

Shirenewton Parish Magazine



April 2025

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Bob O'Keefe

It is with great sadness that the death of Bob was announced during February following a period of ill health.

Bob was a very kind and considerate gentleman, a true friend to many, always ready to help anyone where he could and he will be sadly missed by many.

Bob had a passion for canoeing, making his own canoes and paddling away down many canals and rivers. During his national service in the army in Norway he was involved with instructing other soldiers in canoeing. Whilst in Norway he met his future wife Wenche who sadly died during 2020. For several years Bob held the record as the class winner of the Devizes to Westminster International Canoe Marathon which is 125 miles. He often told many amusing stories of his experiences on and off the water.

For many years Bob was the Convenor for Chepstow u3a Painting and Drawing group and also a member of Chepstow u3a Art Club. His personal artwork was excellent and he always encouraged the group to achieve their best, with a story, a laugh, a joke and a smile.

Our sincere condolences go to Bob's daughter Helen and son Paul and their families at this sad time.

Bob will be sadly missed by all who knew him.

FROM THE REGISTERS

The funeral of Robert Michael (Bob) O'Keefe (1936-2025) took place on Monday 24th March 2025 at St Thomas à Becket Church, Shirenewton at 2 p.m. with the Reverend John Waters officiating.

Congratulations to our 200 Club winners in March:

1. Amy Baker
2. William Smith-Haddon
3. Simon Lockhart

Happy Easter!

This month we see the arrival of Easter Sunday, the culmination and celebration at the end of 6 weeks of Lenten fasting and solemnness.

One of Barney's favourite poems about Lent is by George Herbert, and begins with the line "Welcome dear feast of Lent!". People may think this is an odd thing to say as we mostly associate Lent with fasting, withdrawal and sacrifice. But in fact, the purpose of fasting – if we choose to do so – is not simply to help us lose weight, or to eat a bit healthier; but in fact, to provide more space and focus to spend time with God. It is a fast for the body, in order to enable a feast for the soul – hence George Herbert's phrase.

I think one of the most productive Lents I ever had, a true soul-feast, was when I decided to take something up, instead of give something up in order to grow closer to God. So I committed to getting up at sunrise every day and going for a walk in my local parkland. I took a camera with me to capture any little bits of nature that caught my eye. It was wonderful seeing spring slowly emerge in the buds on trees and flowers on the ground. Some mornings were just stunningly beautiful, as mist rose off the grass and the sun's first rays reflected through the trees.

You might also be aware that Lent is 40 days long, but if you add up all the days between Ash Wednesday and Easter Sunday, you will actually count a total of 46. This is because in the Anglican tradition, Sundays are always feast days. Each Sunday is a 'mini' Easter Sunday – a celebration of Christ's death and resurrection. This is what I have since started to call "The Anglican Loophole" and have made very good use of it when, some years, I have given up food-stuffs very dear to me.... Such as chocolate! I knew that each week I could be relieved of the withdrawal symptoms! And celebrate, with Jesus, his victory on the cross by breaking my fast each Sunday.

That's not to say that anyone who fasts for the entirety of Lent are doing it wrong, if anything you are showing God true commitment and self-sacrifice which I know He notices and honours. Everything we do, if we do it with the best intentions, is considered worship to God. As 1 Samuel 16:7 reminds us: "Man looks on the outside, but God looks at the heart."

So however you have spent the season of Lent this year, I pray that this Easter you will find the fullness of joy that Christ's victory has won for us, and that the journey to the cross through Lent is one of deepening and strengthening our faith. Every blessing Zoe

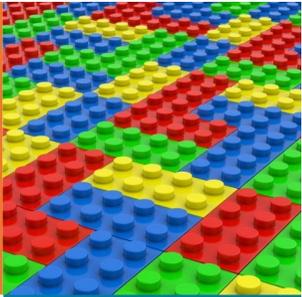
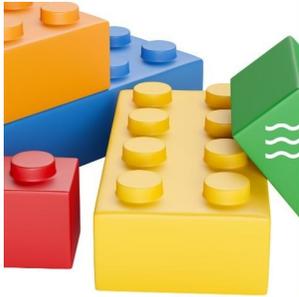
Sunday 27th July

10am at St.Mary's Chepstow



Please join us for a single **joint** service, for **all** churches in Severn Wye Ministry Area - to bless Philip, hear more about his plans to walk from Chepstow to Rome in 90 days, and send him on his pilgrimage with our prayers





LEGO Church

Come and create bible stories from your imagination and Lego!

