

APRIL 2022

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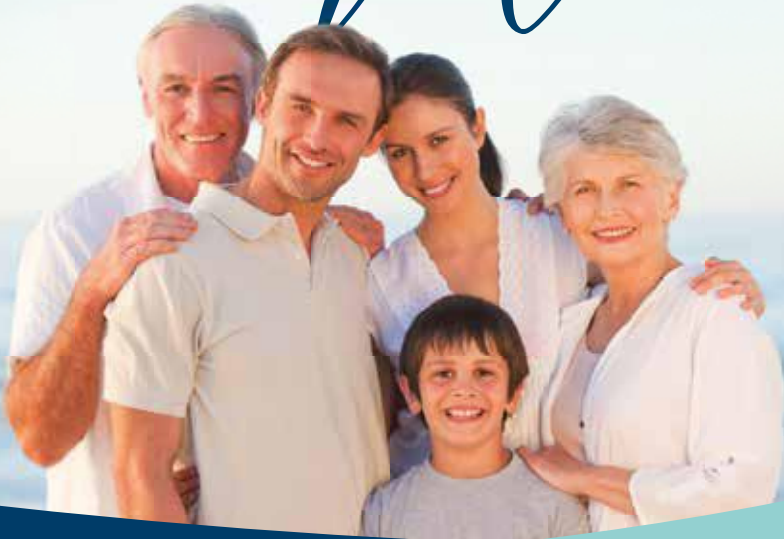


Lymington Parish News



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Lymington Parish News

St Thomas' and All Saints' Churches



St Thomas' Church
St Thomas Street
Lymington
SO41 9ND

All Saints' Church
All Saints Road
Lymington
SO41 8FD



Services

For details of Sunday and midweek services, please see the Diary inside.

Enquiries

There is a great deal of information to be found on our website:

www.lymingtonchurch.org

To enquire about weddings, baptisms, funerals, church and hall bookings please contact our **Parish Office** which is open at St Thomas' Church, Monday to Friday, 9.30a.m.—11.30a.m.

You can 'Meet the Vicar' by appointment on Tuesday evenings.

Administrator: Mrs Suzie Napleton

office@lymingtonchurch.org 01590 676194

Contacts

Vicar: The Revd Canon Peter Salisbury (day off Friday)
peter@lymingtonchurch.org 01590 673847

Churchwardens: *To be elected at the Annual Parochial Church Meeting on 30 March 2022.*

LLM Emeritus: Mr Malcolm Ward, 01590 679651

Organist & Choir Director: Mr Martin Penrose, ARCO, LTCL,
penrosemusic@aol.com 02380 864439

Verger: Ms Helen Pocklington
helenpocklington@hotmail.co.uk 01590 673750

Tower Secretary: Mr Larry Stace, 01590 682417

Magazine

Publication date: 1st of each month. Please submit copy to the Editor by the 6th of the previous month.

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Subscriptions: Susan Canter-Visscher 01590 679666



THE VICAR'S LETTER

Dear Friends,

I have two things on my mind at the moment: Ukraine and COVID. COVID because I tested positive and my busy world was brought to an immediate halt. Ukraine because it's unspeakably awful and, with nothing much else to occupy myself, I am glued to the 24/7 news feed from that viciously constructed hell.

On the COVID front I've discovered a few useful things: 1) Strong salt water is a very good treatment for sore throats; 2) Paracetamol is very helpful for getting to sleep, especially if you suck the capsules rather than swallowing them; and 3) A hot bath with lavender oil is excellent for clearing your lungs.

Dozing in bed with a laptop playing in turns Al Jazeera and BBC News channels makes for strange dreams. And some of them involve being not-very-Christian towards gatherings of Russian artillery shelling Mariupol. And it was hard not to cheer inside when watching fuzzy footage of UK-made rockets dispatching Russian tanks. Only later do you remember that the contents of the cans are people too.

One commentator mentioned David and Goliath. President Zelensky, being Jewish, would appreciate that one. But Goliath didn't bludgeon to death David's family, women and children. Goliath strode out onto the field and had the guts to face David. Perhaps a closer parallel is Herod's slaughter of the innocents.

