
TOWER AND TOWN

THE MAGAZINE OF MARLBOROUGH'S COMMUNITY AND CHURCHES



SPRING IN THE AIR

NO. 756 | MARCH 2025

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



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TOWER AND TOWN

Spring in the Air

As I write, drab January is giving way to slightly brighter February. We're not there yet but hopefully by the time you are reading this there will be many more positive signs of that spring we crave throughout the long winter months.

For those of you for whom January was "dry", well done, and if you are already yearning for more self-denial, worry not - Lent is just round the corner and you can give up all over again. Mind you for the rest of the country January was far from dry, and storm after storm (with unusual names) ensured that this was one of the wettest Januaries on record.

Talking of Lent, you can read in this issue of plans for a Lent course of readings and discussion groups organised by Marlborough Churches Together, as well as some fascinating initiatives by the Methodists (see pages 26-27), including a virtual pilgrimage to Jerusalem which starts on Ash Wednesday (March 5th). Spiritual reawakening can be as much part of your springtime experience as getting out into the garden, doing some gardening and listening to and watching nature come alive.

In that vein, you can read here about local conservation organisations that need your help, and our wonderful nature correspondent opens our eyes to birdlife in March. Our gardening correspondent tells us more about the medlar tree, and we hear about the four books shortlisted for the Richard Jefferies literary award for outstanding nature writing.

March also sees the celebration of the centenary of the opening of the Memorial Hall at Marlborough College with two magnificent concerts. And John Osborne reminds us that for many cultures March was the first month of the year, a fact still celebrated in Iran today with a two-week long festival enjoyed with family and friends.

Yes, folks, winter is gone and a new year beckons. Here's wishing you all good health and happiness in the warmer sunnier months ahead.

David Du Croz
Editor

March Edition No. 756

Compiler: Sarah Bumphrey

Proof Readers: Julia Peel, Diana Foster Kemp

Marlborough Churches
Together



Richard Jefferies Literary Award

The Richard Jefferies Society celebrates the work of the 19th century writer, born in Swindon, who produced a remarkable output of largely nature writing during the 38 years of his life.

The eponymous Award is presented annually to the book considered by a Panel of Judges to be the outstanding nature writing of the year. Each winning work reflects the heritage, content and sense of place that is so strong in Jefferies' countryside books.

The first award was made in 2015 in memory of John Webb, one of the Society's members and a generous benefactor. John was a remarkable man; a collector and maker of brass instruments, and in an earlier life, a film maker. Despite this last calling, he never owned a television, and was an avid reader – especially of works by Jefferies, Thoreau, and other country writers.

Each Award is for £1,000, funded half by the Society, and half by the White Horse Bookshop, our generous local sponsor. Debby Guest has also served as a very welcome and experienced judge up until this year.

The Award is decided on a calendar year basis, so each year the two shortlisters (of whom I am one) receive more than 40 books for consideration. Most of these are submitted by publishers, some are submitted by the authors, and some are suggested by members of the

Society. We then have to reduce this (very) long-list to a shortlist for the final judging panel of six to read and vote on. There is no entry fee, the judges are not paid, and (so far) we have not had any major Booker-type disagreements! The winner each year has also been invited to speak at the White Horse Bookshop in the early autumn.

Previously, we have produced a shortlist of six books for the panel to consider, but, for the first time this year, we found it difficult to select more than four titles because there was a larger number of non-contenders than usual. The four we have selected, however, should ensure that our previous high standard is maintained, and they all are fascinating reads; albeit all very different.



Credit: David Du Croz

All the books on the shortlist (photo above) can be seen and/or ordered at the White Horse Bookshop. See also two previous articles in Tower and Town about Richard Jefferies and Marlborough from August 2019 and August 2020.

John Price

No Ruz – The Iranian New Year

On 21st March, the Iranian 'No Ruz' or 'New Day', an Iranian family, like thousands of others in the country that we used to call Persia, sits round their table at home.

On it there is a special collection of objects, the *Haft Sin* or the *Seven S's*, seven symbolic objects whose names in Persian all begin with an S:

Sabzeh: a bowl of sprouting wheat shoots, symbolizing rebirth and growth

Samanu: a sweet pudding made from wheat germ, for wealth and strength

Sanjad: dried oleaster berries, for love and wisdom

Sir: garlic, for cleansing the body

Sib: an apple, for health and beauty

Sumac: berries, for patience

Sirkeh: vinegar, for long life

The spread traditionally also includes: a mirror, for self-knowledge; candles, for light; coloured eggs, for fertility; a gold-fish in a bowl, for life; new coins; and a significant book, such as the poetry of Hafez or the Koran, for wisdom and knowledge. There follows a full-blown family meal with rice, fish and vegetable dishes, and fruits, nuts and pastries.

Earlier there will have been a 'spring clean' of the house. Parents give money

to children and employers give new banknotes to their employees. Among the street celebrations people leap over bonfires with the cry, "Give me your colour red and take my colour yellow." This wish is for the fire to burn away the yellow of sickness and replace it with the blood-red of life. Fire is one of the four sacred elements of Zoroastrianism, the national religion of Iran before the advent of Islam.