(This activity is in no way endorsed by the Lego brand)

Mondays
4-5pm
(during term time only)

**** Starting Monday 28th April ****



All ages welcome


St Christophers Church
Pembroke Road
Bulwark

www.saintschepstow.org



Severn Wye Ministry Are Clergy Team. Revd John Waters asked not to feature in the photo as he has a phobia of having photos taken, but he is still part of the team so he is represented in silhouette form! The clergy are as follows from Left to Right: Fr Chris, Fr Michael, Revd Philip, Revd Barney, Revd John, Centre: Revd Zoe

Shirenewton Church Magazine Long Service Thank You!

As you know, your magazine is delivered to you by one of our team of Magazine Posties.

Two of our long-standing Posties, Maureen Moody and Barbara Walters, have recently hung up their post-bags. We would like to say a huge thank you to them for their years of service. Maureen has clocked up over 40 years of delivering, which, we think, must be the Long Service Record, and Barbara is not far behind. They must have posted a ton of magazines and worn out several pairs of shoes between them!

While writing, we would also like to thank all our magazine posties for their sterling work. And also our two new recruits, Cath Beaver and Jean Howe, who have kindly taken over from Maureen and Barbara.

Many thanks and best wishes from the distribution team, Jane, Wendy, and the two Johns

Good
Friday
18th
Apr



Nature walk followed by free hot breakfast!

Join us for a nature walk suitable for all ages, including an Easter treasure hunt along the way, followed by **bacon baps, vegan sausage baps, hot cross buns, pastries** with tea and coffee at Shirenewton church hall, to nourish us at the end!



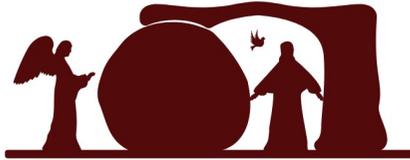
Meet at Shirenewton
Church at 9am

Please use the QR code to
RSVP for catering purposes,
or contact Revd Zoe:
07754 306229
severn.wye.MAL@gmail.com





He is Risen!



**Join us at Shirenewton
Church this Easter Sunday,
10am, 20th April**

Come and celebrate the highlight of the
Christian calendar with joyful music and
worship, and a fun message from Revd Zoe.
Children and dogs welcome!





Shirenewton Primary School are currently advertising for two positions. If you are interested in either or both positions, please email shirenewtonprimary@monmouthshireschools.wales or call 01291 641774

We are looking for caring, enthusiastic and positive people to assist and supervise children during the lunchtime and/ or breakfast club, to encourage healthy eating and good table manners, and to enhance the play activities of the pupils.



BREAKFAST CLUB SUPERVISOR

5 HOURS PER WEEK, 38 WEEKS PER YEAR
DAYS PER WEEK, TERM TIME ONLY

MIDDAY SUPERVISOR

8.75 HOURS PER WEEK, 39 WEEKS PER YEAR
5 DAYS PER WEEK, TERM TIME ONLY



Eileen O' Dwyer



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63 Chepstow | Usk | Pontypool | Cwmbran

Monday to Friday except Bank Holiday Mondays

	Sch	HOL
Chepstow Bus Station	0805 1040 1320	1525 1526 1820
Chepstow Comprehensive School	0809 1044 1324	1530 1824
Shirenewton Road Junction	0817 1051 1331	1537 1831
Earlswood West End	0825 1059 1339	1545 1839
Llangwm Bridge Inn Road	0834 1108 1348	1554 1848
Usk Twyn Square	0843 1117 1357	1603 1857
Usk Coleg Gwent Main Road	0848 1122 1402	1609 1901
Little Mill Bridge	0855 1129 1409	1616 1908
Pontypool Town Hall	0903 1138 1418	1625 1916
Pontypool Park Road	0904 1139 1421	1626 1917
Pontypool opp. Town Hall	0905 1140	1627 1918
Croesyceiling Edlogan Square	0913 1147	1635 1925
Cwmbran Bus Station	0917 1151	1639 1929

