
TOWER^{AND}TOWN

THE MAGAZINE OF MARLBOROUGH'S COMMUNITY AND CHURCHES



MARLBOROUGH CHURCHES OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

NO. 765 | DECEMBER 2025
& JANUARY 2026

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

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TOWER^{AND}TOWN

Opportunities and Challenges

Tower and Town began life in September 1960 as St Mary's Church magazine. It has, however, changed considerably over the years.

In the 50th anniversary edition in July 2010, the late Eileen Nancarrow wrote: "Its title was chosen 'to suggest that the Christian is both churchman [sic] and townsman [sic]'. This reveals that the magazine was for church people interested in the town and not as now is the case for everyone whether they attend church or not." It is poignant to be quoting from Eileen who died in October; her life of kindness and service is beautifully recorded in a tribute to her on page 20.

In recognition of the magazine's origins and in discussion with clergy and church representatives I suggested an edition in which the churches themselves were the theme. The title 'Opportunities and Challenges' was agreed upon with each contributor choosing how they would interpret it.

Unsurprisingly, given the range of Christian denominations present in

Marlborough and the individuality of each writer, the contributions differ widely. This is all to the good, as eight similar articles would make for very dull reading. All face different challenges from maintaining an old building or finding one in which to worship to the challenges of 21st century social media and how to take the Christian message beyond church walls. Opportunities abound in the energy engendered by faith in God and care for one another and the wider community.

December is an appropriate time for such reflection. Amid the very commercialised version of Christmas bombarding us it is good to be reminded of the powerful Christian message of love and hope embodied in the promise of a newborn baby.

My warmest thanks go to all the contributors and to Rachel Rosedale, secretary of Marlborough Churches Together, for her invaluable help in bringing this edition to fruition.

Sarah Bumphrey
chairman@towerandtown.org.uk



Emmanuel Church

Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness! (Lam 3:22-23).

As we look ahead to the opportunities and challenges that we face today, it's encouraging to look back and see how faithful God has been in the past.

How faithful he has been to the Emmanuel church family since we held our first Sunday service ten years ago! For some months beforehand, a few of us had met occasionally in the back room of the Green Dragon to seek if it was God's will to start a new church in the town. As we prayed and prayed, it seemed clear that the Lord had given us a wonderful opportunity in this great town. So, with generous initial help from Calne Free Church, Freshbrook Church and Emmanuel Church Chippenham, our church began with this mission: *As we grow together in faith in Jesus, we want to reach out in love with his good news. So we seek, by God's grace to teach the Bible faithfully, love one another in community and pray, all in dependence on the Holy Spirit.*

It was exciting to meet on Sundays in St John's academy in the early years, though it was hard work operating as a small team and transporting our equipment from my garden shed every week. Over the next few years we were, 'all hands on deck,' and it was great to

see church members starting and serving in various ministries, including midweek groups for children and young people, and also for the elderly in Savernake View care home. The pandemic, though very hard, forced us to take the message of Jesus out of our four walls, e.g. with 'Car Park Carols'. When we were permitted to meet again in September 2020, and were briefly homeless, Christchurch Methodist church kindly let us meet in their building. We were grateful, in January 2023, to be able to buy the building, through the generous gifts of church members and others, after our Methodist friends had put it up for sale. As we gradually refurbish the building, we would love to use it to serve the wider community.

The challenges we face are very great. Nearly 10,000 souls live in Marlborough, and a similar number in the wider area, each one loved by God and needing to hear the good news of Jesus Christ, who died and rose for us all. We are just scratching the surface and are grateful for other churches who share the task. Since we are more established than we were at first, it would be easy to lose our early sense of outward-looking gospel adventure, of prayerful dependence on the Lord, of 'all hands on deck' partnership or of willingness for change. The challenge is to take Jesus at his word, who said, 'seek first [God's] kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well'. To that end we have recently added a

10am service to our 4pm service, running both services weekly with children's groups.

Along with the challenges, we also have wonderful opportunities, especially with precious individuals. This year has been unusually remarkable for the substantial number of people who, having not previously been attending church, have come to put their faith in Christ for the first time. This is happening not through anything impressive that we are doing but through God's amazing grace: as people from a variety of backgrounds

have had a thirst for God, have come to church, discovered both the love within our community and especially the good news of Jesus Christ, and committed their lives to him. For each seeker we've had the joy of meeting, perhaps there are many more.

I thank God and hope, reader, that you too will find his blessings whether through Emmanuel or at another church. Great is his faithfulness!

Reuben Mann

The Quakers

The Quakers were formed in the 1650s by the radical itinerant preacher, George Fox. England had endured a bitter and costly Civil War which set the Crown and the aristocracy against Parliament and the Protestants.

Parliament had prevailed and executed King Charles. The established church was in disarray and had lost much of its power; the traditional hierarchies were broken; it was the world turned upside down, and a flurry of radical and revolutionary groups sprang up: the Diggers, the Ranters, the Levellers and the Seekers, and among these the equally radical Quakers.