When someone is as unspeakably cruel and vicious as Herod, it is hard not to wish them ill. I suppose whatever happens to them is in God's will, not ours. So if Putin is in Herod's place perhaps we should just wish him Herod's end. To quote one source, "More than 2,000 years after Herod the Great succumbed at age 69, doctors have now settled on exactly what killed the king of ancient Judea: chronic kidney disease complicated by a very uncomfortable case of maggot-infested gangrene of the genitals." (See also Acts 12:20-23)

Another hopeful parallel is that all Herod grasped for turned to dust with him. The child he tried to kill so violently grew to be the Prince of Peace. Evil, even as it speaks its character in violence, seems doomed to destroy itself rather than its enemy.

The crucified and risen Jesus shines resurrection light into the darkest places. Alleluia!

Best wishes, Peter.

MONTHLY EVENTS

Zoom Details – Prayer (1)

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89529902640>
pwd=QVQxTGxjODdwV3ROT1gxM2NWUjN0dz09
or from a landline phone: 0203 481 5240; Meeting ID: 895 2990 2640:
Passcode: 2020

Zoom Details – Social (2)

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85117060907>
pwd=SThHqWROTGRxSVROMEvvZlprTFJvdz09
or from a landline phone: 0203 481 5240; Meeting ID: 851 1706 0907:
Passcode: coffee

+ St Thomas' Church is open daily for visitors and private prayer +

REGULAR WEEKLY EVENTS:

Sunday:	8.00am	Early Communion
	9.15am	Choral Communion
	11.00am	Life & Soul Informal Service
Monday to Friday:	9.00am	Zoom Morning Prayer [1]
Monday:	12 noon	Monday Lunch - STH
Tuesday:	10.00am	Toddler Group - STH
	11.00am	Zoom <i>Taketime</i> Ignatian Meditation [1]
	5.00pm	Meet the Vicar
Wednesday:	10.00am	Poetry Corner - STH (2nd Wednesday on Zoom)
	11.00am	Holy Communion
Thursday:	10.00am	Vistas Café - STH
Saturday:	9.00am	Zoom Prayer for the work of the parish [1]

APRIL EVENTS

Sun 3

PASSION SUNDAY

Services as usual

3.00pm

Baptism of Raven and Ruby

4.00pm

Lent Course

APRIL EVENTS

Sun 10

PALM SUNDAY

Services as usual

Holy Week led by The Revd Canon Peter Salisbury, theme 'Transitions'

Mon 11	11.00am	Holy Week Communion
Tue 12	11.00am	Holy Week Communion
Wed 13		NO Poetry Corner this week
	11.00am	Holy Week Communion
Thu 14		MAUNDY THURSDAY
	7.00pm	Maundy Thursday Liturgy
Fri 15		GOOD FRIDAY
	10.00am	CTLP Good Friday Service - URC
	12 noon	3-hour Service
Sat 16	10.00am	Messy Church Easter Brunch and Activities - STH

Sun 17

EASTER SUNDAY

5.30am Dawn Communion Journey - Lymington Bandstand
10.30am Easter Communion
4.00pm Easter Evensong

Mon 18		NO Monday Lunch today
Wed 20		NO Poetry Corner this week
Sat 23	7.30pm	Nova Foresta Players Concert

Sun 24

EASTER 2

Services as usual

Tue 27	10.00am	Toddler Group restarts - STH
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MAY EVENTS

Sun 1

EASTER 3

Services as usual including
3.00pm **Baptism of Autumn**

— — —

CTLP - Churches Together in Lymington and Pennington

URC - United Reform Church, High Street



*We should like to wish
Happy April Birthday to...*

Isaac Yates + Amelia Gates
Alexander Parkhouse + Sophia Wright
Georgia Wood + Anna Thomas

*This month's cover: Easter Garden, St Thomas' Church 2021.
Photo: Nigel Mussett*



St Thomas' Church
Lymington

Saturday 16 April

Brunch from 10.00am in St Thomas' Hall



Easter Activities
Food, Bible stories, songs and messy fun.
EVERYONE WELCOME!

Info and updates at www.lymingtonchurch.org/messy-church

Several friends have recently sent donations to The National Deaf Children's Society in memory of the late Christine Cummings. These were acknowledged in a letter received from the Society in March: "I was very touched to receive the very kind donation of £440.00 in memory of Christine. We're very grateful you chose to support our work with deaf children and their families at this difficult time. As we slowly emerge from these challenging times, gifts like these are helping to provide the vital support, advice and reassurance that deaf children need to grow up with confidence. Thank you for helping bring about a world without barriers for deaf children."

