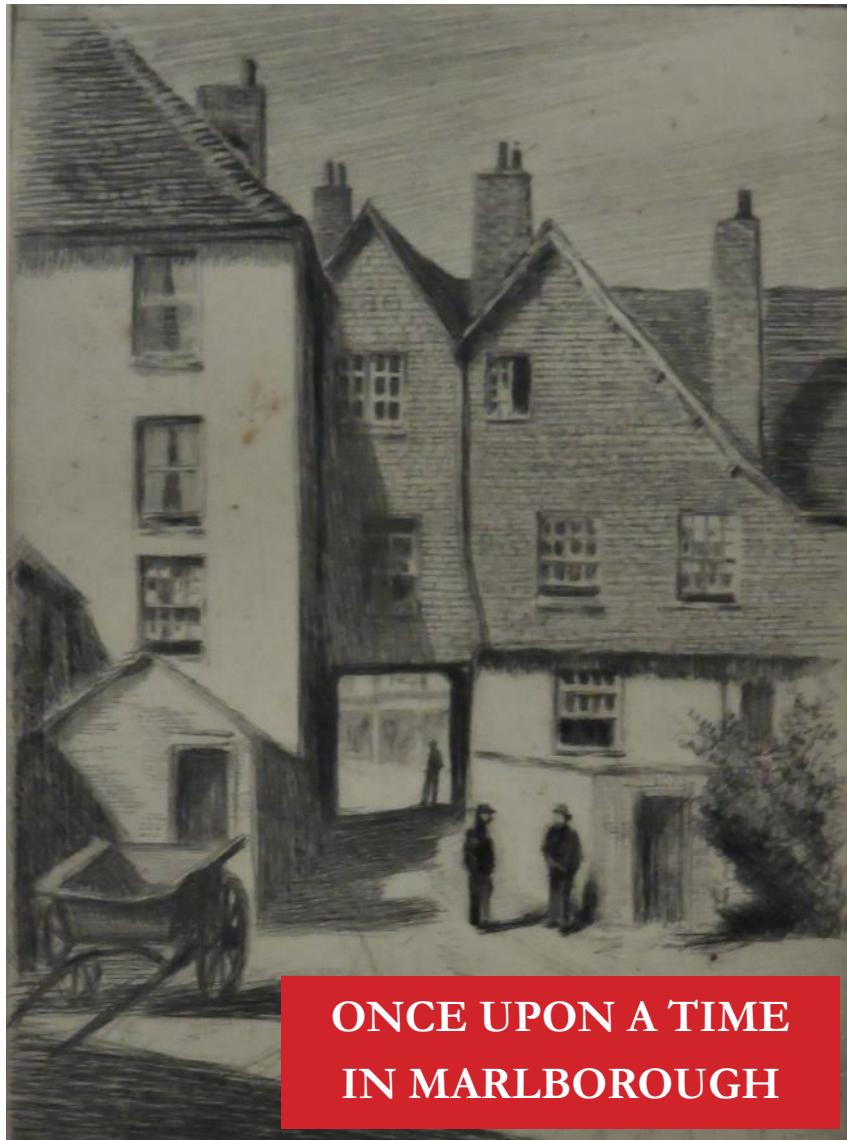


TOWER AND TOWN

THE MAGAZINE OF MARLBOROUGH'S COMMUNITY AND CHURCHES



ONCE UPON A TIME
IN MARLBOROUGH

NO. 766 | FEBRUARY 2026

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TOWER AND TOWN

Once Upon a Time in Marlborough

If you are of a certain generation, like me, what was History like when you were taught it at school? Dates, revolutions, civil wars, more dates, kings, queens, Acts of Parliament, British victories?

The Marlborough you learned about was more likely to have been the Duke who fought and won the Battle of Blenheim, and had his Oxfordshire palace named after it, than the town we live in.

In the last couple of generations there has been an uncovering of the past that focuses on what it was like for the people who lived then, not simply the grand events. This issue is just a tiny attempt to go back a generation or two, or a century or two, to see and to remind ourselves what it was like in Marlborough.

Some of you will remember a town of a fair few pubs, a score of local shops, no supermarkets, many small traders in the High Street and local crafts and manufacturing down the alleys behind.

Children could roam, get into scrapes and get scolded by their parents. Marlborough would have had a different feel – a place where the majority of the inhabitants worked and shopped in the town where they lived, and died here, generation after generation. They did not drive to Swindon or shop online.

My thanks to all Tower and Town's dedicated team of regular contributors, as well as to those whose memories have been resurrected into print again.

John Osborne - Editor

February Edition No. 766

Compiler: Sarah Bumphrey

Proof Readers: Julia Peel, Diana Foster Kemp

Marlborough Churches

Together



Memories of a Misspent Youth

I was born in Chiminage Close in 1943. My Dad was Richard (Dick) Milsom, a plumber, and my Mum (Hilda) was from a farm workers' family in Downton. The family has been in Marlborough for six generations.

I had two older sisters and two younger brothers, and on my fifth birthday in 1948 the family moved to St Margaret's Mead. Doctor Tim was persuaded that a move lower down from cold and draughty Chiminage Close to the still under construction St Margaret's Mead would benefit my recurring croup.