Theirs was a faith rooted in the teachings of Jesus, but in reaction to the Church of those times. It was without hierarchy, so without priests or bishops and without set

prayers, hymns or liturgy. Worship is mostly in silence which can be broken by members who feel strongly moved by an insight coming in the silence. And we don't have creeds or dogmatic statements of belief imposed on us. So, patterns of belief are less important for us than patterns of behaviour; with less reliance on external authority there is more responsibility to try to live our lives together *according* to our own spiritual experience. And from this has flowed our alternative to creeds, our shared *Testimonies*.

Our Testimony for *Simplicity* is a concern about the waste, pollution and unfairness of our consumer society and its lethal threat to our environment, and Quakers are active in climate change awareness and action.

A foundational Testimony is for *Truth*, not in the sense that we have some dogma unavailable to others, but a demand for

integrity in personal, political or business life, an idea relevant in today's post-truth world. It was relevant too in the seamy business world of the 18th century (not unlike today's) when the Quakers, excluded as non-conformists from the universities and therefore from the professions, earned a reputation for honesty which led to almost embarrassing success in the business world. Lloyds and Barclays were such foundations (not now), Friends Provident, Clarke's shoes and some well-known chocolate companies, among many others.

The third and very important Testimony is for *Equality*. It flows from our belief that there is that of God (however you may personally define that concept) in everyone. And it follows that every person, whether male or female, white or black, rich or poor, gay or straight, sinner or devout, deserves our respect and our care and consideration. Can you cheat or kill or exploit a being who shares a measure of divinity with you? Can you enslave them? The Quakers were a vital and effective part of the anti-slavery

movement, and today we recognise how gross inequalities in our societies threaten our futures.

The Quaker Testimony for *Pacifism* is well known. War seems built into the DNA of humanity, but Quakers have always tried to counter the causes of war and succour its victims.

So here we are in a post-truth world, riven by wars, with increasing levels of inequalities of every kind, and with climate change already threatening us with major extinctions a few generations down the line. We are a small group, like so many others diminishing and ageing. We ask: why isn't everyone a Quaker?

George Fox wrote (from prison, in equally uncertain times) "*Be patterns, be examples in all countries, places, islands, nations, wherever you come, that your carriage and life may preach among all sorts of people; then you will come to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in everyone.*"

Barney Rosedale



Marlborough Area Poverty Action Group

After a busy summer with 3 family outings, to Bournemouth, Beale Park and Cotswold Wildlife Park, we are looking towards Christmas and plan to give vouchers to vulnerable families in the Marlborough area, as funds allow.

To donate via the MAPAG bank account please contact Rachel Rosedale rachelrosed1@gmail.com or at The Paddock, Kingsbury Street, SN8 1HZ.

Barn Dance



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St John the Baptist, Minal

I've found it surprisingly hard to think about our much-loved village church in terms of opportunities and challenges.

It's felt a bit like commenting on one's children to others – neither wanting to boast about how marvellous everything is, nor wanting to point out their flaws.

However, let's start with the challenges. As with all Grade 1 listed churches, there are times when it's worth dressing warmly for services in winter, although we've been exploring options and hoping to offer a much warmer church, very soon. Maintaining a historic building is also costly, with constant attention needed for repairs, accessibility and all the related paperwork.

On a more positive note, the opportunities are widespread and St John the Baptist draws people in for worship, reflection and celebration. It's a

friendly church and whether you want to come to a place of prayer and peace during the week or join us for Sunday services, everyone is welcome. A few years ago, we re-instated regular Sunday services at 9am and are blessed with a loyal congregation and a supportive community of bell-ringers, flower arrangers, coffee makers and chalice assistants. Baptisms, weddings and funerals are all poignant occasions, whether full of joy or holding great sadness but both have a place in our church. It's held fondly by the whole community and open every day, so do drop in as you pass by.

It's also a fascinating building, with two pulpits, box pews, a 16th century tower, and a gallery built with 'benches for the poor', for those who couldn't afford pew rents. Those days are long gone, and now the choir serenades us from the gallery, during our Candlelit Carol service.



Photo credit: Sarah Musgrave

Minal Harvest Festival

Further opportunities lie within our wider community and amongst other ways, we reach out through the Village Fete, the Village Nativity, the Harvest Barn Dance, Lent Groups, our relationship with Willows Nursery, and most recently, a talk in the Village Hall about the history of our church.

The church is made up of the building and the people ...but also so much more. At Christmas, we celebrate one of the most profound and uplifting moments in Christian faith: the birth of Jesus Christ.

God chose to reveal himself to the world through his son, 'born in a stable so bare'. This speaks deeply to the simplicity and purity of God's love for his people.

It is my hope and prayer that St John the Baptist Church, Minal, will continue to thrive as a place of prayer and worship for generations to come. Do come and join us.

Canon Sarah Musgrave
Licensed Lay Minister

St Thomas More RC Church

The opportunities and challenges are so noticeable at this time of the year: Advent, Christmas and New Year.

