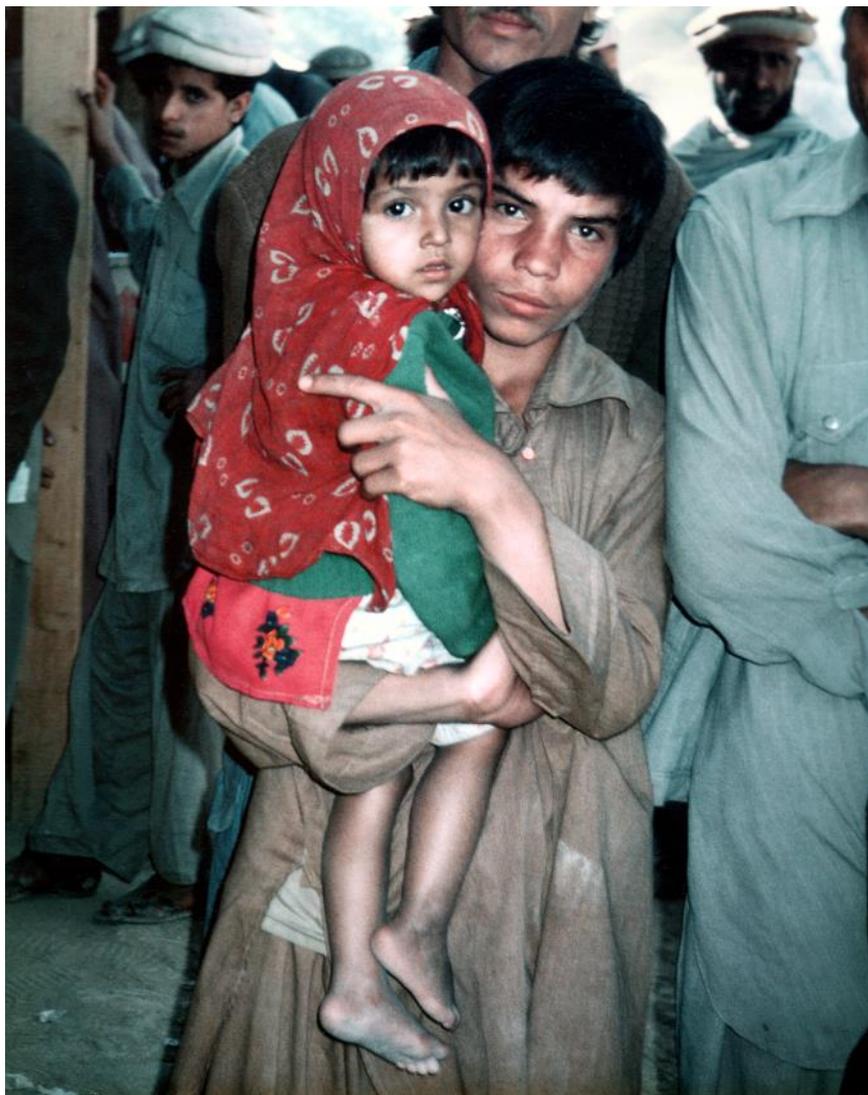

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Understanding Afghanistan

OCTOBER 2021 50P

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TOWER AND TOWN

THE MAGAZINE OF MARLBOROUGH'S COMMUNITY AND CHURCHES

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Understanding Afghanistan

Ten years ago my wife and I and the then Chairman of Afghanaid, David Page, ran a two day seminar *Understanding Afghanistan* at Marlborough College by kind permission of the Master.

There was considerable local interest and we were privileged to be supported by some very interesting and knowledgeable speakers, both English and Afghan.

How did I get interested in Afghanistan? Fortunately this first occurred when I met an Afghan family, living in London, when I was a teenager. They encouraged me to read a book by one Peter King: - *AFGHANISTAN: COCKPIT IN HIGH ASIA* (Geoffrey Bles 1966). This book opened my eyes to this extraordinary country, its beauty, its wide range of peoples – Hazaras, Tajiks, Pushtuns, Afridis, Turkomen and many others – and the remarkable skills that many of these people possessed. Numerous poets, storytellers and warriors, indeed, but an Afghan could be a farmer, a skilled horseman, a calligrapher, a breathtakingly detailed metal worker or carver in lapis lazuli, a painter of fine miniatures, or a designer and weaver of magnificent carpets. I was also alerted by King's book to the presence, in Nuristan, of the *markaz* or 'power house of the people': the centre for the hidden Sufis of Afghanistan which, later, became a somewhat debased coin.

It is possible that I became over romantic with regard to the Afghans and it took me time to learn that there were 'goodies' and 'baddies'. Sadly, Afghanistan has also been subject to a turbulent history and although we have tried to paint a broad picture there are many references in this edition of *Tower and Town* to gut wrenching troubles in the past and now. Perhaps not surprising in this mountainous land with all those tribes vying with each other and invasions from foreign powers.

I have never been beyond Landi Kotal at the top of the Khyber Pass but when in Peshawar in 1990 I had this conversation with my son, Tarquin, who was teaching English in the refugee camps.

I was curious about *buzkashi* the fierce game played on horseback (*cont. overleaf*)

Front cover
Amina Shah (1983): Afghan refugees, Peshawar

with a dead goat and asked whether there was any chance of seeing a game.

‘Maybe. I’ll try and find out, but that could prove difficult. You can never be sure with these people. They will tell you that there is a game on Saturday and you turn up at the ground, but there’s not a soul in sight. They may have meant some future Saturday, because games are usually played on Saturdays, or Saturday if Allah wills, or Saturday if it’s fine, or Saturday if the horses are fit.’