Mr Perry, who had a haulage business in London Road, carried out the removal. Quite a thrill for a five-year old to ride in the lorry! Dad never learned to drive, so rides other than on a bus were treats that happened only when uncles visited. Five Stiles Road had yet to be built and the Mead ended where the recreation ground begins.

The land between there and the railway was farmed by Mr Strong. At harvest time we would chase rats and rabbits as the corn was threshed by a machine driven by a traction engine. Mr Strong also owned the shop that stood on the corner of

Salisbury Road and George Lane. Mrs Strong ran the shop. Near the shop was the forge.

St Margaret's Mead was a paradise for the kids who lived there. We roamed the forest and paddled in the Kennet. When it snowed, we sledged on the hill above the Mead or better still down Butterfly Alley on Granham Hill. The more reckless could find themselves in the railway cutting or in the Kennet. The hill in Stonebridge Lane was our soap box track. The aim was to start at the top and cross the bridge. No pram or pedestrian was safe.

The forest was our playground and the source of firewood when fuel was expensive. Youngsters dragging huge branches down the road attracted no comment or attention from the police. There were rules, however. We only took wood from fallen trees; green wood doesn't burn very well. There were traces of the Second War in the forest, and scraps of ammunition from the old stores along Long Harry was much sought after by us children.

James Milsom

This was the first of three fresh and lively pieces first published in 2018.

The complete memoir is on the Tower and Town website.

Cooper's Meadow

“Cooper’s Meadow” is now a green space opposite the Town Mill development with a playground and a footpath running along the south bank of the Kennet, and an enclosure for occasional grazing.

Much of the area round about the river used to be industrial: in addition to the grazing, corn was ground at the Town Mill, and small businesses populated the many yards which ran between the High Street and the river.

As the industry disappeared, the riverside became a neglected and environmentally degraded area. In 1987 Cooper’s Meadow was handed over to the Town Council. A huge effort of transformation by professional and volunteers, such as ARK, has produced today’s river frontage.

In 2018, **Maurice and Rosemary Cooper** described the former water meadow which bears the family name:

“Cooper’s Meadow’ was one of three water meadows, the others being where the houses and the garage are in George Lane, and on the site of the present public car park. They were managed by my grandfather, my father and my uncle in the traditional way.

The meadow would be ‘floated’, i.e. flooded, in the winter for about three weeks. This would enable their sheep and cattle to get ‘an early bite’, meaning that they could graze for about three or four weeks in April, which is earlier than on a traditional meadow.

My grandfather would walk cattle from Savernake market through the forest and graze them in the meadow to be fattened up before going up to our slaughterhouse in Angel Yard. The carcasses were sold at Cooper’s butcher’s shop at 7 Kingsbury Street, now a restaurant, and at larger premises at 1 and 2 The Parade, now also a restaurant.

The entrance to Cooper’s Meadow was down Chestnut Drive at the side of the little lodge on George Lane. This led to a stable block, a granary and a barn. Hay could be grown throughout the summer and my grandfather sometimes let the grasses and flowers seed before cutting so that the meadow was re-seeded the natural way.

In the late summer the meadows were once again floated to encourage a fresh flush of grass. Then a few days before the sheep fair on the Common, sheep were brought to town and kept in pens in the meadow before being walked up Herd Street to be sold.”

John Osborne

Marlborough's Market

The pedigree of Marlborough's Saturday and Wednesday markets stretches back as far as the incorporation of King John's charter of 1204.

The oldest market trade was in corn. Among the great variety of manufacturing crafts and trades was the leather industry. Wingrove and Edge's tannery closed as recently as the last century.

The space below the Town Hall, open on three sides and supported by pillars, was the market house. Examples survive at Wootton Bassett and Tetbury.

Marlborough's present town hall was built to commemorate the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria in 1897.

On the site of the present market area stood the butchers' shambles. This took the form of double rows of columns supporting a long pitched roof. This was taken down in 1812, but there is still a market shambles at Devizes.

Court records reveal that substandard produce was on sale. Walter Jeffries was fined 12 pence in 1627 for selling penny loaves at short weight. Unwholesome beef was found on sale in 1749 and in 1752 the mayor burned a neck of veal deemed unfit for human consumption.

In 1800, the placing of goods was strictly defined: fresh beef, mutton, lamb and tripe in the shambles; cheese, butter, salt beef and fish beneath the market house; pork, bacon and veal in either place. Between the shambles and the market house were vegetables, and, at the east end of the penthouse, eggs, poultry and fruit. Corn and seed were sold in front of the Castle and Ball. Space was reserved in front of the market house for toys and confectionery.

Michael Gray

This is a shortened and edited version of an article first published in Tower and Town in 2012.

The Old Town Hall

The Town Hall on pillars in the illustration (*on the opposite page*) is one of the two condemned and demolished in the 19th century. The Town Council commissioned CE Ponting, the Diocesan Architect, to draw up plans for a replacement.

Horrified at the cost, they rejected them, but then in an about turn re-commissioned him to build a new Town Hall, the one we have today, to his

original plans. The cupola taken from the previous building houses the old fire bell. But the cells beneath are disused, and the foundation stone of 1902 is now hidden behind the access ramp.

David Sherratt

This is a snippet from an article first published in Tower and Town in 2013.



The east end of Marlborough High Street featuring the Town Hall prior to the construction of the present building. It shows the market house open on three sides and supported by pillars.