Churchwardens' Notes

A Time of Change for the Parish

This year will see several major changes for St Thomas' and coping with change is often a difficult process. As I am sure everybody knows, Peter will be retiring from ministry this year after thirty years as a priest. For the last seventeen years we have had the privilege of having him as our Vicar. And not just Peter, of course, but Sarah's ministry has been core to what we have achieved and become. It is a common misconception that clergy spouses, and particularly wives, are seen as somehow part of a joint appointment and then a whole raft of unrealistic expectations is attached to them. It is not so. However, we have been so blessed with having Peter *and* Sarah with their joint leadership and input and mutual support. There is so much love and best wishes from the congregation and beyond for their retirement and whatever God has in store for them in the future in His service.

This leaves us with an Interregnum, or a vacancy in more modern parlance. Personally, I cannot think of any organisation or business that would actively seek to have a hiatus between one leader/CEO/head departing and the appointment of their successor, and I think the Church is very odd in this regard. The statistics would bear out my reservations. The norm is that attendances tend to fall during the vacancy, and the longer it lasts the greater the decline. All is not bad, however, as attendances pick up within the first year of a new incumbent and can grow beyond the starting position, if the vacancy is only for six months or less.

Peter is not the only retiree this year. Gill Maunder, our Parish Administrator, is also leaving us. Her ever smiling, ever helpful, quiet, efficient and personable ways make for very large boots to fill. We have already had an answer to prayer with a new Parish Administrator being appointed before Gill finished at the end of March. This enabled Gill's successor to learn the many facets of the role during a short period of overlap.

The last change concerns the Churchwardens. Wardens only serve for a year at a time and have to be re-elected every year if they want to serve longer; the maximum continuous period is six years. Both Maureen and I informed Peter before Christmas that we would not be standing for re-election at this year's APCM. This means that we are looking for two new Wardens. Given the nature of the changes taking place with the search for a new incumbent, and following Peter's lead, we are looking for Wardens to oversee the Interregnum - so most likely for just eighteen months, with a maximum of two years. All matters begin and end in prayer so please pray for God's guidance and providence in these potentially difficult circumstances. If you feel the call to warden the vacancy then please speak to Peter or either of us.

David Bridges



THE ORGANIST PIPES UP!

My rather poor pass at O-Level Geography is perhaps reflected in the fact that I had no idea 'Guiting Power' was the name of a village in rural Gloucestershire – until I heard it on a radio programme the other day.

On the other hand, I was well aware that it was the name of a 20th century hymn tune by John Barnard and sung to the words 'Christ triumphant, ever reigning', and that set me thinking about how many of our familiar hymn tunes are named after places.

Sticking with Gloucestershire, *Down Ampney* – Ralph Vaughan Williams' familiar tune to the hymn 'Come down o love divine' – is named after the village where RVW was born in the local vicarage in October 1872. Vaughan Williams also gave a place name to the folk tune he adapted and set to the words 'I heard the voice of Jesus say'. He chose *Kingsfold* as it was the name of the small Surrey town where he first heard it.