Like the Shepherds of Bethlehem, we live on exposed hillsides, a prey to sun, wind and rain. We try to live good and upright lives in this world, and to take care of our own, to make a living, and have security - but living in this world is like "living out in the fields." We are vulnerable, nothing is certain, and the darkness often engulfs us. We do live in a land of deep shadow.

Our yearning is to be delivered into the light of day, like a newborn baby. We want to feel the touch of love all around us, to know the love of family and friends. We want to be held and hugged and gazed upon with love. We wish to be children newborn, to experience love towards ourselves in our very helplessness and weak-

ness. We do not want to be under the adult pressure of having to earn the love of others.

'Unless you become like little children,' Jesus said, 'you will never enter the kingdom of Heaven'. He became a little child for us, born a baby at Bethlehem. Christmas is the time for us to become children again. Every newborn baby tells us who we are - children of God. The Birth of Jesus tells us most of all - we are sisters and brothers in Christ. It is a joy for all. A baby is born for us, and we are all reborn.

Glory to God in heaven. Peace to the people on earth. May the love of God in a tender child restore the child in us. May the peace of God in a tender child restore the peace in us. May the happiness of God in a tender child bring happiness to us all.

Father John Blacker

Christchurch Methodist Fellowship

Methodism originated in the 18th century in Britain as a revival movement within the Church of England, led by brothers John and Charles Wesley.

‘Methodist’ was a nickname for their group of highly structured and devout students at Oxford University. They were known for their methodical approach with an emphasis on personal faith and holy living. The movement gained a large following. Wesley always intended to remain part of the Anglican church, but the growing movement and independent organisation led to Methodism becoming a distinct Christian denomination after his death.

The emphases were on preaching the word, hence large central pulpits in chapels, and Christian witness in social action. Wesley lived by his words:

‘Do all the good you can, By all the means you can, In all the ways you can, In all the places you can, At all the times you can, To all the people you can, As long as ever you can.’

The Methodist calling responds to the gospel of God’s love in Christ and to live out its discipleship in worship and mission. There are four aspects to this calling: Worship, Learning & Caring, Service and Evangelism. Early Methodism was heavily involved in caring for the poor, the abolition of slavery, promoting education for all,

prison reform, founding of trade unions and global missions. As members of the Britain Council of Churches and World Council of churches, Methodism has 80 million followers worldwide in 138 countries.

Methodism faces the challenge of finding its relevance in today’s world. Many of the social injustices championed by Methodism are now rightly undertaken by the welfare state. Also, many of the buildings are now too big for the size of congregations. This was faced by Christchurch and after much prayer and discussion with members, it was decided that God was guiding our fellowship to worship with St Mary’s.

We have been able to keep many of our distinct traditions and worship whilst being warmly welcomed by the Anglican congregation. Since joining we have been delighted to share our gifts in worship, especially in music, and many have commented that the worship on Sundays has a new buzz.

This has led to the opportunity to continue to care, respond and witness for mission within Marlborough. We are an inclusive fellowship and support the local community motivated by Christ’s teaching to love your neighbour as yourself, and by the Grace of God and the help of the Holy Spirit we will continue to do so.

The Revd Stephen Skinner

Marlborough College

Marlborough College was founded by the Church of England in 1843 to educate the ‘Sons of the Clergy’.

The Chapel, consecrated on the Feast of St. Michael and All Angels in 1886 by the Bishop of Salisbury who continues to this day to be the College President, is a regular place of worship for pupils, staff, parents and Council.

It is invariably the first place of return when Old Marlburians visit the College in their adulthood and, whether religious or not, it leaves an indelible mark on the memories of those who sang hymns, heard sermons and addresses, spent time celebrating baptisms, confirmations and marriages, and experienced the solemnity of Memorial services and funerals, often at impressionable young ages. There is an almost overwhelming opportunity to share the Christian story and to disseminate its beauty and life-giving spirit to countless youth who come and go on the five-year cycle from Shell, Remove and Hundreds, to Lower and Upper Sixth.

Attendance at Chapel is mandatory for all pupils. Pupils of other faiths are encouraged by the Senior Chaplain and welcome to enrich their own spirituality under the tutelage of one of the school’s faith chaplains – be they Muslim or Hindu, Jewish or Buddhist. But the principle services of worship are offered in the Liberal Catholic tradition of the Church of England with a world-

class choir of dedicated pupil choristers, many of whom are on a scholarship.

‘Public School Anglicanism’, emphasising heritage, tradition and even nostalgia continues to be embraced by a Governing Board who realise it as an opportunity for pupils to reflect upon ‘matters of Ultimate Concern’, in the words of Paul Tillich – American Theologian. ‘Who am I?’ ‘What am I meant to be doing with my life?’ ‘How can I lead a life of service, given this opportunity with which I am so blessed, to be a member of this College? These are the reflection points that are put into context by the power of the Gospel.