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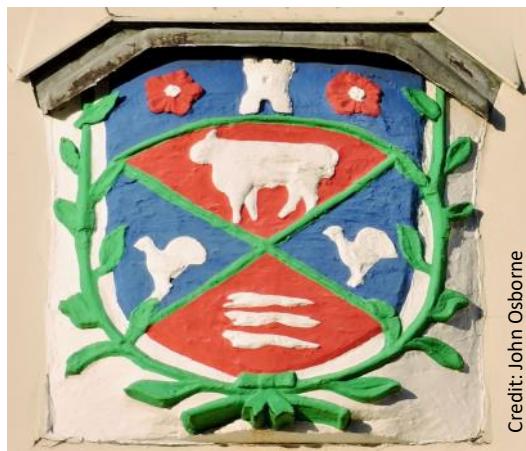
What Has Become of the Town's Pubs?

The town's twelve* pubs all have a history going back many years, but at the end of the 18th century there were more than three times as many hosteries to sate the thirst of locals and travellers.

At that time the coaching trade brought many people through the town on their way to and from London and Bath.

When the railways arrived, the coaching trade collapsed and many of the pubs closed. But their names live on. *Angel Yard* is named after 'The Angel' which was on the south side of the High Street. The 'Plume of Feathers' gave its name to the lane off the London Road. You can see the arms of the Borough of Marlborough (above) high on the wall of the former D & R furnishers in The Parade, as this used to be 'The Borough Arms'.

There were several 'White Hart' inns around the town over the centuries, and Samuel Pepys stayed in one of them when he passed through in 1668. The Chamberlain's Men, the company of William Shakespeare, are said to have



Credit: John Osborne

performed in one of the 'White Hart' inns in the High Street. The cellar of Alma House in Alma Place still has the ramps for rolling down the barrels of beer from when the premises were 'The White Hart' between 1679 and 1777.

Others have not left much of a mark: 'The Temperance Hotel' is now the estate agents at 1 London Road; 'The Bell and Shoulder of Mutton' is now a shop in Kingsbury Street; 'The Duke of York' is

now a block of flats in St Martins; 'The Cross Keys' is now offices in The Parade; and 'The Jolly Butcher' is now a card shop on the High Street.

'The Five Alls' in the London Road is private housing, but, as a pub from 1780 to 1999, it had an interesting

sign which explained the origin of its name: the Soldier who fights for All, the Priest who prays for All, the Lawyer who pleads for All, the King who rules over All, and finally John Bull, who pays for them All.

David Chandler

*When this article was published in 2013, there were 12 pubs in Marlborough. Now there are 9: 'The Crown' has become a restaurant, and 'The Cricketers' and 'Queens Head' private accommodation.

Marlborough in the Civil War

“A town the most notoriously discontented,” its inhabitants full of “obstinacy and malice,” was how Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon, described Marlborough.

In 1640 a crowd had broken open the town gaol to release those imprisoned for refusing to pay King Charles’ tax to finance his campaign against the Scots. When war broke out in the summer of 1642, Marlborough was prepared: four hundred fully-armed militia assembled to defend the citizens’ rights.

The King in Oxford chose his courtier, Lord Digby, to take a modest force to Marlborough to persuade the town to submit. The town’s defenders told Digby that they would not admit any of his “rabble” and discharged a volley of musket fire into the air. Digby turned tail for Oxford. Retaliating, the King sent an army led by Henry Wilmot, his commander of horse, and popular with his soldiers for his “mixture of courage, enterprise and boozy affability”.

On Monday 5 December Wilmot’s attack began. Cannon shot preceded the firing of a barn, which enabled the Royalist forces to break into the town via an inn yard. The market people, who had been

compelled to join the defence, wavered. Many threw their weapons into the Kennet and escaped from the town. If they hadn’t given in so readily, Clarendon observed, “that vile place might have cost more blood.” Muskets were fired from upper storey windows and from behind barricades. The Royalists responded by firing the buildings. Vastly outnumbered, there could only be one outcome for the brave citizens of Marlborough.

The Royalists, however, did not remain long as they knew that a relief force was on its way from Newbury. Carts were seized, filled with plunder and taken to Oxford along with prisoners, among whom were apprentice boys and John Franklin, Member of Parliament, who died in Oxford Castle. His widow was later awarded a pension by a grateful Parliament.

After the devastating fire in 1653, Marlborough was rebuilt with money raised by a national subscription in recognition of the loyalty shown by the town’s citizens to Cromwell’s Parliamentary cause.

Nick Baxter

This piece was first published in Tower and Town in 2013

Memories of St Mary's Infant School

I started school at St Mary's "up Herd Street" in 1940. The Infant School consisted of one huge room with an enormous sliding partition, which was opened as required with much shoving and pushing. It was girls only: the boys went to St Peter's, now the town library.

War had been declared. The air raid warning and all-clear alarms were sounded from the Town Hall. We carried gas masks in cardboard boxes with a strong shoulder strap. We were subject to random gas mask tests and on one occasion the authorities brought *real* gas into school to test everything out. I dodged it all by going across the playground to the lavatory block which held square wooden boxes, each with a hole in the middle of the large square seat. The flush came at intervals and passed down the row of loos until all had flushed. I remained there, quite frightened until all the people had left, and then I crept back into the classroom which stank of the terrible gas.

