

ST JOHN'S URC CHURCH MARSH GREEN

CHRISTMAS 2021 NEWSLETTER

INTRODUCTION

The Elders and interim Moderator of St John's wish all readers a Happy Christmas and a very good New Year. In the 3 months since Graham, our Minister, retired, we have been very active in ensuring that our services have been varied and interesting, and that church life has continued to develop despite the vacancy and the pandemic. As I write we still plan to have **a live carol service in the church on Christmas Eve**, though we're keeping an open mind as Government advice develops. We had a successful Christmas Fair at the end of November and you will see news of other developments in this Newsletter.



MINISTER'S LETTER by the Interim Moderator

Dear friends at Marsh Green,

Have you heard about cat churches and dog churches? A dog church is one that really needs a minister to lead it - rather as a dog might need a human to lead it on walks. Without one, the dog really isn't sure what to do. A cat church, on the other hand, might be happy to have a minister, especially if s/he brings gifts. Rather as a cat is happy to have a human around, if the human brings gifts - preferably edible gifts! But the cat church, like the cat, would otherwise get on with its daily living.

Please don't be upset, dog owners. Like many of the parables of Jesus, the story is told to illustrate a particular point and isn't intended to stand over-analysis.

I am absolutely certain that St John's, Marsh Green, is a cat church. Even the dog owners among you! I have always thought that, when I have led Sunday services as a visiting lay preacher. I am more sure of it, having attended an Elders Meeting in November as your Interim Moderator. So I am convinced that you will make good use of the time of transition, before you have the opportunity to call a new minister. When you do, every church member will have a vote. So, if you are not a member, this would be a very good time to explore the possibility.

As your Interim Moderator, my task is to assist you, and your friends at Oxted, on the transition journey. As we set out, we have been warned that it will probably take longer than we might wish. But we travel, hopefully and confidently, knowing that we will be guided and sustained, if we put our trust in God.

The Elders have begun work on drafting a response to the Synod Mission Criteria. That will come before a Church Meeting, after morning worship on Sunday 30 January 2022. You will see the draft before then and will have the opportunity to contribute. I will attend that Church Meeting and will answer any questions. If there is something burning you need to know before then, please contact me. My email address is at the foot of this article.

Once the mission documents from both churches have been submitted, there will be a visitation from a 'Scoping Group' who will make recommendations about the size and shape of any future pastorate.

Your Elders will face many challenges in the months ahead. It is important that you support them. Be nice to them. Pray for them. I know you to be caring and loving people, so I am sure you will.

Finally, humour is important to me. I believe laughter to be one of the best medicines available to us. So, as you prepare for your Christmas activities, I share this with you:

A graphic artist was asked to produce a banner advertising the church nativity service. He asked: What wording? And what size? His assistant was a little surprised

when opening the church secretary's email reply which read: *Unto Us A Child Is Born. Seven feet six inches by one foot three inches. (229cms x 38cms).*

I wish you a happy and blessed Christmas.

Stuart Dew.
Interim Moderator

DIARY FOR DECEMBER/JANUARY - CHURCH SERVICES

*****NATIVITY SERVICE ON 19 DECEMBER*****

The Nativity service this Sunday, 19th, will be different this year, as we need to follow and be aware of any COVID guidance. Most schools have, sadly, cancelled or limited the numbers of people able to attend the school nativity plays this year. We want to still tell the nativity story but will be doing so in a slightly different way this year and will need everyone to help out .

We need people to follow COVID guidance and wear masks and keep socially distanced as far as possible. We are keeping the church ventilated and asking people to sit in alternate rows as far as possible. Although it would be good to see as many people as possible, please don't come if you have a cough, cold symptoms or raised temperature. We will not be providing refreshments after the service.