All work comes to a standstill during the following two weeks and much travelling and visiting of friends, family and neighbours takes place. On the thirteenth day of the holiday there is a great exodus to parks or to the banks of streams for the family picnic, when the wheat shoots are cast into the water - a kind of giving back to nature.

This is how the Iranian New Year begins in the springtime, celebrated like this for possibly three thousand years. The subject peoples of the old Persian empire are sculpted in relief on the walls of the Palace at Persepolis, shown bringing New Year gifts to the Great King (500/450 BC). No Ruz is still the most popular and important holiday in the Iranian calendar, antedating Islam by at least fifteen hundred years, and it shows how the traditional culture and outlook of a vast number of Iranians has persisted through the Islamic era.

John Osborne

Lent Course: Big Church Read

Marlborough Churches Together has chosen "Wild, Bright Hope" as the Big Church Read for Lent this year. The Lent Course discussion groups will be based on this reading. Here **Rachel Rosedale** (Society of Friends) provides an insight into the book.

It looks really good (as the picture of the cover on page 5 shows) and is described as a "hugely heartening book on hope" which will help us look "at the world and the challenges we face in a new way". The book consists of twelve chapters, which we will consider in five weekly sessions, beginning the week commencing 9th March.

Each chapter is written in the last six months, by a different person. "Wild, Bright Hope" gives a "fantastic range of lively, up-and-coming writers who are willing to dig deep. ...they write passionately about what gives them hope." The reflections are on topics such as "Kingdom, faiths and diplomacy", "A vision for hope in politics", "Widening Horizons", "A beautiful and messy awakening", "Wild paths of peace" and "Hope in suffering".

A taster from the book: the chapter "Wild Paths of Peace" is written by Martha Jarvis who is the Anglican Communion's representative to the

United Nations. She works with a small team to create bridges between the Church's work and the UN's, raising the Church's voice in international negotiations with some success. The chapter ends with the following quote "Deep conflicts are stressful and painful. At worst they are violent and destructive. Yet at the same time, they create some of the most intense spiritual encounters we experience. Conflict opens a path, towards revelation and reconciliation" (Jean Paul Laderach - a Mennonite mediator).

The book "urges us not only to embrace a more hopeful perspective, but also to consider how we ourselves might play a full part in bringing in the kingdom of God". It is a very accessible book, which is full of stories, personal testimonies and reflection questions for use at home and together in groups. The groups' sessions will be like a cross between a Book Club and a traditional Lent Course!

If you have not already done so there are sign up forms in the back of St. Mary's Church and a list of groups, days and times they meet. Do consider joining one.

The books are available at Mustard Seed.



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Rural Affairs

This time last year we featured a number of local organisations who help to give us the beautiful local countryside to enjoy. Here we catch up with three of them again

Forestry England

Spring is within reach and brings the bird nesting season. Different bird species have overlapping breeding seasons and some can nest all year-round!

This makes it tricky, as a working forest, to delicately balance felling trees whilst protecting some of the wildlife that inhabits them. Harvesting trees is an important part of sustainable forestry because well-managed forests support more wildlife. Before starting work we carry out surveys for birds, mammals, rodents, invertebrates, fungi, and native plants, such as bluebells. We consider these against complex factors including tree health, how the ground slopes, soil condition, and likely rainfall when planning work that

will support our long-term management plan.

Our timber harvesting works at Savernake Forest have been very start-stop over the last year due to the wet weather. As we try to reschedule the works while protecting the ground, we hope to resume them during the summer months.

We do what we reasonably can to avoid disturbing or damaging birds' nests. We also take extra care to look for wildlife that has special protection, including badgers, bats and rare or threatened birds. We either suspend or alter work to make sure this special wildlife is protected. Unfortunately, there is no completely risk-free time to work. Working in the wetter, winter months



Credit: Forestry England

risks causing long term damage to soils. Protecting soil is important for the whole forest ecosystem and means we often need to work in drier conditions, which are more likely to fall within the bird breeding season. Whilst we would prefer to work in the summer, we are restricted again due to European Protected Species and have a limited window during the year in which to carry out operations.

Each site is different and operations can start, and then appear to stop midway through, and may look unfinished for a time, before we return to complete and reinstate paths and tracks.



For more information, visit <https://www.forestryengland.uk/article/felling-and-nesting-birds> Contacts: Forestry England westengland@forestryengland.uk or Facebook at [facebook.com/ForestryEnglandSavernakeForest](https://www.facebook.com/ForestryEnglandSavernakeForest)

Wiltshire Wildlife Trust

The Trust, which we featured this time last year, runs the Bay Meadows Reserve on the edge of Marlborough and welcomes volunteers. As we move into Spring now might be the time for you to think about what you could do to help with the conservation of our local environment. Here are a number of ways in which you could assist:

Practical Conservation: Help maintain our nature reserves by clearing invasive species, planting native trees, and creating habitats for wildlife.