Miss Thomas was a lovely headmistress. She taught us to read en masse with the

vowels always up on the board for word formation. She would have each of us at her desk every day to read to her. Miss Bryant taught us arithmetic. She arranged the twelve times tables on the doors all around the room. We really enjoyed this daily task which brought out the competitive side in us. Every morning we lined up to receive our spoonful of government issue cod liver oil and malt to prevent rickets. It tasted DISGUSTING. The spoon was wiped on some sort of paper between pupils.

We were put into teams: Red, Blue, Green, and Yellow. I was Blue. Every Friday afternoon our weekly points were counted. The winning team then had the appropriate coloured team star stuck to its poster on the partition wall. Looking back, I realize it was a good introduction to learning to live with failure – not always being on the winning team!

Pamela Horril

Pamela Horril's father was AR Stedman, Headmaster of Marlborough Grammar School. Her tribute to him, like this article, is in the Tower and Town online archive for October 2017.



Photo left: Dan Crossman (Headteacher of St Mary's - see the article on the opposite page) raising money for Great Ormond Street Hospital.

Photo right: School dog Woody is a hit with pupils.



Silver Headteacher of the Year Award

When Dan Crossman scooped Silver for Headteacher of the Year at the Pearson National Teaching Awards in November last year (dubbed the “Oscars of teaching”), it was a moment in the spotlight for the Head of Marlborough St Mary’s Primary School.

More than that, however, it was recognition for Dan and the whole school community that five years of collective dedication to transforming the school was having an impact.

Since joining the school, Dan has quietly led a revolution rooted in kindness, clarity and an unwavering belief in every child. Rather than imposing a one-size-fits-all vision, he reshaped the school around four guiding principles — Read, Talk, Connection and Joy — which underpin daily life in the classrooms, corridors and staffroom alike.

The results have been striking. Marlborough St Mary’s has achieved its best-ever outcomes alongside an exceptional Ofsted inspection in 2025. “Dan is a remarkable headteacher,” says the school’s Deputy Head, Russell Goodman. “He has relentless dedication to ensuring every child receives the support they need. Dan never gives up, no matter how impossible the challenge may seem. His ‘no shrugged shoulders’ rule exemplifies his commitment to advocating for every child and staff member, and particularly for the most disadvantaged.”

Dan’s commitment to inclusion is shaped by personal experience supporting his daughter with a rare brain condition. When he’s not running marathons (photo on p8) to raise funds for Great Ormond Street Hospital (where his daughter has received treatment), Dan is busy implementing initiatives like the trauma-informed “Five to Thrive” and the “Be Kind” rule, which have improved relationships, attendance and parent-teacher collaboration.

The school is now widely recognised for its support for children with additional needs, with two thriving complex-needs resource bases offering highly tailored provision. Learning here extends far beyond the classroom, with horse riding, sensory circuits, an onsite Forest School and weekly Maths Cafés forming part of a genuinely inclusive curriculum. Much of this Dan has managed through private funding initiatives.

Early Years classes follow the Danish ‘Hygge’ approach – an innovative style of teaching that allows children to explore the natural world around them, develop their physical and social skills, and learn to love school.

The Silver Headteacher of the Year Award is stamped with Dan’s name, but it recognises something much bigger: a school community that has grown in confidence, care and ambition together.

Catherine Balston
Governor of Marlborough St Mary’s

The Second World War Remembered

After leaving school I joined the Air Force. The Second World War had broken out the month before. I went to West Drayton for basic training. There were no uniforms at that time, just a beret and a mac.

My colleagues and I were then sent off in a bus to what turned out to be Bawdsey in East Anglia. It was all so secret. We were billeted in some cottages down by the mouth of the river. The only furniture was six nails and one wooden box which we used as a table and an ironing board.

For our training some very clever lads came to lecture us. When they finished there was a stunned silence and we were asked if we had any questions. One brave soul said, "Yes, can you say all that again, only more slowly?" Someone else asked, "Can you please give us a book so that we at least have a chance to understand what words like cathode and anode mean? We didn't cover that sort of thing at school."

After three months we all passed out, which was a great surprise because they didn't think that women could do that

sort of thing. I went home for Christmas and was then posted to the radar station on Pevensey Bay. I was there for a year. One night we heard some bangs in the dark and it appeared that a U-boat had torpedoed a British vessel off Eastbourne, and the beach was covered with all sorts of things including cheese and typewriters. The cheese was lovely, but unfortunately it was covered in oil, which was difficult to clean off.

Later on I went to Dover, where we had a few close scrapes. One of the girls was in a building that got hit, but she survived thanks to her tin hat. The CO, a Scottish Presbyterian, who had been away from the station, was concerned to see the damage when he got back, especially when his less pious deputy reported, "They've absolutely buggered your office." My friend tried to comfort him by offering him her hat: "You are much more important than me, sir."

Louise Palmer

Miss Palmer was a resident of Coombe End Court.

This piece was first published in Tower and Town in 2013.



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The Old Graveyard, A Victorian Cemetery

The 1853 Burial Act required the closure of overcrowded church graveyards and the establishment of new cemeteries, away from water courses and where people were living, in an attempt to control the spread of infectious diseases like cholera and typhoid.

The Old Graveyard (aka The Victorian Cemetery) was established in 1854 on former farm land donated by the Marquess of Ailesbury. It was opened against a backdrop of social change towards bereavement and commemoration alongside increasing awareness of sanitation and disease.

