# Issue 6: July 2024



St Ethelwold

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# Hazy Summer







Where? – See Page 16

#### Into Green Pastures

I remember to this day the essay I wrote when I was about to leave my curacy in 1983; I titled it 'setting sail'. That was a moment full of excitement but also of grief. I was leaving behind clergy colleagues very dear to me and a congregation which had in so many professional and personal ways enabled me to grow and thrive. But the lure of a post and eventual research at Oxford was a draw which we all knew I couldn't resist. So set sail I did.

Looking ahead to November, I already feel the creep of those same feelings. Yet there are two differences. First, my horizon of life and ministry is not like the rising of the sun at dawn but more like its setting at eventide; and second, the waters of the seas into which I will set sail, the seas, I mean of 'normal' life and church life, are so different from the mid-1980s when I first came to live in Britain, study at Oxford and minister in the Church of England.

As I've been considering the open space of retirement's new horizon, I find myself partly inclined to go back and partly inclined to go forward. By 'go back' I mean the desire to return to the States, my native land, in order to spend time with my sisters and perhaps with the small cohort of relations which I have there still. One deficit of pastoral clerical life, compounded by a move abroad, is that I have spent so few of the occasions when families get together - Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter, birthdays, anniversaries -- with my natural, birth family. I need to rectify that.

Visits there will be more frequent but still just occasional since I am now a British subject and England is home.

'Going back' also means picking up the threads of interests and projects (study and writing, I mean) which I've had to abandon through the years of pastoral ministry. So I have in mind returning to work on the 20th-century's major Romanian Orthodox theologian about whom I wrote the first introductory book in English. Much of his work awaits translation into English and I'd like to work at that. Then there is a book intermittently worked on in years past, but not recently, which I've provisionally titled *The Caroline Gospel*, an editorial endeavour really, assembling passages from 17th-century English ('Anglican') theologians based on the Gospel of St Luke. This is an almost wholly forgotten world of a 'classic' period in the evolution of our tradition. I'd like to retrieve it as a resource for the spiritual life, for scriptural interpretation and for a better understanding of 'who we are' as a tradition of faith and life. I realize that study of the past is indeed now passé in contemporary Britain and the Church of England, but I still hold to the view that different ages can, in fact, and should speak meaningfully to one another. Such a *florilegium* of texts from our forebears of the Jacobean and Caroline reigns promises a rich feast to savour. I would also like to re-start a biography project about my spiritual father who shaped my life as a teenager and young priest. More and more I see his enduring imprint on me. He was a remarkable man and bishop, and he deserves to be remembered through a judicious and sympathetic study. Maybe I can provide that.

'Looking ahead' means building on interests and insights gained through my deeply enriching period of life and ministry in Abingdon. I hope that will be for me taking forward the momentum I have in regard to Henri Matisse and the 'modern movement' and sacred art.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Priest professor Dumitru Staniloae; *The Gift of the World. An Introduction to the Theology of Dumitru Staniloae* (T & T Clark: Edinburgh, 2000).

Shifting my locus on mid-twentieth-century personalities back to England, I want to dig thoroughly into the life and writings of Evelyn Underhill whose remarkable witness as a historian of the Christian spiritual tradition and as a 'soul doctor' and retreat leader needs renewed attention. Of all those, be they ancient or modern, whom I read about the spiritual life, I feel most on her 'wave-length'. (Gosh, won't you feel relief to be rid of a vicar so stuck in the twentieth century?!)

But lest I spend all my time at a desk or in a library, I plan to make the most of having a London address with all the amusements life in the capital offers viz-a-viz church and culture. And when that gets tiresome and just too wet, there is the constant allure of the continent via Eurostar. I reckon France will be a regular destination, certainly Paris but also the cities, towns and villages further afield. Abingdon has given me some precious Italian friends too, so I want to pick up those threads as well.