Community Engagement: Lead guided walks, deliver informative talks, or assist at events and festivals, sharing your passion for nature with others.

Education and Outreach: Inspire the next generation of conservationists by helping with school visits, running educational programs, or assisting with wildlife surveys.

Wildlife Research and Monitoring: Become a citizen scientist or a water guardian and help us gather crucial data on Wiltshire's wildlife. Participate in surveys, help monitor our waterways, record species populations, and contribute to vital research projects.

If you would like to know more about volunteering, visit our website www.wiltshirewildlife.org/support-us or email volunteer@wiltshirewildlife.org to explore the diverse opportunities available and discover how you can make a difference.

Rural Affairs (continued from previous page)

The Landscape Trust

The Landscape Trust, which has recently relaunched, outlines below its aims and objectives.

The North Wessex Downs Landscape Trust (NWDLT) is an independent charity with a passion for the natural environment, heritage and culture of the North Wessex Downs. The charity promotes awareness and understanding of the North Wessex Downs through information, education and advice. It delivers projects and initiatives to support and enhance natural beauty and local priorities across the North Wessex Downs by providing grant funding for small-scale community



projects and raising resources for landscape and wildlife conservation activities.

Working in partnership with others, the charity aims to deliver bigger, better and more joined up initiatives. If you are interested in how to create a wildflower area on a grass verge or elsewhere, then have a look here at how to go about it using the Trust's Verge Biodiversity Survey, which was developed with the Pewsey Community Area Partnership.

If you'd like to find out how you could get involved in any of the Trust's projects, or if you would like to donate to their work, then please visit:

www.nwdlt.org.uk

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Marlborough College's Memorial Hall: 1

2025 marks the centenary of the opening of Marlborough College's Memorial Hall. To mark that occasion and to celebrate the building's past and present, **Philip Dukes**, Artistic Director, here writes about two fantastic concerts at the very beginning of the month.

On **Saturday March 1st**, the College Symphony Orchestra, Chamber Orchestra and Brasser, will give a side-by-side performance with the College's professional orchestra in partnership, London's Sinfonia Smith Square, including music by Vivaldi, Gerald Finzi, and concluding with Rachmaninoff's famous Piano Concerto No.2 with Upper Sixth Music Scholar Elliot R as the featured soloist. This event is free and no tickets are required.

On **Sunday 2nd March** at 3pm the full complement of Sinfonia Smith Square will give a performance as part of the prestigious Marlborough College Concert Series. The programme will include Mendelssohn's Overture to 'A Midsummer Night's Dream', Beethoven's Symphony No.7 and Vaughan Williams'

beguiling work 'Flos Campi'. Vaughan Williams wrote the work in 1925 (hence the attraction of performing it on this occasion) and it is scored for solo viola, orchestra and choir. Schola Cantorum, who are the College's elite choral group, will perform alongside Sinfonia Smith Square, and the viola soloist will be Philip Dukes, Artistic Director at the College. The concert will be conducted by both Adam Meehan-Staines and Alex Arkwright in the absence of Sinfonia Smith Square's regular Music Director Simon Over, who is indisposed.

Philip Dukes has a long association with the Sinfonia (formally Southbank Sinfonia), and who themselves have become synonymous with the Concert Series and their highly acclaimed annual performances in the Memorial Hall over many years.

Indeed, to have such a jewel in the crown as the Memorial Hall, with its enhanced acoustics following the impressive refurbishment just a few years ago, gives every performance that takes place in there a real sense of occasion and a truly memorable experience for audience and performers alike.

Sunday 16th March at 7pm in St Peter's Church **ALTEA NARICI (solo cello)**

Sponsored by the International Yehudi Menuhin Foundation, Altea will be playing an enticing mixture of classical and modern music including extracts from three Bach Suites

Full programme details on www.stpetersmarlborough.org.uk/event
Tickets £15 (£10 for St Peter's members) from the above or on the door on the night.

Marlborough College's Memorial Hall: 2

David Du Croz, former Head of History at the College, tells the story of that building's beginning 100 years ago.

That Marlborough College would have a Memorial Hall to commemorate its dead of the First World War was no foregone conclusion - the story behind the building that we know today was far from straightforward.

To start with, it took the best part of three years to decide what form that memorial would take. The first idea and one that carried most support initially was for a memorial cloister attached to the south side of Chapel. The Master at the time thought it "the best way of commemorating the loss the School has undergone".

Other ideas in the early stages included money to endow bursaries for the education of the sons of the fallen at the College, though it was soon realised that this would not do justice to the majority since most of those who had died were too young to have had any children of their own.

As time went on the mood shifted and what was to be called a Speech Hall became the favourite, and in October 1919 a considerable majority voted in favour at a meeting held at Central hall, Westminster.