To plan and establish the cemetery, a Burial Board was established consisting of members of the Borough, the Town Council and the Board of Guardians (the Church). It is likely that a significant influence on the design was JC Louden, who wrote a pamphlet titled '*On the Laying Out, Planting, and Managing of Cemeteries (1843)*'. The carefully planned layout reflects Louden's view that a graveyard should be a place of reflection and tranquillity.

Let's look around. If you approach the Old Graveyard from the Common, you are using the St. Mary's entrance. If you approach from Leaze Road, you are using the St. Peter's and St. Paul's entrance. Inside, it is divided into four areas. Stand at the grass 'T' junction, between the two entrances, and look up the graveyard.

There used to be a large lych gate here. The gravestones to the right (east) commemorate people who lived in St. Mary's parish, whilst those on the left (west) commemorate those who lived and died in St Peter's and St Paul's parish. In the green area in the centre there used to be a small mortuary chapel, designed by the Gothic Revival architect SS Teulon, built in 1863 and demolished in 1950s after it became structurally unsound.

Now turn around. On your left (east), there is a large area without gravestones. This is the final resting place of Paupers who died in the Workhouse (now St Luke's Court) or who did not have the financial means for a burial. There is a memorial to them here. On your right (west), the rather overcrowded area of gravestones is the Nonconformist section.

Although the cemetery closed for burials in 1924 (but briefly reopened in 1948 for the interment of cremations), it provides a wealth of information about the inhabitants of Marlborough - their trades, religion, beliefs and social standing. Original features remain, including the ornate iron railings around many of the graves and the perimeter sarsen wall built by Frees.

Please visit and enjoy the Old Graveyard, designed as a place of peace and tranquility but watch out for uneven surfaces and take care, as many of the gravestones and memorials are becoming fragile.

Kim Wakeham

Looking after the Victorian Cemetery

Small groups of volunteers have been gardening the Old Graveyard, the Victorian Cemetery, for more than a decade and, inspired by former Mayor Margaret Rose, we have evolved a way of gardening to enhance and to work with nature.

There are thousands of snowdrops, wild daffodils and anemones, and we have split and replanted these and added bluebells, crocus, cyclamen and fritillaries annually. Last year we even tried camassias and look forward to a replacement laburnum. Our most important aim has been to allow wild flowers to be seen - battling brambles, docks and nettles, and collecting bagfuls of grass cuttings to allow small flowers like celandines or purple vetch space to come through.

Later in the season, areas of grass grow tall and wave in the breeze with cow parsley and geraniums. We prune trees and shrubs and open up vistas among the four

magnificent cedars of Lebanon and the fully grown monkey puzzle. These were fashionable trees thought to enhance the new cemeteries built in the mid 19th century as places of reflection and recreation.

Some might not appreciate the semi-wildness, but wildlife (weasels, muntjac and foxes) and people in search of peace and beauty now value the place, ringed by mown paths. The Paupers and the Nonconformists occupy spaces nearest to St Luke's Court, the former dreaded workhouse, and we give these marginalised groups special focus with a stumpery garden and plantings of bulbs.

We have planted some graves and tree stumps with plants and seeds to give colour in the summer and autumn. The site is ringed by a yew hedge and walls which give it a secluded aspect. Beehives occupy one of the corners accompanied by rosebay willow herb and we have bug hotels and will have bat boxes. Last year we focussed on ferns and foxgloves; this

year we'll be looking to introduce new plants sensitively, true to the spirit of the place.

We need more volunteers and also money for new plantings. The Friends of the Victorian Cemetery work with Marlborough Town Council and if you would like to join us please see the information on the Town Council website.

Clare Russell

Credit: John Osborne



What's On in February

Marlborough College Concert Series:

London Mozart Players with soloist

Michael Butterfield (Organ).

1st Sunday 3.00pm

Marlborough College Chapel.

Programme to include:

Handel – Organ Concerto Op.4 no.5 in F,

Barber – Adagio, Poulenc – Organ

Concerto, Widor – Symphony No.5.

£25, student concessions £12.50

Tickets available from:

www.marlboroughconcertseries.org

Parking and programme free.

The Arts Society – Pewsey Vale: “How to ‘Read’ an English Country Church”

3rd Tuesday 2.30pm

Bouverie Hall, Pewsey.

Rev Dr Nicholas Henderson will discuss whether it is possible to ‘read’ the passage of time, movements, cultures and peoples in the architecture and art forms evident in many of our English country churches. The sixteenth century marked the arrival of the epoch-changing Tudors and ultimately moved us into the establishment of a new Protestant England. Later the destructive changes of the seventeenth century Commonwealth era were followed by restoration and liturgical change.

A graduate of Selwyn College, Cambridge, Nicholas Henderson trained for the Anglican ministry at Ripon Hall, Oxford. He was formerly Bishop-elect for the Diocese of Lake Malawi in Central Africa (2004-2009).

Doors open at 2.00pm, refreshments available.

Visitors always welcome - £7 on the door, cash or card.

Marlborough Floral Club

5th Thursday 2.00pm

Mildenhall Village Hall.

‘Blooming Artistry’ with Cathryn Brown.

£6 to attend, everyone welcome.

For more information contact Mickey Graham on 01672 514301.