‘Or Saturday if the tea hasn’t run out or the apricots have ripened,’ I chipped in.

‘Exactly; they just don’t think like we do and if they can’t provide an answer they prefer not to have to say ‘no’. They are the consummate diplomats. But let’s see, maybe we’ll get lucky.’ Which we were!

Neil G M Hall, Editor

Then on a horse which bit and bucked
(The half-broke four-year-old Marauder)
Came Minton Price of th’ Afghan border,
Lean, puckered, yellowed, knotted, scarred,
Tough as a hide-rope twisted hard,
Tense tiger-sinew knit to bone.
Strange-wayed from having lived alone
With Kafir, Afghan and Beloosh
In stations frozen in the Koosh.
Where nothing but the bullet sings.
His mind had conquered many things –
Painting, mechanics, physics, law.
White-hot, hand beaten things to draw
Self-hammered from his own soul’s stithy.
His speech was blacksmith-sparked and pithy.
Danger had been his brother bred;
The stones had often been his bed
In bickers with the border thieves.

John Masfield: *Reynard the Fox* (1919)

When you’re wounded and left on Afghanistan’s plains
An’ the women come out to cut up what remains
Jest roll out your rifle an’ blow out your brains
An’ go to your Gawd like a soldier.

Rudyard Kipling: *The Young British Soldier* (1890)

Afghan soldiering 2011: Lt Peter Gordon-Finlayson

“THREE soldiers from 1st Queen’s Dragoon Guards have praised the new Scimitar MK2 after they survived a strike by a large Improvised Explosive Device (IED) in Afghanistan.

“The trio from the Welsh Cavalry were on a routine patrol in Nahr-e Saraj when their Scimitar Mk2 was engulfed in an explosion. All three soldiers walked away from the incident unharmed.” (*MoD Army website*)

The following piece is taken from a letter from Old Marlburian, Lieutenant Peter Gordon-Finlayson, 1st Queen’s Dragoon Guards, to his parents; written in Helmand in 2011.

We left the gates and completed the familiar routine of loading weapons and announcing our departure over the radio. This patrol, however, would be a little more exciting than I was anticipating. Gereshk held its usual visual delights of rusty, aged lorries carrying loads that seem improbable, cars balanced teetering on the roofs of buses and various farm animals crammed onto the back seats of cars along with family members. We drove on, waving to children and nodding greetings to the omnipresent Afghan soldiers that manned the many check points. Leaving the highway, my vehicle led the small convoy into the desert. We rolled over dunes and peacefully cut through the sand as if skiing through virgin snow. Another convoy drove slowly along a track nearby going in the opposite direction. Suddenly the peaceful scene was shattered by a huge explosion and the entire world seemed to shake as if it had been seized in the grasp of an angry baby. It took a few seconds to realise what had happened. To start with I was indignant that my musings should be shattered so violently. After what seemed like a long time, although in reality must have been fractions of a second, I felt fear, a thrill of excitement, relief at being unharmed and then composure. The vehicle skidded to a halt and I immediately checked the status of the other crewmembers. My operator, LCpl Hatton, was holding his elbow but said he was fine so I turned my attention to the driver. Tpr Griffiths initially did not answer and I feared the worst. However after a second or two he answered my worried calls by appearing out of his hatch with a camera and immediately took a picture of me! I instinctively grinned at him like a goon; the result is a very obscure picture!

In the true nature of young men in a thrilling job, seeking and finding great adventure, we relished the story telling that ensued. Although we were clearly very lucky to walk away totally unscathed, there was no room for remorse or fear. We were elated by our survival and considered it a victory over those who would try to harm us.

My Childhood, My Country - 20 years in Afghanistan

The title of this piece is also the title of a film by Phil Grabsky, Film and Documentary Maker, Seventh Art Productions, (seventh-art.com) and the Afghan filmmaker, Shoaib Sharifi, Director of BBC Media Action in Afghanistan. The first film about the boy, Mir, was shown at the Marlborough College Afghanistan Seminar in 2011. We are hoping to arrange a screening of Grabsky's new film in Marlborough soon.

Heated discussion continues about what has and has not been achieved over the past 20 years in Afghanistan. In 2002, I flew into Afghanistan searching for a story to help illustrate the essence of the Afghans. For far too long, horrific TV images had portrayed the Afghan people as nothing other than oppressor or oppressed. My fate led me to deciding to make a film about a young, cheeky, good-humoured boy called Mir whose face smiled back at me through my camera lens. My first film, *'The Boy Who Plays on the Buddhas of Bamiyan'* was released in 2004 and a second film (working with the extraordinary Afghan filmmaker Shoaib Sharifi) when Mir was just 16, was released in 2011: *'The Boy Mir - 10 years in Afghanistan'*.



Afghanistan filming presented challenges; mines, kidnap, the Taliban and the most lethal, driving on their roads. In 2011, my time filming in Afghanistan felt like it had ended, but not my involvement with a people whom I had grown to love, respect and greatly admire. The broadcasting world had also changed, so making truthful reality films in countries like Afghanistan had become almost impossible. One broadcaster stood out, however, WDR in Germany. They wanted more of Mir and, after some reflection, we decided that 20 years was a better timeframe in which to reach some kind of conclusion about the 2001 US/NATO intervention. Knowing full well Afghanistan is never black or white, the film does make clear there have been many positive developments. Afghanistan has changed, but opportunities were missed; lives have been unnecessarily lost; progress that could have been made, has not been made. That the Taliban have retaken power is not a surprise to me. In my view, it could have been different. But, with me forever are the amazing adventures, the laughter and Mir's sheer perseverance in helping to create 20 years of unique filming, offering unparalleled insight into Afghanistan and families now desperately trying to leave.

