Sandon Voice

Quarterly from St Andrew's 75p for non residents

September 2026



Taste and see that the Lord is good.
The Lord's words are sweeter to me than honey.
Ps 34:8, Ps 119:103

Farming Today

A disastrous harvest for 2026. Yields have been affected deeply by the lack of moisture. However, we have produced a good quality grain with high protein levels due to the amount of sunshine we have received. It is now three years since we used the grain dryer, so this is a cost saving. Our biggest challenge now is to keep the grain cool in these temperatures to maintain the quality. Never before in Richard's 45 years of farming, have we had to start combining at 3:30 am in order to ensure that the grain doesn't become too dry

Combining Oil Seed Rape at less than 6% can cause rejection and deductions. Harvest this year commenced on the 1st July and finished on the 24th July. In a normal year we wouldn't even be combining wheat until the 1st week of August.



Unloading grain from the combine to a trailer



Combining under way

The sheep flock has now been increased to 470 ewes. We are currently having to feed supplement to them hay due to the lack of grass available, in order to keep the body condition on the ewes. All sheep on the farm have been Blue Tongue vaccinated. This new highly infectious disease can affect fertility.

A new addition to the flock is 4 rams from Aberystwyth in Wales bought for £950 each! Two Primera and two Aberfield. A change of breed hopes for earlier finishing and live weight gain on the lambs. All 2026 season lambs were sold by the 1st week in June. Fortunately, before the grass disappeared. The teaser (vasectomised) rams go in to the ewes on the 19th August to try and get them all to come into heat.

This is in preparation for the fertile rams going into service the ewes on 3rd September. This is what we call tupping.

Iodine levels are currently low in the breeding flock which can affect fertility. This was found during blood tests carried out by our vets. We can treat this with an Iodine bolus (tablet) which is given 3 weeks before tupping.

Our two Irish students are heading home on the 15th August. Our third student from Harper Adams will leave us in early September. All have proved a success.

Fuel and fertiliser costs remain high with America and Iran still at war. On the up side all fertiliser is on farm in preparation for 2027 season.

Farmers are desperate for rain in the South of England, and with no rain forecast in the near future Oil Seed Rape drilling will be unable to commence until some decent rain falls. Oil seed rape drilling normally commences in late August so there is still time for a rain dance! *All the best*

Richard & Charlie

Possible Words for a Rain Dance or better a Prayer for Rain

O GOD, heavenly Father, who by your Son Jesus Christ have promised to all them that seek your kingdom, and the righteousness thereof, all things necessary to their bodily sustenance: Send us, we beseech you, in this our necessity, such moderate rain and showers, that we may receive the fruits of the earth to our comfort, and to your honour; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Winter Fayre

Saturday 21st November
12 - 3 pm

Grand raffle first prize £100
Bottle tombola
Turkey raffle
Neals yard
Avon
Guess the weight of the cake
Crafts
Games
Cakes
Mulled wine and mince pies
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We would also appreciate any donations. Thank you
Cakes, gifts. Raffle prizes, bottles
Contact
Liz Bobeldijk 07846 845327

Letter from the Wardens

Looking back

As I sat down to think about this article I started to ponder over the last year and in particular over this summer. Inevitably it has had its ups and downs. The extremely hot weather looked like making the summer fête difficult, if not dangerous to continue with. The RSPCA made it plain that they did not think a dog show should happen for animal safety reasons. Yet on the day, although the sun shone, it was not unbearably hot and people came along and thoroughly enjoyed themselves. Wonderful! Afternoon teas on a Sunday once a month have also proved successful. Tea on the Green followed by songs of praise at the end of July was well attended and again the weather was very kind to us. As a church we were suddenly blessed with five Holy Communion services on five consecutive Sundays. Something I don't think happened even when Terry was still with us. Sad things have happened. Not least the death of George Turner who will be greatly missed both as a loyal church member and also a character around the village.

A while back George had to stop working in the churchyard due to his failing health. We were wondering what to do to ensure this beautiful village asset continued to be maintained to the usual high standard. We often tell ourselves that God will provide what is needed but do we truly believe it? As they say, "The proof is in the pudding!" Nobody has been specifically asked and yet a need was seen, offers of help received and been accepted. It is abundantly apparent that not only does God provide what is needed, but also that Sandon village as a community, value and honour both its church and the area around it. The church yard and, indeed the church building itself, are an oasis of beauty that Sandon village should be justifiably proud of. As an aside you may have heard swifts if you have wandered through the churchyard early or late. Don't be fooled they are a recording. Swift boxes were installed in the tower a couple of months ago to encourage nesting in a declining species. In a couple of years we hope to have our own resident swifts swooping around the church every summer.
Interestingly swifts are not worried by church bells, which is a bonus, because since our bells were taken away mended, refurbished and retuned, bell ringing at St Andrew's church has gone from strength to strength mostly thanks to the dedication of Mike Worboys and Smurf (AKA Sandra Murphy) who seem always to be asking to add extra teaching sessions. There are also many groups of visiting ringers making use of our bells, so thankfully swifts do not seem to need earplugs!

The tower roof has been mended, swifts have been invited, bell ringers are ringing and the church yard and church are cared for and loved.
We have been truly blessed by God both as a church community and a village. Long may it continue, and I am sure it will. Some of us meet together to pray at 8:30 am five days a week. Over the course of a month every road and many individuals are prayed for. Leaflets inviting requests for prayer are also being gradually delivered around the whole parish.