An Evening with Maddy Prior and Peter Knight

6th Friday 8.00pm

Marlborough Town Hall.

As legends of British folk music, Maddy Prior and Peter Knight require absolutely no introduction. Peter and Maddy will revisit some special moments from their shared history with Steeleye Span, not only in music, but also in words, answering questions from the audience. An unmissable evening.

Tickets £26 from marlboroughfolk-roots.co.uk

Marlborough Gardening Association

11th Wednesday 7.30pm

Town Hall, Marlborough.

The Unexpected Dandelion with Simon Leach.

Display table: Snowdrops and Aconites.

For more information contact
marlbgainfo@gmail.com

What's On in February

Brilliant International Musicians

Series: Tom Gamble (guitar)

28th Saturday 7.00pm – 9.00pm

St Peter's Church, Marlborough.

Tom Gamble is a London-born musician whose playing defies genre. Starting out in local pubs and venues, he was encouraged by guitar legend Tommy Emmanuel to pursue solo performance, later studying classical guitar at Trinity Laban Conservatoire under Graham Anthony Devine. He went on to earn a Master of Music in classical guitar at the University of British Columbia, and perform widely across Canada and the USA. Since returning to London in 2017, he has built an international career as a performer and recording artist. He has

released five solo albums to critical acclaim, with his latest, *On An Ocean*, featured on BBC and international radio stations.

Tickets £20, members £15 from stpetersmarlborough.org.uk

School Dates

Marlborough St Mary's Primary and St John's Half Term begins Friday 13th. Term 4 begins on Monday 23rd.

Preshute Primary Half Term begins on Friday 13th. Term 4 begins on Tuesday 24th.

Marlborough College Half Term begins at 12 noon on Friday 13th. The term recommences at 9.00pm on Sunday 22nd

Coming up in March

Marlborough Concert Orchestra's Spring Concert

Saturday 14th March, 7.30pm

St Mary's Church, Marlborough

Programme:

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

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

Marlborough Choral Society's Spring Concert

Saturday 28th March, 7.30pm

St Mary's Church, Marlborough

Programme:

Karl Jenkins, The Armed Man
Tickets at Sound Knowledge, Marlborough, online at www.ticketsource.co.uk/marlborough-choral-society or on the door.

Adults £15, students £4, under 16s free.

Linda Illsley - What's On Editor

A Good Read

One of the little treats in life is when a book you've been looking forward to reading turns out to be every bit as good as you've hoped and expected. *Brian* by Jeremy Cooper is such a lovely quiet, absorbing story of the life of a solitary man.

It's a meditation on friendship and creating a fulfilling life, however narrow, through the dedicated pursuit of a specific interest. Brian finds a sense of belonging through cinema, and the reader learns about him through his responses to the films he watches on his nightly visits to the British Film Institute.

The survivor of a difficult childhood he has by necessity as well as inclination become private and self-contained, creating a manageable existence of unremarkable routine. The reader is always aware of the potential for pain, but Brian, while not a happy man, is not actively suffering.

The novel demonstrates that privacy and solitude are not necessarily the same as loneliness and that an enthusiasm doesn't have to be loud and demonstrative to be nourishing and sustaining. Simultaneously melancholy and uplifting, it's a book that will stay with me.

Completely different, but another of life's pleasures is a really good children's

picture book. When I say 'really good', what I mean of course is that I like the illustrations, the words, the general premise. Bear in mind that I'm not a small child, and my criteria might differ from that of the target audience. But anyway, I absolutely love *Diggers, Dozers & Dumpers* by Ole Konnecke.

It gives useful information about assorted machines, so the reader understands what a straddle-carrier is, or how a dredger or a telescopic crane works. It has lovely funny illustrations and short ever-so-faintly sardonic stories about the various animals who use the bulldozers, cherry-pickers and flat-bed trucks. We meet artistic and self-satisfied sheep and cows, passive-aggressive poultry, a 'helpful' wolf (!) and there's a recipe for making pancake batter in a cement-mixer. You need a *lot* of eggs.

As it's winter, and I am therefore in a Bad Mood which will last until April, I have decided to indulge myself by reading, or re-reading, Eva Ibbotson's romance novels, which are witty, charming, and highly improbable: suitable for Young Adults who don't want lurid fantasy, or for cantankerous old booksellers who'd rather be on a carriage-ride round the *Ringstrasse* in old Vienna.

Debby Guest

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Late Winter, Early Signs of Spring

As the days grow longer and lighter, spring will soon be with us. Birds such as song thrushes, robins and blackbirds have already started to sing.

Listening to my two local male song thrushes battling for territory, each trying to out-sing the other with louder and more complex repetitive songs, has been making me smile on a grey, gloomy day. New life is emerging from the ground in many forms, but a real highlight for me is seeing the first snowdrops and primroses. Hazel trees are already showing catkins and, with some warmer bright weather, they will soon be in flower.

The trees and hedgerows are still full of berries, fruit, and nuts as 2025 was a mast year. Mast years only

occur every four to five years and are nature's clever way of ensuring the next generation of trees. There is so much food that birds and mammals cannot eat it all, allowing some seeds to grow into new saplings. Producing such large quantities of fruit takes a huge amount



Redwing - *Turdus iliacus* © Helen Llewelyn



Siskin - *Carduelis spinus* © Helen Llewelyn

of energy, which is why trees cannot do this every year.