We need people to come prepared for the nativity with a few simple costumes/props from home - ideally one of each of the following within each family group:-

- Mary - blue head scarf (and a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes if you have one) (we can have more than one Mary and Joseph in this nativity)
- Joseph - brown head scarf (and a toy tool box/ carpenter kit if you have one)
- angel - tinsel halo - (and wings if you have them)
- star - if anyone has a star costume
- shepherds tea towels with headband to secure
- cuddly toy sheep and other farm animals
- wise men - crowns and wrapped gifts

We need people to stay in their seats and join in when it is their part in the action . We will limit the amount of movement around the church but will want everyone to take part - especially in their thoughts and prayers during the service.

FULL LIST OF SERVICES AND EVENTS with WORSHIP LEADERS IN DECEMBER AND JANUARY

- December 19th 'Instant Nativity – The Impossible Promise'
A Nativity for everyone
- 24th 6.30 pm Carols by Candlelight (with covid precautions,
depending on government guidelines at the time)
- 25th All-age service for Christmas Day
- 26th No service in the church
Opportunities to join online with other churches:
Banstead URC at 10.30am – Worship led by David Skitt
Moat URC at 10.30 am – Readings and Carols led by
Martin Hazell
*(Links to these services will be in the Church News on the
19th Dec.)*
- January 2nd Gary Bradford
- 9th Ian Fletcher from Horsham URC
- 16th Revd Carole Jenkins from The Eden Church
- 23rd Hilary and Peter Brand
- 30th Mike Downing from St. John's Hill URC, Sevenoaks
Followed by Church Meeting

January 18th – 25th Week of Prayer for Christian Unity – The ECC will provide material to guide and aid prayers for each day.

Prayer Group

“For where two or three gather in my name, there I will be among them.” Matthew 18:20

On the first Sunday of the month

In the Upper Room at St John’s Marsh Green

10.00am – 10.20am (before the 10.30am Sunday Service)

We gather for quiet, shared prayer. It is a gentle, helpful and spiritual way to prepare for worship. It is particularly wonderful when we hear singers rehearse in the room below.

We hear the coming and going of our congregation as they come into the church and get ready, greeting each other, setting up for Junior Church or tea and coffee. There is a quiet bustling below which adds to the sense of why we are there and what we need to hold in mind and pray about.

There isn’t a fixed routine, it is a coming together to pray in a warm and caring environment with whatever comes up. We come as we are, in whatever state of preparedness, bringing ourselves to God in fellowship and prayer.

All welcome, for all or part of the time

Whether you wish to pray aloud or quietly

If you would like to know more please speak to Heidi Tanner or Sue Rowe

New Beginnings

What do we want our church to be?

This is a time of change for Marsh Green (and perhaps for all churches, as lockdown has thrown up questions about what church means to us and new ideas of what it could be).

To explore what this means for our church we would like to invite everyone to a series of four informal discussion sessions, one per month beginning in January. We are suggesting that the best time for this might be a Saturday morning from 9am to 11am, incorporating a breakfast. An alternative could be a weekday evening with a break for food.

We envisage this being held in a home, or in the church building if numbers are larger. If a substantial number of people would like a different time, it might also be possible to run a parallel monthly group at a different time.

Each session will begin by sharing our own thoughts and reactions, then moving beyond that to look at other ways in which church might be seen - by the Bible, by history, by other denominations, by those looking in from outside - and concluding by seeking what God might be saying to us in our specific situation.

The course is not about laying down a party line (though it may mean making sure we do know what our church actually teaches) but being free to be honest, to question our assumptions, to listen respectfully to the varying views of others and enjoy the difference.

It is not just about generalities but about how it affects our church here and now, about our particular strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

It is intended to be fun and not too heavy, though ideally with a commitment to attend all four sessions if possible and perhaps to read or to make a few notes between meetings.

1. The church as social group and the church as worship

What do we want from Sunday services?

What makes a church a church - what are the vital components?

2. The church as place to be accepted and place to grow

What sorts of teaching and encouragement do we need ?

Can Sunday services provide that - if not, what else?