As church wardens, and as a church, we are completely convinced by the power of prayer so we hope that our prayers are welcomed and valued by the whole of Sandon. Therefore I end with a prayer from the book of Numbers in the Old Testament section of the Holy Bible:
"The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace."

Looking Forward

As we look to the autumn and indeed beyond there are several seasons we pass through. The Farming Today article suggests that we are rather late to mark the harvest. We plan to do so and give thanks on 4th October, a week after the Howe Green chapel do so. So that is 2 possible lunches in 8 days, 26th September and 4th October.
The autumn is also a time when we particularly remember those who have died. Andy Griffiths has agreed to come and lead our Time to Remember Service on 1st November at 4 pm. And Andrew Merchant will lead our Remembrance Day service on 8th November starting at 10:00 am.
We are working towards Christmas too, and this year the team are planning a Winter Fayre on 21st November in the Village Hall.
We are delighted that we have made plans with 7 different ministers to lead one or more service during this quarter. They are shown in the list of services on the centre pages, namely Andy, Andrew, Carol, Jonathan, Keith, Rob and Simon. Such is the privilege of a vacancy that shows no sign of ending and there are currently no plans for the appointment of a priest, primarily because there is no priest to appoint.

Andy and Richard
Church Wardens

A Single Poppy

A single flower by the grave,
be-stoned,
Heat-beatened there windblown it
stands
A valiant survivor in a sun parched
land
Defying the sun and arid soil alone;
For such short time it rears its head
To place its seed where others fear to
tread.

Against all odds, upright it stands
'Gainst the memorial of those so
brave
Whose resting place, in France, their
grave
In a strange and alien land;
Not for them to lie under an English
sky
Nor to see an English spring pass by
They will gather poppies, alas no
more
Nor through English woods explore
Yet still the poppy fights valiant on
When those brave soldiers have now
sadly gone.

Richard Simmonds
10th.June 2026

After The Honeymoon Is Over

After the honeymoon is over
When dress and clothes, yes once
adored
Are all packed in boxes, neatly stored
When the music no longer plays a
single note
And when the holiday album lies quiet
afloat
In cupboards now ignored.

When all that's left are treasured
memories
There buried deep fondly in their
dreams
When they think of those who
danced, such scenes,
The night away, with knowing glance
'Please just one last dance'
And of the laughs and children's
happy screams.

When sitting lost in commuting noise
As wedding gown turns to clothes for
town
They together, as though of one mind
Think of those days, a slow rewind
When the world was theirs
And theirs alone

The sights, the sounds there mixed
inside their heads
Wishing they were back there instead
But now the daily nine-to-five
A must to keep themselves alive
With memories of their life they now
share.

Their earnest wish, unspoken just
Of nothing to crowd out, no daily
cares
No work, no money, no ringing phone
That time when none other existed
But themselves alone
A united legal pair,
When he said 'A band of gold to
match her golden hair'

The honeymoon, the island's sea and
sky so blue
Still there on the phone - now new

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Reminders of a wedding day, a
blissful honeymoon
All over quickly, yes way too soon
Now that the honeymoon is over.

Richard Simmonds
26th July.2026

Tiny Tots Pre School

We meet in the St Andrew's Room on the second Wednesday of the month 1:00 pm to 2:30 pm so come along.
Further information
Contact: Alison 01245 474858 or e-mail: tots@sandon-church.info

Thank you for uniting with us in hope

christian aid

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With over 400 projects funded across the world last year, together with our supporters like you, we reached the immediate humanitarian needs of **over 3.2 million people**. We can only do it with donations like yours.

Robert Ross
Community
Fundraising Advisor

Two Rooks

The day, yes bright, the sky set fair
Two birds together, yes a pair
Two rooks, go bent-walk, the empty field,
Each day they on patrol do walk, do cross
Sombre they, dressed all in their coal black cloth
As if in some invisible procession, sealed;
They slowly pass,
One respectfully behind its mate, a suggestion
As though to the churchyard they head
To lay flowers to a friend, with words unsaid.

The morning sun, brighter gleams
To catch the blackened, silvered green
With heads alert, a haughty stance
Their backs caught by sun's slanting glance
Then gently, a walking pair
Pass by my seat, as though I was not there.

…… Weeks have passed since I wrote these lines
And still the field I walk most times
The rooks are there, together fair
As though attached by some invisible line, where
I cannot see either line or cord
As they both move with one accord.

…… I still return to my quietened field
For any secrets its presence yield.
Though rain and sun have passed this way
Since I last penned some verse
The two rooks continue in their walk
The field, its bounds, their universe;
They troop together yards apart
In sight of others' wings
For grubs, insects they search the ground
In search of many things,
Yes they are a familiar sight to me
In this troubled world
And then at once they to the air do take
Their coal black wings unfurled.

…… After the rain, a day downcast, begins
Sun and shower the forecast grim;
The greying clouds, on blue they speed
They in a rush, I do not heed
Grey they threaten overhead
But I sit quiet upon my bench
As morning sun breaks through the cloud
Severing, threatening the greying shroud
And as though sensing their sunborn cue
Two rooks appear, again just two
They glide from close - by trees, a likely nest
As clouds do thicken from the west
They caw and squark as they fly to ground
Unmistaken cry heard all around
The distance between, they seem to know
Wherever one, the other goes.

Richard Simmonds
26th March till 2nd April, 30th April, 17th May and 4th June.2026

Sandon School

passing the baton

As a new school year starts Mr Jon Pead takes up post of head teacher at Sandon School as Andy Weaver retires. Both offer some reflections.