You may have noticed fewer birds visiting your garden recently, as many have been feeding out in the countryside where food is abundant. Our winter migrants from Scandinavia and Russia, including Fieldfare and Redwing, have been feasting on the berries, and locally I have seen several large flocks of both. I often hear their distinctive 'tseep' or 'chack' calls before spotting them. Many of the blackbirds we see at this time of year have likely arrived from Germany

and northern Europe and will start to depart late February. Our local blackbirds seem to tolerate their continental cousins.

This winter I am also seeing more Blackcap than in previous years. I suspect this is due to good food availability and milder weather but it does make me wonder whether they somehow respond to mast years. As a species they seem to be doing well. These overwintering birds will leave in early March, followed shortly by our breeding Blackcaps returning from southern Europe and North Africa.

Other interesting birds that you may be lucky to come onto your garden feeders are Brambling, Redpoll and Siskin and, if you are extremely lucky as a friend of mine was last year, a Hawfinch.

Brambling are a stunningly colourful finch closely related to a Chaffinch.

Redpolls and Siskins are much smaller finches but just as impressive in colour, male Redpoll can have a pink chest and male Siskins are very bright yellow.

If you do feed the birds in your garden, please make sure you clean your feeders regularly to stop the spread of disease.

Helen Llewelyn

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My Footprints to Marlborough

Ron Jones and Di Jones, lifelong Marlborough residents, answer eight questions from **Matt Gow**.



Credit: Matt Gow

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

Ron: I was born on 5 March 1942 at Savernake Hospital.

Di: I was also born at Savernake Hospital, just a few days later on 11 March 1942. We both grew up in Marlborough and have lived here all our lives.

2. What was your early life like?

Ron: I went to St Mary's in Herd Street, where I was taught by Miss Charlton and Miss Gregory, and later attended St Peter's School (now the library) from the age of seven to eleven.

Di: I went to Preshute School in Manton.

3. What kind of education did you have growing up?

We both went to Marlborough Secondary Modern on the Common from 1952 to 1957. The school buildings were old army huts left behind by the Americans after the Second World War, which made it quite a memorable place to be educated.

4. What kind of work did you have?

Ron: I started work in 1957 as an apprentice carpenter at Marlborough

College and stayed there for 50 years, retiring in 2007 - a huge part of my life.

Di: I worked in a couple of sweet shops in the town, including one owned by Mr Lenny, which is now the Blue Cross charity shop, until I had children.

5. What first brought your family to Marlborough?

Ron: My father came to Marlborough during the war after being evacuated from Dunkirk. He was originally from Bolton and served in the East Lancashire Regiment. He met my mother at a dance in the Town Hall and ended up staying here for the rest of his life.

6. What were your memories of growing up in Marlborough?

Ron: I loved growing up here. I was very sporty and played football, golf and cricket whenever I could. Marlborough always offered plenty to do, for young people who enjoyed being active.

7. How else were you involved in the community?

Ron: I joined the fire brigade in 1968. We didn't have pagers - we were summoned by a siren on top of the Town Hall, which you could hear all over the town.

8. What would you say to someone considering raising a family in Marlborough?

Ron: Marlborough is a wonderful place to bring up children. The community has always been very strong, the schools are excellent, and the surrounding countryside is beautiful. There's plenty of sport on offer, and a lovely environment to grow up in - I've always felt very lucky to call it home.

Lent: Forty Days and Forty Nights

Actually, the period from Ash Wednesday to Easter Sunday is forty-six days and nights but according to tradition, we don't count the Sundays in Lent as fasting days because Sundays are a feast day, a 'mini-Easter'.

So there is both fasting and feasting in Lent although the clear focus most of the time is on fasting and penance, looking inwards, a season of *repentance* which means to change direction. I think it's helpful to think of Lent in terms of active goodness as well as self-denial. Here's something that might help you do this:

Fast from judging others. **Feast on** God's goodness dwelling in them.

Fast from hurting words. **Feast on** kind words.

Fast from discontent. **Feast on** gratitude.

Fast from anger. **Feast on** patience.

Fast from pessimism. **Feast on** hope.

Fast from complaining. **Feast on** appreciation.

Fast from bitterness. **Feast on** forgiveness.

Fast from self-concern. **Feast on** compassion.

Fast from idle gossip. **Feast on** purposeful silence/listening.

Fast from worries. **Feast on** trusting the Lord.

In the churches, we will run a united Lent course as we enjoy doing annually. The theme and resources for this year's course have yet to be finally confirmed but we anticipate using a very helpful five-week Lent resource that everyone can engage with.

We look forward to welcoming you to worship on Ash Wednesday, 18th February, the details of which will be published by the churches. See our websites for more details. Please also look out for details of a Lent Quiet Morning to be held at St Mary's early in Lent, a reflective opportunity to commit yourself to this season of prayer, repentance and the hope of the Resurrection.

With you in Christ in Marlborough,



The Revd Pete Sainsbury

Juicy Succulents!

This probably isn't going to sell the desirability of these plants to you because they sit there sulking for most of the year, they don't like being touched because it damages their leaves, hate overwatering and direct sunlight for too long, are susceptible to mealy bugs, mildew and rotting stems, oh and they don't flower. I love them.