Russia remains fixed on my horizon once hostilities cease and travel to St Petersburg becomes convenient again. Were my connection with the Orthodox Theological Academy to be re-established in person rather than just by email (as at present) I would be delighted. I love that city and the friends I've made there since 2013.

What a satisfying thing it is to be a grandfather! I suppose that of all the motivations which have led me to 'jump ship' prior to my seventieth birthday, the desire to have more time and energy for my son Michael, his wife Anna and the boys Theo and Kostya, is preeminent. My family circumstances throughout the eighteen and half years I will have served in Abingdon - that is, mostly alone in the rectory - have given the parish far more time and concentrated energy than would have been the case if I'd been sharing life with a wife and resident family. It's time for me to redress the balance by delving into family life without the constraints of parish ministry and the drain on my emotional resources which heart-felt priestly ministry involves. What will that look like? I'm not sure. What I am sure of is that now's the time to find out.

You may have noticed that I've said nothing about continuing ministry within the Church of England. Perhaps you know that for the first six months to a year a newly retired cleric is not given a Permission to Officiate [PTO]. That's a sensible discipline. After forty-two years of active ministry, it's right to have to step out of the stream. How easy it would otherwise be to remain in ministerial auto-pilot mode! But what happens after the required break? Frankly, there I join the crowd of 'agnostics anonymous'. I will just wait and see. If the Church of England might find my knowledge and experience useful, then it will have to approach me and ask for it. If not, I'm content to plough my own furrow and 'go to ground'. I am, I know, an 'old-fashioned' sort of priest and don't swim comfortably in today's currents of ecclesial life. Will there be a satisfying place for me? I'm not sure. I'm ready and content, therefore, to live with our spiritual ancestors. They have much to teach, and I still have much to learn.

Most of you know the motto 'Man proposes, God disposes'. A Christian way of putting that is to say that we must trust that God's providential hand is guiding us, guiding *me*. My hopes and plans notwithstanding, may the Good Shepherd lead me into retirement's green pasture and to its still waters.

Charles Miller, Vicar and Team Rector

# High Summer

Bone-white, bone-dry, the path traces a line along the cliff edge, bright ribbon unwinding, as sunshine pours down in streams of molten gold.

Earth, parched and cracked, hard as stone, throbs with the heat's pulse; dry grasses by the path scrape and rattle in a fitful breeze.

Inland, fields already harvested lie bare and bleached, while in the distance, hills slump, shimmering in blue and grey as they recede into the haze.

Beyond the cliff edge, the quilted sea stretches to meet the sky, crinkled and shining, as sunshine silvers the ripples with sparkles.

A calm sea, yet constantly shifting, bands of navy, turquoise and sea-green fade to the horizon where boats, motionless smudges of grey, wait for the tide to bring them into port.

Susan Gee



Sunset from the St David's peninsular in Pembrokeshire, looking at a rocky outcrop near Ramsey Island. © David Bevington

### How did we get the New Testament?

Rosalind Rutherford summarising Agnostics Anonymous

Have you ever wondered how you would find out what the followers of Jesus of Nazareth believed, if you had been living about twenty years after Jesus died? Or even twenty years after that, how could you learn about what Jesus said and did? John Barton pointed out, in his recent talk to Agnostics Anonymous, that the earliest parts of the New Testament were, according to the great majority of bible scholars, Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians and his letter to the Christians in Galatia. "What might you have thought," he asked, "if all you had to read was the letter to the Thessalonians? What would be the good news that you might discover?"

John explained that there are two key questions to consider if we ask how we got the New Testament. How and when did each book come to be written and how did they come to be collected and recognised quite early on to be "canonical" - the important texts to be passed down for all future Christians to know?

