



The Flowering tree.  
Iffley Church

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A candle in...

THE

# WINDOW

*News and Views from the Parish of Abingdon-on-Thames*

## Lent or Spring - or Both?

*Charles Masheder*

What a truly gorgeous season this is! For probably the majority of people, Spring is their favourite season, with life returning in nature and the days getting longer and warmer. Everywhere the spring flowers lift our spirits with their colour and scent. It is a happy coincidence that in the Northern hemisphere Lent and Spring emerge together. However there is an interesting ambivalence on the two words.

The word 'Lent' probably comes from the Latin 'lentus', meaning 'slow' and as every musician will know 'lento' means the music should not be rushed. The 'forty days' are days for slowly waiting, as the days gradually lengthen, and for self-examination which cannot be rushed. It is no good entering Lent, which we did a little while ago, wishing the time away; it is a God-given opportunity to give time for reflection on our lives, our relationship with God and our relationships with one another.

So much in our society is 'of the moment' and often without due consideration. The words, 'patience' and 'perseverance' are not in common parlance as they were. When you read this we will be two or three weeks into Lent and you may find that your hopes and plans for that time have not been met. I always say "Take heart, forget the past and use the rest of the time to re-engage." As we wait and watch the spring flowers, we have seen them first sprouting leaves through the ground and then being halted by the ice and snow and then forming buds which eventually are opening and revealing absolute beauty. It takes time!

The word 'Spring' would imply powerful movement and as the warmer weather takes over suddenly nature seems to be even more alive as one can almost see the effect on trees and plants. As it lifts the soul, one is reassured of real hope. The festival of Easter speaks of Christ bursting from the tomb, echoing the bursting of buds on the trees. Some of the resurrection images in art show real strength of movement. The life of Jesus at Easter is not just a return to living but a new dimension of abundant life and as we find in John's Gospel (10:10) Jesus saying "I have come that they may have life and have it in all its fullness". The image of Jesus as the Lord of the dance reveals that dramatic abundance of hope.

So yes, we are drawn into a season of watching and waiting as we continue in Lent and we will have to be prepared to walk through Holy Week, simply waiting patiently but sharing with Christ in his Passion. Then the fullness of our hope will be revealed in our Easter celebrations (however that may be this year...).

Doesn't this have resonances with our present Covid-affected time?..... we are waiting but not without hope; a wonderful hope of a life more free as the months lie ahead than we have been experiencing. Surely we will never take for granted those little pleasures of life which had to be temporarily removed. 'Wait patiently' as the Psalmist tells us – it makes the hope even more special!

## Coming Home: Tackling the Housing Crisis Together: The New Report from the Commission of the Archbishops of Canterbury and York on Housing, Church and Community:

*Geoff Meen*

Why should the Church be interested in housing? What does the Church have to add to conventional housing policies? Why do we need another report on housing? The recently published report of the Archbishops' Housing Commission delves into the ways in which the Church – from the top down to us as individuals - can begin to contribute to solving Britain's long-standing housing problems. In the view of the Commission, housing is not just about building houses, but about the creation of communities, based on five core values where housing should be "sustainable, safe, stable, sociable and satisfying". The Commission argues that the Church of England has a major role to play in realizing a vision for a long-term housing policy over the next twenty years. It also suggests that housing has received little attention in Christian thought and begins to develop a practical theology of housing which represents people's real life experiences. To quote from the report: "A Christian vision of Housing therefore is one that tells the story of the gospel in bricks and mortar".



The report's recommendations include the use of the Church's own resources, notably land, to support low-income housing. The Church Commissioners hold 6,000 acres of potentially developable land and are encouraged to set an example to other landowners by using its land for social and environmental purposes, including affordable housing, in line with the five core values rather than maximizing sale value. This would involve a change to the current legal framework which requires the Church to maximise value. Similar problems face sales of the large land stocks held by the NHS and Ministry of Defence. Additionally, the Commission recommends that clergy and lay activists should be offered training in housing matters – few of us know how to set up a Community Land Trust – and importantly the church community should "shift from crisis interventions to prevention". This implies a more pro-active approach to anticipating problems.

But the Church cannot act by itself and the report recognises the centrality of government policy. It recommends the development of a long-term cross-party strategy; a review of housing support for low-income renters; greater protection for private tenants; a reduction in the use of temporary accommodation; a greater voice for tenants; and the removal of unsafe cladding from tower blocks. None of these proposals are new and have received muted support from the Treasury because of the public expenditure costs.

But is it that easy? Housing policy makers, practitioners and researchers care deeply about the welfare of low-income households and the report's five values echo past policies designed to create sustainable and cohesive communities. None of the numerous recent reports into housing<sup>1</sup> has adequately identified easy solutions to the problems of neighbourhoods or affordability. This is because housing has to be seen in the context of the wider national economy, to which it always plays second fiddle. Changes in fiscal (taxation) and monetary (interest rates) policies can worsen affordability for those on low incomes since macroeconomic policies deal mainly with overall economic stability rather than their distributional consequences. Indeed, the capital gains that many of us have experienced from our homes arise primarily from fiscal and monetary policy<sup>2</sup>. Furthermore, there is a limit to what might be achieved by Church

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, the 2020 report of the Affordable Housing Commission and the 2016 report of the House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee enquiry into housing amongst many.

<sup>2</sup> The constraints imposed on housing by macro policy are explored further in G. Meen and C. Whitehead (2020), *Understanding Affordability: The Economics of Housing Markets*. Bristol University Press.

land sales. At first sight, sales are attractive and make a useful contribution but, over a twenty year plan, even if all the 6,000 acres were developed, it is unlikely to change the national picture significantly.

The Commission has less to say about owner-occupation – the main focus of current housing policy - although more than 60% of households are owners. Housing costs of owners are typically lower than renters as the majority of owners have no outstanding mortgage. Some (mainly economists) have argued that the replacement of Council Tax with a tax more directly related to the current market value of houses would significantly reduce the relative advantages of owners and would help low-income renting households. The failure to implement reform is a political decision since it would imply higher housing costs particularly for older homeowners living in the south of the country. That involves sacrifice by you and me and requires a change in our perception of our homes as an asset where property prices are always expected to rise. Rather than rejoicing at the notional increase in our wealth, it should be seen as a symptom of an underlying problem. As the report argues: "... housing can so often be seen as primarily a financial asset. Is this a problem – and, if so, why?" and "This is a challenge to a system that allows the price of land to rise inexorably, taking it out of reach of ordinary people. It reminds us that land and housing is a means of shelter and of sharing in the life of a society, before it is an asset to be bought and sold".