Credit: Carolyn Stimpson

But if you love succulents you definitely won't stop at owning just one and you will start collecting. This is a huge family of plants that often gets put with cacti, but although many succulents can be cacti too, cacti are not succulents and their care is totally different.

Succulents need free draining compost; mine are all in multi purpose but I don't use peat free because some moisture retention is necessary and I use alpine

grit to cover the soil so that the leaves don't touch wet soil. The compost must dry out between watering and feeding isn't needed but Epsom salt is useful as it increases the magnesium content which encourages better growth.

The incredible range of colours, leaf shapes and textures are so exciting and there is not another family of plants that can grow leaves in amazing swirls and rosettes.

Succulents are not winter hardy because it's too wet, but plant breeders have

crossed the sempervivum with aeonium and the result is a real stunner. Called a Semponium, they are huge and dramatic and definitely worth looking out for.

Succulents are really good for planting a 'theatre' because they can grow vertically too. Find a really nice container with a flat base, fill with compost very firmly then plant your treasures very close together to keep the compost in place (or cover it with fine mesh like old tights!) the idea is to create a patchwork. Leave to settle for a week then raise it up. The possibilities are endless and it's great fun.

Carolyn Stimpson
Marlborough Gardening Association

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Marlborough Churches Together

Usual Sunday Services Times

Society of Friends, Friends Meeting House, The Parade

10.30am Meeting for worship

St George's Preshute (Anglican)

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

10.30am Worship

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

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

10.30am Worship

5.00pm Informal Worship

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

Baptisms - We welcome:

07/12/25 Ada & Willa Othen St Mary's, Marlborough

21/12/25 Edward Gaarder St John the Baptist, Mildenhall

Departed - We pray for the families of:

19/10/25 Robin Notton (81), Royal Wootton Bassett St George's, Preshute

29/11/25 Rosemary Grice (86), Devizes St Mary's, Marlborough

27/10/25 Adam Harvey (88), Bristol St George's, Preshute

28/10/25 Eileen Nancarrow (86), Culvermead Close St Mary's, Marlborough

03/11/25 John Wright (54), Cherry Orchard St Mary's, Marlborough

22/11/25 Denise Edwards (87) Miranda House Nursing Home St Mary's, Marlborough

News from the Churches

30 Days of Prayer for the Muslim World, 18 February – 20 March



Copies of the booklet will be available in Mustard Seed and St Mary's church or can be downloaded from the website (£1 each).

The focus of this year's guide is on Muslim peoples from whom there are now radiant Christian believers, sharing the Gospel with their own or nearby Muslim people groups. Some have left professions to be able to share the gospel full-time. Others remain in their jobs or in the home where they are faithful witnesses. In holding fast to Christ and proclaiming His name, many have suffered persecution. We rejoice that bringing the good news to Muslims is not just something done by those from far away countries; it is now the Christian believers from Muslim backgrounds themselves who are key to transformation in their countries.

They are co-labourers with God and we are co-labourers with them through our prayers!

Emmanuel Church

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

- At 10 am our service includes a group for children from age 3 to school Year 4, followed by refreshments.
- At 4 pm our service includes crèche and Sunday School groups, followed by refreshments (for adults) and a sandwich tea for the children.

In addition to our Sunday service, we offer various activities throughout the week for children: **Sparklers, Little Friends Toddler Group, Explorers and Friday Nights.**

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

Rooted, a discipleship group for Y7-9 and Y10-13 takes place on **Fridays, 6th & 27th February from 6-7.15 pm**.

Through Bible study, training and discussion, we want to grow in love for each other and for Jesus. We'd love to see you there! For more details and the **location** address, please email ruth@emmanuelmarlborough.org

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

News from the Churches

Marlborough Anglican Team with Christchurch Methodist Fellowship

St Mary's Ladies Supper

Thursday 5th February, 7-9pm

Church Cottage, Silverless Street

We are delighted to be holding another St Mary's Ladies Supper.

Please book your space with Dorothy MacLachlan at

d.maclashlan@talktalk.net.

Cost, £8 to be paid on the night.

Faith on Tap

Wednesday 4th February, 7pm

The Green Dragon

Pull up a barstool and join us for a new monthly social where open minds and good conversations flow as freely as the drinks. Faith on Tap invites you to explore big questions and Christian perspectives in a relaxed, friendly setting. This month we will be discussing Christian perspectives on immigration and migration with guest speaker Chris Smith. Come curious, come questioning, or come for the company — all are welcome.

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

The Bereavement Journey Course

Tuesday 17th February, 6.00pm

Church Cottage

The course lasts for 6 weeks, with an

optional 7th session on Faith questions. The course is designed to help anyone who has experienced a bereavement of any sort and at any time.

If you or someone you know would be interested in attending the course, or would like further information, please contact Louise Seddon (07917 248339; seddon.louise@gmail.com) or Mark Whitehead (07814 895127; mjwhi1@gmail.com) as soon as possible.

St Mary's 5pm Informal Worship

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 friendly, informal and open to God's Spirit. On the third Sunday of the month, we break bread together.

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

All age worship: Sunday 1st February, 5pm. All are welcome.

The Ark Parent/Carer and Toddler

Group - Mondays in term time, 9:30am to 11am in the Church Hall, Silverless St. 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, 10am to 11am.

Join for coffee, chat, Lectio and prayer. All welcome - for more details and dates, email marlb.anglicanteam@tiscali.co.uk

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

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

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