Andy's reflections:
It is with some sadness that I made the decision earlier this year to retire from The Sandon School after 29 years service, with 8 years as Headteacher. In that time the school has played a role in the local community in lots of ways. I remember days of children in registration times practising the National Anthem, ready to sing at the rededication of the oak on Sandon Green in 2000. Visitors to the school at that time couldn't quite work out why all they could hear was God Save The Queen ringing out every morning at 8:35am! I also saw how students went out into the community, along with members of the Parish Council, to plant trees for the Queen's Platinum Jubilee in 2022, and the Sandon Choir singing for the rededication of the bells at St Andrews.
I enjoyed welcoming the Parish Council to Sandon for its AGM and the way the Parish welcomed the views of Sandon's students into your local plan. I was thrilled to be invited to read at the nine Lessons and Carol services on several occasions, including the Covid year where that service was held online with us all in our respective homes, and the following year when we held it outside. That all seems so long ago.

The job of teaching has changed so much in my time. The expectations on schools have never been greater, the demands of teachers have never been more challenging and the answers to all of society's problems seem to be able to be achieved by getting the schools to do a little bit more. All of those little bits are adding up to a mountain.

I know it's not always easy for a village to have a school with 1250 students on its doorstep, but it is a testament to the village and the people lucky enough to live there, that we get by with so few problems ... although we won't mention how difficult it is to get down Woodhill Road at 3 pm every day! It says a lot too about the wonderful students that we have at Sandon.

I have worked with some inspirational teachers, some committed and dedicated

governors including the wonderful Rev Terry Brown, and I have met with some marvellous families working so hard to do the hardest job in the world – successfully bringing up children. There is an old proverb of African origin that says 'it takes a village to raise a child'. When I grew up, the village was comprised of my parents, siblings, cousins, aunties and uncles, all of whom lived within walking distance of our home. Family life today is more complex and the modern village comprises not only parents but friends, schools, youth organisations, sports clubs and sometimes the Church, all held together by technology.

I have enjoyed the last 29 years – some days it was so good it didn't feel like going to work at all. It doesn't get better than that!

Good luck to you all and God Bless! *Andy Weaver*

Jon's Vision:
I am delighted and honoured to introduce myself as the new Headteacher of The Sandon School.

Having spent my career working in education, I have always believed passionately that education has the power to transform lives. A great school does more than prepare young people for examinations; it builds confidence, character, curiosity and ambition, helping every student to discover their strengths and understand the opportunities available to them.

I am incredibly grateful to Andy Weaver for his many years of dedicated service to The Sandon School. His commitment, leadership and support for the school community have been hugely valued, and I would like to thank him for the care he has shown in ensuring a smooth and effective handover. I look forward to building on the strong foundations that he and so many others have created, and wish him every happiness for his retirement.

My vision for The Sandon School is to ensure that we continue to provide an education that inspires and empowers every student. We want our young people to leave us with the knowledge, skills and confidence they need to thrive in a dynamic and ever-changing world. Most importantly, we want Sandon to remain a school at the heart of its community - a school that families are proud to be part of and that the wider community can celebrate.

I am excited to begin this next chapter and look forward to working closely with our students, staff, families, governors and the Sandon community. Strong partnerships facilitate incredible opportunities for students to thrive, and I am committed to listening, learning and working alongside everyone who cares about the future of our young people.

Together, we can ensure that The Sandon School continues on its journey, provides an exceptional education and remains a source of pride for the whole community.

Mr J M Pead

Wedding guest

A little boy at Sunday School learned about the time Jesus went to a wedding and changed the water into wine. "And what did you learn from that story?" asked his father afterwards.
The boy thought for a moment and answered, "If you're having a wedding, make sure Jesus is there."

Our Church is open!

The church is open for quiet contemplation and prayer every day from about 8:30am to 5:00pm (exact times will vary).

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All in the month of SEPTEMBER

It was:

250 years ago, on 9th September that the Second Continental Congress adopted the name United States, which replaced United Colonies.

200 years ago, on 5th September 1826 that John Wisden, British cricketer was born. Founder of *Wisden's Cricketers' Almanac*. Launched with 112 pages in 1864, it now runs to 1500 pages and is the bible of cricket.

175 years ago, on 19th September 1851, Wiliam Lever, 1st Viscount Leverhulme, was born. Co-founder of Lever Brothers with his brother James. Now called Unilever, this global consumer-goods company operates in more than 190 countries.

125 years ago, on 29th September 1901 that Enrico Fermi, Italian-born American physicist was born. Creator of the first nuclear reactor, he became known as the 'architect of the nuclear bomb.'

90 years ago, on 30th September 1936 that Pinewood Studios in Buckinghamshire were officially opened.

80 years ago, on 5th September 1946 that Freddie Mercury, Zanzibar-born British rock singer and songwriter was born. As lead singer of Queen, he sold more than 250 million records worldwide. Died of bronchial pneumonia resulting from AIDS in 1991.

60 years ago, on 8th September 1966 that the Severn Bridge was officially opened. Linking Wales and England over the rivers Severn and Wye, it carries about 32,000 vehicles a day.

50 years ago, on 5th September 1976 that the first episode of the Muppet Show was broadcast on ITV in the UK. It attracted 15 million viewers and ran for five series until March 1981.

40 years ago, on 7th September 1986 that Desmond Tutu became the first black Archbishop of Cape Town. Retired in 1996.

30 years ago, on 27th September 1996 that the Taliban seized control of Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan. Mullah Omar was installed as Head of the Supreme Council and ruled until 2001.