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HOOPOE – the largest children’s books distributor in Afghanistan; August 2021:

Sally Mallam

Sadly, we have had to suspend our programme in Afghanistan. We are trying to help our key team and their families get out, or stay inside with the funds to survive. So far we are having no luck on either score, but have sent numerous visa applications, and wait for them to be accepted. Then, of course, there's the problem of getting to Kabul airport. Right now, there is no way to send money - banks and Western Union are closed. But we are still exploring ways around it, to prevent people going without food. There are just under 100 people of all ages in all, including our key team of 14 families, translators, and two large mobile libraries who've distributed thousands of our books all over the country. All now under threat of death, at least in part, because of their association with us. Sadly, as the largest children's book distributor in Afghanistan, we were well known. Since 2009, when we started the partnership with our Afghan friends, we've printed and distributed over 5.4 million bilingual Dari-Pashto and English books all over the country, even in remote areas. In 2018 we were asked by SIL.org to partner with them to publish and distribute Hoopoe stories in minority languages, such as Nuristani, Shughni, Sawji and Turkmeni, paired with the national language (Dari or Pashto) that kids need to know before they enter the schools system at age seven. Many don't speak the national languages at home, and so lag behind when they enter the school system. Our books gave them the opportunity to learn to read in their mother tongue and to transfer that skill when they were ready to take on the national language - reading the same story! We've trained hundreds of teacher trainers who've trained other teachers to teach literacy and cognitive skills. We've had the stories on local radio, and audio versions of them in Dari, Pashto and English were downloadable.

We had to close down the website, but will move some of the elements to the main hoopoebooks.com website as soon as possible.

For anyone who wants to help us support our friends while they remain in Afghanistan and support them if they are lucky enough to get out,(since they won't be allowed to work for possibly six months or more) go to: <https://ishk.networkforgood.com/projects/93101-main-giving-page> put in the amount and select **Fund for Afghan Relief**.

Only a Dash of Afghan History and Mindset:

Lucinda Hall

Balkh, 2000 -1500 BC, in North Western Afghanistan, is known as ‘The Mother of All Cities’. The first well organised city on Earth? To the Zoroastrians, the first organised religion and a precursor to the other great religions, perpetuating a one God creator of good and evil, Balkh is the birthplace of Zoroaster or Zarathustra (Persian). Balkh, Herat, Ghazni and other centres, in science and many other fields, produced for centuries men of learning second to none. The mighty Afghan Barmecides wrote the first books on Algebra, pioneered research in medicine, philosophy and astronomy. Jabir ibn el-Hayyan, known to the west as Geber, the father of Western chemistry, who wrote more than 100 works on the subject, lived in Afghanistan for a time. Down the centuries, the list of Afghan poets and luminaries is endless. Rumi, the Sufi Mystic, buried in Konia, Turkey, was also born in Balkh, but left with his father knowing the Mongol invasion was imminent. His poetry and stories, although of their time, are still read today. It is purported that, on occasions, Rumi used miracle teaching methods like those of Jesus.

Afghans are descended from the original Aryan Race, from the armies of Alexander the Great -- the Nuristanis whose blondes and redheads abound, eat at tables and bury their dead in coffins -- and from the progenitors of the Hindus as well as the Mongol Mughals and others. Genghis Khan and Tamerlane fought many battles here. Ancient Egyptian Pharaohs saw Afghan Lapis Lazuli as a magical stone and may have built the white marbled snow-capped Pyramids as imitations of the mountains of Afghanistan. Buddhism also blossomed here during the Kushan dynasty, hence the Bamiyan Buddhas, brutally destroyed by the Taliban in 2001. To The Hindus, it is the land from which came their ancestors and from where the beautiful Hindu Vedantic texts were composed. Alexander the Great’s armies also brought Aristotelian and Platonic, ‘The Brotherhood of Man’ thinking to Afghanistan, again as a forerunner to the flowering of Christianity. Even Judaism and Islam have complicated connections to Afghanistan, via the basic ‘inner kernel’ of all religions.

A mysterious country, Afghanistan is not quite like anywhere else, more like a strange magical 1001 Arabian Nights Shangri La Twilight Zone. Whether you spend 5 minutes or 50 years in Afghanistan or even much time with the Afghan diaspora, as I have, you will know that Afghans seem to be ‘wired up’ differently. Not behaving like most people due to a back to front, inside out kind of Mulla Nasrudin, their National Fool, logic, this acts as a secret weapon survival mechanism which has protected them for 1000s of years. Sounds a bit like the

English, does it not, and, surprise, surprise, there is more and more evidence that the nomadic Angles were from much further afield, in fact, Scythian Afghans wandering from Sakasina in Central Asia to Schleswig Holstein, and, eventually after about 200 years, found themselves on Albion's shores.

The majority of Afghans are not fanatical, instead a dutiful, honourable, almost medieval people, but with a sophisticated sense of humour. However, the Taliban *are* homegrown, perhaps, genetic throwbacks to those who follow a Darth Vader thinking or sons of those indoctrinated zealots in the Pakistani refugee camps. Therefore, the Taliban, a linear thinking, hateful, obvious, boring mob, really has no chance of long term Afghan governance.