The next problem was finance. Although initially donations to the fund were generous, the delay in reaching a

decision resulted in a slowing of the fund-raising, and once the decision had been made post-war economic problems resulted in spiralling costs and hesitancy in the minds of potential donors.

Nevertheless a competition for the design of the building was launched in 1920 and won by William Newton, and the site chosen was the paddock below Chapel to the west on the Bath Road - "it would be a splendid position and it would be part of the Chapel precincts as well." Foundations began to be laid in 1921.

The financial uncertainty impacted also on the actual design of the building as it became clear that Newton's original plans (a two-level auditorium) were too ambitious for the money available, and the plans had to be scaled back.

There were also significant architectural problems. It was soon found that the weight of the building on what were essentially water meadows would require a concrete platform to prevent the building from sinking.

And that was not the end of Newton's problems. His initial brief for a Speech Hall was in the course of construction expanded to accommodate a hall for concert performances, and eventually also small plays. It was hoped that the Hall would be ready by the summer of 1924, but the opening had to be delayed by a year.

Despite all these uncertainties and problems, the finished product was



A water colour by William Newton of the original design.

much admired when the Duke of Connaught came to open the Hall on May 23rd 1925. Newton had created more than just a building - he had crafted a commemoration of the dead in what was described as "a poetic landscape" in which the new Hall and Chapel were linked in a "hallowed acre".

In its report on the building The Architectural Review of June 1925 praised it as a triumph - *'Here in fact is a holy precinct. The chapel on its mound, the quiet garden, the empty space of the great brick forecourt, the memorial hall itself, all combine for one purpose. They are monuments to youth not death.'*

Marlborough Choral Society Spring Concert

Saturday 5th April, 7.30pm in St Mary's Church, Marlborough

The lovely programme includes anthems and songs by well-known English composers. We will be performing works by Wesley, Elgar, Vaughan Williams ("Five Mystical Songs"), Mendelssohn ("Hear my Prayer") and Handel (movements from "Messiah" appropriate for the Easter period including the Hallelujah chorus). The two German composers were closely associated with the country - the Mendelssohn was first performed in London.

Tickets £12 (£4 for students, Under 16s free), available online at <https://www.ticketsource.co.uk/marlborough-choral-society>, from Sound Knowledge, choir members or on the door. Refreshments available during the interval.

There will be a retiring collection for The Prospect Hospice.

The Colours of Spring



Credit: Dave Pegden



Credit: Bridget Codrington



Credit: Bridget Codrington

The Medlar

Built on the site of a cinema, Waitrose opened in 1977 in Marlborough. At the rear door of the store, there are a number of trees, one of which is a Medlar. This particular tree would be around 35 years old.

The medlar belongs to the Rose family and is a native of SE Asia and SE Europe. The dog rose, crab apples, quinces, hawthorn, mountain ash, blackthorn, cherry and plum trees are also members of this family.

Once cultivated by the Greeks and the Romans thousands of years ago, medlar trees were found in old cottage gardens, orchards and parks. This is because the fruit is harvested in the winter making it one of the few sources of sugar available in the medieval winters.

Medlars are small trees with grey bark and crooked trunks. They are unfussy and long-lived. In the spring, the star-shaped flowers have five petals and are pollinated by bees. The five seeds in the fruit are dispersed by birds. In the autumn, the leaves are a kaleidoscope of colours: green, yellow, brown and blood red.



Chaucer described the medlar as ‘an open arsed fruit.’ The fruit is peculiar as it is only eaten after it has been BLETTERED, in other words it is allowed to go over-ripe and to become brown and soft. At this stage the fruit, which is packed with

vitamins, can be eaten out of its skin with a teaspoon. The taste is described as “baked apple with the consistency of chestnut purée.”

Jellies and preserves can be made because the fruit has a high tannin content. Apparently it was used in the tanning process for that reason. The fruit of the medlar can be turned into a ‘curd’ style of fruit cheese where the strained pulp is cooked with

eggs, butter and sugar so the ‘cheese’ is really a cake. It can also be used as a tea and has antibacterial properties.

I am plucking up the courage to sample the fruit when the bletting is complete in the autumn.

Allan Skipper

Marlborough Gardening Association

Photo credit: Allan Skipper

What's On in March

1st Saturday 10.00am – 4.00pm

Art Workshop: Acrylics – Light in the Landscape with Stuart Roper.

Whitehorse Bookshop studio.

For more information and the schedule for the Spring Workshop Programme

2025 see whitehorsebooks.co.uk

2nd Sunday 3.00pm

Marlborough College Concert Series: Sinfonia Smith Square

Marlborough College Memorial Hall.

The Sinfonia will be performing with the College's elite singers, Schola Cantorum.

Mendelssohn - A Midsummer Night's

Dream Overture, Vaughan Williams -

Flos Campi (Soloist Philip Dukes),

Beethoven - Symphony No.7.

To book: Marlboroughconcertseries.org

4th Tuesday 2.30pm

The Arts Society – Pewsey Vale

Bouverie Hall, Pewsey.