Sch Operates on schooldays only

Hol Operates school holidays only

Sundays and Bank Holiday Mondays

Sorry, there is no Sunday service on route 63

Timetable from 1 September 2024

via Chepstow Community Hospital, Shirenewton, Earlswood, Gaerllwyd, Llangwm, Gwernesney, Coleg Gwent, Croesyceiling

Saturdays

0805	1040	1320	1526	1820
0809	1044	1324	1530	1824
0817	1051	1331	1537	1831
0825	1059	1339	1545	1839
0834	1108	1348	1554	1848
0843	1117	1357	1603	1857
0848	1122	1402	1609	1901
0855	1129	1409	1616	1908
0903	1138	1418	1625	1916
0904	1139	1421	1626	1917
0905	1140	---	1627	1918
0913	1147	---	1635	1925
0917	1151	---	1639	1929

63 Cwmbra | Pontypool | Usk | Chepstow

Timetable from 1 September 2024

via Croesyceiliog, Coleg Gwent, Gwensney, Llangwm, Gaerllwyd, Earlswood, Shirenewton, Chepstow Community Hospital

Monday to Friday except Bank Holiday Mondays

	Sch	HOL						
Cwmbra Bus Station (Stand H)	0712	0712	0922	1200	---	1650		
Croesyceiliog Edlogan Square	0717	0717	0927	1205	---	1655		
Pontypool Town Hall	0725	0725	0935	1213	1420	1713		
Pontypool Park Road	0726	0726	0936	1214	1421	1714		
Pontypool opp Town Hall	0727	0727	0937	1215	1422	1715		
Little Mill Pont-y-pia	0734	0734	0944	1222	1429	1722		
Usk Coleg Gwent Main Road	0741	0741	0951	1229	1436	1730		
Usk Twyn Square	0747	0747	0957	1235	1442	1736		
Llangwm Bridge Inn Road	0755	0755	1005	1243	1450	1744		
Earlswood West End	0803	0803	1013	1251	1458	1752		
Shirenewton Road Junction	0813	0813	1023	1301	1508	1800		
Chepstow Community Hospital Main Road	---	0820	1030	1308	1515	1807		
Chepstow Comprehensive School	0820	---	---	---	---	---		
Chepstow Bus Station	0825	0824	1034	1312	1519	1811		

Saturdays

	0712	0922	1200	---	1700
	0717	0927	1205	---	1705
	0725	0935	1213	1420	1713
	0726	0936	1214	1421	1714
	0727	0937	1215	1422	1715
	0734	0944	1222	1429	1722
	0741	0951	1229	1436	1730
	0747	0957	1235	1442	1736
	0755	1005	1243	1450	1744
	0803	1013	1251	1458	1752
	0813	1023	1301	1508	1800
	0820	1030	1308	1515	1807
	---	---	---	---	---
	0824	1034	1312	1519	1811

Sundays and Bank Holiday Mondays Sorry, there is no Sunday service on route 63



SHIRENEWTON COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Extracts from the minutes of the monthly meeting held 3rd March 2025

Public Participation—Toby Wall & Elis Park Local Police officers. Bob Millar.

Toby and Elis were able to call in briefly before going out on a call, and explain how the Police work in the locality, who covers which areas, and ongoing raised concerns. Cllrs thanks them both for attending and introducing themselves.

Bob Millar,

Bob Millar kindly visited to see if the council had any questions regarding his email for the Community Clock Works Quotation, received the day before the meeting. Mr Millar confirmed that fundraising efforts would be restarted now that there was a figure to work to, and what is and not included within the quote. Cllrs thanked Bob for his time and confirmed they intend to discuss later in the meeting.

Councillor considered the following planning matters

DM/2024/00391 Retention of 6 Stables with storeroom and construction of 6 additional stables at Home Farm Stables Shirenewton.