Whatever your religious leaning, a 'Person of the Book', Buddhist, Mormon, and so on, we all owe a debt to Afghanistan for having nurtured the extraordinary Covenant I believe we humans still have with an Almighty somewhere in the Universe. In my view, Jesus Christ was the most perfect soul to have set foot on this planet. He advised us to 'Love one another'. Amina Shah, Afghan writer and poet agrees in her poem, *There is No End to Love* (see p.11). The Afghan positive mindset will endure, as will all people of goodwill, whatever dangers lie ahead this century. Keep Calm and Carry On.

Systemic Failure:

Dr Rob Johnson

The rapid collapse of the government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan provoked a welter of think tank analyses, political recriminations, and breathless media coverage, with responsibility pinned either onto the hasty manner of the United States' withdrawal, faulty intelligence, or the alleged inadequacy of the Afghan security forces. Regardless of these assessments, the events in Afghanistan constitute a systemic failure. But it was avoidable.

Historically, there are comparable cases of systemic collapse. These can be seen, not in the shallow sense of the optical similarities of the fall of Saigon, but in the stresses, thresholds, and tolerances of regimes. Under similar conditions, not all systems fail so comprehensively, suggesting that the haste of the US withdrawal, conducted without consultation of Allies, was indeed the critical factor.

Surveying previous insurgencies, it is clear that when governments fail, they do so rapidly. When insurgent movements are defeated, they tend to do so gradually, indicated by steady splintering and factionalism. The Taliban had started to fragment in 2015-16. They had inflicted heavy losses on the Afghan government forces, but the emergence of 'IS-Khorassan', a faction emulating Daesh, indicated

that there were divisions. However, repeated US announcements of withdrawal kept the insurgent factions together. Pakistan continued to supply the Taliban and its other confederates, and to provide the mountainous border region to base the fighters and their commanders, while keeping up the pretence of alignment with the United States. The younger cohorts of insurgents had been steadily radicalised by Deobandi, Salafi, and Wahabi ideologues. There is every prospect that the radicalised movement that now holds power in Kabul will steadily impose its brutal variant of governance: it is the nature of revolutionaries to brook no criticism and to exact revenge.

Is Taliban rule now established? They may yet suffer the fate of Daesh. On Afghanistan's national day (19 August) protestors were tearing down Taliban banners and putting the national flag back up. The divisions and fissures that had riven Afghan society are still there, and now the unifying element of a corrupted government has gone, so it seems that a new pulse of civil violence is highly likely.

There is the question of the longer term significance. Is this the watershed, as 9/11 was purported to be, or just a phase in a continuum, as the fall of South Vietnam proved to be? Does it mark a more seismic defeat of the Western world, its democratising project, and its 'rules-based international system' established in 1944-45, or will it galvanise the West?

Finally, those who advocated for so long that the West should withdraw, 'stop the war', and bring the troops home, got their wish. Here are the consequences.

Dr Rob Johnson is the author of *The Afghan Way of War* (2011) and co-editor of *At the End of Military Intervention*, with Dr Tim Clack (2014).

Afghan Reading

- The Kite Runner*: Khaled Hosseini
- A Thousand Splendid Suns*: Khaled Hosseini
- The Dressmaker of Khair Khana*: Gayle Tzemach Lemmon
- The Places In Between*: Rory Stewart
- In the Wars*: Waheed Arian
- Taliban: The Power of Militant Islam in Afghanistan and Beyond*: Ahmed Rashid
- Return of a King: The Battle for Afghanistan*: William Dalrymple
- The Bookseller Of Kabul*: Asne Selerstad
- My Khyber Marriage*: Morag Murray
- Valley of the Giant Buddhas*: Morag Murray
- My Life from Brigand to King*: Emir Habibulla
- Afghanistan of the Afghans*: the Sirdar Ikbal Ali Shah
- Afghanistan: Cockpit in High Asia*: Peter King

Amina Shah

The late Amina Shah, sister of the renowned Afghan author, Idries Shah, was a poet, storyteller, photographer and traveller. These poems were written shortly after the Russian invasion. [Editor]

NO END TO ANYTHING

No, there is no end to anything, no end, no mend;
The dismaying drip of dank despair, the murdered friend
Whose voice will never leave your ear until your world shall end...
End? End? But there is no end to anything. The world will spin
Always in circles, circles, warm and fat with sin,
A ferris-wheel of frenzy in incessant farmyard din,
And the gaunt grey masks of homeless, silent, end to end,
Lonely, hungry, starved of land. Allah, to them send
The wolves of vengeance soon, the red invader's heart to rend.
There is no end to sunshine, there is no end to rain,
My bones, my flesh will crumble to make green grass again.
My bones will turn to powder, but there is no end to pain,
There is no end to hating. Shall I return again
And laugh whilst all around me weep beneath the tyrant's reign?
No, there is no end to anything, the evil hand in glove
With those who do not understand the message of the Dove,
But best of all, there is no end
There is no end, to
Love.

THE QUESTIONING CHILD

Why do we walk, my Mother's Mother through the mountains and the pass?
Why do we leave Mother and Father, silent, hidden in the grass?
Where are all our sheep and horses, why do our empty bellies swell?
Why do the flying gunships bomb us with the flames as hot as Hell?
Hush, male child of seven summers, walk on o'er this snowy hill.
Afghan hearts are strong and willing to take on the good and ill.
Grow strong, grow strong as Afghan eagles; shelter till you are a man –
And then with risen Men of Freedom, win your fields back,
As you can!

I was fortunate enough to visit Afghanistan with my stepmother (Amina Shah, the front cover photographer of this edition of Tower and Town) in the spring of 1977.

On arrival we stayed with Afghan friends in Kabul, exploring its busy streets, colourful bazaars and the picturesque nearby village of Isalif with its delicately glazed blue pottery.