The Victorian founders and benefactors of the College could never have imagined the Smartphone. They certainly couldn’t have grasped in any way the challenges placed upon adolescents in the 21st century – the powers of materialism and ego-centric individualism enhanced by social media, alongside the mountain that any youth needs to climb in a world marked by isolationist self-concern and greed, so endemic in our Western world, that even challenges their ability to enter the workforce.

But there still, in the middle of campus, stands the Chapel of St Michael and All Angels – the spiritual hub and geographic centre of an institution that will forever shape their lives.

The Revd Tim Novis
Senior Chaplain

St George's, Preshute

St George's, at the eastern end of Preshute Lane, is the parish church for Manton and the western side of Marlborough. We are charged with the 'cure of souls' for everyone in the parish, regardless of religious affiliation or none.

We regularly have a sense of this as members of the local community and visitors to the area make time to appreciate the churchyard, set in an unusually beautiful position. And those who come into the building gain a sense of the continuing presence of God in a place which has seen centuries and centuries of Christian worship and prayer. The Reformed statement that "Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever" is one that resonates with us.

A heart for the local community is a key part of being a Christian in the Anglican

tradition. Anyone living in the geographic parish can be married in the church and choose to have their ashes buried in the churchyard when the time comes. As well as our foundational link with Preshute School, we would love to find other ways to grow our family ministry. But like many churches, we are an ageing community. Connecting with families and younger adults remains a keen challenge but one we are thoughtful as to how to meet in the years to come.

But in the meantime and soon, there is Christmas! Our services and gatherings are very popular locally with children and adults alike. In particular we would love to welcome you to Carols by Candlelight on Sunday 14th December at 6pm, where we will gladly remember and jubilantly celebrate the great hope we have, in the face of a world desperate for a bit of *good news*.

The Revd Pete Sainsbury

St Mary's, Marlborough

St Mary's has stood at the end of Marlborough High Street since Norman times. For nearly a thousand years, it has been a place where people have marked life's milestones and sought a sense of peace and purpose.

Today, it remains home to a living, welcoming community of people who worship

Jesus Christ and care deeply for their town.

We're always there for the moments that matter – baptisms, weddings and funerals – and our doors are open to anyone who wants to find friendship, music, or a quiet space. Our choir and worship group are full of life, and many of our members volunteer across Marlborough, from serving as school governors to helping at the community fridge.

(continued page 12)



Hello, I'm Ant Chambers, I live locally and I own Family Trusts.

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(St Mary's continued)

Our greatest opportunity is to share the hope and meaning we find in Jesus – his life, teaching, death and resurrection – with a world that often feels uncertain and searching. We long to help people discover the comfort of faith and the peace of personal prayer.

But we also face real challenges. Like many churches, our congregation is ageing, and Sunday mornings must compete with busy family lives and weekend sport.

The decline in national churchgoing, and past failures within the wider Church, weigh heavily. Yet there are signs of new life: our 5pm children's church is thriving, our choir is flourishing, and we've installed solar panels as part of our care for creation.

Everyone is welcome at St Mary's – any Sunday, and especially this Christmas.

Chris Smith
Rector

Wiltshire Historic Churches Trust

Photo credit: Brian J Woodruffe



Angel Trumpeter at the gates of Heaven from the 'Seeing' Window by Thomas Denny 2024, Church of St John the Baptist, Tisbury, Wiltshire

Photo credit: Brian J Woodruffe



The Nativity by C.E. Kemp 1918, Church of St Mary and St Ethelbert, Luckington, Wiltshire

These beautiful images are from Christmas cards sold by the Friends of Wiltshire Churches on behalf of The Wiltshire Historic Churches Trust www.wiltshirehistoricchurches.org.uk. They are printed here by kind permission; and are available in packs of 10 for £6. Postage and packing: £4 per 10 (or fewer) packs. If you wish to purchase some please contact Sarah Bumphrey for details.
chairman@towerandtown.org.uk.

My Footprints to Marlborough

Angus MacLennan, manager of The White Horse Bookshop, answers ten questions from **Matt Gow**.

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

I was born in Scone, Perthshire (home of the Stone of Scone which sits under the Coronation Chair).

2. What was your early life like?

I was sent off to boarding school aged 7. Make of that what you will. Ours was an army family so most of my childhood was spent on army camps in Germany. I then went to Fettes College in Edinburgh.

3. What kind of work or passion have you followed in life?

From the age of 14 I decided that I wanted to be an actor (an admirably early decision but perhaps I should have waited) and I managed to be one for about six years performing on stage and on screen but I stopped after being in London for a few years. I had already started working in a bookshop and then went on to manage five shops in various chains.

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

I had heard of it but had no idea beyond that.

5. What first brought you to Marlborough and when?

It was a circuitous route, involving ru-

mour and chance, but I came for the White Horse Bookshop at the start of 2014.

6. What were your first impressions of the town?

I remember the first time I drove up onto the High Street and it is a view that never gets old or tired, and that was on a dark, wet January day.

7. Why did you decide to stay (or return) and make it home?

I don't live here but the fact that I am willing to drive 60 miles each way every day does show some sort of commitment.