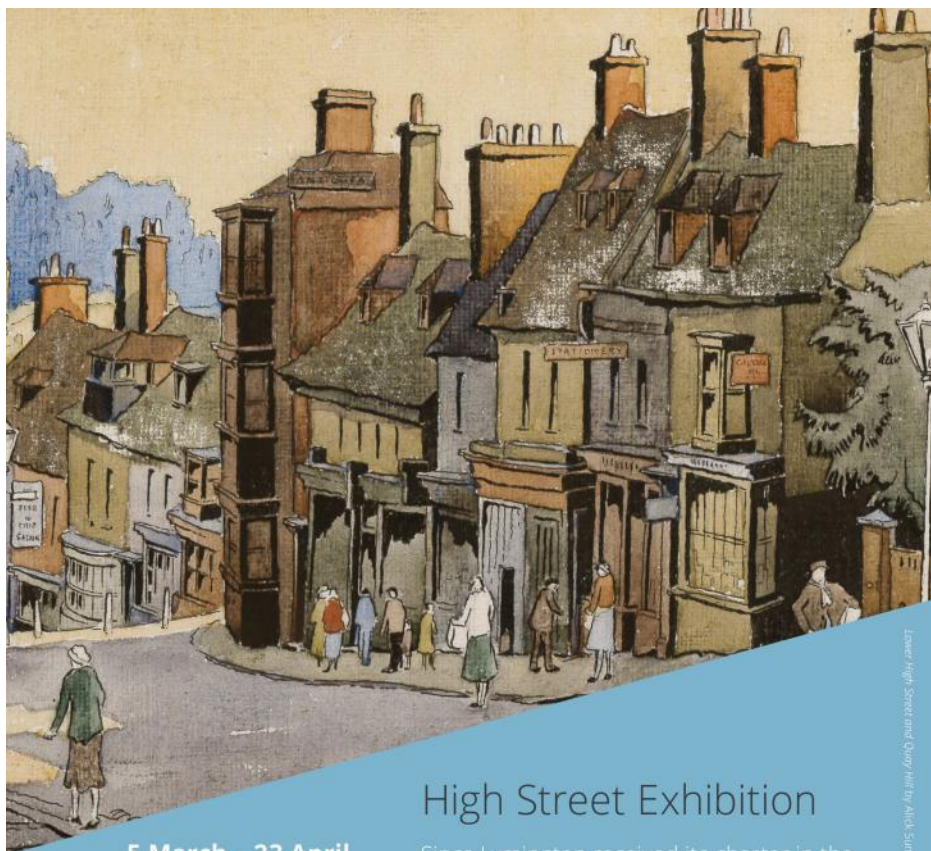
S. S. Wesley's tune of *Hereford*, sung to 'O thou who camest from above', gets its name because he was organist of the cathedral there at the beginning of his career in the early 1830s.

Thinking more locally, Winchester gives its name to two hymn tunes. *Winchester New* is sung to 'Ride on, ride on in majesty' and 'On Jordan's bank', while *Winchester Old* is the tune we sing at Christmas to 'While shepherds watched'.

Perhaps the best known of all is *Crimond*, thought to have been composed in 1871 by Jessie Seymour Irvine and named after the Aberdeenshire village church where her father Alexander was minister. Other place names given to well known hymns include *Richmond*, *Sussex*, *York* and *Wareham* to name but a few.

I've written one or two psalm chants over the years, but never a hymn tune. If I ever get round to it, I think I may go for *Hammonds Green*, which is the name of a local district close to our home in Totton.

Martin Penrose



Lower High Street and Quay Hill by Alice Summers. © St Barbe Museum Collection

5 March – 23 April

**Open: Mon – Sat
10am – 4pm**

High Street Exhibition

Since Lymington received its charter in the 12th century the High Street has been the beating heart of the town. This exhibition explores the past, present and future of the High Street through objects, photographs, drawings, maps and interviews collected from and by those who have lived, worked and celebrated there.



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St Barbe Museum and Art Gallery is an independent registered charity no. 1018779





The Blue Lamp Trust is a Hampshire based registered charity (charity number 1137786). It is a unique partnership between Hampshire Police, Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service, business and the community. The Trust promotes community safety and security in Hampshire through two schemes - The Bobby Scheme and the Cyber Bobby Scheme.

The Bobby Scheme

The Bobby Scheme operates throughout Hampshire. It provides practical help with home safety and security to those over 65, vulnerable due to circumstance, disabled (over 18) and victims of burglary and domestic abuse.

A full crime prevention and fire safety survey is carried out by one of our trained, police-vetted fitters. They will provide both general and specific crime and fire prevention advice to improve home safety. When appropriate our fitters will fit such items as locks, spy-holes, door chains and smoke alarms, etc. This service is completely free.

The Trust can also supply and fit the Supra C500 Key Safe, an ACPO Police Accredited Key Safe. The cost to supply and fit is £75 including VAT.

The Cyber Bobby Scheme

One of our police checked and trained Cyber advisors will visit the client in their own home and give advice and guidance on basic IT security and how to avoid being affected by a cyber crime or a cyber enabled crime. The service is open to those over 65, disabled (over 18) and victims of cyber crime.

They will cover such things as: What is cyber crime, cyber and scam prevention advice, how to check privacy settings, signposting to other advice and resources, how to report issues and how to recognise scam emails and text messages. As with the Bobby Scheme the service is completely free.

As well as visits the team can do talks about both schemes to local community and social groups.