The Commission's recommendations are to be taken forward by its first Bishop for Housing, Dr Guli Francis-Dehqani, supported by an executive team, tasked with embedding the vision within the Church. The team will have a difficult task but, among the many problems, we should remember the long-run progress that has already been made. After the Second World War, 64% of households were without piped hot water to a bath, sink and hand basin. Now we no longer bother to measure shortages of this type. Progress is not impossible.

The full report can be found at:

<https://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/priorities/coming-home>

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Rob R adds some statistics to ponder:

(taken from the English Housing Survey 2019/20 and quoted by Shelter)

- 28% of private renters found it difficult to pay rent – this works out as almost 1.2 million private renters
- 61% of private renters had no savings
- households spent on average 33% of their household income on rent and this increased to 47% for people aged 16-24

Polly Neate, chief executive of Shelter, said: "These figures highlight again the bleak situation that many renters are in as they struggle to navigate the financial chaos of the pandemic. And they echo what our services hear on a daily basis - that many families don't have savings to fall back on and that young renters have been particularly badly hit."

"Our own research shows that almost 230,000 have fallen behind with rent since March, meaning thousands could face homelessness when the evictions ban lifts - despite Robert Jenrick promising that nobody would lose their home due to coronavirus."

## The Wait

*Jeanette Thomas*

In early February I had an experience which made me associate with the parable where Jesus heals the man born blind (John 9: 1-12). I was first formally diagnosed with Fuchs Corneal Dystrophy in September 2019 having found that my eyesight had been changing for the worse over the previous few months. This is an inherited condition which my father has to a lesser extent where the cornea gradually ceases to function causing blurred vision and eventually the only treatment is a cornea transplant. Often this is required in both eyes with the transplants beings done at least several months apart.

Soon after my diagnosis I decided that I could no longer see well enough to drive so resorted to getting around by bike. A cornea transplant is complex surgery and was to be performed at the same time as cataract surgery with only one surgeon in Oxfordshire able to carry out the procedure. Eventually I received a surgery date in April 2020 but then the pandemic hit ... The new period of waiting began with no hope of surgery for the foreseeable future. All the time my eyesight was deteriorating but I felt pleased that I could still carry on with most things (that were allowed during lockdown) including working from home.

As time passed I became more appreciative of my eyesight and thought more about people who were partially sighted or completely blind. I began to notice the raised studs on pavements, dropped kerbs and I was very pleased to have pedestrian crossings to help me get across the road safely when I could not see far enough to be certain nothing was coming. I had to be very careful where I rode my bike, fortunately Abingdon is good for cycle paths, and the light conditions dictated whether I could cycle or not. On January 1st I decided that I would have to give up riding my bike. Then there was the day I went for a walk and nearly had to ask someone to help me across the road as I could not see because of the sun. Most people would not expect someone in their mid-fifties to need help crossing a road and this made me think about people with hidden disabilities.

Finally I was given an operation date of 1<sup>st</sup> February only to hear that The John Radcliffe Hospital had cancelled all non-emergency procedures. My surgery was cancelled again but because there was no cornea available. Luck was on my side this time and a cornea became available and my surgery was reinstated and took place. This is the point that I started associating with the parable where Jesus heals the man born blind.

For about three days after my surgery it was uncomfortable trying to open my eye and my other eye was out in sympathy and did not really want to open either; this rendered me almost blind. It is quite amazing how you adapt to getting around the space that you know whilst seeing very little, but also how much help is needed for day to day things like meals. Just about everything that I thought that I could do to pass the time involved being able to see – reading, doing puzzles, finding a podcast to listen to, checking e-mails and letting people know how you are and even finding and dialling phone numbers. Fortunately I had good family support.

The association with the parable continues. I had been told not to touch my eye so it had got a bit sticky from all the eyedrops that I needed seven times a day. After six days I could open it a bit so could see a little. On day seven I had a check-up at the hospital. I was reprimanded for not cleaning my eye and once it had been cleaned it opened much more. Immediately after cleaning I had to try and read the letter chart. I started near the top and it was a revelation that I found that I could read down several more lines as my sight returned. It was amazing! I went home feeling like a new woman and that it was the first day of the rest of my life. I kept thinking about this parable and how my life was loosely similar.

I feel completely humbled by the whole experience and thankful for the family of the anonymous donor who agreed to donate their deceased loved-one's cornea, and possibly other body parts, to help restore someone else's life. As I had to wait such a long time for my operation it made me become more appreciative of so many things and the waiting period meant that I felt ready for my operation. If it had

taken place back in April 2020, I would not have experienced so much, so in some ways I am grateful for the delay. The pandemic has meant that I have not missed out on as many things as I might have done if it had been a “normal” year.

I am in awe of all the NHS staff who made my operation possible including, administrators, porters, cleaning staff and catering staff as well as the obvious doctors, nurses and healthcare assistants. Whilst lying in the ward I overheard conversations showing that they were short staffed and even had to miss their breaks but this did not show in the care that I received. It was wonderful when my anaesthetist arrived for my pre-operation discussion and I discovered that it was my fellow Abingdon bell-ringer who had been assigned to me. A friendly face made all the difference helping me to feel more at ease.

The pandemic and churches not holding public services meant that I could listen to the live-streamed service on Sunday 7th February whilst lying on the couch at home. Charles Masheder delivered a sermon where he revealed that his favourite hymn is All Creatures of our God and King. He preached about the gift of nature and how we are touched by its beauty when we look around. This was so meaningful for someone whose eyesight was being transformed. Now the waiting starts again for the operation on my second eye ...

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## Some thoughts on ‘getting the jab’

*Sue Pemberton*

Many of us have probably received at least our first Covid vaccination by now and I’m sure we are all very grateful to have received it. How fortunate we are that it is freely available to all, and is being rolled out at an unbelievable rate.

This morning I decided to join the Oxford Diocese service which started with a video by Bishop Olivia as part of the Give Hope campaign. This is an inter-denominational project to encourage local churches to support vaccination in their local communities, especially by targeting vaccine misinformation. Hope stands for:

- H**ave a conversation
- O**ffer information
- P**ractical support
- E**ngage and share

One thing which struck me particularly was Bishop Olivia referring to having the vaccine as an act of love, “Each vaccination taken up is an act of love for those around us. A way of showing our gratitude to all those that have made it possible. A sign of hope for the future”

There is more information about the Give Hope campaign at <https://www.oxford.anglican.org/give-hope/>

From the order of service I also learned about ‘Twin your vaccine’. This scheme invites you to make a donation to Unicef to be used for transportation and storage of vaccines and training of health workers to administer them. You can find out more at <https://www.unicef.org.uk/donate/jan21-em-covax/>. There has been a lot in the press recently about the ethics of worldwide vaccine supply and I’m sure many of us feel uneasy that people in poorer countries face a long wait. If you’ve received yours, you might want to consider a donation to help others to receive theirs as an act of thanks. It certainly inspired me.

