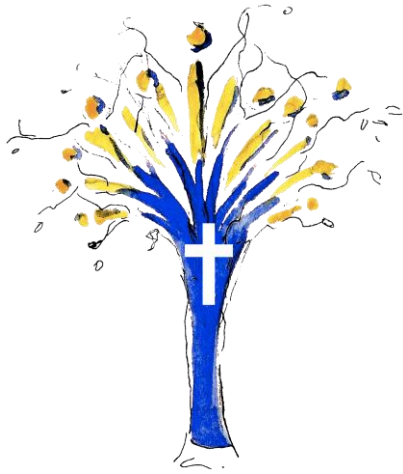


Off the Record



From **MAGOR
BAPTIST CHURCH**

*Growing and sharing
in God's love*



SUMMER 2025



A Faithful Saying

Hello Friends

I have written two pieces for this magazine. The first, immediately following, is something for you to read slowly with a Bible in your hand. The second piece is something to read carefully, with prayer in your heart. They cover quite different matters, but I hope each of them will be interesting and helpful to you.

Bless you, Mark

This is a trustworthy saying

Read: Titus 3v4-5 : *But when the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us...*

That word 'saved' is too easily overlooked, or understated, or dulled by overuse. This is a miracle word and it means when everything was at stake, when we were lost beyond our own help, God intervened. The kindness and love of God appeared in the gift and revelation of God's Son, Jesus. This old apostle is in the process of establishing his legacy in the form of a faith community in which the risen Son of God, Jesus Christ, is present by his Spirit – to save, and keep, and guide. Grateful worship has always been the living evidence that we are saved, and we know it.

Read: Titus 3v5 : *He saved us not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy...*

We are saved not by our best efforts, but by the kindness, love, and mercy of God. These three keywords of Christian vocabulary are required to express something of the sheer gift and undeserved grace, of what God has done for sinners through the work of Christ. Once saved, of course, God requires us to live by that same grace into holiness and righteousness. Being saved by God's mercy and justified by grace, is "a status which must then be demonstrated in practice by righteous living."

Read: Titus 3v5 : *He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.*

Deep echoes here of that late night conversation with Nicodemus about being born again by the Holy Spirit. There can be no more radical new beginning than being born again. Our moral life, our inner drives of love and desire and hope, so often distorted by sin into possessiveness, greed and self-serving, are all of them reset in a renewal only possible by the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. No wonder Paul said, "If anyone is in Christ – new creation!" And all by the kindness, love and mercy of God. We really should take more time to sit down and wonder at all of that!

Read: Titus 3v6 : *"The Holy Spirit whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Saviour.*

The language is still about the extravagant grace and generosity of God. The Holy Spirit is given without measure, a reminder of John's vivid memory: "From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.." (John 1v16) God gives of himself in his fullness in Christ and by the Holy Spirit. Not only so, it is all mediated through Jesus Christ our Saviour. There is no more convincing sign of the saved soul than grateful love, lived out in faithful service to church and world, and continually celebrated in lifelong praise to the Saviour.

Read: Titus 3v7 : *So that having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.*

Being justified by grace means we are not heirs by right, but by gift. In Romans Paul spells this out much more fully: "The Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ..." The hope of eternal life is not set round with conditions, or 'ifs and buts'. This hope is secured in our relationship to God, through Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. That's what being saved means, to live faithfully and hopefully towards our future in eternal fellowship with God.

There is no more convincing sign of the saved soul than grateful love,

Read: Titus 3v8 : *This is a trustworthy saying.*

In his letters to Timothy and Titus, the Apostle Paul repeatedly tells those who will hear his letters read, "This is a trustworthy saying." Believe it; stake your life on it; act on the truth of it; accept it into your heart and mind and let its truth and trustworthiness be fuel for your faith, day in and day out. Read Titus 3.1-8 again, because the truth Paul is telling is well worthy of your deepest trust and strongest confidence in God.

For your interest here are the other 'faithful sayings':-

1 Timothy 1v15; 3v1; 4v8;

2 Timothy 2v11-12;

Titus 3v8.

Find time to ponder these trustworthy sayings too.