8. How has living here changed or shaped your life?

Running the White Horse Bookshop has been the most rewarding job I've ever had. I genuinely believe I'm the luckiest bookseller in the world. Every day I get to listen to people being effusive about my shop. Self-serving, I know.

9. What do you appreciate most about the Marlborough community?

Well, a great amount of the people I care most about are here and I do love the fact that all day, every day, people are talking to each other in the street or in my shop or others. Lunchtime visits to Waitrose can take a while.

10. What would you say to someone considering moving to Marlborough?

Do it. I would (and might, one day).

What's On in December & January

Monthly Monday Market

1st 8th 15th and 22nd 10.00am – 3.00pm
St Peter's Church. Every Monday in December. The aim is to showcase the best of local businesses bringing together their products and produce.

The Arts Society – Pewsey Vale

2nd Tuesday 2.30pm Bouverie Hall, Pewsey. The Life and Works of H.G. Murphy, Gold and Silversmith. Speaker John Benjamin, jewellery historian. Doors open at 2.00pm. £7 on the door cash or card. For more information see www.taspv.org.uk

The Merchant's House

2nd, 9th & 16th Tuesdays 10.00-4.00pm A Christmas Carol Comes to Life.

Marlborough Floral Club

4th Thursday 2.00pm Mildenhall Village Hall. AGM.

Marlborough Quakers at the Friends Meeting House

4th Thursday 4.15-6.30pm
Judith Moran, director of a Quaker charity for people in poverty in London, will talk about her work and the challenges. Followed by discussion. rachelrosed1@gmail.com

Storytime with Santa

6th Saturday 10.00am – 3.00pm The Merchant's House, High Street, Marlborough. Spaces are limited. Tickets £8 per child (with a max of two

accompanying adults per child) at themerchantshouse.co.uk

Marlborough Concert Orchestra

6th Saturday 7.30pm St Mary's Church, Marlborough. Programme: Sibelius – Karelia Suite, Christian Morris – Premiere of new composition, Tchaikovsky – Nutcracker Suite, Sibelius – Tapiola. Tickets on sale at Sound Knowledge, at mco.org.uk and on the door. Adults £15, students £5, under 18s free.

Brilliant Young Musicians Series:

7th Sunday 7.00-9.00pm Jâms Coleman (piano) and Colin Scobie (violin). St Peter's Church. Full information and tickets at stpetersmarlborough.org.uk

Christmas Wreath Making

Monday 8th and Tuesday 9th The Merchant's House. Make your Christmas extra special this year with a festive wreath-making workshop in the historic kitchen. You'll get plenty of hands-on help. Enjoy a hot drink and mince pies as you create. Limited spaces so book early. Tickets £55 at themerchantshouse.co.uk

Marlborough Gardening Assoc.

10th Wednesday 7.30pm Town Hall, Marlborough. Christmas Table Decorations with Sara Williams. Display Table: Greenery. Information marlbgainfo@gmail.com

What's On in December & January

Marlborough Choral Society

13th Saturday 7.30pm St Mary's Church, Marlborough. Seasonal music and Carols to include JS Bach, Malcolm, Whitacre and Holst. Tickets £15 (Students £4, Under 16's free) <https://www.ticketsource.co.uk/marlborough-choral-society> or from Sound Knowledge, choir members or on the door. Refreshments available during the interval. Retiring collection for Love Marlborough Kids Meals.

St Agnes Fountain

16th Tuesday 8.00pm Marlborough Town Hall. Fairport Convention's Chris Leslie and multi award winning duo Chris While and Julie Matthews bring musical invention and laughter. Fans agree, Christmas starts with St Agnes Fountain. Tickets £26 from Sound Knowledge or at marlboroughfolk-roots.co.uk.

Apres Ski Theme Night

19th Friday 7.00pm – 10.00pm St Peter's Church, Marlborough. Fun for all the family. All ages are welcome. Full bar, music, games and activities. Children go free. Tickets £15 for St Peter's Future funds at stpetersmarlborough.org.uk

New Year's Eve Party 2025

31st Wednesday 7.00pm – 12.30am St Peter's Church, Marlborough. Dance your way into the new year with a disco-themed celebration. Live DJ spinning the all greatest hits. Fully licensed bar all night. Tasty nibbles

provided. Bring the whole family. Tickets £25, children go free at stpetersmarlborough.org.uk

January 2026

Julia's House Christmas Tree Collection

Between 8th Thursday and 10th Saturday in SN8, SN9 and SN10. Real trees will be collected and recycled. Funds raised will support local children and families. Book your tree collection by 5th January at www.juliashouse.org/collect

Marlborough College Concert Series

11th Sunday 3.00pm Memorial Hall, Marlborough College. Einstein's Music. Half concert, half lecture, exploring the science in music and the music in science. Featuring Jack Liebeck (violin) with Professor Brian Foster OBE. Free parking and programme. Tickets £25. Students £12.50 from www.marlboroughconcertseries.org

Marlborough Gardening Association

14th Wednesday 7.30pm Town Hall, Marlborough. Lemontree Trust with Jennie Spears. Display Table: Potted Hyacinths. Information at marlbgainfo@gmail.com

Barn Dance for Médecins Sans Frontières

30th Friday 7.30pm Town Hall, (see advert page 5)

A Good Read

Books make Christmas. It's not just that they are the very best gifts (I'm a bookseller, I would say that), but in the sense that our ideas of Christmas are often formed by literature.