The order in which the books of the New Testament are arranged does not match the chronological order in which they were written. The gospels, which tell the story of Jesus' earthly life, were not written first. Most scholars are sure that the letters definitely by Paul were written several decades before any of the gospels, and the first two letters were 1 Thessalonians and Galatians. So this means that the gospels are extremely unlikely to have been written down by eyewitnesses. Anything we, and the early Christian communities, the first readers of the epistles, might know about Jesus is based on stories and sayings passed down by word of mouth. However, stories handed down, particularly from the teaching of the apostles, carried authority – certainly more authority than we might give to oral history and stories handed down today.

The other question that John addressed was the creation of "the Canon" - the recognition by the Church, as it grew in different cities and areas, that a particular collection of letters, and gospels, (together with Acts and Revelation) were the books that held what was needed to grow in the Christian faith. We tend to think that the New Testament is the foundation of our Christian belief, but it might be more accurate to say that our Christian faith is the foundation of the New Testament. It did not take long for general agreement to emerge on which books are part of the New Testament because we know that in 367AD, the books of the New Testament were the same as we have today. A letter written by St Athanasius in that year lists the books.

These are the books quoted in sermons; these are books for which commentaries were written. Another sign that books were regarded as part of the New Testament is that they were copied and circulated in the form of books (known as codices, or a single codex) rather than scrolls which were how most other holy books were written and circulated. The New Testament is the only holy book written and passed on as a book rather than a scroll – though we do not know why this is.

John's talk left us with thoughts and questions which matter, but for which we do not have obvious answers. How have we ended up with texts of the quality of the four canonical gospels, which, while not including exactly the same material, are consistent in how Jesus is depicted and his teaching recorded? There are other contemporary texts but those regarded as being part of the New Testament do seem to have a quality which they share and other texts do not. The New Testament, written nearly 2000 years ago, can speak to us now.

We were left with one final thought: the way Christianity was transmitted then is the way that it still is today: through sharing memories, stories and experience.

# The Abingdon Passion Play 2024

Here are some comments from some people that saw it and some that took part in it:

The greatest pleasure for me was to see the various Churches in Abingdon coming together in witness.

It was brilliant, very moving and told the story simply and with fun as well as awe and sadness. Having the two women in the café as commentators on the scenes was a stroke of genius. Jesus and Herod were wonderfully professional. Others were less so, but it didn't matter.

I have been part of all four of Abingdon passion plays and one of the enjoyable features is working with people from other churches. Performing this time in June sunshine meant the audience could sit in a relaxed atmosphere to enjoy the play.

It was amazing to experience a group of people from very different nationalities, backgrounds and Christian traditions developing into true brothers and sisters in Christ through a common purpose. I was especially touched by how everyone shared our family's joy on the birth of my granddaughter, and their prayers and support when she contracted viral meningitis between the two performances on the day of the Passion Play itself.

I have not done anything like it since I was at school, but people were welcoming and helpful, and I enjoyed doing it - though it was quite a time commitment. Sure, I muddled my lines but we kept the story going....

An inspiration - to start playing the flute again after 40 years - for which I am very grateful.

Knowing some people who knew people who knew people in the thick of it, I had picked up some anxiety that the play would not be ready in time. In fact it all seemed to come together wonderfully. It must have been a great shared enterprise - a metaphor perhaps for the common purpose of sharing and caring that we need as a nation? Theologically, the best result of the play for me was that discussion afterwards sent me back to John Barton's wonderful book 'Love Unknown'. If you missed the play (or even if you didn't miss it), just make sure you don't miss John's book!

I loved learning new songs in different languages, they were very beautiful. I liked marching and waving ribbons walking on to stage.

It was really good to work with others. A play helps you to imagine what it was like to be there - it made me wonder how I might have reacted to the empty tomb. Puzzled and frightened probably. I'm still thinking about the theology. Jesus as a planned sacrifice doesn't sound right but Jesus as the image and word of a loving God does.

The cafe setting at the side, providing an occasional commentary on what was happening, was a good idea. The music was a very effective contribution.