Travelling on local buses we crisscrossed the country, seeing a wonderful variety of people and spectacular landscapes. In my mind I still picture brightly colored carpets put out in the streets to be “seasoned” as we walked or drove over them; children everywhere wanting to practise English greetings; women in brightly coloured clothes; shops with an abundance of grapes and melons; beautiful gardens full of flowers

We visited the famous mosques of Herat and Mazar i Sharif; the valley of Bamiyan with its (then) magnificent statues of the Buddha.

In the ruins of the ancient city of Kandahar we climbed the forty steps carved out of a solid piece of rock by the emperor Babur. We visited Jalalabad and nearby Hadda which had been a major centre of Graeco-Buddhist culture.

More remote areas could be reached only by jeep: the majestic blue lakes of Bande Amir; and the isolated mountain villages of Nuristan with its fast-running streams and rivers, mountainside houses on stilts.

Even more than the astonishing beauty of the country, my memories are of the warmth, welcome and deep hospitality of its people. Passengers on the buses were eager to share their food. Everywhere tea, frequently flavoured with cardamom, was graciously served by the host, always accompanied by sweets or dried mulberries.

At shop doors or on market stalls, small boys mimicking their elders’ old world charm greeted us with salutations and Afghan pleasantries.

In Nuristan, where one encountered many people with green eyes and pale skin (the descendants of Alexander the Great, perhaps) and roses in such abundance that men often wore them behind the ear as everyday adornment, we were each offered a rose upon entering a village headman’s house.

On the long, hot drive across semi-desert between Herat and Kandahar our bus was stopped by an old man and a boy. Without a word, they proffered a small, aluminium jug to our driver, and he, as silently, filled it with water. Then we drove away.

I hope that Afghan refugees arriving here will meet a welcome as generous as the one offered visitors in their country.

The North American educationalist Anne Sullivan once wrote, "Language and knowledge are indissolubly connected; they are interdependent. Good work in language presupposes and depends on a real knowledge of things." Anne certainly knew what she was talking about, as she is famous for being the teacher of Helen Keller.

Helen was a profoundly deaf and blind girl, who grew to overcome these disabilities. Although Helen never fully developed the power of speech, she learned to communicate eloquently in many other ways. But the thought applies to all of us. As rational beings we desire to have a real knowledge of things, and we learn and share this knowledge largely through language. Other creatures, from whales to ants and bees, have systems of communication, but only humans have reasoned, intelligent speech which can grasp the depths of reality. Intelligent laughter is something that only humans can do.

So language is a gift which builds society, makes cultures and gives us great pleasure. To be used properly it must be used truthfully, and reflect a "real knowledge of things." The ultimate reality that satisfies the human desire for knowledge and truth is God. Thus the highest task of language is to talk about God or to talk to God, however eloquent or otherwise we are, however able-bodied or otherwise we are. All this may take a lifetime, but it is filled with hope and forgiveness, which are much needed in our own days.

New Exhibition - Richard Shirley Smith

9th - 30th September White Horse Gallery

We are delighted to begin a new series of exhibitions with paintings, engravings and books by Richard Shirley Smith. There is no private view, but Richard intends to be working and meeting in the Gallery from 2.30 - 4.30pm on Thursdays and Saturdays.

We look forward to welcoming you back to the White Horse Gallery.

What's On

October calendar

30th September (Thursday) to 3rd October (Sunday)

Marlborough LitFest. Tickets from marlboroughlitfest.org or the White Horse Bookshop.

7th (Thursday)

2pm Mildenhall Village Hall, Marlborough Floral Club, demonstrator Sally Taylor: 'Sallying Forth Again'. First Thursday of each month, arrangements are raffled at the end of the demonstration (4th November's demonstrator is Nicky Heal: 'Christmas at Home') For more information, please call Micky Graham 01672 514301

10th (Sunday)

5.30pm St Peter's Church. Annual Choral Evensong. The rescheduled Patronal Festival service sung by Dodecantus with The Revd Canon Henry Pearson preaching. All welcome.

15th (Friday)

Marlborough College: Half Term starts (to Sunday 31st October)

17th (Sunday)

7.30pm St Peter's Church. Brilliant International Musicians Concert, Hayley Myles (piano) playing music by Schubert, Liszt and Chopin. Tickets £13 (£9 for St Peter's members) from White Horse Bookshop or on the door on the night.

20th (Wednesday)

St John's Academy: Term 1 ends

21st (Thursday)

7.30pm St Peter's Church. Marlborough History Society Roger Day lectures on 'Motoring Emergencies: a brief history of the Automobile Association from a local perspective'. Non-members £5 on the door on the night.

25th (Monday) to 30th (Saturday) daily

10am to 3.30pm St Peter's Church. Dark Skies Festival: Exhibition of Astrophotography by Robert Harvey of *Natural World Photography*, previously showing at the Wiltshire Museum in Devizes – amazing photos of the sky at night. Free entry.

31st (Sunday)

7.30pm St Peter's Church. Brilliant International Musicians Concert, Harry Fox (piano), Alisa Liubarskaya (cello) playing music by Franck, Tchaikovsky and Beethoven. Tickets £13 (£9 for St Peter's members) from White Horse Bookshop or on the door on the night. See related advert for further programme details.