## Piet Mondrian: Still Life with Ginger Pot II



To know what matters and what does not is the lesson that we all long to be taught. Mondrian's painting shows us a geometrical tangle of incoherent lines, which might or might not have a meaning. But at the centre of all this, pure, rounded and still, gleams the pot, the one satisfying certainty amid the existential chaos. It is only when we are still, when we open up to our inner reality, that the things in our life fall into coherence for us. We do not necessarily have to think this out: silence makes the order plain ...

Taken from 'The Art of Lent' by Sister Wendy Becket

Suggested by Marian Ward

## For the Interim Time

*Sue Sheppy*

Interim times come to us all throughout our lives. It may be a time between:

- a relationship that has ended and a new one beginning
- a time of bereavement and a move towards a new way of being
- leaving a job and an uncertain way forward
- reaching retirement and wondering what the future holds
- the house you've lived in for years and a new location.

Each year Lent can become one such interim time. A time when we try to slow down, live more simply, and make a conscious effort to re-examine our lives. This year of pandemic has felt, for many of us, like an extended Lenten period with many false dawns. We seem to be waiting all year, often with a decreasing sense of hope.

In-between times can be stimulating as we head towards a future that has not yet emerged. But they can also be daunting as they may involve grieving for the past, while being patient with the present, and stirring up mixed feelings of anticipation and anxiety about the future. For people of faith, if we are to continue on our journey, there will always be times of transition, and these can leave us feeling vulnerable. For example, when the image of God that we have held for many years suddenly seems inadequate, broken, that can be alarming. Likewise, when our ways of praying no longer seems to work. And yet, we feel God is drawing us on to new perspectives, new ways of thinking, new ways of praying, and new ways of seeing, which are compelling. We may go cautiously forward in trepidation but also with anticipation and hope. In Isaiah 43:19 God says: *I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?*

The Irish poet priest, John O'Donohue, has written a poem for just such times as these in which he encourages us to hold our confidence as we wait for our arrival in a new dawn.

## For the Interim Time

*John O'Donohue*

When near the end of day, life has drained  
Out of light, and it is too soon  
For the mind of night to have darkened things,

No place looks like itself, loss of outline  
Makes everything look strangely in-between,  
Unsure of what has been, or what might come.

In this wan light, even trees seem groundless.  
In a while it will be night, but nothing  
Here seems to believe the relief of darkness.

You are in this time of the interim  
Where everything seems withheld.

The path you took to get here has washed out;  
The way forward is still concealed from you.

"The old is not old enough to have died away;  
The new is still too young to be born."

You cannot lay claim to anything;  
In this place of dusk,  
Your eyes are blurred;  
And there is no mirror.

Everyone else has lost sight of your heart  
And you can see nowhere to put your trust;  
You know you have to make your own way through.

As far as you can, hold your confidence.  
Do not allow confusion to squander  
This call which is loosening  
Your roots in false ground,  
That you might come free  
From all you have outgrown.

What is being transfigured here in your mind,  
And it is difficult and slow to become new.  
The more faithfully you can endure here,  
The more refined your heart will become  
For your arrival in the new dawn.

## David's Crown

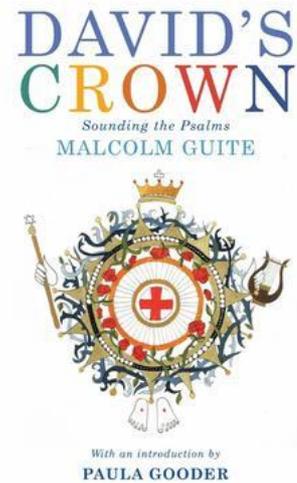
Rosalind Rutherford

One of the joys of being forced on line in the last year has been the opportunity to “go to” talks and events that I would never have attended in person. So when I saw a book launch advertised, featuring not just the author, Malcolm Guite, but also Paula Gooder, Roger Wagner (a religious artist), and David Taylor, an American theologian, I signed up at once – and was not disappointed. An hour later, my appreciation of the Book of Psalms had been increased and extended and I was off to read Psalms again and order the new book!

Malcolm Guite spoke of how in lockdown he returned to the psalms as source of solace and hope. That made a lot of sense to me, because a year ago, when we were thrust into lock down, I had also found myself returning to the psalms, because there I have discovered words and expressions for any experience. Anger, revenge, lamentation, fear, as well as joy and praise: they are all in the psalms. Malcolm Guite did not just read and recite the psalms – he began to plan a personal and poetic response to the whole book. The name of the virus – corona – started the idea of a structuring them in a way that represented a corona, an entwined coronet encircling a head. So he created links with the last line of each fifteen line poem also becoming the first line of the next poem. The circle is closed when the final line of the poem linked to Psalm 150 is the first line of Psalm 1. In Malcolm's words: “a chaplet of praise to garland the head of the one who wore the *corona spinea*, the crown of thorns for us, and who has suffered with us through the corona pandemic”.

Paula Gooder's contribution encouraged us to see the psalms not as a collection or anthology of sacred Hebrew poetry, but as a book (well, five books,) edited into a complete sequence that took us to the depths of human despair and then gradually led us out of that place of hopelessness to the hope and praise that is Psalm 150. For her, and following her, Malcolm Guite in this sequence, Psalm 88 is the psalm that marks the nadir, and which, unlike nearly every other psalm, is an unrelenting lament. She pointed out that this psalm is in the middle of the book if one counts up its total length. I was off to Psalm 88 the moment the talks ended. She also made sure that she reminded all of us who were listening that the Psalms are poetry from before the time of Christ and that although several are often used to reflect on Christian faith, such as Psalm 22 on Good Friday, this is not the way she as a biblical researcher would encourage – except that she was very happy to encourage us to read the series of poems as meditations linked to the psalms, which are unapologetically focused on Christ as the centre of Guite's faith and the lens through which he responds personally to each of the psalms.

I've bought the book and already, reading a poem alongside a psalm is offering me new insights into how I might respond to the psalms as a journey of faith. Guite's reflective poetry brings out and explores some of the riches of the psalms which I often miss as I read on to the next verse, such as the image of a tree planted by water in Psalm 1. However, the contrast between the poems, all in the same form, and the psalter, also reminds me how powerful the psalms themselves are, whether in the Coverdale translation (the one used in the BCP) or a more contemporary translation. The poems will offer images and ideas to reflect on, but I shall still return to the psalms themselves when I need a good shout or weep.