Mark

The sanctity of personal choice - an unwelcome danger.

It was a warm Sunday in August and we had returned from one of our trips 'up North', although I don't supposed residents of Macclesfield have ever regarded themselves as Northerners. But from the perspective of South Wales, heading up the M5 and M6 is evidently going 'up North' and it was from there that we had returned.

Sometime earlier that same day a friend had jumped off a bridge. I was reminded of this a few days ago as my diary alerted me to Amanda's birthday. Simultaneously a friend, the daughter of a friend, and the granddaughter of my first Church Secretary, Amanda was also the young woman and mother who I had the privilege of baptising on Easter Sunday 2014. Why Amanda chose to jump off a bridge later that year we will never

know. That she chose to do so is a choice I am not alone in wishing she hadn't made.

And yet, we are living at a time when individual autonomy is the major lens through which people see reality, and personal choice is an unquestionable right. For example, the debate around the Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill, which came before parliament recently, has revealed the enormous cultural emphasis on the sanctity of personal choice. And so, "My right to die" is simply one aspect of a broader worldview where I am entitled to exercise my individual rights without interference from the state or my neighbours.

Here too is the language of 'rights', so prevalent in such debates. And yet, the language of rights is contingent on what worldview one holds. If one sees society simply as a collection of autonomous individuals, then it is easy to understand why someone might believe in "my right to die". However, if one sees life as a gift from someone else (like God), it becomes nonsensical to talk about control over one's death as a right. This issue (like others) cannot be discussed apart from the larger story.

As a Christian I, myself, am very comfortable with the language of rights. As image bearers of God, we certainly do have rights. But **who** you think gives human rights and **who** determines the constraints on exercising those rights makes a world of difference.

I'm aware that the readers of this article are more than likely to be Christians. But that doesn't mean there is nothing to consider here for those with little or no faith. I think citizens of the UK should be concerned about this issue for all sorts of reasons that are not exclusively Christian, and which go beyond the arguments around coercion, manipulation of the vulnerable, or the 'beginning of the slippery slope' trajectory. These are well-rehearsed arguments and indeed a cause for great concern but further to them (and in spite of what people often claim), the choice to die or live is deeply influenced by society at large; there is no influence-free zone in which purely autonomous or free choices are made. And especially in a society in which it is becoming increasingly "inconvenient" to provide for the burgeoning elderly population, it is all too easy for people to feel both overt and covert pressure to "cease being an inconvenience." People may well feel that they are becoming a burden to their family and to the health system. Once we erode the protection of life, and even begin to allow professionals to participate in actively facilitating death, we're opening up a wide door for all sorts of bad things to happen.

Those who campaign for euthanasia don't see it in these terms at all. On the contrary, they couch their arguments with words like dignity, love and

compassion. And who am I to question that? I have no doubt that is what motivates so many of the ideas around this subject. However, among those who promote this agenda is a priority of personal autonomy above all else, and therein lies the problem.

The belief in individual autonomy has been with us for quite a while now, of course. The idea that '*I am the master of my fate, the captain of my soul*,' to quote the lines from *Invictus* by William Ernest Henley, is deeply embedded in our western psyche. But with autonomy comes the smallness as well as the sadness of a self-referential world. Devoid of any notion of transcendence, beyond that of self-transcendence, we shall be governed by legislation (even with all the caveats around what constitutes terminal illness), predicated on the dangerously subjective notion of 'quality of life'. For many people that is an entirely legitimate criterion. We use it for our dogs without any questions. But you and I are not dogs.

Humans are the image bearers of God from conception to the grave – this has always been the Christian conviction. It is the erosion of this story that even allows the issue of euthanasia to arise in public discourse as a viable possibility.

To be clear, to resist the move towards ending life, in the sense of assisted suicide, is certainly not to promote the prolongation of life at all costs. There comes a time in end-of-life care when medical intervention needs to stop, and death must take its course. All good palliative care recognises this, even as it also ensures the mitigation of pain right to the end.

Choices are ever before us, and occasionally they are matters of life and death. The debate around this bill has revealed the enormous cultural **emphasis on the sanctity of personal choice**. However, personal choice

“I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse.
Therefore choose life.” (Deuteronomy ch30 v19)

does not overrule the sanctity of human life.