Cllrs will recall considering this application last May. Home Farm Stables is off a track on the right hand side of the Crick Road (when heading to Crick) below Owl Barn. It comprises a race horse training business graceharrisracing.com connected with Red Barn Farm. Currently there is a central stable block with welfare and a stable block to the northwestern boundary, a park home and static caravan toward the southern boundary and a paddock and menage to the west. A 6 bay stable has already been added along the northeastern boundary, and the application is retrospective in regard this plus a proposal for a further block to provide 6 more bays running down the northeastern

boundary. The site is several hundred yards from the Crick Road and the new single storey block is unlikely to have any visual impact on the landscape, being barely visible from the road. Although no detail had been provided as to materials finishes and colouration, nor was there a landscaping scheme as such save for new hedging and the planting of wildflowers in the banking, SCC raised no substantive objection provided the external finishes were unobtrusive.

The original site plan had included two existing caravans (manager and staff accommodation respectively). The retention of these on site is now to be the subject of a separate application. The MCC planning officer raised the following issues which have given rise to this re-consultation.

With regards to the application for the stables, the issues are a little more complex. I note that within the redline boundary you have included, the stables, car parking and two caravans. I also consider that a lot of cut and fill will be required for the additional carparking and stables. I think all these elements should be included in one application and that there should be a planning statement explaining how the business operates. The one caravan that was the subject of the Rural enterprise dwelling has temporary permission until 2nd October 2021. In order to take this application, forward I recommend that you:

To alter the description of the proposal to include the two caravans, stables, car parking and change of levels

Provide a comprehensive statement about the business, how long it's been established, how many people it employs, the need for the caravans and any other information that you think would help to make the case.

How many horses at the site and details of the numbers of visitors. Provide sections thought the site to show the extent of cut and fill.

Explain exactly how many stables are on site now and how many are proposed. Provide a manure management plan

Provide a Drainage Management Plan including details of surface water destination in relation to the SUDS

Biodiversity Enhancements

The applicant's agent has therefore revised the site plan excluding the two caravans. A manure report shows the applicant intends to export the 110 tonnes of manure produced by 26 horses on site for 365 days/year.

MCC Green Infrastructure and Landscape officer requests:

Further clarity comments on references to butterfly banks consisting of a range of shrubs.

Further clarity is required on where the proposed butterfly banks of shrubs are to be situated, and the density, number of plants, size at the point of planting and proposed establishment and aftercare programme.

The proposed wildflower planting is welcome however there are no establishment and aftercare prescriptions to ensure ongoing management.

Further clarity is also needed as to the proposed colours of the timber boarding, timber boarded doors and profile sheeting.

The application has not indicated any lighting to be proposed for the development or any security lighting. Should any lighting be proposed an appropriately scaled lighting strategy will be required to support the application.

Councilor's may wish to consider whether to object pending clarification of the items raised by the MCC officers, notwithstanding the comment made in our original response.

Recommendation: SCC notes the observations of MCC's Planning officer and GI officer requesting further clarity and reports and wishes to comment when those further details become available. **Resolved by unanimous vote.**

DM/2025/00153 – Whitebrook Farm, Bulley Hole Road, Earlswood, NP16 6SA Proposed replacement dwelling.

Whitebrook Farm is accessed off the Bully Hole Bottom road off the B4325. It sits in the upper reaches of the Mounton valley in some 0.4 acres. The immediate surroundings are largely agricultural pastureland, mainly small traditional fields enclosed by hedgerows with occasional scattered dwellings and farm buildings. There is a small tree lined brook (Mounton Brook) to the immediate north of site. The farmhouse is typical of a traditional smallholding and comprises an entrance porch, lounge, dining room and kitchen with a downstairs shower and toilet, with 2 bedrooms upstairs. The roof is pitched with brown interlocking tiles and the walls are natural stone random rubble. The roof ridge is some 5.7m. The structure of the house continues to the left with a large store having a flagstone floor. The store roof is pitched and slightly higher than the main roof as it stands on rising ground and has a pair of large barn doors. The store roof is slate. Beyond this store is a further, single storey store and carport, roofed with corrugated metal sheet. The total floor print is very approximately

250sqm, inclusive of the stores and carport.

The proposal is to replace the structures with a modern 2 storey house having a floor print of some 180sqm to provide 4 bedrooms, 2 with dressing rooms and en suite facilities, with a lounge, study, kitchen/diner and utility room. The roof will be natural slate to east and west elevations and dark grey standing seam metal roof to north and south. Dark grey ply or grp flat roof to dining room, plant room and utility. Walls will be natural stone with mineral paint finish, smooth painted render to kitchen, with horizontal timber cladding natural finish larch boards.