Lecture: From Vincennes to Sevres: The Dawn of the French Royal Porcelain

Manufactory. Speaker: Anne Haworth,

formerly a senior ceramics specialist at

Christie's London with more than 20

years experience working with some of

the world's greatest museums.

Non-members welcome. £7 cash or card

6th Thursday 2.00pm

Marlborough Floral Club

Mildenhall Village Hall.

Flowers Bring Smiles by Melanie Smith.

£6 to attend, no pre booking necessary.

Information from Micky Graham

01672514301.

8th Saturday 11.00am-11.45am

Rally to show solidarity for the Palestinian People.

'The Bulge' on the High Street by the White Horse Bookshop.

8th Saturday 6.30pm for 7.00pm

Ramsbury Quiz in support of Action for the River Kennet.

Memorial Hall, Ramsbury, SN8 2QU.

See poster on p8 for details.

12th Wednesday 6.45pm for 7.30pm

Marlborough Gardening Association

Marlborough Town Hall.

Pruning Trees and Shrubs with Richard Cripps.

Display table: Early Spring Flowers.

Information on talks and events at

marlbga.org.uk

16th Sunday 7.00pm – 9.00pm

Brilliant International Musicians Series:

Altea Narici (solo cello)

St Peter's Church, Marlborough.

See poster on p9 for details.

20th Thursday 7.30pm

Marlborough History Society

St Peter's Church

Talk: The Two Longest Reigns Part II:

Work and Leisure in the Reigns of

Queen Victoria and Queen Elizabeth II.

Speaker: Patrick Hickman-Robertson,

OBE, is the author of a number of best-

selling books on social history and on

cinema.

Entry £5. Guests very welcome.

What's On in March

(continued)

25th Tuesday 10.30 – 12.30pm

Spring Study Series: 'Elizabethan England' with David Du Croz.

The Merchant's House.

The first of three compelling lectures on Elizabethan England. Tickets £16 - £19.

To book see themerchantshouse.co.uk

30th Sunday 8.00pm

Steve Knightly 'Winter into Spring'.

St Peter's Church Marlborough.

Acclaimed singer-songwriter and former Show of Hands frontman Steve Knightly is back with his eagerly anticipated solo tour, Winter into Spring. This brand new show will take Steve back to intimate venues where he honed his craft. The tour features songs from the critically acclaimed Winter Yards album alongside some of his most iconic songs in a completely fresh performance. Steve promises an unforgettable evening of music and stories. Tickets (which are limited) £22.50 from Sound Knowledge or marlboroughfolk-roots.co.uk

School Dates

Please see school websites for any updated information.

Marlborough College

Exeat: 12 noon Friday 14th March – 9.00pm Sunday 16th March.

Term ends: 12 noon Friday 28th March.

Coming Up in April & Looking Ahead

Tuesday 1st April 10.30 – 12.30pm

Spring Study Series: 'Painting in the Age of Elizabeth I' with David Evans.

The Merchant's House.

Tickets £16 - £19.

To book: themerchantshouse.co.uk

Saturday 5th April 7.30pm

Marlborough Choral Society Spring Concert

St Mary's Church, Marlborough.

See poster on p11 for details

Tuesday 8th April 10.30 – 12.30pm

Spring Study Series: 'Stately Eminences' (the creation of spectacular country houses) with Chris Rogers.

The Merchant's House.

Tickets £16 - £19.

To book: themerchantshouse.co.uk

25 – 28 September

Marlborough LitFest: First Headliner and 2025 Golding Speaker has been

announced as acclaimed, award winning contemporary novelist, Alan

Hollinghurst.

The full programme will be available in the summer. Become a Friend of LitFest.

For priority booking:

www.marlboroughlitfest.org

Linda Illsley

What's On Editor

Erratum - Family News: The tribute to **Dorothy Blythe** in last month's magazine was wrongly credited to Peter Noble. It was, in fact, written by **Dorothy's daughter, Louise**. We apologise sincerely to Louise and Dorothy's family for our mistake.

A Good Read

I don't think I've ever been given a proper remit for these columns, which is just as well because I haven't stuck to it! I try to bring new titles to your attention, but I confess I usually just write about what I've been reading lately.

So, instead of reviewing new publications this month I'm flagging up two older books/writers, one of whom was new to me. I don't generally read science fiction, but I came across ***The Separation*** by Christopher Priest, first published in 2002, and loved it. An alternate history of WW2 it avoids cliché, thank goodness, and is an extraordinary, prismatic and inconclusive tale, told in letters, diaries and reports. "I can't help feeling we are being told only part of the story" one character says, about wartime news reporting. We readers, however, are told everything in a densely hallucinatory narrative in which nothing quite adds up and yet all is utterly convincing. Each version of the story is completely believable and at the same time impossible to take for granted.