Rev. Mark Thomas
Summer 2025

Fellowship News from Val Jones

How have you all been coping with the hot weather? I trust you have found somewhere cool to sit and just enjoy it. I must admit I have found it a bit too hot and not wanted to do much, but Dave and I have enjoyed sitting outside for our tea/coffee under the willow tree with a breeze drifting through every so often. Perfect.

The May Day Fayre on Monday 5th May was a busy day in The Square and in the tearooms where some £462 was raised for Ty Hafan and Raven House. Also the bric-a-bac stall raised £405 for the Leprosy Mission and Natalya's Fund.

On 26th June Dave and I celebrated our Diamond Wedding Anniversary with lots of cards, flowers, gifts and good wishes and a card from King Charles and Queen Camilla. Quite an achievement. We have had our ups and downs, happinesses and sorrows but we have known God with us over the whole 60 years and we thank him that we have managed to come this far. We were married in the old Ebenezer Chapel, now the Meeting Room and it has been wonderful belonging to such a loving Fellowship.

During April and May we had to say goodbye to two comparatively new friends. Gill Edwards moved into St David's Court only a few years ago but soon joined us at Ebenezer where she quickly made friends and became part of the Ebenezer Family. Our minister Mark was able to lead the service of thanksgiving for her life at the crematorium on 6th May. We send our sympathy and love to her daughters Gemma and Claire and the whole family.

We knew Jeanette Walker, also from St. David's Court, a little longer and she too quickly became part of the Ebenezer Church Family with many friends. Our minister Mark led both services of thanksgiving in the crematorium and chapel on 12th May. We send our sympathy and love to her children Jacqui, Richard and Jayne and the whole family. We count ourselves fortunate, if only for a short time, to have known two such lovely ladies. We ask that God's love surround each of the families as they come to terms with their sad loss.

Over the last few months we have been blessed with new folk coming to join us. We thank God for them and we would invite anyone who would like to know more about God's love to please come along on a Sunday and you will be assured of a warm welcome. Stop and enjoy tea/coffee and biscuits/cake and get to know us better.

Alternatively come and bring your children to the Family Fun Day free of charge on 4th August or come to our Friday Coffee Morning where you can have a cup of tea/coffee and a homemade cheese or fruit scone for £1. Coffee Morning also has a stall where you can buy beautiful cards, paper etc., for all occasions at very reasonable prices starting from as little as 50p. All proceeds from both the Coffee Morning and Card Stall go to a different charity each month.

Over the last two weeks we have had children from both Magor and Undy Schools join us at Coffee Morning and entertain us with their beautiful singing. The children stop and chat afterwards and it is good to get to meet them and their wonderful teachers. They give such pleasure to us all. You can also come in the rear entrance of the building to the Community Fridge which is held at the same time on a Friday morning.

On Sunday 6th July we celebrated our Church Anniversary with Revd Dr Craig Gardener from Cardiff Baptist College and afterwards over 50 of us enjoyed a splendid feast, the desserts were a special treat!



Nicola and Adam Beavan were pleased to announce the birth of Orla June Beavan, granddaughter for Jacque Hegarty, born on 4th June and weighing 5lb 12oz. We send our congratulations to the family.

On Saturday 12th April the wedding of Laura Elliott and Greg Carr took place at Ebenezer. We wish the happy couple a long and healthy marriage.



Uganda news from Phyllis Kasozi

During our time in the UK we were able to head to Scotland and see Roy & Caitlin's new baby and the family. It was a good time and we bless the Lord for that. Sorry we couldn't arrange a visit to Magor this time.

I am looking forward to going back to work on Monday at the high school in Busiika. So far the term has been moving on smoothly, all the children came back and so far we have got 8 new ones which is a good thing. God has guided us with the work because these days there is a lot of drama and chaos in the education sector in our country.

We are grateful to God that last term we had a friend who has donated 8 computers for the school, something called a 'raspberry pi' which I am taking back with me. With the new curriculum being internet based this will be a great help.