3. The church as comfort and the church as risk

Jesus came to bring peace but also challenge

- how can we appropriately offer both?

4. The church as beacon and the church as carer

The church was never intended to be a holy huddle

- how can we serve our neighbourhood and our world?

Hilary Brand

Contact details:

brand@btinternet.com,

01732 500554

07973 758192

Memories of Friday Club by Doreen Wildy

After a lot of thought and as a result of Covid it is felt that the time has come for Friday club to cease meeting, at least for the time being. Several people in the church and the village will have fond memories going back to the time when it all started.

Friday Club was founded in 1983 by Eileen Wells and Connie Seymour was the Treasurer . As time went on the club was able to apply for a grant from Sevenoaks District Council and once approved we were credited with £50 and then £100 on an annual basis for a few years. In 1995 Brenda Hillman took over as Treasurer and remained a mainstay of the club until moving to Somerset in 2017.

In those early days outings were arranged and thoroughly enjoyed. Some of the places visited were The Whitbread Farm, Penshurst Vineyards, Ashdown Forest, Lullingstone, Barnsgate Manor, Chartwell, Starborough Castle and a Medway River Cruise.



Visit to Starborough
Castle
October 2002

Throughout the years afternoon teas have been enjoyed at venues such as Duddleswell, St. Ives Tea Garden, Occasionally Yours Garden Centre, as well as Elizabeth and Derek Richmond and Pat and Brian Wheatley's gardens.

Then from 2006 the annual summer tea has been at Richard and Doreen Wildy's house when on all but two occasions it has been outside on a hot and sunny July afternoon.

The Christmas lunches in the early years were popular and sometimes held in The Wheatsheaf in the village. They were also held in the church and it was interesting to

note that the turkey for everyone in 1993 cost just £3.60! 1994 saw the start of the Christmas tea party which has always been a lovely time singing carols, readings, pulling crackers and enjoying the Christmas fare. On a few occasions the Pre-School has entertained us to their lovely singing.



Christmas Tea Party December 2016

Our Fish & Chips lunch became an annual event each August, firstly at Tom Bells then at the Church when we enjoyed Pat's cooking of the chips and peas. Latterly we have been to Elizabeth Richmond each August.

There have been many interesting talks given which in latter years gave way to chats and games afternoons. The favourites have been Rummikub, Shove Ha'penny, Uno and quizzes. A memorable quiz is one that Kate Russell devised of pictures of well-known people which included one of herself – did anyone guess that it was her?? We must not forget Boules which Bill Morris introduced to us and we continued to play. from time to time on warm summer days. Our thanks also go to Pat Wheatley who over the years has provided us with her delicious home-made scones and cakes each month.