Laurie Colwin, who died 30 years ago, far too young, was on the surface a writer mainly concerned with domestic comfort and undoubtedly privileged characters. Yet she absolutely understands the human weakness, passion and complexity simmering

beneath the veneer of solidly established, and 'establishment' relationships among the wealthy professional classes, and she gently picks at underlying moral ambiguities. Her heroines, devoted wives, supportive girlfriends and (usually) dutiful daughters manage, with a certain amount of mildly anguished compromise, to have - well, not quite all, but certainly most of it. Calm, ironic, resolutely unsentimental, Colwin rather wonderfully presents mild subversion as essential if one wants ***Family Happiness***, or to be ***Happy All the Time*** or to enjoy ***Another Marvelous Thing***, to name but three.

I keep seeing short paragraphs at the end of review pages and lifestyle columns about the re-issue of Laurie Colwin's novels, and what a Good Thing it is, and I have to stop myself from childishly stamping my feet and wailing "I saw her first. She's *my* novelist!" That's a very un-Colwin way to behave, so I shan't. I shall be grown up and polite, and share the writer I've enjoyed for *forty-five years* with you. Her novels and cookery books used to be the ones I'd save from a burning building, and now they're available again, so I don't have to worry. If you've ever fantasised about a little mild, civilised adultery, in a New York brownstone, with solid silver flatware, fresh flowers and excellent coffee then look no further.

Debby Guest

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Nature Notes: Birds in Early Spring

It's a bright warm day in March and a bird pops up on a mound of earth on a sloping field, showing a pale rump as it darts back and forth searching for food.

It's a male Wheatear, a migrant on its way north, larger and brighter than the pair of Meadow Pipits who have arrived to breed locally. The Wheatear is a glamorous fellow, with a white eye-stripe, buff colouring on the throat, a grey back and black wings. When it flies the white rump catches your eye: the name wheatear derives from the old name for the bird "white arse." I always mark down my first sighting of this bird, which gladdens the heart and renews expectation of more summer visitors yet to appear.

On a nearby downland spot another bird has arrived from Africa, the secretive Stone Curlew, its oatmeal plumage melting into the background of

the bare stony field that will be its breeding territory. High and still mounting in the sky above, a Skylark begins his endless, melodious roudades of sound.

Songs and calls of birds are increasing daily: those of the Song and Mistle Thrush that have been heard on and off since January are joined by the fluty tones of the garden Blackbird. First of the warblers to sing are the Chiffchaff and Blackcap, some of whom may have overwintered here. The Chiffchaff sings his name time and again, hard to spot as it flits from branch to branch and sometimes he forgets himself and sings



“Chaffchiff”! The Blackcap is elusive too, then suddenly coming into view if you have kept still and waited. I love its sweet, jumbled phrases, aimed to attract the female with her warmer colours and brown cap.

Small and rather indistinctive, the Cetti's Warbler is a shy bird that likes to skulk about in patches of scrub and long grass. Its loud bursts of song mean you'll usually hear it before you see it. But if you're determined to spot one, look for a dark, rather stocky warbler with short wings and a full, rounded tail, diving for cover along local stretches of the River

Kennet near Ramsbury. Bearing in mind the decline of so many species, this is one of the UK's most welcome new residents, first breeding in Kent in 1972.

March offers a good variety of bird species to see and hear, a prelude to the arrival of many more in April and May.

Robin Nelson

Photograph opposite: Male Wheatear
Credit: Helen Llewelyn

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

Penny Reader

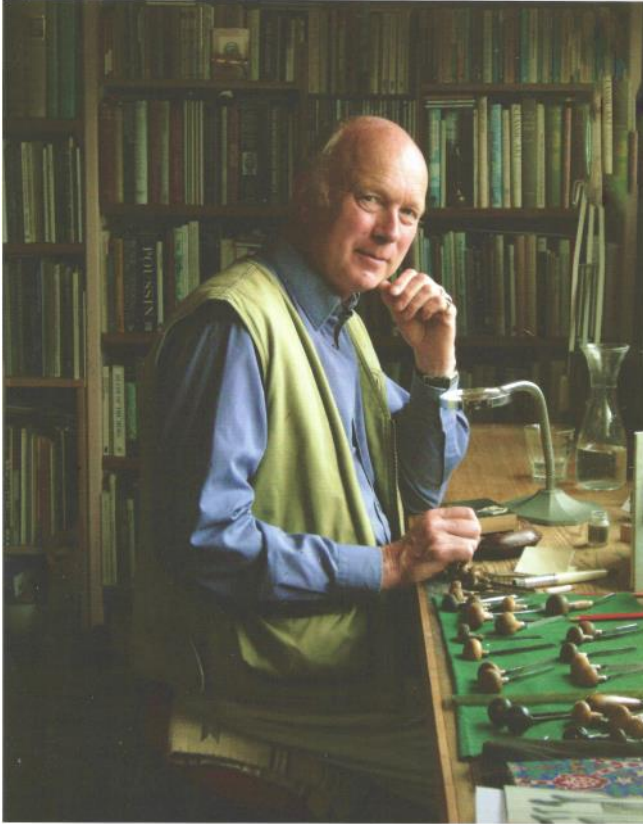
Anglican Team secretary

marlb.anglicanteam@tiscali.co.uk
Church Cottage, Silverless Street, SN8 1JQ
512357; 07593 815609
(Weekdays, 0900 to 1300)

Methodist Office Coordinator

07564 082092
office@christchurchmarlborough.org.uk

Family News



Credit: Juliet Wood

Simon Brett died on 29th December 2024, aged 81.