## How our Charities are Coping with Covid

*Peter Penfold and Tom Hardy, members of St Helen's Charitable Giving Group.*

The Coronavirus pandemic has significantly affected all our lives; but how has it affected the work of the charities which our churches have been supporting? Here is a brief résumé.

### People with Disabilities (PWDs)

The estimated 14 million PWDs in Britain have been especially affected by the Covid pandemic in so many ways – their health and well-being, access to health care, medicines, groceries, travel, work and education. For example the recent ONS (Office of National Statistics) report noted that 50% of PWDs who were receiving medical treatment before the pandemic are now receiving it only partially or none at all, and that PWDs with learning difficulties have a death rate from Covid six times higher than the average.

The **Dorothy Springer Trust (DST)** is working with PWDs in Sierra Leone and St Helen's has been supporting it financially for several years. Given the particular risks involved how has DST coped? As soon as the first Covid 19 case was reported in Sierra Leone in March last year DST, through the leadership of its dynamic head, Dr Abs Dumbuya, launched a Covid 19 Response project aimed at the half million PWDS in the country in conjunction with the Government of Sierra Leone's efforts. This involved a national public education programme including a song and video, composed and produced by PWDs, which were widely aired on all radio and TV stations. DST also organised the making of face masks by PWDs and distributed them plus sanitisation equipment to 20 different Disabled Persons Organisations. The project has been highly successful. Of the 4,000 reported Covid 19 cases in the country since the start, only one was a PWD, and he has since recovered. To date there have been only 79 Covid 19 deaths. Clearly Sierra Leone has learned the lessons from dealing with the Ebola pandemic and this has enabled DST to continue its regular training programme. A member of our Parish, Peter Penfold, who is the Patron of the charity, went out to Sierra Leone at the end of last year to launch the next five month training course for 10 people with various disabilities.



### Carers

Much has been written about the impact of Covid 19 on our carers and on Care Homes, which have borne the brunt of the pandemic. Initially it seemed that they had been forgotten by government. Much of the work of carers takes place at home and often by very young persons. It is gratifying therefore to know that one of the charities which St Helen's has been supporting is **Be Free YC** which supports young carers. Initially this was providing emotional support, social activities and training, but with the lockdown it was quickly realised that young carers confined to their homes would be under greater stress and anxiety with many taking on even more caring responsibilities. Support switched to online activities such as increased social media activity, a creative writing project with Fusion Arts and a collaboration with the Oxford Playhouse to develop an online radio programme. Be Free YC even held a very successful virtual Christmas Party for over 25 young carers. For the immediate future the charity continues to plan virtual activities for young carers as it continues to receive on average two or three new referrals per week, predominantly from schools but also from social care professionals.

Refugees

While staying at home and self-isolating have been relatively easy to achieve here in the UK, this is not the case with those hundreds of thousands of people currently living in refugee camps in the Middle East and Africa. The **International Refugee Trust (IRT)** spoke before Christmas about the additional strains that the global Covid 19 pandemic has put on their operating partners in these places. In Jordan, which currently supports thousands of refugees from the war in Syria, the Sisters working at the hospitals in Karaj and Amman have continued to provide care for these Syrian refugees. As we have seen in this country, in order for hospitals to keep operating, it is necessary for the staff to have personal protective



Nzara Primary School in South Sudan, run by the Comboni Sisters

equipment, but this has added a considerable expense to their already strained budgets. In South Sudan the St Therese Hospital in Nzara run by the Comboni Missionary Sisters has been earmarked as a regional site for the management of Covid 19 patients. This has required it to set up a screening site and isolation unit. And in Uganda at the Moyo Babies Home and the Redeemer Children's Home both homes had to operate in full lockdown mode in the early stages of the pandemic.

So the invaluable work these hospital and homes are doing continues, but the Covid 19 pandemic has placed considerable extra strain on their resources.

Local schools

As we are aware schools have been closed for many months all over the UK, and teachers, parents and cares have been trying to provide home learning opportunities to enable children to continue their education. **Trinity Learning** is based in Abingdon and had been delivering school based projects, but with the closure of schools they have been looking for new ways of supporting schools. They have developed activity packs for children, set up an on-line singing hub and held virtual Advent meetings before Christmas amongst many other activities. They have also put out an appeal for donations of old laptops and tablets, as many children have not been able to access these on-line resources without the necessary equipment. Again, the need to change their approach necessitated by the effects of the Covid 19 pandemic has been a challenge to their resources.

Conclusion

We have all had to adapt to new ways of working during the corona pandemic. Charities are no exception, many of them having to do so with a significant reduction in their incomes. The charities which St Helen's is supporting are clearly making exceptional efforts in the face of these challenging demands.

## Charities supported by St Michael's Church

St Michael's Church is supporting two main charities: Tariro and The Abingdon Bridge

**Tariro** (Hope for youth in Zimbabwe) is a small grant making charity based in the UK that raises money to support orphans or young people whose one parent can't look after them anymore. They fund between 45 and 50 young people who need help and support in four centres in Zimbabwe; supporting them through school and then with further education or practical projects until they are able to live independently. Tariro gives these children and young people hope when they have had none, it gives them a reason to live, and helps them to thrive.

At the moment during Covid restrictions Fr Stebbing reports that the children are not in school and the charity has made money available to them to buy books, pay for private tuition and equip some with IT gadgets so that they can access online teaching.

### The Abingdon Bridge



The Abingdon Bridge (TAB) is a local charity which supports young people aged 13 to 25 who find themselves in challenging circumstances. It aims to build resilience and to promote well-being and good mental health in young people and young adults through community and school partnerships. Some of the services it offers include 1 to 1 counselling, 1 to 1 support in developing healthy lifestyles and a SMART programme to help young people counter some of the negative effects of social media. The charity is one that is dear to the hearts of St Michael's congregation who have continued to raise money for it since it became one of the two charities supported in their 2017 anniversary year.

TAB is open and continuing to support young people. They are providing online support as well as face to face support with individuals and groups.

**For LENT 2021** St Michaels' have set a target of £500 to be divided equally between the two charities. If you would like to support them, the most convenient way to donate is by bank transfer to: NatWest Bank, Account no: 61580376 Sort code: 600101, account name Abingdon Parochial Church Council St Michael's Church; please use the reference LENT 2021. Alternatively cheques made payable to 'Abingdon Parochial Church Council St Michael's Church' may be sent to The Treasurer, St Michael's Church, Parish Office, St Helen's Court, Abingdon OX14 5BS. In the present circumstances it is not feasible to receive cash donations. Please make donations before Palm Sunday so that a total can be announced on Easter Day.