A few things you could pray for us about-
God's protection during the term when we have so many kids in our hands,
Also since the farm area is still remote, we have a big challenge of electricity. It is usually on for around 3 days in a week which means we can't pump water some days, then the kids sleep in darkness some nights which is very insecure, also we can't run the computer lab without electricity. Life becomes a bit challenging. So our prayer is that we will get a good solar system which is more dependable and stable. *[Ed: Uganda is our charity offering in July]*

I am very grateful for all your help and your patience, love and concern, it does blow my mind away. I must say you are like an angel sent from heaven to us.

May God bless you and greatly reward you.

Greetings to everyone in Magor

Love Phyllis.

April Charity Offering - Tearfund, Myanmar - News

Following the devastating earthquake in Myanmar Tearfund along with the Disasters Emergency Committee appealed for urgent donations for vital help in Myanmar. The church agreed to match all giving to Myanmar in April and a total of **£2,915** (including matched funds of £1,333) was sent to Tearfund at the end of April.

Update from Tearfund

They tell me this is the hardest thing they have ever faced." People in Myanmar, still scared, now face monsoons in tents, three months after the devastating earthquake.

Saturday, June 28th, marks three months since a devastating 7.7 magnitude earthquake struck Myanmar, claiming the lives of at least 3,700 people and injuring thousands more. As the monsoon season arrives, many of those affected remain in temporary shelters or unsafe homes. Tearfund has spoken to one of its local partners who has been responding to the disaster. Due to security concerns, their words are shared anonymously.



"It has been almost three months since the devastating earthquake on March 28. Its effects are still everywhere. Families are still living in tents on playgrounds, farmlands, and in camps. Some are staying in their unsafe houses because they have nowhere else to go. With the monsoon starting, they face serious risks from rain, bad weather and diseases like flu and diarrhea. But the physical damage is only part of the story. The emotional

part runs deep. People are still scared. They live with constant fear of aftershocks. When I recently visited the affected area, I spent a night in the field. I saw families trying to sleep under the open sky. Children are hugging their parents for comfort. Everyone looks tired, worried and anxious. The needs are still urgent. Families are still asking for food, clean water and a safe place to stay. Parents are doing everything they can to protect their children. Some are rebuilding their homes with bamboo, using plastic sheets for roofing, and clearing away the debris from collapsed buildings.

"And yet, even in the midst of the crisis, there is hope. Communities are standing together. People are sharing the little they have – food, water, shelter – and giving each other strength through phone calls, visits and kind words. Tearfund and local partners responded quickly after the earthquake. They supported search and rescue efforts, provided hot meals and clean water, and moved families to safe places. Now they are helping people build temporary shelters and begin the long road to recovery.

"Schools have reopened and children are going back to class. Some families are using the help they have received to pay for healthcare and school fees. But the need is still great. People want to rebuild their lives, their future. They are asking for continued support and prayers not just to survive, but to stand strong again. When I walk with families, they tell me this is the hardest thing they have ever faced. But they also speak with gratitude for the support that came when they needed it most. They speak with hope that with continued help, they can recover. So, today, I want to share this message with you. The people affected by the earthquake are strong and resilient, but they cannot do this alone. They need us to help. Keep walking alongside them to help them rebuild, not just buildings, but lives filled with safety, dignity and hope. Thank you very much."

Tearfund's local partners in Myanmar have been providing immediate assistance so that people are able to access emergency supplies, and are providing essential needs like water, food and non-food items and cash assistance, as well as maternal health clinics and psychosocial support particularly for vulnerable children. To date, Tearfund's local partners have reached over 15,000 individuals.

See www.tearfund.org



Church attendance has risen by 50 per cent over the last six years, busting the myth of church decline. The findings come in *The Quiet Revival*, a survey commissioned by Bible Society and conducted by YouGov.

A report by Rev Mark Woods (Bible Society)

For most of my time in Baptist ministry – nearly 40 years now, 16 of which I spent as a pastor – the prevailing story for our churches has been one of numerical decline. Of course, it goes back even further than that; our lecturers at college in the '80s had seen it, and their teachers had too. There were churches that grew, and the Spirit had obviously not abandoned us – I'd like to think that my and subsequent generations of ministers and churches did some good things – but still.