1st November (Monday)

4.30pm to 6pm Wesley Hall, Oxford Street. Bright Lights Party for ages 4-11 to celebrate the start of the Fall term, with lots of food, games and storytelling from the Bible. Come as you are or in your favourite costume! Free entry, please RSVP to evie@emmanuelmarlborough.org

I'm going to start today's class by asking What is Reading? We talk about 'reading' signals, body language, paintings and films, so it doesn't have to be about pages of print. Which is just as well, because it's time for Debby's annual "I've overdosed on books" column. I write these pieces a month or so in advance, so there's a time-warp. As you read this, LitFest will have just happened (fingers crossed), but as I write preparations are still in full swing, I'm trying to read as many of the authors as I can, and beginning to feel a bit queasy with over-reading. So I'm going to put myself on a light diet of graphic novels.

I've mentioned before that I think graphic novels are underappreciated and misunderstood. They are *not just for children, and they're not just picture books*. In fact, some graphic novels deal with complex situations and relationships or political issues which make them inappropriate for younger readers – just giving you fair warning.

Probably the best-selling GNs in the bookshop are those which are based on existing novels. Think of them as film adaptations, and consider how many books you haven't read, but you have seen on the screen. GNs are a good way to tackle, for example, Proust, in an edition with beautiful *ligne claire* illustrations (familiar as the style of *Tin Tin*). Or you could also read Orwell, or Robert Tressell (*The Ragged Trousered Philanthropist*), or *To Kill a Mockingbird*. I'm planning to tackle a genre that I don't usually like by reading the GN versions of Cixin Liu's science fiction novels, and I'm also eyeing up the graphic *Homo Sapiens* by Yuval Noah Harari. If I like them I'll try the 'real thing'.

There are 'classic' GNs and many well-respected creators – Joe Sacco, Marjane Satrapi, Bryan Talbot, Posy Simmonds, Alison Bechdel, Alan Moore, Raymond Briggs, Shaun Tan. Not all of them will appeal equally. As the illustration is 50% or more of the novel, if you don't like the visual style you're unlikely to want to read the book – just as a writing style can be off-putting. (I am prejudiced against novels written in the continuous present tense.) *But*, remember, don't judge a book by its cover/pictures. The style may well be intentionally related and relevant to the narrative and character, so don't dismiss it out of hand. It's Autumn, time for the new school term, and maybe new 'reading'?

Only one of our native ducks really quacks, and that's the female mallard. If you take the path southwards along the canal at Crofton you'll come to Wilton Water, a small lake near Great Bedwyn, which supplies the summit pound of the Kennet and Avon Canal with water. Halfway along there's a waterside bench with the name "Quackers" on it, and there are always mallards there in a sheltered bay, (as well as gadwall and tufted ducks) and like as not they'll be quacking away merrily.

Their breeding season is from mid-March to July. The laying period is very stressful for the female as she lays more than half her body weight in eggs over a couple of weeks, a dozen in batches of three or four. She needs a lot of rest and depends heavily on her mate to protect her. The male is a handsome fellow with a glossy-green head, a white neck-ring and a purplish-brown breast. After the breeding season all males go into "eclipse" plumage: they moult all their flight feathers and become flightless for about a month, making them vulnerable to predators.

By October the glamorous plumage is restored, at a time when the duck population has increased with the arrival of visitors from the north: Fenno-Scandia, Russia, Iceland and elsewhere. At the Slimbridge Wildfowl Refuge, the Cotswold Water Park and on the larger Wiltshire lakes, numbers are building up. A flock of wigeon call with a whistling "wee, whee-oo" and a short low musical "krrit" from the shallow margins denotes the presence of a small flock of teal, the smallest European duck.

There are other surface-feeding or dabbling ducks. Along with increased numbers of mallard and gadwall, shovelers have arrived, sifting the surface with spoon-like bills, and pintails, the males with chocolate brown heads, a white streak from breast to neck and, as the name suggests, pointed tails.

Then there are the diving ducks: along with pochards and tufted ducks comes the scarcer goldeneye, which has a conspicuous white spot on its triangular-shaped black head.

Perhaps the most handsome of all these immigrants is the male goosander with its long white body, glossy-green head and black back. The breast is a pinkish white, the bill, which is red, is spike-like and has toothed edges, classifying the goosander as a "sawbill."

It's birds like these that lend colour and excitement to late autumn birdwatching.

FROM THE REGISTERS

Baptisms – *we welcome*

- 22 August Alexander George Nicholas Francis at St John the Baptist
29 August Isabella Blay, Lily-May Blay and Ozzie Blay at St George's
29 August Rosie Ellen Lader Bowen at St John the Baptist
4 September Lyra Hiscox at St George's
5 September Rosie Mary Grech at St Mary's

Weddings - *we congratulate*

- 14 August Emma Price & Luke Day at St John the Baptist
14 August William & Mari Hill at St George's
28 August Lucy Cross & Max McGroarty at St George's
28 August Caroline Treacher & Ben Harrop at St Mary's

Funerals - *we pray for the families of:*

- 3 August Peter Geoffrey Oldring (89) of Savernake View Care Home,
Marlborough
North Wiltshire Crematorium, Royal Wootton Bassett
- 18 August Lorna Cecilia Moore (89) of Merlin Court Care Home,
Marlborough
West Berkshire Crematorium, Thatcham

Afghan Quiz: Twelve questions.