If you would like a visit for either scheme or to arrange a talk, either go to our website <https://www.bluelamptrust.org.uk/bobby-scheme-choice/> or email the team at info@bluelamptrust.org.uk or call 0300 777 0157



The Mission to Seafarers

Caring for seafarers around the world

Saturday 11th June 2022



Join us and help to support the work of The Mission to Seafarers on a five hour 'Beaulieu 4 Rivers' excursion from Southampton aboard the m/v *Ocean Scene* (Blue Funnel Cruises) to view cruise ships and the other vessels in the port. Then visit the River Itchen and River Hamble before rounding Calshot Spit to enter the Beaulieu River as far as Bucklers Hard. *Ocean Scene* will then cruise back to Southampton.

Depart from the Hythe Ferry Terminal, Town Quay, Southampton at 1115 and return at 1615.

Enjoy a ham or cheese ploughman's lunch, with afternoon tea/coffee and cake all included in the fare. Vegetarian and gluten-free alternatives will be available.

Fares (including a donation to the Mission to Seafarers):

Adult / Senior £30.00 Children (5 - 14 yrs.) £20.00

Please complete an application form, or apply for one from

***Bob Joughin (Tel: 07483 232186 E-mail:
r.joughin@btinternet.com***

Retirement of Gill Maunder

Gill writes:

Sixteen years ago I responded to an advertisement in the local paper looking for a Church Administrator. My interview was first thing in the morning and I recall bumping into Peter in the Narthex where I learned that he had been hastily putting a 'No Smoking' sign on the office door!

I started work in January and remember feeling overwhelmed during the first few weeks with such a variety of jobs to get my head around. I expect that Suzie will feel a little like this also but I know that, as everyone is so kind and considerate, she will be fine.



I have enjoyed my time as Administrator enormously and have learned so much, not least from Peter with his considerable computer knowledge, meaning that I could often sort out my husband's computer problems: we shall miss this!

I am looking forward to extra free time and having the grandchildren more in the holidays - Emma (13), twins Holly and Lucy, and Alesha (all 10) and Amelia (7). I am sure, however, that after a bit of a holiday period, I shall be looking to find some voluntary work and will, of course, be bumping into some of you around the town now that we are living in Lynton.

- 0 -

Readers will wish to join others in the church in expressing their profound sense of gratitude to Gill for the wonderful support and devotion she has given to her work as Parish Administrator over the past sixteen years. Everybody at St Thomas', and, indeed, anybody from beyond our congregation who has had any reason to contact the church, cannot have failed to be impressed by the friendly and efficient way in which Gill has carried out her multitudinous and varied responsibilities, and which have always been accompanied by a cheerful and reassuring smile and kind word. It would be invidious to single out any particular rôle because she has performed so many in her time with us, and we are truly grateful for all that she has done. Those of us concerned with the magazine owe her a special vote of thanks for the support she has given in providing the details for the calendar of events each month and for dealing with any subscriptions which have come her way. We wish her a long and happy retirement—THANK YOU GILL!



Last November the delayed and long-awaited COP26 Conference took place and like many of you, I followed the events and discussions with interest and many mixed emotions. Although there were many disappointing conclusions at the end of the fortnight, the main positive outcomes of COP26 included agreement to:

1. phase down the unabated use of coal power and phase out fossil fuel subsidies;
2. further commit to limiting global warming to 1.5°C with an agreed Rulebook as to how this was to be achieved;
3. recognise the need to reduce all greenhouse gases, including methane;
4. halt all deforestation by 2030.



All of these may feel far removed from our everyday lives but in fact there are a number of ways that our choices can make a difference to helping to achieve these outcomes. Eco Church can also help us:

- to continue to improve our building fabric, and particularly insulation, thereby reducing our energy consumption and the associated carbon emissions which are increasing global warming;
- to be more aware of all the products we use that can affect our water sources with chemical and plastic pollution;
- to continue to improve our churchyard and gardens with the aim of increasing biodiversity and encouraging wildlife;
- to engage with local groups and lobbying our MP and local councillors on environmental issues to ensure that they understand how important these issues are to their voters;
- to reduce our consumption of meat and to buy locally-produced seasonal foods where possible, thereby helping to reduce the demand for fresh land needed for growing crops and the resultant increased methane emissions from livestock;
- through our Worship and Teaching to keep the decision makers, and those communities directly affected by the impact of climate change, constantly in our minds and prayers. Continuing to buy Fairtrade products is another way in which we can support these communities.