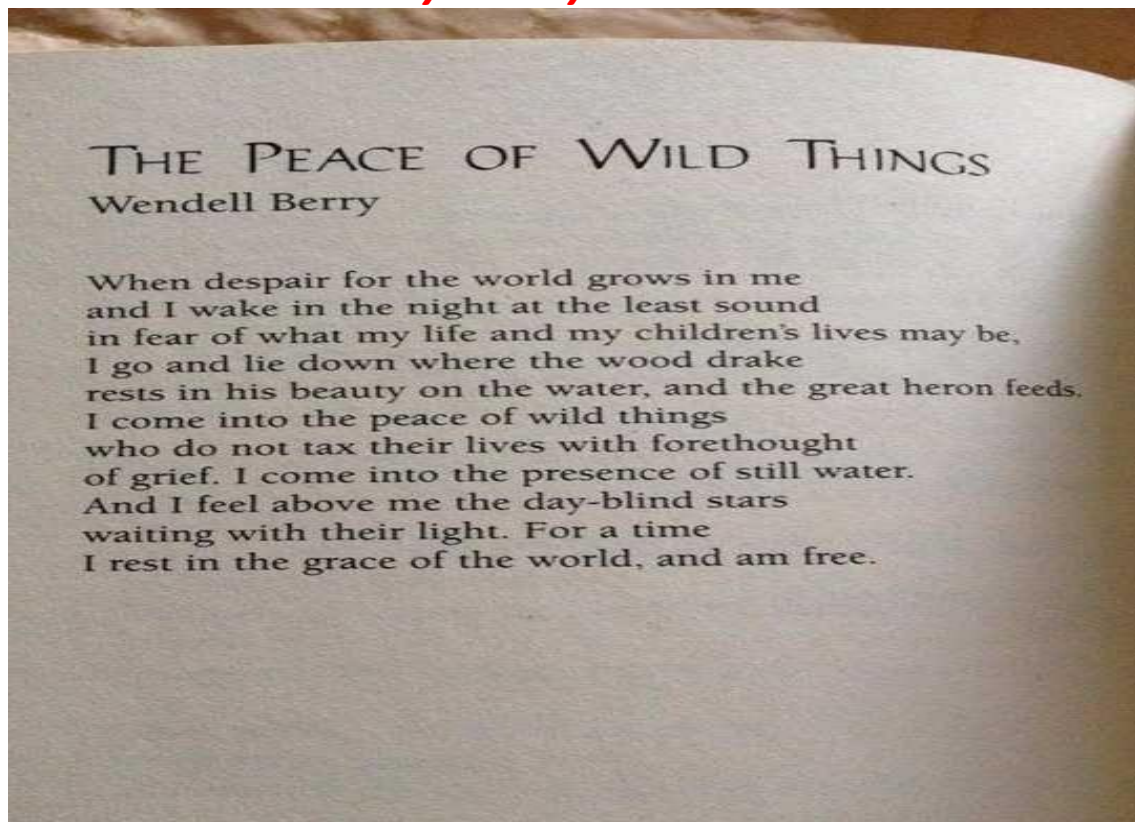
Playing Shoveha'penny in April 2016

Our member Kate Russell celebrated her 100th birthday in 2020 and in 2019 she devised with her family the Treasure Hunt for the Advent Fair. The prize was £50 provided by them and this raised £55 which was part of the donation given to the Church. Over the years Friday Club has given a donation following the Advent Fair. The jigsaw puzzles on the stall have become quite a favourite with visitors and of course in the past Brenda Hillman cooked her Scotch Pancakes which were always a hit.

Meetings have taken place on the first Friday of each month with the exception of January throughout each year but on some occasions have had to be cancelled due to bad weather, mostly snow. However, February 1998 was very warm and more like May, apparently. And then last year in 2020 the March meeting was cancelled due to Covid and of course the rest is history.

We have all enjoyed the years of Friday Club and look back fondly at all the things it has achieved.

POEM contributed by Shirley Homan



Nature Reserve Update

We are pleased to report that over the last few months, the Eco Group, with the help of volunteers of all ages from within the church and beyond, a digger kindly loaned to us, plus a grant from The Great Stone Bridge Trust, have created a wildlife pond in the nature reserve.

The idea of having a pond first arose after one of the many periods of heavy rain several winters ago, when a natural pond appeared and attracted various waterbirds.

David Sayell very willingly took the controls of a borrowed digger to dig 75cm down for the main rectangular body of the pond, which we quickly found went into very solid clay, then we “sculpted” it into a more natural shape and created a shallower shelf, which we intend to cover with cobbles. We ran out of time on our first digging day in mid-October to put in the pond liner, but we intended to resume work soon after to fit the liner. Unfortunately, that day was followed by that period of very, very heavy rain, so the following week the whole pond filled with a mixture of rainwater and the clay soil.



Undaunted, Gill and I borrowed a pump from Hoopers Farm and to our surprise managed to get almost all the water cleared for the second pond making day in early November,



On the second pond making day, we fitted the white underlay then the thick black pond liner, adding some large stones to hold the liner edges in place – and filled it with water!