25 years ago, on 11th September 2001 that the terrorist attacks on America took place. Al-Qaeda terrorists hijacked four planes and crashed them into the World Trade Centre's Twin Towers in New York, into the Pentagon, and into a field in Pennsylvania. 2,973 people were killed.

20 years ago, on 3rd September 2006 that Andre Agassi announced his retirement due to back problems. He was 36, a former world number one in tennis, and the 1996 Olympic champion.

Hornby trains and Dinky Toys

It was also 90 years ago, on 21st September 1936, that Frank Hornby, the British inventor, died. He is remembered for the immensely popular Meccano, Hornby Model Railways and Dinky Toys.

Hornby was born into a Liverpool working-class family and was said to have been inspired by the industry in the city. He was brought up as a Methodist and was interested in music, having a strong tenor voice. He met his future wife, Clara, when they were members of the Liverpool Philharmonic Society choir: they married in 1887 and had three children.

To amuse his two sons he constructed a model crane using perforated strips of metal held together with nuts and bolts. It could be dismantled and the parts used to build other things: this formed the basis of Meccano, which when refined proved hugely popular.

After the first world war he turned his attention to the construction of toy trains, powered by clockwork. At first these were made from kits, but it was not long before they were sold as ready-made train sets – a perfect children's toy. Dinky toys started as an accessory but soon developed into big-sellers in their own right.

Later Hornby, who was described as polite and a "keen observer of morality", became a Conservative MP for Everton. In his youth he joined the anti-alcohol Band of Hope and set up a number of groups and clubs dedicated to the improvement of society. He was a great believer in determination and the ability to overcome setbacks.

This enabled him to become not only a visionary but a practical creator in toy development and production. His persistence in adapting his original ideas and making them workable, brought him deserved success in producing three of the most popular lines of toys in the 20th century.

Tim Lenton

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Church Services — St. Andrew's, Sandon

Services currently planned online via Zoom are shown in italics.

Also, we hope to say Morning Prayer at 8:30 am each morning, Sunday to Wednesday and Evening Prayer at 4:00 pm each Thursday.

September

Tuesday 1st	9:30 am	Said Communion Carol Ball
Wednesday 2nd	8:30 pm	*Night Prayer*
Sunday 6th	**Trinity 14**	
	10:00 am	Morning Worship
Tuesday 8th	9:30 am	Morning Worship
Wednesday 9th	8:30 pm	*Night Prayer*
Sunday 13th	**Trinity 15**	
	10:00 am	Worship Together
Tuesday 15th	9:30 am	Said Communion Carol Ball
Wednesday 16th	8:30 pm	*Night Prayer*
Sunday 20th	**Trinity 16**	
	10:00 am	Sung Eucharist Andrew Merchant
	3:00 pm	Communion at Howe Green
		Jo Clare-Young
Tuesday 22nd	9:30 am	Said Communion Keith Anderson
Wednesday 23rd	8:30 pm	*Night Prayer*
Saturday 26th	12:30 pm	Harvest Lunch at Howe Green URC
Sunday 27th	**Trinity 17**	
	10:00 am	Sung Eucharist
Tuesday 29th	9:30 am	Agape Meal
Wednesday 30th	8:30 pm	*Night Prayer*

October

Sunday 4th	**Trinity 18**	
	10:00 am	Harvest Service
	followed by Bring and Share Harvest Lunch	
Tuesday 6th	9:30 am	Said Communion Carol Ball
Wednesday 7th	8:30 pm	*Night Prayer*
Sunday 11th	**Trinity 19**	
	10:00 am	Sung Eucharist Andrew Merchant

Tuesday 13th	9:30 am	Said Communion Simon Pearce
Wednesday 14th	8:30 pm	*Night Prayer*
Sunday 18th	**Trinity 20**	
	10:00 am	Sung Eucharist Jonathan Holmes
	3:00 pm	Worship at Howe Green
		with Believers in Recovery
Tuesday 20th	9:30 am	Said Communion Carol Ball
Wednesday 21st	8:30 pm	*Night Prayer*
Sunday 25th	**Bible Sunday**	
	10:00 am	Worship Together
Tuesday 27th	9:30 am	Said Communion Keith Anderson
Wednesday 28th	8:30 pm	*Night Prayer*

November

Sunday 1st	**All Saints' Day**	
	10:00 am	Morning Worship
	4:00 pm	Time to Remember Andy Griffiths
Tuesday 3rd	9:30 am	Said Communion Carol Ball
Wednesday 4th	8:30 pm	*Night Prayer*
Sunday 8th	**Remembrance Day**	
	10:00 am	Remembrance Andrew Merchant
Tuesday 10th	9:30 am	Agape Meal
Wednesday 11th	8:30 pm	*Night Prayer*
Sunday 15th	**2nd before Advent**	
	10:00 am	Worship Together
	3:00 pm	Worship at Howe Green
		Rev'd Jo Clare-Young
Tuesday 17th	9:30 am	Said Communion Carol Ball
Wednesday 18th	8:30 pm	*Night Prayer*
Sunday 22nd	**Christ the King**	
	10:00 am	Songs of Praise
Tuesday 24th	9:30 am	Said Communion Simon Pearce
Wednesday 25th	8:30 pm	*Night Prayer*
Sunday 29th	**Advent 1**	
	10:00 am	Sung Eucharist Bishop Rob

Saint Andrew's Parish Church Contacts

Rector	Vacancy	
Church Wardens	Richard Cecil*+ Andy Horne*+	224747 475279
PCC Secretary	Judy Cecil*+	224747
PCC Treasurer	Nick Bobeldijk*+	471756
Safeguarding Officer	Alison Read*	474858
Electoral Roll	Liz Bobeldijk	471756
Bell Ringing	Mike Worboys	224612
Tiny Tots	Alison Read*	474858
Flower Arranging	Lesley Worboys	224612
Organist	Cathie Horne*	475279
Choir	Gill Haddington	529305
Magazine Editor	Richard Cecil*+	224747
Parochial Church Council Members	as * above and Colin Bryan+, Christine Mennie+, Janet Terry+ and Lisa Wiseman	

Authorised to assist in the distribution of Holy Communion
As + above and Valerie Grimwood, Gill Hodge and Michael Puffett

Regular Events see pages 14 & 15 for full details of worship.