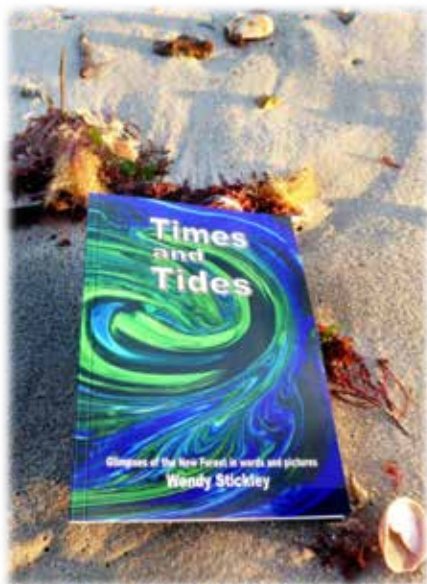
As a way of continuing our Eco Church journey, now that we are free of lockdowns, members of the Eco Church team are planning to use the **Climate Stewards 360° Carbon Toolkit** to help us monitor all of these subjects. This kit looks at energy use, travel, food, waste and water for the Church as a whole community. So, I may be asking for input from some or all of you in the near future. Watch this space!

Annette Cox

Times and Tides

Wendy Stickley is a retired teacher who has lived and worked in the Lymington area all her life. She is a member of St Thomas' Poetry Corner, a group run by Sarah Standage, whose members share their favourite poems on a weekly basis. During the Covid Lockdown Wendy decided to use some of the money which she might otherwise have spent travelling publishing some of her poems in aid of local charities.

Wendy has recently published her second volume entitled *Times and Tides* which is being sold in aid of Oakhaven Hospice. Copies are priced at £7.00 each (£8.50 by post) and are available at the Oakhaven Clothes Shop in the High Street or directly from Wendy by emailing her at: dropintheocean555@gmail.com



Many of Wendy's poems focus on seasons and seascapes in the New Forest and others showcase different emotional content. Two more will follow in May's edition of *LPN*.

What is Spring?

It's the blossom on the trees;
it's the bumble-buzzing-bees;

it's the way the catkins fling themselves about,
while blackbirds sing.

It is robins with red chests
building snug and moss-lined nests;

yellow daffodils, primroses
fleecy hats and cold, red noses;

tadpoles wriggling; muddy puddles
woolly lambs in cosy huddles;

new shoots peeping through the ground -
new life everywhere around.

© Wendy Stickley

The Ten Commandments

Code-cracking is all in a day's work for your average archaeologist. Working one day on a series of what looked like imperial cuneiform inscriptions, they found regular repetition of a formula: "I... [name of king], who... [short description of king's achievements], ..." standing at the beginning of international treaties made by early Hittite conquerors with their defeated victims.

Archaeologists were excited to recognise an exact imitation of a Hittite military inscription in the opening preamble of the Ten Commandments: "I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage" (Exodus 20.1). Perhaps, rather than an imitation, it was a parody!

Other archaeologists working on other occasions, discovered on standing stones from Babylon that provisions for the Sixth Commandment and onwards ("Thou shalt not kill", Exodus 20.13) are already stated in the code of the Babylonian King Hammurabi, four or five hundred years before Moses.

Apart from the Ten Commandments, many other commandments of God, delivered through Moses, are to be found strung throughout Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy (also called 'The Pentateuch'). Many of them are of little relevance today, but in comparison the Ten Commandments have outstandingly withstood the passage of time.

One reason for this survival might be that these others were framed for primitive agricultural conditions of which few, or none, exist today. More likely, however, is the impressive way in which the Ten Commandments are presented to us, with a lordly Hittite-style entry-porch opening the way to the text.

The back-history suggests that the Babylonians and others gathered together key moral insights which they believed were central to human life in society. These were then absorbed and endorsed by the Hittites, Moses and the Israelites. They have been accepted and propounded in the majority of civilisations and continents ever since.

What first dawned in the ancient Near East persuades our own consciences and humanity today; and what appeals to our own consciences and humanity today is a reflection of daylight which first dawned in the ancient Near East!

William Cummings



OYEZ! OYEZ! OYEZ!