One of my favourite novelists, Laurie Colwin, a New Yorker, said that all her ideas of delicious food, domestic life and cosiness came from reading English children's books, with detailed and idealized descriptions of cottage tea-tables. Christmas is like that. I don't think many, if any, of my childhood Christmases featured greenery and wax candles glowing on the window ledges of chilly ancient churches, much less walking back from Midnight Mass through frosty darkness to a large family party feasting round the table and playing charades (I had a perfectly happy childhood, thank you, it just wasn't like that), but that's my image of the season. All from children's books.

Dyan Thomas's *A Child's Christmas in Wales* always strikes me as the ultimate depiction of a perfect, imperfectly remembered Christmas, all myth and nostalgia and family lore. Every year I re-read Antonia Forest's *End of Term* with its glorious set-piece of the Nativity Play in the Minster (if you don't know Forest's books I have to tell you they are difficult to get hold of, but worth it, near-genius.) The *Little Women* giving their breakfast to the Hummels, and the Carr's food

parcel in *What Katy Did at School* are essential reading. December is time to dust off Susan Cooper's *The Dark is Rising*.

You can't go home again. You can't step in the same river twice. I have a theory that we all (if we're lucky) get one perfect Christmas in our lives, usually when we're quite young, against which all others are measured and found faintly, poignantly disappointing. (I am of course speaking of the secular feast; the faithful among you will rightly take issue with me on this.) The Fossils have just such a celebration in *Ballet Shoes*. If you believe that characters go on living after the book is closed you just know that they'll always remember *that* Christmas Day.

There are of course plenty of Christmases in adult literature. One of my educated chums pointed me to Thomas Mann, Tolstoy and Hardy for starters. I'm always keen to promote Lissa Evans, and the Christmas dinner in *V for Victory* is funny and touching. You'll notice I haven't mentioned Dickens, you all know my views.

Whatever your Christmas is, however you celebrate, whatever you expect - we at the White Horse Bookshop wish you all the very best, and happy reading.

Debby Guest

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From Waxwings to Murmurations

Winter is one of my favourite seasons. There's something truly magical about the crisp, cold, frosty mornings, and the golden light from the low-lying sun as it spills across the Wiltshire landscape, making everything shimmer with a delicate, ethereal glow. It's a time when the countryside around us feels calm and still, yet full of quiet beauty.

The winter months also offer wonderful opportunities to get outside and watch some of the birds that have arrived to spend winter in the UK – from mixed flocks of finches and thrushes to winter visitors such as swans, geese, waders and owls. Some species travel from as far away as Russia and Siberia to spend the winter here.

We occasionally experience an influx of certain bird species, an event that doesn't happen every year but occurs from time to time. Last year was a particularly good year for waxwings, as their food supply in Scandinavia had run low, prompting large numbers to travel to the UK in what's known as an *irruption*. Unfortunately, they didn't come through Wiltshire, but a flock of around 30 was reported nearby on Rodborough Common near Stroud. It was a wonderful opportunity to see my first ever waxwings. Every so often, the group would descend from the hawthorn trees to drink from puddles on the road. Their main food source is berries, and after consuming large quantities, especially those that have naturally fermented, the birds can become slightly intoxicated (they have even been known to fall out of a tree drunk) which is why they seek out water to drink to stay hydrated. Watching them that day felt like witnessing a scene straight out of a David Attenborough documentary; it was truly a remarkable sight.

Also, at this time of year, I make a trip over to Salisbury Plain to witness another amazing spectacle, when thousands of starlings sweep across the Pewsey Vale at dusk to roost for the night. They travel in long, flowing streams, sometimes passing so close overhead you can hear the rush of their wings. As they gather, predators such as buzzard, sparrowhawk, and peregrine wait for

Photo credit: Helen Llewelyn



Waxwing (*Bombycilla garrulus*)

their arrival. When danger is near, the starlings take to the sky in a breathtaking murmuration. A swirling, ever-changing cloud that makes it almost impossible for a predator to single out one bird. Occasionally, a peregrine will dive into the flock, seize its prey, and drop vertically away at incredible speed. Once the threat has passed, the murmuration funnels down in unison, as thousands of starlings pour from the sky into their chosen roost for the night. You can hear them chattering for a while and then it is silent, and you wonder where all those birds disappeared to.



Waxwing (*Bombycilla garrulus*)

Helen Llewelyn

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Family News

Eileen Nancarrow died on 28 October after a short illness. She was born and grew up in London but moved to Marlborough with her husband Clyde and son David in 1972; Peter, a second son, was born in Marlborough 1973.

Eileen was an active member of the community and of Marlborough Society of Friends. She was also a member of the Tower and Town team for several years.

