention was the chapter entitled, ‘Spiritual Elevation and Degradation’. Spirituality is key to addressing the anxiety brought on by the Smartphone. Haidt, a staunch Atheist., suggests six spiritual practices:

1. Participate in ‘Shared Sacredness’, be it Christians singing hymns, Muslims circulating the Kaaba, or even protestors chanting together.
2. Coming up for Communion is important, as is standing and sitting collectively. Such acts are believed to aid groups in forming stronger bonds.
3. Engaging in ‘Mindfulness’, stillness or focus, aids connection to self and other.
4. My favourite is ‘Self-transcendence’: while our sense of ego is diminished, we feel more interdependent and connected to people and forces around us. Contrasting this, Haidt writes: “Social media is a fountain of bedevilments. It trains people to think in ways that are exactly contrary to the world’s wisdom traditions: think about yourself first; be materialistic, judgmental, boastful, and petty; seek glory as quantified by likes and followers.”
5. Practise being ‘Slow to anger, quick to forgive’. The dangerous and vicious polarisation in Western politics is as a result of the Smartphone.
6. Find ‘Awe in Nature’ - for example, the recent display of the Aurora Borealis.

In terms of mental health, and to help alleviate the anxiety brought on by the Smartphone, attending to Spiritual Wellbeing is the right thing to do. Indeed, ‘there’s nothing new under the sun.’

The Resilience of Plants or How Less Can Be More

Lesley Andrews

In the 1940s six acres were carved out of farmland on the downs above Aldbourne and two homes were built. In 1984 we purchased one with approximately half an acre of land.

With busy working lives, we intervened very little in the structure of the garden leaving pine trees planted in the 1940s at the front of the house, a *Leylandii* hedge boundary, a concrete drive and the remainder which was lawn with a large pond to the rear in place. We developed a few borders in the main garden behind the house to give us something beautiful to look at and planted a mixture of bulbs to one side of the drive which looked after themselves.

Once we retired the mowing regime remained until we decided it was boring and a waste of time! From about 2010 we ceased mowing apart from paths connecting with the borders and pond. To the rear we sowed yellow rattle which parasitises grass and is widely used to create spaces for wildflowers. Like the bulbs, rattle looks after itself once established. To the front we did nothing. The transformation has been extraordinary. Land farmed for at least a hundred years and given over to conventional management for decades has changed remarkably in a relatively short time.

The first plants to colonise were cowslips and oxeye daisies then others such as stitchwort, clover and primroses popped up. The biggest surprise over the last five years has been the appearance of orchids in both parts of the garden but especially in the front garden where hundreds appeared last summer. These are native to chalk downland and somehow have managed to survive and reappear. And, although we hadn't introduced yellow rattle there, it has colonised small areas and other plants; this spring especially primroses are settling in all without any prompting.



The result of our relaxed gardening regime is colourful meadows from spring all through summer. We now hope that year on year the mix will continue to change with increasing numbers of orchids testament to the survival powers of plants.

Pyramid Orchids in Grass by Lesley Andrews

The Merchant's House 'Refreshed'

Kevin Dickens (Trust Manager)

The Merchant's House Museum, set up in 2018 to portray life in Marlborough, closed during the pandemic. To bring people back to visit again, the exhibition space has been completely refreshed to show the stories and artefacts of 'Marlborough at War'. With a focus on day to day life, trades and shops as well as accounts of military roles and locations, our visitors can take themselves back over 80 years. Thanks to the Marlborough History Society's Oral History Project, you can listen to some of our much loved residents talk about the shops, past times and people of Marlborough.



The historic house itself has been 'reset', with more display boards and stories to help our visitors understand the building and the families who lived and worked here. A new addition this year is self-guided tours, where visitors can navigate the maze of rooms at their own pace. Our very popular guided tours are still running, and you can book these at www.themerchantshouse.co.uk.

There is an exciting calendar of events for 2024. Our ever popular Open Gardens on June 23rd (*for details see What's On p14*), a return visit from 17th century living history group The Devereux's Regiment on the 6th & 7th July and a magical Christmas event later in the year.

We are always seeking new volunteers to give their time on any day Monday – Saturday. If you would like to get involved, please contact Kevin Dickens (Trust Manager) on 01672 511491 or email trustmanager@themerchantshouse.co.uk

Textiles and Stitch Exhibition

Ros Lomas

From 7th-9th June at Kennet Valley Hall (*see page 14*) Textiles & Stitch Around Marlborough will be holding our first exhibition for over 5 years. We are planning a wonderful display of textile art including hand stitching, free machine embroidery, felting, quilting & patchwork and printing.

A favourite group challenge has been the embroidery of old denim pockets stitched onto an outfit (plus suitcase). We will also have demonstrations of hand stitching, needle felting, quilting and patchwork, English paper piecing and beading.