Christian essays inspired by the New Forest

3. The Commoners' Stock

These are the ponies, the cattle, the donkeys, the pigs and occasionally the sheep that are familiar to anyone who knows the Forest. Some people think that these are wild animals like the deer, but that is wrong. All are owned and the Commoners to whom they belong are responsible for them.

There is an essential rightness, a deeply significant appropriateness, about the stock on the Forest. Not only do they please the eye, their presence lifts the heart as does music or poetry. An artist cousin of mine used to say, quite rightly, that however the animals group themselves in the open landscape the result is most pleasing and asking to be painted. Let no weary, hard-pressed Commoner laugh at that thought. He or she is doing more for the world than he might ever think. Why should that be? The Commoner's way of managing stock is simply immemorial, beyond history. Once, all lowland flocks and herds were looked after in unenclosed unlimited landscapes without fences, where there was no 'yours' or 'mine' and everything was 'ours'. The system was 'extensive' in the strict sense of being the opposite of 'intensive' as is the norm today. The Forest stands for the old way, the way of cooperation and neighbourliness. What is produced may lack some of the weight and quality of the cattle of upper Hampshire and beyond, but the now unique husbandry of the Forest still produces a cow, a pony and a pig like no other. It is not simply a question of appearance, but of a way of life as well. A Forest cow will give birth to her calf in a secluded open spot and then wander off to feed, as used always to be nature's way and as the deer do also. To find a tiny newborn calf is a true privilege.



On the Forest it is not simply life and colour that is brought by the animals to the landscape of heathland and plain. Many other reflexions come to mind for someone attuned to the biblical texts and church tradition. The way of Abel in the fourth chapter of Genesis is very like commoning and unlike either enclosed farming or the way of Cain. As a preacher would say to himself as he looks out over Crockford's or Wormstall, "There's a sermon there."



God, be it remembered, approved of the way of Abel. So many biblical writers, from the prophets to the gospels, rely upon the resemblance between the kingdom of God and old ways of animal husbandry. Recall how Isaac and Jacob managed their flocks, how young David earned his living and what the shepherds of Bethlehem were doing when they heard the music of the angels. Sometimes on the Forest we can see in the gentle eyes of a donkey the wisdom of Balaam's ass and the patience and faithfulness of all the biblical donkeys. Never stupid, never mocked, no wonder they each bear the sign of the Cross on their backs. They are not far from Him from whom all thoughts of truth and peace proceed.





One of the major activities of the Verderers and Commoners as autumn approaches is to hold the 'drifts', where the ponies are brought together for marking (registration of ownership) and checking for good health and condition. This is a strenuous and highly specialised activity undertaken in each district of the Forest. It calls for fine horsemanship, energy, knowledge and many skills on the Commoners' part. It involves driving the stock into the local pound and then releasing them after the hard work is done for each animal. It is as it were the other side of the coin of the animal's independence and freedom to go wherever it pleases for the rest of the year. The way a pony's tail is 'marked', the particular pattern of cuts of the tail, shows where the marking took place.

Can we not see here a parallel between marking and baptism? Baptism is universal among Christians, yet it is by no means easy to explain either as to what is needed or why. For those who know the Forest there is the good fortune of a strong analogy, and one moreover easily illustrated in paintings or photographs. How true it is that one picture is worth a thousand words. The new Christian is 'marked' for life by the sign of the Cross at baptism. He or she is positively 'identified' by a Christian name. Water is poured over him to give life, health and spiritual growth. He is not wild but claimed as belonging for ever to Christ. He belongs also to the Church, the family of Christ. Yet he is free and independent, with power to make his own decisions along life's way.

Surely the analogy breaks down over the marking fee that must be paid? Not so. The price of the forgiveness and eternal life conferred in baptism was paid in full by Christ on the Cross. All these things are to be found in the service of Baptism. Well may we reflect upon them when standing beside a Forest pound.

Our thoughts about the Commons' stock should have a tailpiece. What about a conversation between a foal and its mother outside the gates of the Motor Museum at Beaulieu?



"Mummy, what goes on in there?"

"They have a big collection of the things that move too fast by themselves along the road and they all go in to look at them."

"Why?"

"They like those things very much."

"But we don't."

"No. Of course we hate them. But we must remember what the old ponies tell us. They say that before there were those things our lives were very hard: carting gravel, manure and firewood all week long. There was also the frequent job of taking people to Lymington in the trap. And I know for sure that your four times great grandmother used to spend all day every Saturday in Lymington with a load of besoms for sale at sixpence each that her owner used to make. So it was not so easy then."