While her boys were young, she helped run the Methodist Playgroup, which led to her becoming Chair of the Wiltshire Pre-school Playgroups Association. After her time with playgroups, she became a volunteer with the Swindon Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB). When a CAB branch opened in Kennet she became deputy manager and then manager. Under her management she made the Kennet CAB into a truly forward-looking branch. She revelled in helping local

people and would regularly represent clients at employment tribunals, with a great track record of success.

Eileen retired in 1999 and enjoyed an active social life within the town. She played Bridge and Canasta, was a member of the U3A where she walked, tasted wine and acted as membership secretary, Groups Coordinator and Vice Chair for a period of time. Eileen enjoyed attending concerts, theatre and the literary festival. She also enjoyed being a member of the Marlborough Women's Institute. In 2008, to her joy, her grandson Edward was born to David and Kim.

Eileen was committed to every task she undertook. Her kindness and empathy were a constant. She had strong values that she brought to everything she did. Eileen acted with purpose and thought and kindness throughout her life.

David Nancarrow

Family News Request

We value all items for Family News. Why not let us know if you have any news you would be happy to share more widely?

A short article about a family member or circumstance is always welcome or even news about a past Marlborough resident would be appreciated.

This is the time of year that we remember those big celebrations as well as those we have lost throughout the year. If you would like these events shared with a wider audience, please get in touch via family.news@towerandtown.org.uk and we would be delighted to include them. We look forward to receiving your family news for our future editions.

Naomi Painter Family News Editor

Winter Stars - It's time to shine

There are several plants in my garden that sit around for most of the year just looking green and boring. Now is their time in the spotlight and they certainly deserve star treatment.



Many gardening experts treat winter as time to put the "garden to bed" but no, there are still insects, moths and birds that need feeding and winter plants do an important job in keeping them alive. My Arbutus Unedo (Strawberry tree) is absolutely stunning and is covered in flowers that will last into January providing much needed pollen. These will then turn into strawberry-like fruits that will feed the birds. Similarly the Nandina (Sacred Bamboo) and Cotoneaster are covered in berries which is also a great source of bird food. Mine are all in pots so that I can move them close to the house and at Christmas they are woven with tiny string solar lights.

Winter flowering shrubs are weather resilient and often evergreen. Many have a very strong perfume. You will smell the beautiful scent of Daphne or Mahonia

long before you see it. A few stems added to your Christmas arrangement can scent a whole room.

Find cyclamen and violas in garden centres and bring them into a cool room over Christmas to enjoy their delicate scent, outside they will flower through to March.

Winter foliage is invaluable for keeping shape in the garden and providing shelter for wildlife, and leave seed heads and grasses to use in Christmas vases.

If you only have room for one star winter performer look at Acacia Dealbata (mimosa tree) Technically it is a tree but grown in a pot it will stay compact and responds very well to pruning after flowering. It starts performing this month in sheltered places and is covered in tiny yellow fluffy ball flowers, the perfume is truly wonderful!



The garden may be resting, but there is still magic out there.

Carolyn Stimpson
Marlborough Gardening Association

Photo credits: Carolyn Stimpson

Clergy Letter

We seem to be a society short on hope at the moment. This past year the Royal Family, the BBC, and even the Church of England have all faced their share of struggles and disappointments.

As someone who has long supported these institutions, it feels disheartening to see so much uncertainty and self-doubt. Many have compared our national mood to that of the 1970s – though thankfully, without the flares, glam rock, or power cuts!

Perhaps that's why it's worth going back to the beginning when it comes to Christmas – for it is, at heart, a story of great hope. Christians chose to celebrate Jesus' birth in the darkest part of the year because the story itself is one of darkness turning to light. Before Christmas the days grow ever shorter, but after it they begin, slowly, to lengthen again. The prophet Isaiah foresaw this when he wrote, *"The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned."* (Isaiah 9:2)

At Christmas the physical and the spiritual come together: light begins to pierce the darkness, and hope rises again in weary hearts. This rightly cheers our spirits, because Jesus' coming was no accident. It was deliberate, born of love. God saw the mess the world had made and chose to act.

That is why the angels told the shepherds, *"Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you."* (Luke 2:10-11)

This good news still brings hope – of forgiveness, freedom, and eternal life. For a world that so often feels weighed down by fear and judgment, that sounds a bit like scoring a late winner in a cup final!

During my sabbatical this year, I felt renewed by God's grace and filled with fresh hope. Out of that came a novel I've written, *Channel Tides*, inspired by the migrant crisis and subtitled *When Hope Takes the Helm*. We are a society much in need of that very thing.

This Christmas, our churches will be exploring the theme of hope. If you're in need of a lift this winter, you'll find details of our services in this magazine or on our website.