Retailer Sewcraft from Swindon will be present and there will also be items for sale decorated by our own members. Tea, coffee and home-made cakes will be available throughout so come along with friends and make a day of it.

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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

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

10.30am Worship

5.00pm Informal Worship (with Energize Children's Church)

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 (every 3rd Sunday)

4.00pm Worship (every Sunday)

Marlborough College Services are shown at the college chapel

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

From the Churches

Choral Evensong, Sunday 9 June at 7pm, St George's.

A restful and refreshing service of Choral Evensong with The Georgians Choir in the beautiful setting of St George's, Preshute. All welcome.

Children/Family Activities

Informal All-age Worship – Sunday 2nd June at St Mary's Church.

Children's tea at 4.30 pm followed by a service from 5 – 6pm.

Sparklers, Monday, 17th June, 2.30-3.45 pm.

A kids club for School Years Reception to Year 2. Games, snacks and Bible stories. Run by Emmanuel, meeting in the Wesley Hall, Oxford Street,

The Ark Parent/ Carer and Toddler Group, Mondays during term-time, 9:30am to 11am in the Church Hall, Silverless Street. Please contact Caroline Philps (cphilps2@gmail.com)

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

Explorers, Fridays during term time, 6-7.15 pm. Kids' club for school years 3-6. Fun, games, tuck and a short Bible talk (bring 50p for tuck). Run by Emmanuel, meeting in the Wesley Hall, Oxford Street.

Friday Nights, Fridays during term time, 7.30-9 pm. Youth club for school years 7-11. Friends, fun & faith – everyone is welcome! Run by Emmanuel, meeting in the Wesley Hall, Oxford Street.

Midweek Activities

Ladies Bible Study, Fridays 7th & 21st June. 10.00am to 11.30am. Friends discovering God's truth in the Bible (All ladies welcome - onsite crèche available).

For more details, email ladies@emmanuelmarlborough.org

B.L.T (Bible Lunch Time), Monday, 10th June, 12.30 pm

Pop in briefly if you're busy – Stay & chat if you can. Light lunch + short Bible talk, meeting in the Wesley Hall, Oxford Street. (Emmanuel)

Welcome Wednesdays, every Wednesday, 10.30 am in St Mary's.

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

Different voices: A conversation about God, Sex, and Marriage

The Church is struggling to accommodate differing views about human sexuality.

Is marriage a gift of God to humanity, which by necessity and design needs a man and a woman as its constituent parties? Or can aspects of this covenant be extended to same sex couples through prayers and blessings?

We are delighted that two excellent speakers are coming to help us think through these challenging questions. David Runcorn describes himself as an 'explorer' and 'free range priest.' He has taught in theological colleges, been a chaplain to Lee Abbey and written more than ten books including *Love Means Love*. Vaughan Roberts is the Rector of

**Different Voices:
A Conversation about
God, Sex and Marriage**

Speakers



Vaughan Roberts
Rector of St Ebbe's, a Thriving Church in Oxford. Author of *Battles Christians Face*



David Runcorn
Writer, Theological Teacher & Retired Anglican Priest. Author of *Love Means Love*.

Thursday 20th June, 7:30pm
St Mary's Church, Marlborough

Welcome by The Bishop of Ramsbury
Followed by refreshments

www.marlboroughanglicanteam.org.uk

St Ebbe's, a lively student church in Oxford. He has written more than ten books, including Life's Big Questions. Bishop Andrew Rumsey has kindly agreed to come and open the event and Keith Fryer will chair the conversation. There will be time for questions and refreshments will be served afterwards. An audio recording of the evening will be available, but please do invite friends to come along and listen live.

FROM THE REGISTERS

Weddings - we congratulate:

- 27 April Sarah Halsey and Jonathan Cullerne at St George's, Preshute
11 May Lydia Denehy and Hugo Crosthwaite at St John the Baptist, Minal

Departed - we pray for the family of:

- 23 April Anne Notton (76), High Street, Manton
St George's Preshute
4 May Jennifer Ann Dixon (73), Urchfont, Devizes
St Mary's, Marlborough

Family News

Naomi Painter

Jonathan Lawrence writes:

Norman Lawrence sadly passed away on Tuesday 26 March 2024 - his 91st birthday. He was a caring husband to Gloria and devoted father to Stephen and Jonathan. He lived with Gloria in Marlborough for many years - first in Hazel Close and latterly in Wye House Gardens.

Norman was a loyal member of Christchurch in Marlborough and took delight in their monthly Sunday Lunches. He also enjoyed time at the Jubilee Centre. He played a full part in the community taking an active role in various U3A groups and giving talks to members. He was a well-travelled gentleman.

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<i>Family News</i>	Naomi Painter	family.news@towerandtown.org.uk	
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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 July issue by Tuesday 11th June please.

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Tower and Town is available at St Mary's, St Peter's, The White Horse Bookshop, Mustard Seed, Kennet Pharmacy and St George's, Preshute.

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