A 2 storey garage of some 85sqm is also proposed with office accommodation in the roof, with a roof ridge height of 5.6m. This provides for 2 cars and a large garden store reusing the old barn doors, with a home office/studio upstairs. The garage will have natural slate roof, with roof lights, and smooth painted render walls.

The Pre-App consultation with MCC confirmed that the farmhouse is no longer important to the visual and intrinsic character of the landscape and that the application for a replacement dwelling is considered acceptable in principle.

The Bat report reveals the large store is a breeding home to lesser horseshoe bats and possibly some long-eared bats. To mitigate for the loss of the existing maternity roost, it recommends like-for like replacement roost (as close as possible, or better), the new roost must be available and used by bats in the summer season before original removed, the new roost must be constructed of concrete block or brick with a slate roof and bitumen felt roof liner ideally having a roof void with an apex height more than 2.8m and a length and width of 5 m or more, minimal or no removal of vegetation, and subdued or no lighting near the roost.

MCC SUDS have objected that the application has not demonstrated a means of surface water discharge (rainwater harvesting, infiltration, watercourse, surface water sewer or combined sewer). However, as there is a watercourse within the site boundary, their view is the worst case scenario for surface water drainage will be discharge to a watercourse.

Councillors will note that there is no Design Statement justifying the new build nor are the external wall and timber cladding colours specified. No proposals for bats, exterior lighting or landscaping are provided.

Recommendation: Objection pending clarification on foul and surface water treatment, external paint and finish colours, bat mitigation and the lack of a Design statement justifying the development within policy H5. SCC will wish to make further comment when these details are provided. **Resolved by unanimous vote**

Footpath by Shirenewton School – After email exchange with School and MCC - clerk to reply to School.

Traffic issues by Carpenters Arms. Reported to Police– no other action

Cllr Vacancies – 3 posts are currently vacant, advertised in Parish magazine, Website and Facebook.

Any Other Business – Community Clock – Cllrs discussed the in-depth, report compiled by The Cumbria Clock Co and information shared by Bob Millar previously in the meeting. Agreed to discuss in more depth, in future.

COUNTY COUNCILLOR REPORT

County Councillor Brown advised:

Scrutiny Meetings and Cabinet Report of the 5th of March 2025 on the Budget

The Place Scrutiny Committee meeting on the 6th of February, the Performance and Overview Committee on the 11th of February and the People Scrutiny Committee on the 18th of February discussed the forthcoming budget. The Cabinet report for the 5th of March provides the final assessment of the budget. An extra £1.54 million was provided by the Welsh Government as part of the funding floor for the Local Authorities with the lowest settlements.

As a result of the Monmouthshire scrutiny and consultation on the budget, it has been agreed not to cut the opening hours of the libraries/community hubs. Monmouth library will stay at its current location. Unfortunately, all but 11 schools are expecting to finish their financial year having spent more than they received in funding.

However, the council tax rise proposed is still 7.8% with increases in car parking of 10% and increases in other council fees and charges. In England council tax rises cannot be 5% or more without a local referendum unless an exception is made by the Government. It means that a number of English councils set the council tax increase at 4.99%. The Welsh Government have provided no similar legislation to limit council tax rises in Wales.

It can be seen from the Cabinet report of the 5th of March

supporting documents at Appendix K table 1c that the aggregate external finance per capita is £1430 and ranked 22. This means that the Welsh Government has provided Monmouthshire County Council with the worse funding per head of population than any of the other 22 Local Authorities in the whole of Wales. The other Gwent Local Authorities are in the top 10 rankings. This is due to the unfair Revenue Support Grant which takes account of factors such as deprivation but not about the number of elderly.