I now work for Bible Society, and was privileged to have a small part in the production of a report called *The Quiet Revival*, which has turned that story on its head. You can find out more about it on the Bible Society website and read the report yourself, but here are some of the headlines:

- In 2018 around 8 per cent of the population of England and Wales were in church monthly. In 2024 it was 12 per cent. That's an increase of around 2 million.
- Young adults are leading the way, with an increase among 18–24-year-olds from 4 per cent to 16 per cent.

- Bible reading and confidence in the Bible have increased since 2018, with 67 per cent of churchgoing Christians reading the Bible at least weekly outside of church (in 2018 it was only half)
- We also found that churchgoers are far more socially engaged than non-churchgoers, and that churchgoers are far more likely to report much higher life satisfaction than non-churchgoers.

These are extraordinary figures, but they're supported by an extraordinarily large sample size and by the research teams not only of Bible Society but of YouGov, one of the most respected polling organisations in the UK.

They're also supported by evidence that it's hard to dismiss as 'just' anecdotal – stories of life and growth, of people coming to faith, public figures identifying themselves as Christians, and the largest number of baptisms reported by Baptist churches in ten years. Baptists Together General Secretary, Lynn Green, reported that last year showed there were over 800 more baptisms than the previous year – the highest in a decade. Not only that, but the number of baptisms per church has risen from 1.3 in 2018 to 1.6 in 2024.

Furthermore, the growth isn't limited to particular ethnic groups. There is more growth among minority ethnicities, but there is also growth among White communities as well. This is what it looks like: a broad-based, unspectacular but solid increase in churchgoing in England and Wales.

Church growth has an impact on society, says *The Quiet Revival*, as churchgoers are more likely to actively participate in things that benefit the local community, such as donating to food banks, volunteering or giving to charity.

Christians also report a higher life satisfaction than non-churchgoers, with a greater connection to their community and less stress and anxiety.

There has been a change in the spiritual climate, and that's good to see. And reaction to the report in the mainstream media has been surprisingly positive, with many columnists and opinion-formers reflecting on what its findings mean for society today.

Now of course, there are some caveats. There are plenty of churches still struggling and seeing decline rather than growth. If your church is one of those, that doesn't mean the report is wrong; it just operates on a larger scale.

Furthermore, we should be clear that the survey measures churchgoing, and some other behaviours like volunteering and Bible reading (both with encouraging results). It doesn't ask theological or political questions that would allow its findings to be co-opted by particular wings of the Church. My own view, for what it's worth, is that its findings should be unreservedly welcomed; I think generally speaking people are better off in church than not, and I'm glad so many are finding faith.

But what next? I'd encourage everyone to download the report and read it carefully, perhaps as diaconates or church leadership teams, and work out what it says to your own contexts. There are insights in the report about young people and what they're looking for from church; gender; wellbeing; mentoring, and much more besides.

At Bible Society, we believe the Bible is a vital part of laying the foundations for growth that's lasting and transformational. We talk about being 'Bible confident' in the head, heart and hands dimensions – and one of the really encouraging things about *The Quiet Revival* report is that it shows spiritually open people genuinely want to know more about the scriptures. To meet this need we've created a fantastic new edition of *The Bible Course*, our free video series outlining the big story of scripture.

Most of all, though: be encouraged. Not all churches will grow; there's no magic formula. But the Church in England and Wales is now in a different season, and God is doing something quite unexpected.

The Revd Mark Woods is a Baptist minister and head of communications at Bible Society. This article first appeared on the Baptist Times website.