Sundays	10:00 am	Morning Worship/Communion
Tuesdays	8:30 am	Morning Prayer with Compass Group (Zoom) compasschurches.org.uk
	9:30 am	Communion/Morning Worship/ Agape Meal
	7:45 pm	Ringing Practice
Wednesday	8:30 pm	Night Prayer (Zoom) sandon-church.info

Zoom services links can be found at the websites just prior to the service.

St Andrew's, Sandon

www.sandon-church.info

Editor Richard Cecil
Advertising Claire Jefferies
Distribution Manager Alison Read

Copy for December's magazine by 10th November 2026 please.
magazine@sandon-church.info



We welcome to membership of God's church at their baptism
Alma Reenie Allison 17th May
Isabell Georgie Watson 21st June
Jonathon Craig Watson 21st June

We commend to God's care at:
the funeral of
George Turner 17th June
the interment of ashes of
Pamela Ann Norrington 23rd June
David Malcolm Farrar 8th August
the burial of
Christopher Charles Cundy 9th July

Howe Green URC

The last few months have allowed us to get to know our new minister Rev'd Jo and her husband Rev'd Alex. They make a wonderful team. Alex is able to accompany our singing, as he is an accomplished musician. We have welcomed two new members to our church family when Holly and I became 'official' members.
We had a lovely strawberry afternoon tea where there was so much fellowship, people didn't want to go home.
Our upcoming 3 pm services are:
Sunday 20th September with Rev'd Jo Clare-Young when we will be sharing communion and celebrate our harvest. Any gifts given will be donated to CHESS and the Chelmsford Food Bank;
Sunday 18th October with Believers in Recovery;
Sunday 15th November with Rev'd Jo Clare-Young.
All are welcome to join us and to enjoy fellowship with tea and cake afterwards.
To continue celebrating our harvest we are having a Harvest lunch on Saturday 26th September at 12:30 pm. All are welcome to join us. Also we will be having a coffee morning later in October.
We look forward to seeing you.
Jane Clark, Secretary

Songs of Praise/Tea on the Green

This occurred on 19th July when we witnessed the generosity of the Salvation Army Band playing and a talk by Revd Anna Jones, Chaplain of Queens' College, Cambridge, Patrons to St Andrew's, Sandon. Her talk was based on 2 readings from Scripture, namely, Genesis 28:10-end and Colossians 3:12-17

'One learns more in the woods than in books. The trees and the rocks will teach you things you will not hear elsewhere.'[1]

The author of this sage advice was St Bernard of Clairvaux, twelfth- century Cistercian monk and mystic from the Burgundy region in France. Queens' College Cambridge, where I work, is jointly dedicated to St Bernard (along with St Margaret of Antioch), and along with many other contributions to the church of his time, Bernard was a serious scholar, known especially for his preaching. So, he wasn't someone to take book learning lightly. And yet, as he suggests in this quotation from a letter to a colleague, Bernard recognised that the natural world, and trees in particular, also have important things to teach us. As a former librarian turned chaplain this is wisdom I am learning to take to heart.

Trees have very much been on my mind this week. We are fortunate to have many across the college site, including a couple of by now very rare elms, and as in any collection of trees, some of them will have witnessed to many more decades of students coming and going, seasons changing and weather patterns shifting than any human being can claim. As much as the iconic buildings around us, the trees define our surroundings, shedding vast quantities of leaves at the start of the new academic year in the autumn, filtering precious light through their lattices of bare branches in the winter, and providing welcome shade on warm spring and summer days. Trees are an integral and vital part of our outdoor furniture.

So, it was a real shock to walk into College last Sunday and see that the mulberry tree I pass several times a day on the way to and from my office had collapsed.

[1] Letter 101 to Henry Murdach, Abbot of Vauclair, quoted in Cistercian Abbeys: History and Architecture (Köln, Könemann, 1998), 25. Quoted in Nicola Slee, Sabbath: The hidden heartbeat of our lives (2019), p.52.



The fallen mulberry

We've all been watching its massive canopy get closer and closer to the ground as the weight of the huge crop of fruit has strained the branches in the heat over recent weeks. Eventually the strain became too much, and the main trunk split last weekend with a loud crack. It makes for a dramatic and sad sight as the tree lies splayed across the lawn and the leaves on its detached branches have been drying out with each passing day behind the safety barriers, while the precious mulberries drop to the grass beneath out of reach of picking.

Fortunately, there are people around who know about these things, and it seems that with some expert pollarding, it may be possible for a small part of the tree to be saved. (Please join me in sparing a thought for the gardening team and the external contractors who will be masterminding this operation tomorrow.) But the space will not be the same and our community feels this keenly. From long-standing colleagues to short-term summer school guests, the mulberry tree has featured in every conversation I've had this week. There's a shared sense of distress at what's happened, most acute, of course, among those who have the day- to-day care of the college grounds. Although they literally have a life of their own, the trees and plants around us reflect and represent the work of those who tend them, and that is important to acknowledge.