Cabinet on 5th of March 2025

In addition, Cabinet is proposing to change the Leadership funding of the Secondary schools taking account of pupil numbers, so that Chepstow school will get nearly £78K less but will be supported on a transition basis. The reports from the Cabinet together with the appendices on the final budget proposals can be found at the following link:

<https://democracy.monmouthshire.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?Cid=144&MIId=5758>

County Council on 6th of March 2025

The County Council on the above date includes the Council tax budget which needs to be considered by the full council and the updated contract procedure rules. In addition, there are a couple of council motions and questions. One of these is on the consultation on the review of 30mph to 20mph roads.

There were 143 roads to be considered, and according to press reports 1500 applications were submitted and the council looked at four closely before rejecting them. The council indicated that they would not be making any changes based on the strict guidance from the Welsh Government which was supposed to be about reviewing them. This contrasts with other Gwent local authorities who will be making some changes.

In my opinion, it works well in certain areas such as villages and schools, but not all locations. This does not apply to the trunk roads which come under the Welsh Government control. I have continued to email about the return to 30mph of the road to Chepstow town from the High Beech roundabout, which is a trunk road on a hill. The trunk road review is not going to be considered until the Spring/Summertime.

The County Council reports can be found at the following link:

<https://democracy.monmouthshire.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?Cid=143&MIId=5745>

There is a further council meeting on Friday the 7th of March in case the budget on the 6th of March is not approved.

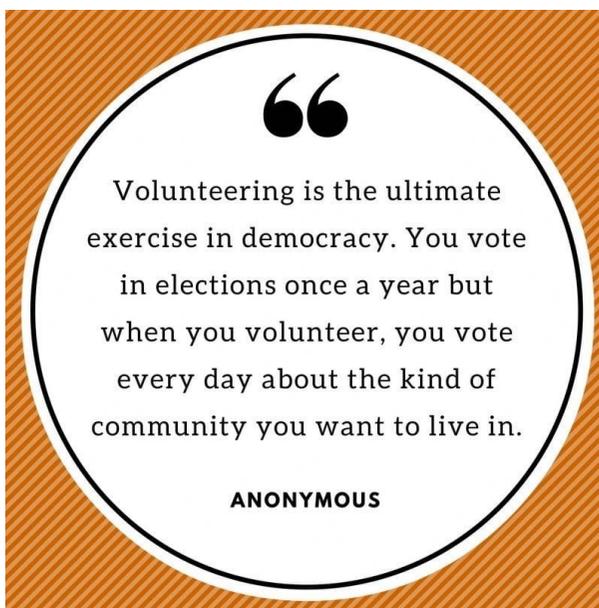
Police report

↑ Crime Category	# Of Crimes	%
Total	4	100%
All Other Theft	1	25%
[REDACTED]	1	25%
Vehicle Crime	1	25%
Violence Without Injury	1	25%

There will be some speed monitoring taking place by myself and my colleagues along the Shirenewton Village road, the 20 MPH zone, some weekdays. Please keep an eye out for me and please remind others of their speed when entering the village area of Shirenewton

Cllrs agreed the date of the next meeting as Monday 7th April 2025 at 7:00pm by public meeting in Shirenewton Recreation Hall or remotely.

Find more information in a draft copy of minutes on the Community Council notice boards. Previous, approved minutes of meetings can be found on the Council's website www.shirenewtoncc.org.uk Contact the Clerk to the Community Council E-mail: shirenewtoncc@gmail.com Mobile: 07410 580961





UPDATE ON

THE TREDEGAR ARMS

New floor – complete
New windows – complete
New bar – complete
New carpet – laid
New lighting – complete
New seating – complete
Log fire swept and working well
100-year-old front door – refurbished

OPENING SOON

Vacancy on Shirenewton Community Council

Shirenewton Community Council has 2 vacancies for a Councillor in the Shirenewton and Mynyddbach ward

If you think you would like to be a Councillor and are over 18 years of age, contact the Clerk by email at shirenewtoncc@gmail.com

What is a Councillor?

Councillors are elected to represent an individual geographical unit on the council, known as a ward or parish. They are generally elected by the public every five years. Between the elections if a Councillor seat becomes available it can be filled by the Council Co-opting the applicant onto the Council. 2 seats for Co-option are now available.

What do Councillors do?

Councillors have three main components to their work.