A truly moving and very imaginative production. I particularly liked the cafe theme, and clever means of narration and explanation to the many coming to the Passion for the first time. The actors came across really well, and we enjoyed the camaraderie and meeting lovely people. Really well done!

Contributors, in a random order: Norman Dawson, Richard Pyke, Oliver (aged 6), Gwen Bevington, Beryl Clements, Halcyon Pope, Bill Murray, Susan Halstead, Rob Rutherford, Silvia Joinson and Tony Richmond

# The Abingdon Passion Play in Pictures: Photographs © Silvie Pope <a href="https://www.sylviepope.com/">https://www.sylviepope.com/</a>





























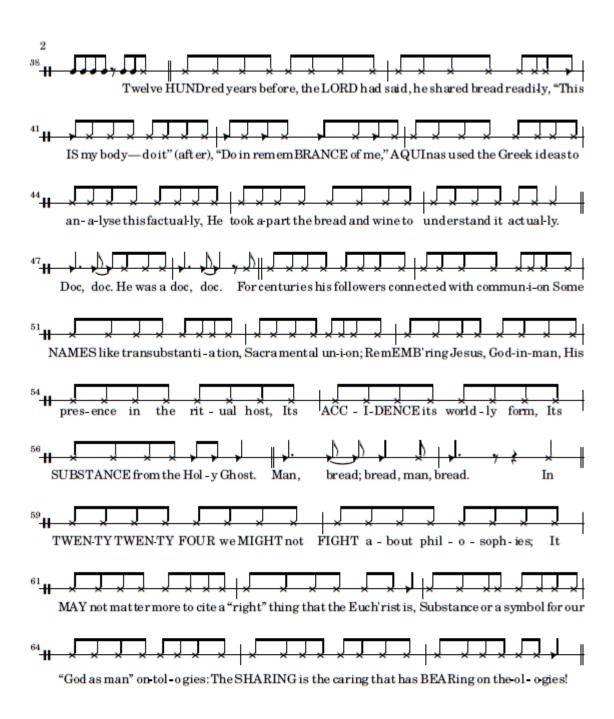


Martin Kimber was keen to tell St Helen's Quest group about Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) and about different interpretations of the Eucharist. He decided to do it with a hip-hop rap! We thought that you might enjoy it too. It is best spoken out loud so do try performing it!. Keep a strict rhythm. You need to know that Thomas Aquinas had a nickname – The Dumb Ox - clearly an unflattering description but despite this, he went on to become a formidable theologian.

#### Thomas Aquinas with apologies to absolutely everybody

Martin Kimber 2024





Music engraving by LilyPond 2.20.0-www.lilypond.org

#### Word of the Month

You might have noticed that the word 'ontology' sneaked its way into the 'rap'. We decided to ask Keith Ward to define it for us:

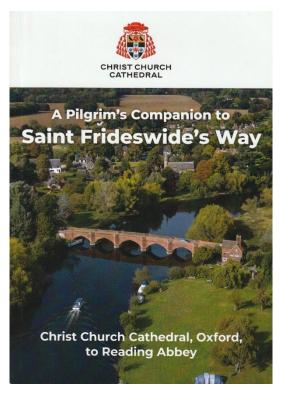
Ontology is the study of being, and is one of the most abstract yet fundamental parts of philosophy. It asks what sorts of things there are, and how they relate to each other. For instance, does mind or consciousness exist, as well as atoms and sub-atomic particles, or is there a creator God. Obviously, Christians think there is a God, but what is the nature of God? Is God infinite, or eternal, or personal, or omnipotent? It must be said that philosophers disagree about these things, and the interest lies in the reasons they give for their opinions. It seems that no view is obvious or absolutely certain, and believers and unbelievers alike should accept that.

## St Frideswide's Way



In the June edition of this magazine (page 9) you could read about this new pilgrimage route from Oxford Cathedral to Reading Abbey. It joins St James' Way to Southampton and forms part of the Camino Ingles to Santiago de Compostela.

On Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> June, a group of about 20 pilgrims started from St Nicolas Church, after a short act of worship, to walk the second day from Abingdon to Wallingford.





# MU Matters, with lots of Cake!

Elizabeth Dawson. (MU Branch Leader)

We have 2 forthcoming events, both in August, which I would like to bring to your attention.

# Away From It All

Firstly, a fund-raising cream tea for "Away From It All" holidays (AFIA), with a raffle and Bring and Buy, at St. Nicolas' Church on Tuesday, 6<sup>th</sup> August, 3-4.30pm. £5. AFIA is a Mothers' Union Charity which provides holidays and days out for needy families in dioceses up and down the country. We support family holidays in Oxford diocese.

'I never thought that Mothers' Union would consider me but they gave me the chance to see my first grandchild and that meant so much to me. It has changed my view on what I thought was a group of 'God-ladies' to a group of ladies that show God cares for people like me.'



Secondly, "Children Heard and Seen" (CHAS) have once again asked our Mothers' Union group and Abingdon parish if we could help provide cakes and goodies for their summer residential. This will be held at Hill End Camp near Cumnor, from 15<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> August. Apparently, our cakes are one of the highlights of their weekend.

CHAS supports children and their families affected by parental imprisonment. Between March 2023 and May 2024, they have supported, face-to-face, 118 children from 61 families across Oxfordshire. Parents can self-refer to the charity for help, often after advice from the police, and there are strong links with schools in Oxfordshire who can also refer affected children.

CHAS began in Oxfordshire several years ago, but the charity now helps families across the UK. This year is their 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Towards the end of 2023, CHAS launched a video, "Invisible Children" at Westminster. It is hoped that this will provide real momentum towards their campaign to establish a national statuary mechanism for identifying and supporting children with a parent in prison. Media opportunities have included national TV and Sky News. The aim is to have parental imprisonment officially recognised in the UK by autumn 2025, and to gain pupil premium funding for children of prisoners in the same way that youngsters with a parent in the armed forces are entitled.

I intend to take our cake contributions to Hill End on Thursday, 15<sup>th</sup> August and to help with their preparations. Could you please let me have cakes by Wednesday, 14<sup>th</sup> August.

They are also requesting help with preparing meals. Let me know if you are interested.

Thank you so much for your support for CHAS in the past. They are always very grateful.

e.m.dawson.15@outlook.com 01235-526415 07816-397139 9, Grundy Close, Abingdon. Ox14 3SD.

#### **Summer Events**

Compiled by Louise Heffernan



Music at St Flelen's Church Abingdon

Saturday 20th July at 7.00pm

# **Hymns and Pimms**

Enjoy refreshments and sing your favourite hymns with

St. Helen's Church Choir,
directed by Peter Foster.

Vote for your favourite hymn; slips and ballot box in St Helen's church until 14th July; open every day 9.30 to 3

Tickets £12 to include 1 free drink, (under 16s free) at the door or from Ticketsource. All proceeds to St. Helen's Church







#### **Cream Teas**

St Michael & All Angels' Church, Park Road



Saturday 27th July 2.30 - 4.30 pm

Tea/coffee with scone/cake £5
Proceeds to church funds
All welcome

A Parish lunch, to mark the retirement of the Rector, is booked at the Hilton Hotel Abingdon, for 1pm on Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2024. The cost of the 2-course lunch is £25pp or £12.95 for the under 12's. Menus, and how to book and pay are on the notice boards of each church.