He was an artist of international standing and had lived in Marlborough for fifty six years. Simon taught drawing at Marlborough College (1971– 89); his Art Appreciation lectures were legendary.

He was known for his imaginative wood engravings, for his many publications (www.simonbrett-woodengraver.co.uk), and for his generous involvement with the Society of Wood Engravers over many years.

Parkinson's slowed but did not diminish his creative work, which he continued until his sudden death.

Simon was much loved by his wife Juliet and their family, and by his many friends and colleagues; all will miss his gentle and thoughtful presence.

A full obituary can be found in Marlborough News Online.

Naomi Painter
Family News Editor

Clergy Letter

Writing at the Feast of Candlemas, the **Revd Tim Novis**, senior Chaplain at Marlborough College, reminds us of the symbolic meaning of candles.

Candlemas is the time when candles for use in the upcoming year would have been prepared and blessed; and in some places still are. In this day and age when we take electricity for granted and simply flip a switch, we forget that candles were once a very big deal. In fact candles are a kind of metaphor for the life of each and every one of us.

There is something very soothing and comforting and fulfilling in praying, and in lighting a candle, when we know that there is little else we can do. There IS little else we can do, and yet it is so much. It is a presentation of our hearts to the God who cares; combined with a reminder by virtue of the burning candle that the 'light shines in the darkness and the darkness comprehends it not.' There is no darkness that can extinguish the light. To paraphrase the words of the last American Vice-President: 'only when it's darkest can you see the stars.' Darkness does not have to be our enemy, especially given that it makes the inextinguishable light of life and goodness shine even brighter by contrast.

We place candles at the foot of the altar or in the votive stand next to it; and we ourselves are candles. Candles whose 'burning time' is a sacrifice during which we are to 'seek justice, and love kindness, and walk humbly with our God.' It's not complicated. No other sacrifice needed. But a sacrifice of 'ourselves, our souls and bodies' is all that is required – in all its simplicity and in all its enormity. Candlemas reminds us that we ourselves are candles.

American theologian Brian McLaren puts it this way: "We're all just wax and wick ... On the day of our birth, our life flame begins to burn, and from that moment, each new moment of life brings us one moment closer to its inevitable end ... we choose neither the length of our candle nor the conditions in which our wick, wax and flame come together ... life's fragile beauty, life's bittersweet wonder and impermanence, and death's inevitability [are] baked into life from the start, not as a flaw, but as a feature."

As the candle, so too us then. We burn and bring light to the world. Not one of us knows the length of our time, but while we give light we are meant to give light with all that we have and with all that we are.

Marlborough Talking News

From time to time Tower and Town is able to make grants to local charities. A grant of £350 was recently made to Marlborough Talking News. Here **Jenny Lyall** explains something of the work of this charity.

I'm a newsreader. I'm not on the TV or radio, nothing grand like that. I'm one of a national network of volunteers who record the local news and these recordings are sent out weekly to those who are blind or partially sighted. I joined the Marlborough Talking News as a relief reader when it was formed in 1987 and have been a regular reader for 30 years. I'd been involved in amateur dramatics and I thought reading would be easy – no lines to learn. Half an hour before my first recording my mouth went dry and I developed a tickly throat.

I'm relaxed now and I've risen to the dizzy heights of editor, finding local stories from Marlborough News Online for my team of three readers. The Gazette covers north Wiltshire and the type of stories has changed enormously – much more doom and gloom now.

Occasionally one of us comes across a difficult name mid-story and stumbles. In the past this would be edited out but nowadays we just apologise and carry on. I have had feedback from some of our listeners that they quite like it when there is a hiccup – it makes us seem more human. In total we record $\frac{3}{4}$ of an hour of local news and the same amount of time on articles of more general interest which might come from the Waitrose magazine or The Telegraph newspaper.

We have a large band of wonderful volunteers so each week of the month there are two teams of four – a News team and what we rather grandly call Supplement in Sound. Once a month I am the engineer which means I make the recording on the computer. Our listeners have been given a machine to use with the memory stick they receive each week and the Post Office allows us free postage.

If you know of anyone who you think would like to receive a free weekly recording of views and local news contact me on 01672 513524.

IN CONVERSATION WITH SALLY COULTHARD

Friday 7th March at 7.00pm, Ogbourne St. Andrew Church (in aid of church funds)

Join the acclaimed author of 'A Brief History of the Countryside in 100 Objects' in her engaging and often humorous journey through 12,000 years of British rural life.