A final after-church session gave us time to trim the edges of the liner and improve the edging – including beginning to build a log and brush barrier between the fence and the pond to act as a habitat for wildlife and really to prevent people from walking

along that edge. Eventually all the black pond liner needs to be covered to protect it from damage by the sun so we hope to establish more wildflowers on the bare clay soil left after our activities making the pond merge better into the meadow. Already Penny and Peter Brookes have kindly given us several purple loosestrife plants and a hornwort from their own garden wildlife pond in Edenbridge. We are really grateful for all their help throughout – without whom we would have really struggled.



As this is designed as a wildlife pond, we will not be putting any fish in the pond and only introducing native plant species. The different depths of the pond should provide a range of habitats for different plants, insects and amphibians (frogs and toads) and the shallow shelf will allow creatures which get into the water to also get out. We will add more native pond and marginal plants in

the spring – and hope to install a motion activated camera to keep track of life around the pond, particularly to check if the pond is attracting any nocturnal visitors – like hedgehogs or badgers

We are in conversation with the Kent Mammal Group about possibly releasing rescued hedgehogs in our nature reserve – and they are particularly positive about using the area now we have a year-round water supply – which will be topped up by the rainwater harvesting system from the church roof.

To keep everyone safe, rather than fencing the pond which we considered would spoil its appearance, we have fitted a padlock on the gate between the church garden and the nature reserve, but anyone wishing to go into the reserve need only ask. When the sheep are in the reserve to control the grass, we will use hurdles or an electric fence to keep the sheep from damaging the pond.

Anne Woodfine

ECO-GROUP

I'm Dreaming of a Green Christmas

What would our planet like for Christmas? Some ideas that will help put the smile back on the face of our world:



- Buy charity Christmas cards and for church bring a card to put on the noticeboard (rather than giving lots) and make a generous donation to Crisis (box will be available). Make gift tags out of last year's cards.
- Buy fewer presents (use Secret Santa system or share present giving)
- Buy second hand or give memberships or experiences, or perhaps make your own. Try World of Books for online 2nd hand books.
- If you are buying new buy ethically* and try to avoid plastic. 4000 tons of products come from China every Christmas
- If you have no wrapping paper left from last year, make your own or use newspaper for wrapping. Rather than Sellotape use coloured wool, ribbons or even string (and keep these for next year!). Parcels can look remarkably attractive!
- Make your own crackers and maybe candles from left over stubs (get advice from Liz!)
- If you use serviettes/napkins use cloth ones
- Challenge yourselves to have a zero-food waste Christmas. This will require pre-planning and using all sorts of ingenious ways of using up leftovers. Check your fridge regularly and freeze food well before it has got to the growing mould stage!
- Turn down the heating as all that cooking/eating/singing/dancing /washing up keeps you warm.
- Nothing beats a real Christmas tree but get a rooted one and try to keep it growing on for several years - but if a carpet of needles indicates this is a non-starter resort to using the council tree recycling service.
- Ban electronic devices and even television over Christmas period if with family or friends (except for keeping in touch with the rest of the family).

Have a happy and sustainable Christmas!

The Eco-group

* Use independent bookshops if available or Hive (online) sources books from these shops (nothing to do with British Gas!). Ethical (or reasonably so) on-line retailers include Ethical Shop, Shared Earth, Traidcraft, Veo and John Lewis.

Gill Musgrove

Moderator's Christmas letter

Christmas 2021

'Hark the Herald Angels Sing, Glory to the new-born king'

Last year Christmas with our families was cancelled, and we wonder if it will happen this year too. The uncertainty continues.



It may seem that after the pandemic we entered a new way of hybrid living, part on zoom and part in person, life might at times feel chaotic and strained at the edges.

You received my letter recently about deployment and maybe moaned at Synod, the national church or even your minister. It doesn't seem very fair that there aren't the number of ministers that we used to have.