For more information see
<https://www.biblesociety.org.uk/research/quiet-revival>

June – August 1975

There was too much other material to include the following extract from the Nov/Dec 1974 magazine in the last Christmas issue. It apparently came from *Voice*, the Full Gospel Business Men's magazine. I reproduce it here as pause for thought.

| | |
|--|--|
| Have you ever seen a counterfeit £5? | Yes |
| Why was it counterfeited? | Because it was worth counterfeiting |
| Was the £5 note to blame? | No |
| Have you ever seen a scrap of Brown paper counterfeited? | No |
| Why? | Because it wasn't worth counterfeiting |
| Have you ever seen a counterfeit Christian? | Yes, lots of them |
| Was Christ to blame? | No |
| Have you ever seen a counterfeit unbeliever? | No |
| Why? | |

June 1975Weather

The church secretary wrote that it had been hot in May but as he wrote, on 4 June, the TV news showed 4" snow in Yorkshire and Derbyshire. Whilst compiling this we are in the middle of a heatwave; I assume snow won't come in the next few weeks!

Film about Ebenezer

The youth group 'Image' reported having discussed in April *'the making of a film about Ebenezer and its place in the community. Each member ... was given a particular part of the church to look into, e.g. Sunday services, Sunday School, Women's Hour, etc.'* They then reported that in May they had discussed its progress. What happened? Was such a film made? If so, does anyone still have a copy?

Magazine postage

Over 600 copies of the church magazine were printed each month. Paper costs had risen by 75% and 2nd class postage had increased in March from 3½p to 5½p (an increase of 57%). This year's rise from 85p to 87p in April was a mere 2.35% - but the total increase since 1975 is 2,386%!

July 1975

Magor & Undy boundary changes

'Much work is in hand in Undy and Magor building roads, preparing building sites, laying water mains, and generally making way for a large village with five times the present population. With this move comes the consideration of making one local government administrative unit and how this shall be done. The Welsh Office have set up the Local Government Boundary Commission ... and invites suggestions from all local government electors affected.' Two public meetings were held in Magor. Only 20 turned up to the first meeting, but they were unanimous in wanting Undy & Magor to be one administrative unit under Monmouth District. Whilst Undy came under Monmouth, Magor then came under Newport Borough. At the second meeting, attendance was better at 70, and Magor Community Council had also gleaned more information. Two thirds of those present *'favoured joining the Monmouth District, with one third wishing to remain with Newport Borough'*. The article continued, *'This is not the place to argue the case but it is the place to warn readers of the need to become very active if they want to have any influence on the final decision. The big boys of Newport borough have already prepared a plan to keep Magor and take over Undy, and have not consulted the people concerned before recommending a boundary change. ... If you are concerned you must write to the Commissioners ... before it is too late.'*

[Of course we now know the outcome which favoured Magor and Undy being in the Monmouthshire area. Not all readers may be aware that the Mill Reen was a key boundary line between Magor and Undy. Ed]

An early winter fuel allowance?

Names were requested of pensioners who had coal fires and would welcome chopped sticks, which boys would deliver during the school holidays.

August 1975

Church finances

The editorial reported on a deacons' meeting concerning church finances and the additional money needed to support the work of the ministry in Magor & Caldicot. Another factor was inflation. *'Global inflation is now*

running at 14% but in Britain the inflation rate is running at a shocking 25%'. It added, 'Worse yet, in Britain the May increase alone was a staggering 4.2% - an annual rate of 60%! There were national plans to stave off disaster but 'prices will never return to those we have enjoyed in the past. We must, as always, be careful with our money, but also bold enough to say that if the Lord's work needs more to be continued efficiently and effectively we must all give the limit.' The article acknowledged generous giving at services but *'when we miss a Sunday ... we forget that the work had to continue ... (when we are on holiday we still pay the rent and rates, although we are not living in the house).'*

Sunday School annual outing

An outstanding success: over 360 people, in seven coaches, went to Weston super Mare – *'a real invasion of the Somerset coast!'*

From a reader

'When I was delivering the Ebenezer Record about 10 miles from Magor, a gentleman with an unfamiliar accent asked whether I had a spare copy. As I handed one over, I apologized, "It's only the magazine of Magor Baptist Church, I don't suppose you've ever heard of it." "Oh yes I have," he replied, "I have heard that it is the most evangelical church in this area." I was filled with a sudden burst of emotion - not pride - because I belonged to Ebenezer, but shame because I so often fail to acknowledge the work that God does there, through those who are prepared to be used by Him.'