And for all of us, however much or little we're aware of it in the normal course of things, we have a special relationship with trees. Many of them live longer than we do, and, though they grow and change with the seasons, sections may fall off, and sometimes they become a nuisance (a weeping willow may look beautiful on the banks of a river, but you wouldn't want one near your house!), there's a solidity to trees that is anchoring, and it's unsettling when that connection is broken. Just think of the reactions to the felling of the Sycamore Gap tree in Nortumberland 3 years ago…

What the fate of the Queens' mulberry tree has further



The trimmed mulberry ready for regrowth

reminded me this week is that our experience of the natural world around us really matters. Nature is not mere decoration. What we notice of it, consciously and unconsciously, helps to connect us with a place, both on an individual level, and as a community among those with whom that place is shared. Nature is, quite literally, grounding.

For the Christians among us, this shouldn't be surprising. The doctrine of creation tells us that God made heaven and earth and all that is in them, which means, quite literally, that everything in earth has something of God in it. From the smallest flower to the tallest tree, from the largest of mammals to the teeniest of bacteria, all are created by God and loved into being. Nature is literally living evidence of God's abundant generosity, expressed in colour and variety and sound and song, and also reflected in the way the whole ecosystem interacts, each part ordered in relation to another for the whole thing to thrive.

Much of the time we get along quite well without thinking about all this too hard. We may notice a new flower, catch a familiar scent or see a bright butterfly out of the corner of our eye as we carry on with our busy and complex lives, but unless and until something stops us in our tracks – like the collapse of a familiar tree, news of flash flooding or of wildfires nearby – the natural world is more of a backdrop than centre stage in our consciousness.

Greater awareness from daily experience of the changing climate around us seems, at last, to be bringing us to the proper realisation of just how complex and interdependent our relationship with nature is. For too long we have been complacent and heedless of the high and non-refundable cost of our choices about how we use natural resources to service lives of comfort and convenience (at least in large parts of the geopolitical west). And yet, an integral part of the story of creation in the first chapter of the book Genesis is our charge, as creatures made in God's likeness, to take

responsibility for the flourishing of the whole. This too is something we clearly need to learn afresh in each generation.

How then can we lean into the wisdom of St Bernard, and tune ourselves better to the things the trees and the rocks can teach us that we won't hear elsewhere?

Well, a good place to start is by slowing down to pay attention. Take a moment now to look around. What catches your eye? Focus on a particular colour. How many greens can you see? And what do you hear? If you can hear birdsong, is it one type or more? What around you now is familiar? What is new? Where do you notice your attention being drawn?

Using our senses to focus our attention on God's creation is a powerful way to connect with God in prayer and praise. The first few times may feel weird, but over a longer period, the spaces we make to draw closer to God in this way can make a huge difference. It's a counter-cultural thing to do in a world full of distractions that risk overstimulating our minds and reducing us to burnout. But it's vital if we are to heed the call of our restless hearts and fulfil our calling as "God's chosen ones, holy and beloved", in the words of the letter to the Colossians.

And what is that calling exactly?

For me, the American writer Wendell Berry offers a beautiful and powerful answer to this question in his poem 'I go among trees':

I go among trees and sit still.
All my stirring becomes quiet
around me like circles on water.
My tasks lie in their places
where I left them, asleep like
cattle.

Then what is afraid of me comes
and lives a while in my sight.
What it fears in me leaves me,
and the fear of me leaves it.
It sings, and I hear its song.

Then what I am afraid of comes.
I live for a while in its sight.
What I fear in it leaves it,
and the fear of it leaves me.
It sings, and I hear its song.

After days of labor,
mute in my consternations,
I hear my song at last,
and I sing it. As we sing,
the day turns, the trees move.[2]

[2]Wendell Berry, 'Sabbaths I, 1979', This Day: 7. Quoted in Nicola Slee, Sabbath: The hidden heartbeat of our lives (2019), p.53.

Berry finds that in communion with nature he can finally hear the voice of God drawing him in love through the language of his own particular song. As he acknowledges, the journey to get to this point of knowing can be bumpy and take us to places that feel uncomfortable for a while as we inevitably confront our fears and come face-to-face with our insecurities; there is nothing like quiet for bringing our demons to the fore. But it is ultimately through tuning into God's love in faith and trust that we are made whole and set free to love and serve and praise God in our turn, and to make that love known in whatever corners of the world where our particular melody can be heard.

On this day when we are gathered to worship God in songs of praise, I pray that we will each be inspired by St Bernard's wisdom and Wendell Berry's example to make space to spend time listening for the unique contour of God's love for us, and to respond by tuning our voices to sing it back with gratitude in our hearts.

For myself, I really hope that when I go back into College on Tuesday there will still be something of the mulberry tree left, and that over the months and years to come that remnant will sprout and spread and fruit again so that future generations of students and staff and even chaplains will enjoy it as we have. In the meantime, I give thanks for its witness to God's boundless love and amazing grace in our midst, and my heart sings out with Jacob as I realise "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." Amen.

Take Care

Take care 'pon the ground on which
you tread
The land that secretes a thousand
dreams
Of those before, who worked unfed
With pick and shovel, their minds
unseen,
Caressing daydreams on which to
cling;
Dreams as fragile as any butterfly
wing
They built their plans, by toil of human
hand
The very soil on which we now stand;
Their dreams so soft, so silent things;
Running silent swift, as water from a
cooling spring
Take care 'pon the ground on which
you tread
Take care of others' gentle dreams,
unsaid.