As the Hebrews sang in Egypt, it's hard to sing the Lord's song in a strange land. Jesus knew all about strange lands, he ended up in Egypt after he was born, to escape Herod. Sometimes we are taken to a place we don't know, even at Christmas time. Of course, while we have strangeness around us, we can hold onto something that is familiar to us, Christmas and the coming of the Lord Jesus. It doesn't matter what kind of land or liminal space we are in; the story of Christ's birth reminds us that God came to be 'with us' in our strife.

Herald angels come to announce good news:

⁸ And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." Luke 2: 8-12

These angels brought good news to bring joy. We, who have heard this good news, are invited to share this news of joy at a time when others need to hear it, rather like the herald angels. Not only your ministers or Elders, we all have someone we could share this amazing news with. Jesus is still coming to us, especially at this time of challenge and uncertainty.

As the evenings grow longer and the darkness seems to deepen, let us hold onto the fact that God is doing what God did 2000 years ago. God is doing a new thing, and we need to take time to recognise it, and embrace it.

May the light of Christ shine in your darkness this Christmas,
Every blessing



News from the Church of the Peace of God (Oxted)

Over the past three months we have been slowly taking small steps towards normality. We still have quite a way to go and the way forward just now is full of questions. Even if the pandemic is tamed by vaccines we as a church are still not sure what will be our new normal. How will we be scoped? How long until we can call a minister? Will we find a suitable minister to call? Where will we find more visiting preachers, and has the pandemic really wiped out all the organists?

It is at times like this you have to lift your head and look around and search for new ways to get the best out of what you have and what is available. Over the past weeks we have had a number of very good services led by visiting preachers, our own lay preacher Matthew Griffiths and even by our elders. How wonderful it has been to listen to the word preached by the likes of Bridget Banks, David Skitt, Charles Bradshaw and Ian Fletcher. It has been a joy, and certainly not a step backwards. We were sad that Charles Bradshaw is having to retire from preaching for medical reasons and he will be much missed.

We have recognised that we cannot always obtain visiting preachers and so we have explored introducing technology. We all learnt the benefits of Zoom during lockdown and we continue to use it, not so much for services, but for church committee meetings. That said we are using Zoom on Boxing Day to join the service at Banstead which is being led by David Skitt. We have been streaming our services for a good number of months, with varying problems as we learn through experience. If you want to view any services they are all available on our website if you want to binge watch them. We are now ready to upgrade our equipment to improve the quality, reliability and ease of use. We are also encouraged that the URC has listened and is moving to provide services in a variety of formats in support of the many churches without ministers. Andy Braunston is leading this effort and full services are now being issued as well as the means to use parts of what is provided. We have looked

at the advent services and found problems with the sound which we have reported back to Andy. I am sure that in the new year he will be able to remedy these issues and a new way of providing service material will become a reality. We are using the content provided by these services as the basis for two services led by elders in the coming month.

Other signs of returning to normal church life has been the restarting of the Wednesday Fellowship group which meets twice a month in the church. There have been two Churches Together in Oxted and District joint services, one of which we hosted. The CTOD Bereavement Support Group is about to start up again and many of the other support groups which use our church building are up and running again. It is lovely to see community life returning and our building being used.

We held our first major event since the Pandemic started when the Snelling Lecture was given by David Olusoga on the 12 November. All went safely and smoothly and the full house of 120 that attended enjoyed a thought provoking lecture on Black and British followed by a question and answer session.

There are still many uncertainties to deal with but we hope we are moving forward again.

Keep safe and God bless

Stuart Milloy

EDEN CHRISTIAN TRUST (ECT) welcomes Leader of Sevenoaks DC to Friday night Youth Club

(St Johns has been a full participant in ECT since its foundation in the late 1990s, when our Youth Club merged into it)

On Friday 8 November Sevenoaks District council Chairman Councillor Diana Esler, called in at the ECT Youth Club based at the Riverside Building Edenbridge.

Eden Christian Trust's invitation to her to meet the Young People who use the Club and its Youth Worker, Anthony Shipwright, followed a successful bid by ECT for funding from the Council to support and enable ECT's ongoing programme of activities in the town and surrounding villages.