## Charities supported by St Nicolas' Church

During lockdown the St Nicolas' congregation have continued to support the Abingdon Foodbank, the Children's Society, local homeless charities and Christian Aid – all of whom have had to respond to increasing need due to Covid.



## Wartime Reflections:

*Our children and grandchildren return to school on March 8<sup>th</sup> after the best part of a year of home schooling. Will the experiences of this anxious time have a lasting effect on their lives, not just in possible lost earnings<sup>3</sup> but also in well-being? How will they recover the lost classroom hours, the lost playtimes with friends? Susan Scott asked those in the parish who lived through WW2, a period that is, rightly or wrongly, sometimes compared to 2020/21, for their memories. They make fascinating and enlightening reading.*

Colin Casemore:

As a 2 year old I moved with the family from Salisbury to Hove. I remember a little later, perhaps when I was 3 or 4, finding Canadian troops in tanks outside our house in the road around a small green space, and also in the local park a mile or so away. We spent many seemingly happy hours playing round the tanks and collecting cigarette cards from the troops. I also remember going outside to see people pointing to the sky as doodle bugs were spotted overhead, but was too young to connect to any bombing or destruction, although I was aware of some local bomb-damaged houses. After the war we went to play on the anti-aircraft gun emplacements on the Downs a few hundred yards away. The limited diet we had thereafter during rationing rather passed me by as my mother always seemed able to feed the family despite the shortages. The food was somewhat repetitive, but wholesome, and for me the same meals became something to look forward to - cottage pie, toad-in-the-hole, and other such dishes, usually regular and on the same day. I remember tinned sausages were a special treat. Our favourite play area was actually a large bomb crater called the Dump behind the local pub where we used the crater to play hide and seek and other invented games. The later years of extended rationing merged into routine whilst I started schooling. I never really looked back at the war in any detail and was much more interested in school and playing sports of all sorts.

Susan Dominey:

I was 7 to 12 years old during the war and remember it as an exciting time in Grimsby and not at all frightening. Helping Daddy move little German/British flags each day on our map, going to see people searching for their possessions in bombed houses, watching the British bombers each night going past on their way to Germany at one-minute intervals, the pleasure of interrupted lessons at school due to air raids. I must have been a very callous child! Only one incident, when my father returned from work at the hospital (anaesthetist), in tears, frightened me. I didn't ask why. Obviously my parents' anxiety was not transferred to us children.

Silvia Joinson:

Berkshire/Oxfordshire was a safe area and children were evacuated to it or moved by family. This meant quite a change of friends; people left in 1945/6 and others came or returned. I remember the influx of children of Harwell scientists and others who'd spent the war in US or Canada. My grandmas in London were frightened of the bombs and came to us for respite. At some stage I went and visited in London and slept in the Morrison shelter which was a big steel box in the front room. Like Susan Dominey I remember the big map on the wall near the radiogram and the moving of flags; one had to be very quiet when the news was on! I remember keeping chickens and growing veg, helped by our various visitors. So for me the main impact was movement of people and the fact that my father died in 1943. This was from leukaemia - he worked at Bletchley park and got home when he could. There was then a railway link to Oxford.

Rosemary Smith:

I wasn't born until 1948, but have heard many stories from my older siblings, including VE Day reminiscences. Their memories all seemed to be jolly, including sheltering - fighting - under the stairs until they got their Andersen shelter, listening when the doodle bug went quiet; walking along railway lines, picking up pieces of coal for mum; following horses to pick up manure for the veg patch. One of my brothers got lost, and when taken to the Police Station, was offered cake, whereupon he stuffed

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<sup>3</sup>Possibly as much as £40,000 over a lifetime, mainly concentrated among those from disadvantaged backgrounds, according to the Institute of Fiscal Studies.

several extra pieces up his jumper to take home for his brothers and sisters. From our house, there was a good view of Portsmouth Dockyard, and they watched the bombing, praying it would miss our Dad, a welder, who was in the thick of it. There were various other relatives camping in the sitting room who had been bombed out, and many a stray sailor who'd missed their train ended up on the sofa enjoying the odd bottle of dandelion wine.

My uncle, home on leave after winning the Victoria Cross, said that they should have given the medals to the women. What he had done was nothing in comparison with what the women had to put up with, looking after this lot!

As a post-war baby, I grew up with a feeling of having missed out. Yes, there was death, hunger, destruction and sadness ... but they didn't dwell on it. It wasn't that they repressed their emotions. They just didn't nurture a "poor me" attitude. They were grateful for what they had and didn't complain about what they couldn't change. They took pride in what they were doing, however menial. And most importantly, they had each other! A camaraderie that continued all life long. They were poor, but they set the bar high.

Jill Gant:

I was a 1-year old when war was declared and so spent my infancy in wartime. We lived in Surrey between Tolworth (near Kingston) and Epsom. We were therefore on the bombing run into London. I distinctly remember the sound of the siren and sound of bombers going overhead. I don't have a lot of memories of childhood generally but many of them are of this period. My dad was an air raid warden; there was a community shelter in the road on the grass outside our house. I remember being in it and being rather cold and uncomfortable. Indoors my sister (born in 1941) and I slept under a Morrison shelter in the dining room I seem to remember being told not to wake her up but one night I was reciting the contents of a tea service out loud (!) and she said 'teapot', so I was rather apprehensive! We also had a family of three living in our bedroom because for some reason they had nowhere to go. When I started school I used to see the bombed out houses and once went in to have a look.

The most memorable experience though was during a sunny afternoon. Dad had a box of day-old chicks and he was transferring them into an adapted cold frame with heating to grow them on. At just this time the siren went and we had to run immediately into the house and lie on the floor, leaving the chicks to run around the garden. A bomb dropped very close to our house and the blast blew out all the windows. All I was worried about was the survival of the chicks! As soon as we could we went back into the garden to look for them. We managed to catch them all and put them safely into their lovely warm house.

In late spring 1941 my mum, who was pregnant with my sister, took me to stay with my grandmother in Bedfordshire. She didn't say good-bye when she left. I was up the garden with my gran and didn't know she was going. She thought it would be better not to upset me!! As I was nearly three they admitted me in the little school across the road where I learnt to make pom-poms! Later in the war, my mum took my sister and I to Lancing where we stayed with a rather formidable aunt. I remember having milk shakes in the milk bar there!

After my father's death I had all his diaries; in the one for 1942 (?) there was an entry which said, 'last night was the first night without an air raid.'

It was a really stressful time for my parents. Looking back on it I think they protected us very well from their anxieties.