Tickets £12 (incl. glass of wine). Contact : 01672-512125 / maizey50@gmail.com.

Find out more on Instagram [@salcoulthard](https://www.instagram.com/salcoulthard) or visit www.sallycoulthard.co.uk

Signed copies of Sally's 100 Objects book will be available to purchase at the event.

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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 (with Energize Children's Church)

4:30pm (1st Sunday of the month) All-age worship with Children's tea

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)

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 REGISTERS

Weddings - We congratulate:

01/02/25 Eliza Sangster and John Llewellyn St George's, Preshute

Departed - We pray for the families of:

05/01/25 Mary D'Arcy (84), Cherry Orchard, Marlborough
St Mary's, Marlborough

24/01/25 Edward (Eddy) Ward (79), St Margaret's Mead, Marlborough
St Mary's, Marlborough

03/02/25 David King (69), Poulton Hill, Marlborough
St Mary's, Marlborough

News from the Churches

30 Days of Prayer for the Muslim World

February 28th to March 30th 2025



30 Days of Prayer is inviting Christians to pray with love and respect for Muslim families, peoples and nations. We do this by publishing an annual prayer guide, hoping to see God bless the Muslim World and bring hope, healing and transformation. It is intended to coincide with the Islamic holy month of Ramadan, when Muslims are fasting and praying themselves, as it is a good time for Christians to remember to pray. When Christians hear in the media that Ramadan is coming, it reminds them to keep Muslims in their hearts and prayers.

God is at work in the Muslim World and when Christians pray, we find that:

- + Christians gain a better understanding about Muslim people, their faith and their various, diverse cultures.
- + There is increased love and compassion towards the needs of Muslims around the world.
- + God effects change and Muslims grow in their interest in Jesus.

Copies are available from Mustard Seed bookshop or St Mary's church.

They can also be downloaded from the website: <https://www.pray30days.org/store>

The Christchurch/St Mary's Virtual Pilgrimage to Jerusalem Starting on Ash Wednesday, 5th March

Throughout Lent/Easter week we would love you to join us on our 3000-mile virtual journey from Marlborough to the Holy Land. Each week we will use WhatsApp to post a selection of readings, music, prayers, pictures and an update on the places we visit as we 'walk' through Europe towards Jerusalem. If you would like to join our journey let Penny in the office know and we'll do the admin.

Record the miles you travel and post photos of your special sights. Follow our journey on the map in St Mary's each week and drop your mileages into the Church box.

Wholehearted Monthly On the second Tuesday of the month starting in March, 7pm-9pm

'Wholehearted Monthly' is a free, online mission series starting hosted by The Methodist Church in Britain and open to all. Get your seat at the online table here: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/wholehearted-monthly-tickets-1082365166349?aff=evangelismgrowth>

News from the Churches

What is wholehearted monthly? Think community organising rally meets immersive spiritual laboratory. It's for anyone committed to a vibrant friendship between "Church" and "World" — and a desire for both to flourish.

The first gathering is on March 11th when the speaker is Nadia Bolz-Weber, a best-selling author, public theologian and pastor, who is the founder and church planter of House for All Sinners and Saints.

Emmanuel Church

All are welcome to join us every Sunday at 4 pm for our weekly church service located on New Road. Our service includes crèche and Sunday School groups, followed by refreshments (for adults) and a sandwich tea for the children.



In addition to our Sunday service, we offer various activities throughout the week for children: **Sparklers, Little Friends Toddler Group, Explorers, Friday Nights.** We also hold **home groups in Marlborough, Pewsey and Ogbourne St George**, as well as **Ladies' Bible Study** and **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 information and updates on our events, please visit our website at emmanuelmarlborough.org.

Marlborough Anglican Team



Bereavement Journey Course:
Starting 20th February at 6.00pm.

This is for anyone who has been bereaved at any time and in any way. If you or anyone you know would like to attend, or would just like some more information, please contact Mark Whitehead: mjwhi1@gmail.com or Louise Seddon: the_seddons@btinternet.com

All age worship: Sunday 2nd March, 5pm (Children's tea 4.30pm) Our all-age worship service continuing our look at Galatians 5:22-26 with Kindness. Please join us for a children's tea beforehand then for our service with songs, prayer and craft.

Ash Wednesday – 5th March

Holy Communion 10:30am
St Mary's, Marlborough

Holy Communion 7:30pm
St George's, Preshute

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

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 | Marlborough College | 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> | Penny Reader | church.news@towerandtown.org.uk | 512357 |
| | Church Cottage, Silverless Street, SN8 1JQ | | |
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| <i>Arts</i> | Gabriella Venus | arts.correspondent@towerandtown.org.uk | |
| <i>Books</i> | Debby Guest | books.correspondent@towerandtown.org.uk | |
| <i>Nature</i> | Robin Nelson | nature.correspondent@towerandtown.org.uk | |
| <i>Gardening</i> | Wendy Jackson | 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 11th March please.

Our Advertisers support us. Contact Matt Gow if you would like to join them.

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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