Anthony commented "It was great to welcome Diana on a busy evening for ECT and to have an opportunity to thank her and

Sevenoaks District Council for their support. We were also able to give her an insight into our other areas of work such as mentoring, outreach, school visits, summer camps and previous trips abroad.”

If you would like to find out more about ECT then please visit their website www.ectyouth.com or contact Anthony at ect.youthworker@gmail.com

From left to right: ECT Chairman Tim Hill, Volunteer Rachel Wright, Cllr Diana Esler, ECT Youth Worker Anthony Shipwright



ENDPIECE

THE FIRST CHURCH IN MARSH GREEN (continued)

In the Harvest Newsletter I asked whether anyone had any knowledge of a building at the corner of Greybury Lane which might have been a Plymouth Brethren Chapel but nobody has contacted me.

I have now done a bit more research and I would like to put forward a hypothesis for what might have happened. There is quite a long preamble but I hope it makes sense.

In the Tithe Map of 1844 (the earliest detailed map of Marsh Green) there is a small plot of land at the relevant place on the corner of Greybury Lane that is owned by Thomas Knight. He appears in the 1841 census as an Agricultural Labourer with his wife and 4 children, the oldest of whom is his son, another Thomas Knight, who we will meet from time to time.

10 years later Thomas Knight senior is still living in the same dwelling with his family but his son is living at Christmas Mill as a Farm Servant. However, by 1861 Thomas Knight Senior has died and his son has returned to the family home and is described as a Cattle Drover. In 1871 he is still there with his widowed mother and a younger sister who is their Housekeeper. However, instead of Knight, the family's surname has changed to Latter and these two surnames seem to be interchangeable.

Moving on a further 10 years to 1881 we only have Thomas and his sister in the property but by now their surname is Knight Latter and this is still the case in censuses up to the last one which has been published so far, i.e. 1911. His sister is still living with him and by now he is shown as a Retired Cattle Drover – he is 82 and the cottage is described as having 3 rooms.

He died in 1913 aged 84 and his obituary in The Courier (he is Tom Knight again) states that he only gave up his business 5 years previously and 5 years before that he had driven 70 bullocks from Reading to Edenbridge. "Attired in his round smock and accompanied by his faithful dog he was usually to be seen in Tonbridge on market days." (His smock is now in the Eden Valley Museum.) He is said to have lived all his time in an old-fashioned thatched cottage.

Large scale Ordnance Survey maps from 1869 to 1936 only show one main building in the same position as the cottage appearing on the 1844 Tithe Map and therefore I have come to the conclusion that this building, owned by the Knight family, was used by the Plymouth Brethren as their chapel rather than that there was ever a separate building.

It seems as though the Plymouth Brethren meeting was quite short lived. As I mentioned last time, the chapel is shown on the 1869 Ordnance Survey map and I have now found reference to Marsh Green, Kent (near

Edenbridge) in “a list of some meetings” compiled in 1873 for the Exclusive Brethren. However, by 1878 it seems that services must have ceased because of what can be found in a book published in 1926 called “The work of the Lord in a Surrey Village”. The village is Lingfield, and the book is mainly about the Mission Hall there and Dr. Austin who founded it, but it strays into Kent, and Marsh Green in particular.

Here is a quote from the book “there was in this village a drover named Tom Knight, who was a well known character in all the neighbourhood. Sometimes he would ‘go on tramp’, and make his way even so far as Wales. One day the rupture of a blood vessel in his leg nearly lost him his life, and Dr. Austin, feeling this to be a warning to the people, drove over the following Sunday with an evangelist to preach the gospel. An open-air meeting of great power was held, resulting in the starting of a regular Sunday Afternoon Meeting, which continued from 1878 in a cottage for some years. Large numbers gathered and this resulted in the erection of a permanent church building with a school, which has been used by the Presbyterians for many years”.