Marian Ward:

I grew up in South Wales, far from any real threat so, unlike city dwellers there was no environment of fear. Like many of that generation, my early years were spent in a single parent household with fathers away at war, or in my case, with a father in a sanatorium suffering from TB. Widowhood brought uncertainty and my mother's anxiety about bringing up her two remaining children during wartime communicated itself to me despite her best efforts and the support of a close community of honorary

aunts and uncles. So, looking back, I realise that that vague atmosphere of anxiety coloured my view of the future and had a lasting influence on my attitude to life.

Having said there was no danger, one of my aunts was knocked unconscious by a stray exploding bomb ditched by German bombers returning from a raid on Swansea. This flattened the house next door and the telling of this event, much embroidered, gave me great kudos later in my school life. The war reached out in other ways. Another aunt took in an evacuee from Birmingham. She was several years older than me and I followed her around, not really understanding very much of what she said. She can't have been very impressed by life in our quiet little backwater and the delights of picking raspberries from the garden as she didn't stay long.

I was a 'phoney war' baby so very few memories surface of my early years except I remember fighting off the attempts made to make me try on a gas mask, even if it was disguised as Mickey Mouse. Starting Nursery School, I have vague memories of being shepherded down some dark underground place. These air raid shelters later became smelly sanctuaries for marauding sheep, down off the hillsides to the valley bottoms where they had discovered that the pickings from overturned dustbins were choicer than the marshy grass of the hill farms.

I remember my mother's anxiety when she carelessly opened the kitchen door one evening allowing light to escape and was threatened with a summons by the Air Raid Warden watching for such incidents from the hillside above. My father had been a prominent local councillor so word went out and probable fines and 'public disgrace' were reduced to a caution.

Of course there were happy memories. Sweets. Word would go out that sweets were in stock. Queues would form and when it was my turn I would be lifted up to the high counters (very little opportunity for shop lifting in those days) to make the agonising choice of spending my coupons on the selection available. Could the sweet ration really have been only 2 ounces of sweets per week? Favourites were sherbet dabs, which were cones of paper enclosing yellow sherbet. This was consumed by licking a finger and dipping it into the sugary powder. Bliss.

Later in the war came food parcels from America. Distributed to the schools these food parcels contained the biggest and reddest apples I had ever seen and drinking chocolate. However, why waste it in drinks when it made brilliant chocolate dabs? But nothing surpassed the bounty of Christmas. A very much older cousin used to save up his sugar ration for the year and distribute his purchases between another young cousin and myself at Christmas, usually on Christmas Eve. Never mind waiting for Father Christmas, I refused to go to sleep until I had heard his knock on the door and could relax dreaming of the goodies in store for me the next day.

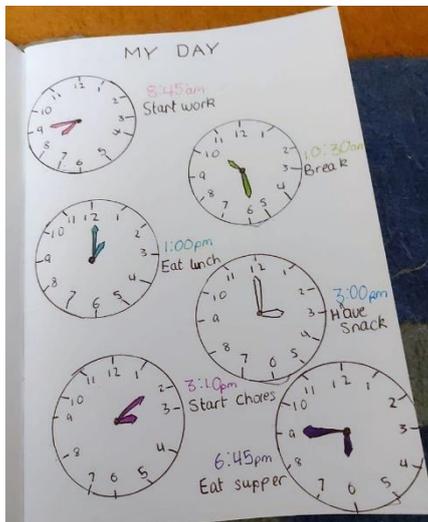
Travelling in wartime was challenging. Vivid memories survive of the first train journey I made at the age of 3 with my mother to stay with our erstwhile vicar, who was now Rector of a parish in Mid Wales. This journey involved 3 changes of trains and with all station names removed (to confuse the enemy) this was a very anxious journey with my mother overcoming her distrust of the rowdy servicemen passengers to inquire frequently whether we had reached Caersws: the equivalent of 'Are we there yet?' We spent quite a bit of time staying at the Rectory throughout the war. To me it was enormous and grand with a long drive through cow grazing fields, an inner courtyard where mustard and cress was grown on damp sacks and a live-in maid and 2 gardeners. I used to have to help 'Gwennie' hang out the washing. This was in a special drying garden, where the privet hedges concealed the Rector's 'smalls' from visitors to the house. Gwennie disappeared at some stage in the years that followed as did the younger of the two gardeners: both drawn away to war work. They were replaced with what I now realise were 'paying guests' and would have been quite common during war time when people escaped from cities for greater safety to the countryside.

These visits to Montgomeryshire were happy times and crowned by a memory of being lifted up to pull the bell rope to ring the church bells to celebrate the end of the war.

## Junior Church

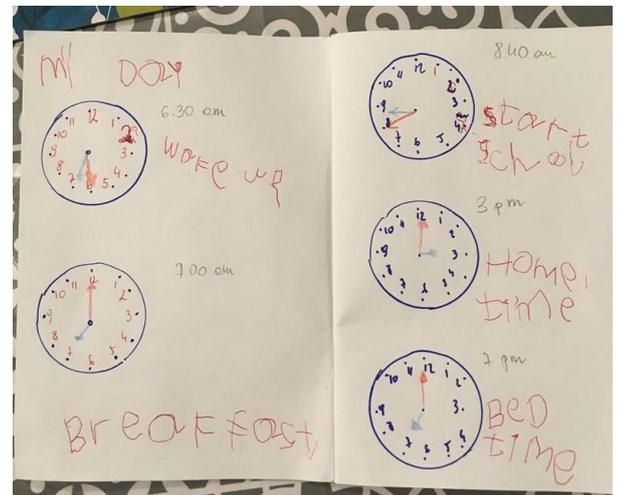
*Sue Pemberton on behalf of the Junior Church leadership team.*

Junior Church continues to meet via our Facebook Group. This month we have been following the Gospel readings apart from 14<sup>th</sup> February when we had a St Valentine's Day special! We looked at different ways of loving, partly based on clips from children's films. We remembered that Jesus taught us to love one another.



Jemima's Day!

On 7<sup>th</sup> February our story described how Jesus spent His time – going to the Synagogue, healing people, spending time with His friends and going away alone to pray. Jesus knew what His purpose was and also knew that it is important to have a balanced life with time for relaxation and prayer as well as work. This is a really important lesson for us, especially at the moment when our lives have been turned upside down. Jemima and Julia drew clock pictures to describe their day.



Julia's Day!

21<sup>st</sup> February was the first Sunday in Lent and we had reports of yummy pancakes on Shrove Tuesday! We heard about Jesus being baptised and going into the wilderness. He knew that God loved Him and was pleased with Him. We made card photo frames for ourselves, decorated with words God might use to describe us, to remind ourselves we are precious to God.