1. Which city in Afghanistan is known as ‘the Mother of Cities’?
2. The river: Amu Darya is also known by what name?
3. Who was the leader of the Mujheddin who was killed by Al-Queda shortly before the disaster on 9/11?
4. Peter Hopkirk wrote a fascinating book relating to the struggle between the British and Russian empires in Central Asia. What is its title?
5. The Emir of Bokhara was responsible for the beheading of two British officers in 1842. What were their names?
6. In 1987 a renowned Afghan author published *‘Darkest England’*: an anthropological study of England and the English. What is his name?
7. What significant event occurred in Afghanistan in December 1979?
8. A Sufi poet lived in Ghazni in the 12th century and wrote *‘Walled Garden of Truth’* amongst other works – what was his name? (English translation by David Pendlebury).
9. In 1988 Kevin Reynolds directed a film that acquired a cult following. The film follows the crew of a Russian T-55 tank that got lost during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. What is the film’s title?
10. What is the name of the controversial line that divided Afghanistan from Pakistan and created the North West Frontier Province: established in 1893?
11. Dr William Brydon was the only one of 16,000 souls who left Kabul in 1841, heading for Jalalabad, who survived massacre on the way. Who painted a celebrated picture entitled: *Remnants of an Army*?
12. Where is the Bala Hissar fortress?

Answers on page 27



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Prospect Hospice has a challenge for you: a 100 kilometre run, walk, swim or cycle. You don't have to do it outdoors. Do it over a few days or a few weeks in the location of your choice. You have until 31 October 2021. All we ask is that you raise funds for the hospice. Registration is £10 per adult and £5 per child or dog.

Register at <https://www.prospect-hospice.net/fundraising-support-us/challenges/100k-your-way/> or email fundraisingandevents@prospect-hospice.net or call 01793 813355.

Afghanaid has worked in Afghanistan for close to forty years. In any one year we are typically working to support well over one million Afghan men, women and children - approximately one thirtieth of the population.

Over the last decade, our main areas of work have centred around climate change adaptation, (the Afghanistan Resilience Consortium), promoting women's economic engagement and community participation, clean water and improved sanitation and a variety of programmes in response to drought, famine, the Corona-virus pandemic, and other natural disasters. Factored into all of our work are the principles of good governance, community involvement and the participation of both men and women, generating a great deal of long term community acceptance.

In the past three years, we have established over 90 community-based disaster management committees, built 23 flood protection walls, installed more than 530 solar pumps, and supported over 12,000 women to access credit for their enterprises through local savings groups. In 2019 and 2020, we planted over 525,000 trees in 5 provinces across the country. In the last year we have also delivered courses for women in literacy and numeracy skills, tailoring, poultry-rearing, book-keeping, bee keeping, dairy processing and gabion weaving.

However, progress made in gender equality and climate change adaptation currently hangs in the balance following the recent violence and change of power. So far, the Taliban leadership have been supportive of NGOs and that position is also being adopted by local commanders. We are in the process of negotiating access in some areas and in others we have already been able to re-open our offices. Our longstanding roots in these local communities and our reputation for impartiality have been a huge strength during this time. The Kabul office is open.

In addition we are currently delivering emergency support to families whose lives have been destroyed or uprooted by the conflict. With the United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, we were already supporting 18,500 men, women and children who have fled their homes with essential household items, such as hygiene and kitchen kits, as well as emergency food parcels and vital help to keep roofs over their heads. We have now launched an appeal to allow us to urgently increase the number of people we can reach with this assistance.

The future of Afghanistan remains very unclear, but, as with previous times of difficulty, Afghanaid will continue to work alongside local people to help them overcome the challenges they face and ensure they can live in peace and security.

Please donate today: www.afghanaid.org.uk/Appeal/help-families-in-afghanistan

Asfaw Yemiru was born in the area of Bulga 75 miles south of Addis Adaba. He was one of 11 sons born into the family of a village priest.

When Asfaw was 7 years old his father took them on a journey to Addis Adaba. The boys were all confirmed as deacons of the Coptic church. Soon after Asfaw arrived back home he decided to return to Addis Adaba to gain an education. After a few days he arrived at the capital and took refuge in a church yard where children were sleeping. By day he went out into the city begging for food and work.

An Armenian woman passing by dropped her shopping. He ran forward to help her collect it. She decided to offer him work which he did. After a short while she paid for him to go to school where he learned Amharic and English. This helped him to attend as a boarder an English run school, the Wingate School for boys where he could sit his O levels.

He then won a scholarship to Wingate School.

Once in the school Asfaw found left over food was burned or buried and he begged the headmaster for orphans to be given the scraps. From then onwards any scrap food was given to the children outside the school gates after every meal.

Asfaw worked hard at his studies but could not forget the plight of the orphans. After school he would go into the church yard door next and gather together groups of orphans to teach them English, Maths and written Amharic.

He was given an old blackboard and chalk to aid his work. A large number of children came to his school and Asfaw was able to collect enough money to put a shelter on the wall of the churchyard and paper and pencils.

When Asfaw finished school having gained his O levels he decided to carry on with the school for orphans which he set up in the churchyard

He flung himself before the Emperor's car and begged for money and land on which to build a school for the orphans and poor children. The school was built from money donated by the Emperor, foreigners he had come into contact with and Ethiopians.

Asfaw decided to make sure his pupils did not live in the churchyard and instead were cared for by Ethiopian families. To make sure the children stayed at school he gave the carers help with food. The children also learnt to grow vegetables and care for animals. Sometimes as many as 1000 children went to his school which became the best in Addis Ababa.

In 2001 he was awarded the Worlds Children's Prize. His work has become well known. He died on 8th May 2021 and his school goes on.

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Christchurch Office, New Road, SN8 1AH
(Fridays, 14:30 to 16:30)

Brilliant International Musicians in St Peter's Church

Sunday October 17th 7.30pm

Hayley Myles (piano) holds certifications from distinguished institutions including the Mozartium (Austria), Imola Piano Academy (Italy) and Freiburg International Academy (Germany). Her programme will include Schubert Impromptus, Liszt Consolations and Chopin Nocturnes.