Is it just a flight of fancy to suggest that Tom Knight offered his cottage for these meetings as it had previously been used by the Plymouth Brethren?

Incidentally the Knight Latters were connected with the village and our church for many years (descendants of Tom’s brother Henry). They ran the Post Office and Edward played the organ. The last association with the church was Edward’s widow who died in 1974 (133 years after the first census record of the family in Marsh Green).

Mike Musgrove



Extract from 'Reform' magazine about St Johns

Climate



Eco Church Gold

Tamsin Morris reports on the first two United Reformed churches to win the highest award for care for creation

United Reformed churches have been achieving gold in the Eco Church award scheme run by A Rocha UK. St John's Marsh Green URC in Kent was the first in 2019, then in July 2021, Tavistock URC in Devon became the second. These gold award winners demonstrated care for creation in multiple ways – through their worship and teaching, buildings, land, community and global engagement and lifestyle.

St John's and Tavistock URCs have long been committed to addressing environmental issues. To complete a gold award often requires sustained action over many years. Their worship continues to celebrate creation. They pray for action to address the climate crisis and engage with the local community.

The most visible signs of eco-credentials at St John's Marsh Green are such things as the rows of solar panels high up on the slate roof, which mean that the church is a net exporter of electricity, and the rainwater tank that flushes the toilets, and another that waters the plants.

St John's has a nature reserve which is managed to promote a wide diversity of native flora and fauna. It has a wildflower meadow, log piles, fruit trees and numerous bird, bat, bug and butterfly boxes. There are several hedgehog homes as well –

'Creation is an integral part of worship'

part of the scheme to encourage the whole village to become 'hedgehog friendly'. There are compost bins, a wormery, a recycling centre, double or secondary glazed windows, insulation, LED light bulbs, and Fairtrade supplies in the kitchen. Less obvious, but equally important, are ethical banking, using green energy suppliers, involvement of the children, environmental services and film evenings, and green 'spots' in the newsletter and weekly bulletin!

Gill Musgrove, coordinator of the church's eco-group explains: 'At Marsh Green URC we have for many years seen care for creation as an essential part of our mission – a logical extension of "loving our neighbour". As a Gold Eco Church, we see encouraging other congregations down this path as an important part of our role, particularly at this critical time in our planet's history. Back at the church we try not to stand still, and look forward to creating a wildlife pond in our nature reserve this autumn and possibly the arrival of rescue hedgehogs to reinforce the shrinking and increasingly endangered wild UK population.'

Tavistock URC, meanwhile, has no outside land, as it is in the town centre, but the congregation have installed hanging baskets and beautiful planters which are tended and watered by the green fingered members. These are planted up with flowers each season, encouraging bees, butterflies and other insects.

Ten years ago, the church installed solar panels as part of a major refurbishment of the church premises, the start of a number of eco-friendly changes. Over the past five years, the members have continued to take action to reduce their carbon footprint. They have switched to a green electricity supplier, and installed a cycle rack to encourage people to cycle rather than drive to church. Within the church they have hosted a display to highlight the importance of bats in Devon, developed in conjunction with the Devon Bat Project.

The minister, the Revd Robert Weston, has been one of the South Western Synod's Green Advocates since 2019. He ensures that God's creation is an integral part of the worship and teaching life of the church. He says: 'The Gold Eco Church award recognises the journey that we have been on as a congregation over the past twenty years or more. We work with all the churches in Tavistock on a number of green initiatives and seek to support others in our community as they also seek to respond to the climate emergency. We have also played a role in helping the URC Mission Council agree to full divestment from fossil fuels, a policy that has now been implemented in almost every synod of the URC.'

i Tamsin Morris is Press and Communications Officer for A Rocha UK and Climate Sunday Coalition. Since these two awards, Emmanuel Church, Bungay, Suffolk, an LEP, has also won gold. For more information about Eco Church visit ecochurch.arocha.org.uk