We finished the month being star struck! As well as the Gospel reading about Jesus knowing that he had to go to Jerusalem and be killed, we also looked at the story of Abraham and Sarah in Genesis. God told them to leave everything and travel to a new land. When they arrived, God told them that their descendents would be as numerous as the stars in the sky – a bit of a surprise as they were getting on a bit and didn't have any children at that point! The theme of both stories is trust in God, even when the going is tough or we don't know what God's plan is for us. We made star pictures to remind us of trust and there may be some star-gazing tonight!



Lily's stars



Maia's stars

Many of our children and young people will return to school next week for the first time since before Christmas. May I ask for your prayers for all children & young people, parents, and everyone who works in schools as they all embark on this big step towards a more normal life.

## The Seven Minutes of Terror

*Rob Rutherford*

It's a very short but intense wait.

You have spent the best part of perhaps 10 years working towards this moment.

If it fails you will have nothing to show for it.

Not just you but a huge team of people have worked towards this goal of landing the Perseverance Rover on Mars so that its programme of scientific exploration can begin. The seven minutes refers to the time it takes to get from the top of Mars' atmosphere to the surface.

It took about 11 minutes for radio signals to travel from Earth to the spacecraft so there was no way to control its landing manually. It had to be programmed in advance, the machine behaving like a robot, deciding what to do on the basis of information from its sensors. If you have ever tried to write 'code' you will know how challenging this is. Try writing out the instructions for making a cup of tea to realise how many assumptions you make!

Landing on Mars is not easy! The atmosphere is very thin so it offers little braking. A parachute has to be deployed and the craft has to know its position precisely. The aim was to land within an 8km circle close to what had been identified as a dried up river delta - a place to drill rocks and package them for later collection. The key question, of course, is whether life evolved somewhere other than earth. After the parachute did its work, the 'sky crane' engines had to fire up to slow the spacecraft down still further and when hovering, the rover was to be lowered on cables and deposited gently on the surface.

You will know that this sequence of operations was successful and the Rover landed safely at 8.54pm GMT on Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> February 2021. All this was photographed from the sky crane and this photograph (probably to become iconic) was published on Friday 19<sup>th</sup>.



By the following Monday (22<sup>nd</sup> February) a video had been downloaded and released to the press. If you missed it you can see it here: <https://mars.nasa.gov/mars2020/multimedia/videos/?v=461>  
The relief in the control room was palpable!

## *A scene from Death of Democracy, Jan 6, 2021*

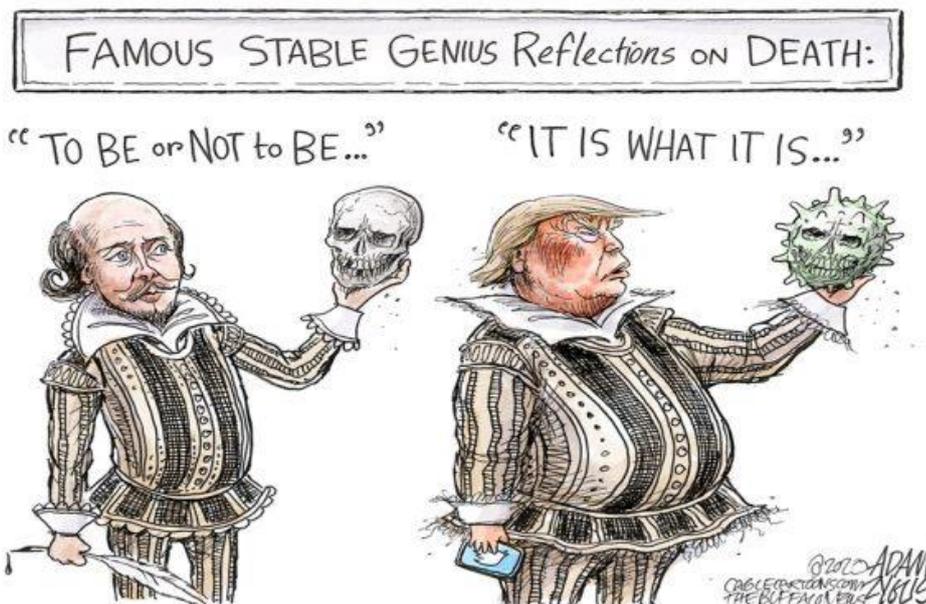
*(Tom Bewley with apologies to William Shakespeare)*

### **Mark Antony Trump**

Friends, allies, countrymen, lend me your ears.  
 I come to bury Biden, once for all,  
 And Pence and Romney, all who dared to steal  
 My justly won election. What e'er they claim,  
 The victory was mine, was mine, my friends,  
 All you who voted in your tens of millions  
 To keep me at the helm of our great state.  
 They that have done this deed are honourable,  
 So they claim. They're not, they're liars,  
 One and all, as they sit there upon the Capitol,  
 Democrats and even some who call themselves  
 Republicans, Judases all, betraying  
 Our great country. I only speak right on;  
 I tell you that which you yourselves do know  
 To ruffle up your spirits and to move  
 The very stones of our great land to march  
 Upon our Capitol and mutiny.

*[Exeunt citizens]*

Mischief, thou art afoot. Take thou thy course,  
 Cry 'Havoc' and let slip the dogs of war!