Closing date is Sunday August 4<sup>th</sup>. Any queries please contact Susan Scott

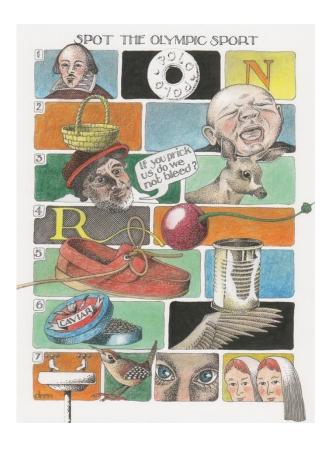
tel: 01235 522960 or

susan.scott21@btinternet.com

ABINGDON CHORALE are presenting their first ever Summer Concert "Hey Nony Nony" in aid of The Abingdon Bridge on Sunday 14 July at 5 pm in St Michael's Church. Join them for an hour of gorgeous music, followed by refreshments. They will sing a selection of songs on a Shakespearean theme, with a few jazzy numbers thrown in for good measure! Tickets price £10 (£2.50 for under 16s) are available at the door.

# Quiz 1 The Olympics

©Simon Drew with thanks! http://www.simondrew.co.uk



### Ride and Stride:

Alexandra Green et al

It is only two months to start planning for the annual Oxfordshire Historic Churches Trust (OHCT) cycle ride. This year it is on Saturday 14th September. For those of you who haven't taken part before, it is a chance to cycle or walk to as many or as few churches as you like, being sponsored to raise money for a church of your choice and the OHCT. if you don't feel energetic, welcomers are needed in church to greet participants, sign sponsor forms and pour much needed glasses of cold drinks. If you can spare an hour or some pedal power for this important cause (all three churches in this parish have re benefitted from OHCT) please look at the website <a href="https://ohct.org.uk/ride-and-stride/">https://ohct.org.uk/ride-and-stride/</a> and look out for further details in the weekly newsletters.

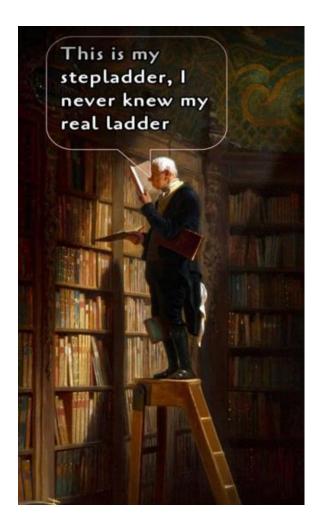
The OHCT have put together a collection of churches with 'quirky features' which you might like to visit on your travels. 'Curiouser & Curiouser' is a collection of churches with quirky features chosen by Oxfordshire-based Clive Fewins (author of 'Be a Church Detective', a children's guide to interesting churches) for you to enjoy exploring. Whether an unusually carved doorway, a giant wall painting or a stairway to nowhere, there is plenty to explore and discover in Oxfordshire's historic churches.

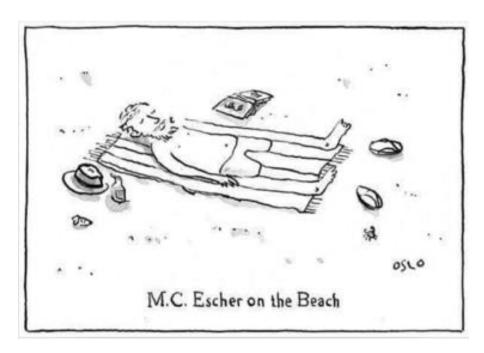
See <a href="https://ohct.org.uk/c-and-c/">https://ohct.org.uk/c-and-c/</a>

# Cartoon Page

With thanks to Rob's Facebook feed...