Sunday October 31st 7.30pm

Harry Fox (piano) and Alisa Liubarskaya (cello). Their programme will include César Franck's Violin Sonata transcribed for Cello and Piano; Tchaikovsky - Nocturne Op 19 no 4 and Pezzo capriccioso, Opus 62; Beethoven 'Moonlight' and 'Waldstein' sonatas.

Tickets at £13 (£9 for St Peter's Trust members) from the White Horse Bookshop, or on the door (cash or cheque only). Also available on zoom at £3.

Contact drnickmaurice@gmail.com

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News from the Churches

Marlborough MOP Fairs

Takes place over the weekend of 9th October (Little MOP) and 16th October (Big MOP). St Mary's is open 9am-5pm for time out to reflect, pray and enjoy some peace.

The Ecumenical Fraternal

hope to meet again on Wednesday 13th October 12.30pm at the Manse, 18 Priorsfield. All welcome.

Marlborough Area Poverty Action Group

Meets at the Friends Meeting House, The Parade at 7.30pm in October, date to be confirmed, please contact Betty for details: betty.dobson@btinternet.com

St Mary's Toddler Group

The Toddler club runs from 9.30-11 every Monday during the term-time in St Mary's Church Hall, Silverless Street, Marlborough. Please bring your own drinks and snacks for yourselves and your children. We want to keep people safe, and the Hall will be well ventilated so please dress warmly!

Christchurch

On September 5th, we had morning worship 'Cafe Style' and looked at how we can improve our Climate Change efforts to obtain our Bronze Eco Church Award from Arocha U.K. and develop our garden with more eco-friendly planting.

We were pleased to welcome participants in 'Ride and Stride' to raise funds for country churches on the 11th September.

We meet every Sunday at 10.30 and are happy to welcome anyone who is interested to join us for worship whether from Methodist background or not.

Harvest Festival is celebrated on 17th October at 10.30am.

October will see us host part of 'Dark Skies Fest' - check our new revamped website for dates of events and regular meetings <https://www.christchurchmarlborough.org.uk/>



The Bible Course – Explore the BIG story

Revd Stephen Skinner will be leading a Bible Study exploring this amazing book starting Tuesday 5th October at 7:30 on Zoom.

Contact Stephen for details.



Marlborough Anglican Team

www.marlboroughanglicanteam.org.uk/

Harvest Festivals 3rd & 10th October

This year we thank God for all his provision, particularly our surviving the pandemic thus far and the wonderful work of the



NHS. This is an opportunity for us to be grateful and generous and to help our own churches and others less well-off recover from the devastation of the pandemic.

During September we joined in with the Salisbury diocesan Generous Giving Stewardship campaign. This began with a week of prayer on 12th September and culminates with our response at Harvest.

Harvest Festivals with Thank Offerings will be held on 3rd October at 9am at St John the Baptist, Minal and at 10.30am at St George's, Preshute.

St Mary's 10.30am Communion Service on 3rd October will celebrate the Thank Offering in line with the other churches and the Harvest Festival at St Mary's will take place at 10.30am on 10th October.

Planned Services for October: -

8am Holy Communion at St Mary's (2nd and 3rd Sundays of the month) and St George's (1st and 4th Sundays of the month)

9am Weekly Services at Minal (Harvest on 3rd October)

10:30am Weekly Services at St Mary's (Harvest on 10th October) and St George's (Harvest on 3rd October)

5:30pm Weekly Informal Service at St Mary's *NB no 5.30 on 31st October due to the Ecumenical All Souls Service (see below)*

All three churches remain open for private prayer daily:

St Mary's 9am-5pm; St George's 9am-6pm; St John the Baptist 9am-5.30pm along with Prayer meetings on Wednesdays at 8am in St Mary's Church and in the afternoon via a zoom meeting at 5pm.

Prayer support is available for individuals or for your loved ones. Please contact the clergy, in confidence, see page 22. Please do be praying for our world and the church at this time.

All Souls' Service

The annual All Souls' Service takes place at 4pm on Sunday 31st October in St Mary's. This is an Ecumenical Service of Thanksgiving and Remembrance for those who have died during the past year.

Emmanuel

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

EMMANUEL
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Little Friends Toddler Group, Thurs 7 and 14 Oct, 10-11.30am at the Marlborough Community and Youth Centre. Come and enjoy free play, singing and story time, snacks for children and refreshments for carers. Book at littlefriends@emmanuelmarlborough.org

Explorers, Fri 8 and 15 Oct, 6-7.15pm at the Wesley Hall, Oxford Street, Marlborough. Our kids club for school years 3-6. Fun, games, tuck and a short Bible talk (bring 50p for tuck).

Friday Nights Fri 8 and 15 Oct, 7:30-9pm at the Wesley Hall, Oxford Street, Marlborough. Our youth club for school years 7-11. Friends, fun & faith – everyone welcome!

Christianity Explored Explore the life & claims of Jesus through Mark's gospel using this video-based course in a friendly, interactive setting. All are welcome to come and ask any question or just listen. For more details, email office@emmanuelmarlborough.org

Afghan Quiz: answers

1. Balkh
2. The Oxus
3. Ahmed Shah Massoud – (*Afghan Napoleon*. The biography of Ahmed Shah Massoud by Sandy Gall has recently been published).
4. The Great Game
5. Stoddart and Conolly
6. Idries Shah
7. The Russians invaded Afghanistan
8. Hakim Sanai
9. The Beast
10. The Durand Line
11. Lady Butler
12. Kabul

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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 November issue by Tuesday 12th October please.

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