And as Phillips Brooks wrote so beautifully in *O Little Town of Bethlehem*:

*"Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light;
the hopes and fears of all the years are
met in thee tonight."*

Chris Smith
Rector, Anglican Team

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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 1st & 3rd Sundays: Holy Communion

10.30am 1st Sunday: All-age, 2nd & 4th: Communion, 3rd: Worship

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

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

10.30am 1st & 3rd Sundays: Communion, 2nd & 4th: Worship

5.00pm 1st Sunday: All-age worship with children's tea 4.30pm

5.00pm 2nd, 3rd & 4th: All-age worship with Energize children's church

St John the Baptist, Minal (Anglican)

9.00 am 1st & 3rd Sundays: Worship, 2nd & 4th: Communion

St Thomas More, George Lane (Roman Catholic)

11.00 am Mass

Emmanuel, New Road (Free Evangelical)

10.00am Worship, a young children's group and refreshments

4.00pm Worship, crèche, Sunday School and refreshments.

Marlborough College Services are shown at the college chapel.

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

FROM THE REGISTERS

Baptisms - We welcome

19th Oct Beatrice Catherine to Jade & Ivor Yates St George's

Departed - We pray for the family of:

4th Oct Ann Birley, 97, of Savernake View St George's

A Christmas Carol Comes to Life

The Merchant's House 2nd Dec (Tuesday) 10.00 - 4.00pm

and all Tuesdays to the end of December - Adults £11, Children FREE

News from the Churches

Marlborough Anglican Team with Christchurch Methodist Fellowship

If you're new to the area or thinking about the faith, please consider joining us at 5pm on Sunday at St Mary's. We are a friendly, informal group, open to God's Spirit.

Christmas Services Tuesday 2nd December

Christchurch Methodist Advent
Service 6pm St Mary's

Sunday 7th December

All Age Christingle 10.30am St
George's

Carols by Candlelight 4pm St John the
Baptist

Christingle Making & All age service
5pm St Mary's with a family tea at
4:30pm

Sunday 14th December

Community Carols 5pm St Mary's

Carols by Candlelight 6pm St
George's

Wednesday 17th December

Beer & Carols 6pm St Mary's

Thursday 18th December

St George's Carol Singing for CRISIS,
5.45pm Outdoors at Farrar Drive,
Barton Park

Monday 22nd December

Singalong Nativity 3pm St George's

Tuesday 23rd December

Willow Tree Nativity 4.30pm St John
the Baptist.

Christmas Eve

Crib Service 3pm St George's

Family Carols with Chocolate 3pm St
Mary's

Village Nativity 5pm Minal –
beginning at the Horseshoe Pub

First Communion 10pm St George's

Midnight Communion 11:15pm St
Mary's

Christmas Day

Holy Communion 8am St Mary's

Family Communion 9am St John the
Baptist

Family Communion 10:30am at St
George's and also St Mary's

Sunday 28th December

Team Holy Communion 10:30am St
Mary's

Children/Family Activities

The Ark Parent/ Carer and Toddler Group

Mondays in term time, 9:30am to
11am in the Church Hall, Silverless
Street. Please contact Caroline Philps
for more information
cphilps2@gmail.com

Welcome Wednesdays

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

St Mary's Women's Group

Thursdays 10 am to 11 am. Join for
coffee, chat, Lectio and prayer. All
welcome - for more details
marlb.anglicanteam@tiscali.co.uk

News from the Churches

Marlborough Area Poverty Action Group

After a busy summer with 3 family outings, to Bournemouth, Beale Park and Cotswold Wildlife Park, we are looking towards Christmas and plan to give vouchers to vulnerable families in the Marlborough area, as funds allow. To donate via the MAPAG bank account please contact Rachel Rosedale rachelrosed1@gmail.com or at The Paddock, Kingsbury Street, SN8 1HZ.

Emmanuel Church

Join us:

10 am service includes a group for children from age 3 to school Year 4, followed by refreshments.

On 28 December when there will be no morning service

4 pm service includes crèche and Sunday School groups, followed by refreshments (for adults) and a sandwich tea for the children.

For more information and updates on our events, please visit our website at emmanuelmarlborough.org.

Emanuel Christmas Events:

Advent Services

Sundays, 7th, 14th & 21st December, 10am & 4pm

Carols by Candlelight (All ages)

Sunday, 14th December, 4pm
(non-alcoholic) mulled wine with refreshments & children's craft

Carols at the Silks

Friday, 19th December, 6.30pm

Christmas Day

Thursday, 25th December, 10am

St Thomas More & Holy Family Churches

Christmas Eve (Wednesday 24th December)

4.00 pm (Family Mass)

9.00pm at Saint Thomas More Church

Christmas Day (Thursday 25th December)

9.00am at Holy Family Church

11.00am at Saint Thomas More Church.

Friday 26th December

12pm Saint Thomas More Church.

Saturday 27th December

10.00am Saint Thomas More Church

Sunday 28th December

9.00am Holy Family Church

11.00am Saint Thomas More

School Dates

St John's and Preshute Primary close 19th December and open on 5th January.

Marlborough St Mary's Primary closes 19th December and open on 7th January.

Marlborough College closes 12 noon 10th December and opens 6.00pm –

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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 February issue by Tuesday 13th January please.

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