# July Quiz: Holiday Destinations!

- 1. The seaside setting for 'Flowery Twats'
- 2. A town of interest to Christians a famous Synod was held there and to Goths.
- 3. Site of John Betjeman's grave
- 4. 'Fisherman's Friends' was set and filmed here
- 5. The island of Robert Hooke's birth
- 6. Who composed 'Farewell to Stromness'?
- 7. Tracey Emin lives here at least some of the time!
- 8. A bay named after an outlaw
- 9. "Didn't we have a lovely day the day we went to ......?" Fiddler's Dram song 1979
- 10. A seaside town, home to Greene's Pinkie and mob and now appropriately Green.
- 11. Strictly the best place for a dance.
- 12. Where dinosaurs roamed and Mary Anning searched for them.
- 13. Lots of herbs to be found at this northern seaside town's fair. Are you going there?
- 14. Welsh seaside resort, part setting for Gavin and Stacey.
- 15. Where to meet a clerical smuggler? (R Thorndike)
- 16. Will you hear the singing fighters?
- 17. Where one hundred figures stare out to sea.
- 18. Fancy a ride at the largest Goose Fair?
- 19. Northern Europe's most complete Neolithic village
- 20. 2,4,8,16....
- 21. Where to find Blue John
- 22. The setting of Ian McEwan's novella of 2007
- 23. Whilst here, why not visit the world famous pencil museum!
- 24. Gorgeous cheese!
- 25. Did the monks enjoy getting wet here?



The Old Harry Rocks near Studland, Dorset. Photo: Rob Rutherford

July Quiz Answers:

# Quiz Answers!

Fountains Abbey in Yorkshire .25.

> Cheddar .42

Keswick .53

Chesil Beach 77

Castleton, Derbyshire / Peak District - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blue\_John\_(mineral) .12

(g)nildu(o)Q .02

Skara Brae / Orkney - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prehistoric\_Orkney .6I

Nottingham - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nottingham\_Goose\_Fair .81

Crosby Beach - https://www.biennial.com/project/antony-gormley-another-place/

Harlech - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Men\_of\_Harlech .91 .51

Romney Marsh - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doctor\_Syn

Barry Island **.**۲۱

Scarborough .81

Lyme Regis 15.

Blackpool .11

Brighton .01

Bangor 6

.71

Robin Hood's Bay in Yorkshire .8

3. 4. 5. 6. 7. Margate

Peter Maxwell Davies

The Isle of Wight

Port Isaac in Cornwall

St Enodoc Church, Trebetherick, Cornwall

Миітьу 7

Lorduay Ţ.



Sink-wren-eyes-women

Roe-wing .9

Shoe-tin ٠,

К-спету .4

Jew-doe ξ.

Basket-bawl 7

M-inim-brad

#### **Useful Weblinks:**

Services: for the latest news see the Parish Website:

https:abingdonparish.org.uk

for Church of England links: services, daily readings etc

https://www.churchofengland.org/

**FOOD BANK.** The Abingdon Foodbank is still very busy and anxious to keep up the support. Northcourt Road (Christ Church) is open to receive donations on Tuesday and Friday mornings between 9.30 am and 1.00 pm. The foodbank also operates from Preston Road Community Centre. Donations are welcome there too between 12.00 and 2.30pm on Wednesdays. You can also donate money by sending a cheque made out to *North Abingdon PCC Christ Church*, clearly marked *'for Food Bank'* or via the Foodbank website

https://abingdon.foodbank.org.uk/give-help/donate-money/ or the Parish office has details if you want to donate via online banking.

Finally, from Dave Walker:

# BREAKING UP

HOW CHURCHES CELEBRATE THE END OF TERM

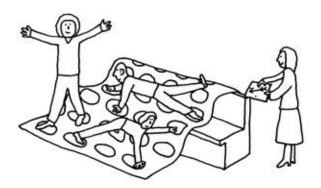




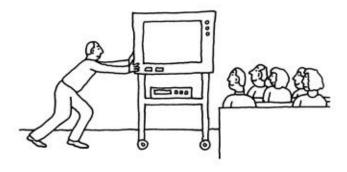


NON-UNIFORM DAY

PRIZEGIVING







A VIDEO INSTEAD OF THE SERMON

CartoonChurch.com

Thanks to all contributors and to you, the readers.

The next issue will probably be published on September 8<sup>th</sup> - ideas and contributions to Candle@abingdonparish.org.uk