"But at least our forebears weren't constantly in danger as we now are."

"True. It goes to show that people's things are not evil in themselves. The wickedness may come from the way they choose to use them sometimes. That, I think, is true of everything that they make."

"I see. But I still think this is a queer place to choose for a collection of the things."

Gordon Wynne

The Feast of St Mark - 25 April

The man we celebrate on this day is the author of what is generally thought of as the earliest of the Gospels. 'Gospel' = 'Good News', an account of Jesus' life and teaching.

We do not know a great deal about the apostle Mark. Some think he was the young man who turned and ran away at Jesus' arrest: his is the only Gospel to record that incident although others report he did take flight again later, deserting Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey. Some claim that he wrote his Gospel in Rome; others that it might have been written in that currently sadly damaged country of Syria; others claim that he may have ended up in Alexandria and for that reason he is held in great veneration by the Coptic Church in Egypt; others again think that he was writing for a community of early Christians undergoing severe suffering.

Mark certainly does spend half his Gospel on the darkness, pain and suffering of Jesus. Another characteristic is the speed and drama of his text – 'and immediately' occurring forty times! Mark's traditional symbol is a winged lion and his Jesus certainly comes onto the stage of this world with a roar. His narrative begins at the River Jordan with Jesus' baptism by John and then starts an urgent ministry of calling people back to God who loves, heals and delivers.



And over all hangs the question 'WHO IS THIS MAN?' Can we work it out? Mark presents us with parables, riddles, misunderstandings and secrecy. When Peter, right at the centre of the Gospel, proclaims Jesus as the Messiah, he is told to be silent, and a shadow falls across the Gospel as the journey is made to Jerusalem and his death. For the second half of this Gospel, God is silent and Jesus dies with a cry to the God who seems to have gone away. Yet Mark tells us God has never been closer and that the veil that separated God from the people has been torn down.

In the same spirit, Mark's account of the resurrection is perplexing. Only eight verses long, with no appearance of Jesus himself, just some messenger saying he has been raised. And then, with women running away from the tomb and saying nothing because they are afraid, the Gospel ends abruptly.

It's clear that when later Gospel writers came to create their own narratives for different places and people they had Mark's account in front of them and used a lot of it. It's equally clear they also felt his account needed more clarity and smoothing over. Mark is raw, punchy, austere and enigmatic, strangely beguiling but too open-ended for some. For me, his is the Gospel that asks us to engage seriously with who this man Jesus is for us – someone we like reading about and admire, or the one we might choose to follow even to death if required?

It is the Gospel that shows that there will be lots of misunderstandings, betrayals and let-downs on the way but that we can be thankful that darkness reminds us of light. The silence of God, rather than hectoring, is often how he draws closer and pushes the contours of our spiritual growth. It's a Gospel of passion, poetry and parable, of a Messiah who suffers, a Gospel full of followers who don't get it, who live through the greatest things but miss the meaning; of faith being found where it shouldn't be and not being found where it should; a Gospel that teaches that faith ultimately runs into an unknown future with only 'Don't be afraid' in our ears for hope; a Gospel that urges us to trust God's fidelity, not our own.

The Jesus to whom Mark testifies is always ahead of us. We have to do our best to keep up with him, for it's only in that way we discover who he really is.

Ron Swan

Thoughts on the nature of a chair

An eccentric philosophy professor gave his students a final examination paper comprising only one question.

He picked up his chair and, placing it on his desk in front of the students, wrote the question on the board: "Using everything we have covered this term, prove that this chair does not exist."

Once the examination was under way, some students looked puzzled for a minute or so, others began writing furiously, some even filled over twenty pages with their thought-out answers.

One bright student, however, finished within a minute and was subsequently awarded top marks. "What chair?" was her two-word answer.



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We pray for all those who are afraid; that your everlasting arms hold
them in this time of great fear.

We pray for all those who have the power over life and death;
that they will choose for all people life, and life in all its fullness.

We pray for those who choose war; that they will remember that you
direct your people to turn our swords into ploughshares and seek for
peace.

We pray for leaders on the world stage;
that they are inspired by the wisdom
and courage of Christ.

Above all, Lord, today we pray for
peace for Ukraine,
and we ask this in the name of your
blessed Son.



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