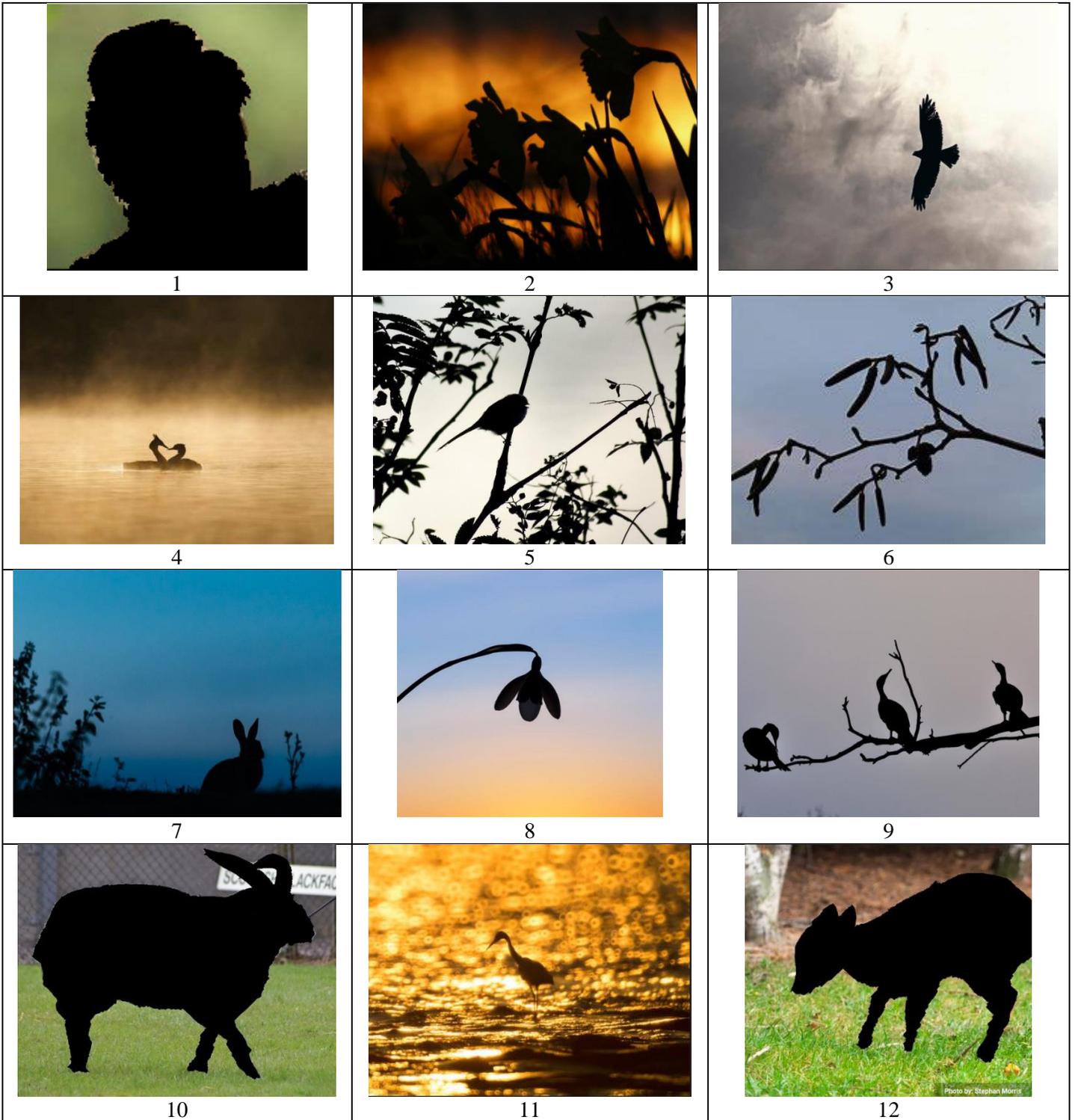


Adam Zyglis Buffalo News

# Abingdon Springwatch

Abielle Hallas

Can you identify the sillouettes? Everything should be visible in Abingdon we think!



## Abingdon Springwatch Answers:

1. Tawny owl  
Photo: <https://www.fredaldous.co.uk/products/rspb-sound-card-tawny-owl>
2. Daffodil  
Photo by: Capella Boltador, [https://www.flickr.com/photos/capella\\_888/2412971514/](https://www.flickr.com/photos/capella_888/2412971514/)
3. Buzzard  
Photo by: Martyn Fletcher, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/134832191@N08/47944925562/>
4. Great-crested grebe  
Photo: <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/photos/stunning-silhouettes-of-animals-in-the-wild/ss-AAvmVti#image=2>
5. Long-tailed tit  
Photo: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/463800461597071141/>
6. Catkin  
Photo: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/514184482444045493/>
7. Rabbit  
Photo: <https://www.robortcanis.com/blog/tag/british-wildlife-photography-awards/>
8. Snowdrop  
Photo by Tim Gainey, <https://fineartamerica.com/featured/sunrise-snowdrop-silhouette-tim-gainey.html>
9. Cormorant  
Photo by: John Carrel, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/46355638@N00/5297859651/>
10. Jacob's sheep  
Photo: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacob\\_sheep](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacob_sheep)
11. Little Egret  
Photo by: Takashi Hososhima, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/takashi/8738815960/>
12. Muntjac deer  
Photo by Stephan Morris, <https://www.bds.org.uk/information-advice/about-deer/deer-species/muntjac-deer/>



Snowdrops at Harcourt Arboretum

## Useful Weblinks:

To take part in the Diocesan services led by the Bishops and to find live streams from other churches:

<https://www.oxford.anglican.org/coronavirus-covid-19/livestream/>

Services: for the latest news see the church websites:

<https://www.abingdon-st-helens.org.uk/>

<https://www.stmichaels-abingdon.org.uk/>

<https://www.stnicolasabingdon.org.uk/>

Page for Church of England links: services, daily readings etc

<https://www.churchofengland.org/>

### RESOURCES ACCESSIBLE BY TELEPHONE

Diocesan Eucharist: Recordings of most of the Sunday services should be available from around 11am each Sunday. Simply call 01865 920930 and, once connected, dial 0 for the full service or 1 a shortened form. Standard call rates apply.

Daily Hope A Church of England resource offering hymns, prayers and reflections as well as full services via a freephone number 0800 804 8044.

**FOOD BANK.** The Abingdon Foodbank is still very busy and anxious to keep up the support even though churches are closed. **Northcourt Road (Christ Church) is open to receive donations on Tuesday and Friday mornings between 9.30 am and 1.00 pm.** Their main long-term needs are: Long life milk (not soya), sugar, fruit squash, tinned meat and vegetables. They also give out a lot of washing up liquid, bleach and toilet rolls. You can also make donations by sending a cheque made out to *North Abingdon PCC Christ Church*, clearly marked 'for Food Bank', you can also donate via CCA website at <https://cca.churchsuite.co.uk/donate/fund/njbejebi/foodbank> or the Parish office have details if you want to donate via online banking.

And finally,  
from Dave  
Walker of  
Cartoon  
Church:

## THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

THE VICAR IS ON  
'THOUGHT FOR THE DAY'



PEOPLE SHE HOPES  
ARE LISTENING



THE BISHOP



ALL HER SOCIAL  
MEDIA FOLLOWERS



A TV TALENT SCOUT

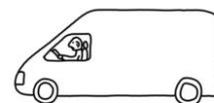


HER MUM

PEOPLE WHO ARE  
ACTUALLY LISTENING



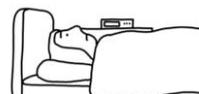
SOMEONE DOING  
THE WASHING UP



A DELIVERY DRIVER



A TENNIS FAN WITH  
TUNING DIFFICULTIES



AN INSOMNIAC USING THE  
RADIO TO GET TO SLEEP

CartoonChurch.com

**Thank you** to all contributors and to you, the readers.

The April issue will be published on Easter Day!

Please get thinking and email ideas and contributions to [Candle@abingdonparish.org.uk](mailto:Candle@abingdonparish.org.uk)

We would also welcome responses to any articles published here or in previous issues.