Richard Simmonds
6th August 2026

Cardinal Peaches

Here's a very simple yet delicious dessert

Ingredients
6 large, ripe peaches
1 vanilla pod (or use paste)
50 - 75g icing sugar
1½ tablespoons caster sugar
350 g fresh raspberries
1 tablespoon toasted almonds

Method
Place peaches in a large saucepan and just cover with water. Add caster sugar and vanilla pod, bring up to simmering point then put the lid on and simmer for about 10 minutes. Drain the peaches and when they're cold slip the skins off.

Meanwhile sprinkle the raspberries with icing sugar and leave them for 20 minutes. Puree or pass through a nylon sieve to make a puree. Place the peaches in a bowl and pour the raspberry puree over. Cover with cling film and chill for several hours.

To serve place them on one large serving dish or in 6 individual dishes and sprinkle with the almonds.
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Narelle Arnold
from Delia Smith

St John the Baptist Church, Danbury
2026 Monthly lunchtime concerts in the church
Fridays at 12.15pm

11th September The Cardea Trio – Music for Soprano, Piano and flute

9th October The Swift Singers - our local Ladies Community choir

13th November Philip Prior- Recitalist, Organist and Director of Music at St James the Great, Colchester with our final hurrah for our organ in its big birthday year

11th DecemberChristmas Extravaganza – Music and readings for the season

Lunch will be available from 11:45 am or bring your own. Entry is free.

What We Were Looking For

My wife, Hayley, and I are both originally from Billericay in Essex. Like many people in our twenties, however, we were drawn towards London. We moved to Stockwell, near Brixton, and spent eight years there.

At the time, life seemed to be moving exactly as it should. We were ambitious and focused on our careers. Hayley qualified as a Chartered Quantity Surveyor, while I built a career as a web designer before eventually becoming a tech company founder. We worked hard, enjoyed the restaurants and nightlife, and embraced everything that came with living in one of the greatest cities in the world.
Our London story reached its natural high point when we got married in Lambeth, overlooking the Thames. From the outside, we had achieved much of what we had set out to achieve.

Yet, gradually, something began to feel missing.

The life we had worked so hard to build was exciting and comfortable, certainly, but somehow less fulfilling than we had expected. Professional success and material comfort are attractive things. There is nothing inherently wrong with either. But I have come to believe there is a trap in thinking that they are the destination rather than simply part of the journey.

Eventually, by then in our early thirties, we decided to leave London and return to Essex. We found the village of Sandon and began building a very different sort of life. In the two and a half years since, we have renovated our home and welcomed the greatest joy of our lives - our daughter, Alma, who is now ten months old.

Becoming a father changed my understanding of what it means to be successful.
The things that once seemed so important suddenly appeared rather less so. A good career still matters to me, but it has been pushed into its proper place. Spending time at home with my wife and daughter simply matters more.

Our daughter was recently christened, and we have since enjoyed attending church services. Hayley has also been attending the church's children's group, where mothers, babies and members of the church come together each month.

What has struck me most is how remarkably simple it all is. People meet and take an interest in one another.
These things sound ordinary - and perhaps that is precisely the point.
Modern life has become extremely good at giving us convenience, but I wonder whether that convenience has sometimes come at the expense of almost everything else. Fewer people are choosing to have children. We know our neighbours less well. More of our lives can now be lived without ever leaving the house. Meanwhile, pubs are closing, high streets are quieter than ever and many of the institutions that once brought people together are disappearing.

Increasingly I believe the Church has an important part to play in reversing that.

Where better to rediscover family and community, and to explore the deeper questions of meaning and purpose, than in an institution that represents the Christian foundations on which so much of our country, culture and way of life was built?

For years, I thought building a good life meant climbing the ladder, earning more and acquiring the things that came with success. Increasingly, I think real wealth looks rather different.

It is a wife and child you love. Neighbours who know your name. And, perhaps above all, a relationship with something greater than yourself.

So, if there is one thing I hope you take away from this article - especially if you are of a similar age to me - it is this:

If, like me, you have spent years pursuing everything modern life tells us should make us happy, but still suspect something is missing, come along to church.

Come to meet your neighbours. Have a conversation. Become part of the village rather than simply somebody who lives within it.

And perhaps, surrounded by that warmth and support, more of us will feel confident enough to grow our families and rediscover the benefits of community.

I am only at the beginning of that journey myself.

But I am increasingly convinced that what we are all looking for might have been here, on our doorstep, all along.

Tom Allison, 34, Sandon

A Week in Politics

I am sure that you have heard that a week is a long time in politics. A phrase apparently attributed to Harold Wilson in the 1960s. Here is a different take on that for the week from 6th July to 11th July. And I am not talking about what appears to be the shocking murder of Ann Widdecombe.

On 20th June, Judy and I went to a Cathedral Essex Book Festival event. The author and journalist Nicola Kelly was being interviewed about her new book entitled 'Anywhere but Here'. Nicola has worked for the Foreign Office for about ten years and then the Home Office. What she saw at the Home Office made her decide to leave the Civil Service and she became a free-lance journalist. She has made it her business to tell the stories of people around immigration, whether immigrants, law enforcement, rescue, traffickers etc. Her book is not a beach read, as she says, but it is immensely readable. It is also shocking and does not show this country in its best light. But it remains that an indication of character is how we treat those who are defenceless.