Holiday home

The latest Coffee Bar and Image project was to renovate *'a caravan, sorry a 'mobile home'* that they had bought. They acknowledged it was 'tatty' but aimed to raise funds to smarten it up, equip it, and move it to a permanent holiday site. It was not a holiday home for them but to help others who would otherwise have no holiday. Does anyone know if they achieved their aim? If you have memories or photos of the project, do get in touch.

God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform

In 1767 a poet and his housekeeper moved from Huntingdon to Olney.

There was only one problem. The works and renovations that had been required to make Orchard House suitable for one of England's leading poets, his housekeeper, and her daughter, were not complete. Fortunately for them the poet had a friend who was the curate at the local parish church. He and his wife offered them a very warm welcome, and this 'emergency' accommodation lasted for some months until the residence was ready.



The poet was William Cowper, and his friend was John Newton. William Cowper (said as Cooper) was one of the most popular poets of his time. He changed the direction of 18th-century poetry by writing of everyday life and scenes of the English countryside. Samuel Taylor Coleridge called him "the best modern poet", whilst William Wordsworth particularly liked his poem "Yardley Oak". He was also admired by Jane Austen.

Olney was at the heart of the Evangelical movement that was sweeping across England at that time. It is of interest to note that one of the aspects of this movement was to move prayer from just being part of the church service out into homes and prayer meetings. During Newton and Cowper's time in Olney there was a real sense of unity between the churches. Ministers from the different churches frequently met together in conference, sometimes in the field between William Cowper's and Newton's house. Writing to his aunt Mrs Madan in June 1768 Cowper refers to a recent holiday week held in Olney for the Association of Baptist Ministers and says ... *"It was a comfortable sight to see thirteen Gospel Ministers together. Most of them either preached or prayed and all that did so approved themselves sound in the word and doctrine"*.

William Cowper suffered with depression and he was often aware when this could happen. In January 1773 when out walking he became fearful that he "would fall again into the depths of Depression". When he got home he started to write his poetic confession of faith before the depression fell on him. The words he wrote that January have now become one of best-known hymns throughout all churches.

God moves in a mysterious way,
His wonders to perform.
He plants his footsteps in the sea
And rides upon the storm.

Good hymns for congregational singing were very much part of the Evangelical movement. Hymns were often in response to a particular need or situation or an enlightenment of a bible text. These hymns needed to be easy to learn as many of those hearing them would not have been able to read very well. A good rhyming couplet style was beneficial for most congregations. Cowper and Newton worked together to produce their own hymnbook, the Olney Hymns, that was first published in February 1779. It is still possible to buy the book and this picture is of a copy at the Cowper and Newton Museum.



Cowper is best known not just for his contribution to the *Olney Hymns*, but as a poet, letter-writer, and translator: his works include *The Diverting History of John Gilpin* (1782), *The Task* (1785) and his translation of the works of Homer published in 1791.

John Newton was concerned about his friend's fragile mental health and when in 1780 he accepted the call to become the vicar of St Mary's, Woolnoth in London, he felt that it was necessary to find someone who could walk alongside Cowper and help at times when he fell into depression. He approached the Rev William Bull, the minister of the independent chapel, to help him at times of need. Today this act of kindness is remembered at what was once the Independent Chapel in Olney and is now part of the URC Church, as this church is called the Cowper Memorial Church.

William Cowper was both a keen gardener and a nature lover. He took to keeping pet hares. At one time he had 3 hares in the house. The front door of Orchard House then opened directly on to the market square (there was no road in front it as there is now). Cowper was concerned that if his hares got out through the front door, he would not be able to save them from the busy market. He insisted that everyone who came to call must come round to the back of the house and use the back door, the door that was would normally only been used by the servants. Therefore, king or pauper everyone had to use the same door.



Today the house is open as the Cowper and Newton Museum and the front door is the way in. The only hares you will find are decorative ones around the house and gardens. The gardens are maintained in the style of a 18th century town garden with attached vegetable garden and the fields between Orchard House and the Vicarage have gradually over the years been filled with houses and shops and small businesses.



There is a reminder of William Cowper to all who use the market place as they can see him and his hares on the weathervane.

Cowper was very concerned for the people of the town he lived in and now the people of Olney can see him every-day.

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