Part of her 'Afterword' reads, "For those I've met and written about in this book, and countless others whose stories are not on these pages, the experience of navigating the UK's needlessly hostile, complex asylum system has meant being kept in limbo, waiting, never sure what tomorrow will bring. It is intended to create fear and to prevent people from wanting to come here and remain here. But many do, and I have seen that communities up and down the country are all the more open and tolerant for them."

As I was musing on what I had read in Nicola Kelly's book, Judy and I were on a brief few days away in the Test Valley, a quite remarkably beautiful spot in the English countryside not far from Andover. It is not very far from Salisbury either. We read that the annual Edward Heath Annual Lecture was to be held in Salisbury Cathedral on 9th July. That is 110 years after Edward Heath's birth. The lecture itself was to be given by William Hague. Judy and I bought tickets and went along. The title was "What Can History Teach Us About Today's Challenges?" The Rt Hon The Lord Hague of Richmond is the author of books about William Pitt the Younger, Britian's longest serving prime minister and the social reformer William Wilberforce. He was introduced wittily by former MP Giles Brandreth. Giles said that he had been Edward Heath's personal whip in the Commons as they had no overall majority in the last years of Heath's time in the Commons. He also quipped about the trio of Williams, Pitt, Wilberforce and Hague.

William Hague suggested that a successful prime minister needed, amongst other things, a clear sense of direction and an ability to make decisions. He referred to the difficulties Pitt coped with as Prime Minister, a war, a mutiny of the Army in London whilst at war, economic doldrums citing a change in the times with the old going out and the new coming in as it did with the industrial revolution. The slowness of communication was illustrated in that it took 16 days for the news of victory at Trafalgar, and the death of Admiral Nelson, to reach Westminster.

He spoke too about how Wilberforce had been behind so many initiatives of his time in justice, most remembered being the abolishment of legal slavery, but also many missionary endeavours some of which recognisably continue to this day. Both these Williams did much of their work in the early 19th century. Hague spoke about how, arguably, we are turning another corner with the arrival of widespread applications of artificial intelligence (although not yet in Sandon Voice).

I had gone to the talk hoping to ask a question. I wanted to ask how our treatment of refugees and asylum seekers had, or hadn't, changed over the years. This was provoked by Nicola Kelly's book. There were questions which were mostly set by Anthony Seldon, an author about British Prime Ministers and also former headteacher. They too were informative and amusing. "Which Prime Minister would you least like to have lunch with?" "Oh! I have had lunch with them!" William Hague suggested there were two but diplomatically no names were revealed!
I was not invited to ask a question so I had to sit on my musing of how the apparent injustices to so many who have a weak voice might be addressed. We were able to have a refreshing cup of tea in the Salisbury cathedral refectory which sits alongside the old cathedral building. It has a glass ceiling which gives excellent views of the gargoyles on the building and the spire, the highest medieval spire in the country, 123 metres high.

(Continued on page 30)

Later we read an email from the Bible Society. It had details of an annual event in the Palace of Westminster, the Parliamentary Prayer breakfast. There were 200 PMs present and 700 people in total. Sponsored by Bible Society and organised by Christians in Parliament, the National Parliamentary Prayer Breakfast brings together peers, MPs, parliamentary staff and church leaders for worship and inspiration.

This year's National Parliamentary Prayer Breakfast was titled 'Hope for the future'. Ms Clare Williams-Sarpong, a tutor at the Oxford Centre for Christian Apologetics, spoke of the crisis of hope in today's society, which sees many people pessimistic about the future.

Clare based her talk on the healing of a blind man, Bartimaeus, at the end of chapter 10 of Mark's gospel. I have put it at the end for you to refer to. She made 3 points about this passage. First that the crowd tried to keep the blind man away from Jesus. Kind of, "Don't make a fuss." Once Jesus notices, the crowd changes its tune and encourages Bartimaeus to his feet. She then points out that Jesus does not presume to know what Bartimaeus wants. He asks him. Jesus gives him agency. She then went on to say that politics is 'a good servant but a terrible saviour'.

Clare said that Bartimaeus was on the margins of his society yet Jesus cared for him. 'Likewise,' she said, 'Many of you have entered politics because you believe that we ought to care for those on the margins.' However, she added, 'Too often we ask politics and political victories to deliver more than they ever could. Not merely policy, but security, identity and even a sense of redemption.
'This misplaced hope can leave us thoroughly disappointed. Disappointed by people, however impressive, or systems that crumble under the weight of expectations that they were never meant to carry. No person, no party, no institution can bear the weight, the burden of ultimate hope.'

Closing the event, Tim Farron MP said: 'Wouldn't it be wonderful, so unspeakably wonderful, if in this messed-up world of heartbreaks great and small, there really was hope? You see, hope isn't a party. Hope isn't an ideology. Hope isn't a philosophy. Hope is a person, and his name is Jesus.'

To which we might add let us put our hope in Jesus, a certainty, rather than anything else. And for me it set the earlier political events and thinking in a much wider and more hopeful context if we care to embrace it.

Richard Cecil

Mark 10:46-52 Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (which means 'son of Timaeus'), was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!'
Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, 'Son of David, have mercy on me!'
Jesus stopped and said, 'Call him.'
So they called to the blind man, 'Cheer up! On your feet! He's calling you.' Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus.
'What do you want me to do for you?' Jesus asked him.
The blind man said, 'Rabbi, I want to see.'
'Go,' said Jesus, 'your faith has healed you.' Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.





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