1. **Decision making** – Through meetings and attending committees with other elected members, councillors decide which activities to support, where money should be spent, what services should be delivered and what policies should be implemented.
2. **Monitoring** – Councillors make sure that their decisions lead to efficient and effective services by keeping an eye on how well things are working.
3. **Getting involved locally** – As local representatives, councillors have responsibilities towards their constituents and local organisations. These responsibilities and duties often depend on what the councillor wants to achieve and how much time is available, and may include:
 - Going to meetings of local organisations
 - Going to meetings of bodies affecting the wider community
 - Taking up issues on behalf of members of the public

How much time does it take up?

Quite often councillors say that their duties occupy them for about an hour a week. Obviously, there are some councillors who spend more time than this – and some less, but in the main, being a community councillor is an enjoyable way of contributing to your community and helping to make it a better place to live and work.

You will be supported in your role and will be expected to undertake training. You should be comfortable working electronically. You should have a positive outlook and a can-do attitude and be willing to work as part of a team. If after reading this notice you are interested in applying, please contact the clerk to the council using the above details.



Shirenewton
Community Council

Vacancy on Shirenewton Community Council

Shirenewton Community Council has 1 vacancy for a Councillor in the Earlswood ward

If you think you would like to be a Councillor and are over 18 years of age, contact the Clerk by email at shirenewtoncc@gmail.com

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Shirenewton
Community Council

Shirenewton W.I. Happy 73rd Birthday



A group of 23 members got together for a fish and chip supper at the Huntsman to celebrate Shirenewton W.I.'s 73rd birthday. It was a great chance for us all to socialise and the evening was made even more fun with the quiz that our own Quizmaster, Ruth Savagar, had put together for us, ably assisted by Claire Lewis. Thank you both for such an interesting array of questions and giving us the opportunity for some friendly competition.

Our thanks go to the Huntsman for once again providing us with a delicious meal, which was so efficiently served, and to Diane Ward for arranging the booking and the money on the evening.

Our next meeting is at **7.15p.m. on Thursday 10th April at Shirenewton Recreation Hall, when Lesley Kelly will be giving a talk on The High Line in New York.** An opportunity to learn about the transformation of an abandoned New York railway line into an urban greenway and park containing over 161 plant species.

Jackie Broughton

If you are interested in joining Shirenewton W.I. or would like to find out more about our group, then please contact Jane Butterworth at janeb247@gmail.com or Angela Gray at angela.deepweir@btopenworld.com . Alternatively, just turn up at our next meeting, and you'll be given a warm welcome.

The Big Spring Clean 2025

In support of Keep Britain Tidy Day, Shirenewton W.I. plans to take part in the Big Spring Clean by organising a litter pick around the village between the dates of 21st March and 6th April.

If you would like to find out more about this or would like to join us (you don't have to be a member) then please contact Jane Butterworth at janeb247@gmail.com for further details.

Swift Action Needed!



Why do we have village swifts?

Not long now, until our village swifts return! Hopefully this will see the return of all our six breeding pairs and their successful offspring from the last four years. Juvenile swifts return up to 3 times to the area where they fledged before finally selecting a nest site. It is believed that the screaming flight you hear just before dusk on a summer's evening, is the extended family groups checking out each other's nesting locations and courtship opportunity for juvenile birds. Once paired, they stay paired for life and will start the process of selecting a nest site. The new pair don't like to move too far from their ancestral home, but this is normally still occupied by their parents who will take no prisoners to defend it. In fact, adult swifts pairs are notoriously grumpy when they first meet up again in spring and might not even recognise their partner initially, treating them as an intruder before they finally accept them and starting the breeding process again. Cameras inside nest sites have shown that adults will even fight before finally recognising their partner. It is thought that the nest site will have been the first time they have seen each other since last summer as they are not believed to migrate with them to their wintering grounds.

Juvenile swifts can be seen in late July, flying up to likely nesting holes, near the roof line of buildings or if you are lucky, a nest box put up by yourself to encourage them. Once a site is selected, they will return in the fourth year to breed for the first time. If the partnership holds they will use the same site every year until one of the pair dies. Your home has become their home and any "improvement" work that prevents access to their chosen home will be disastrous for that pair. They will not change homes and will literally throw themselves at the building to try and gain access. When that fails, so will their breeding for that year and possibly subsequent years as they are extremely territorial, the pair bond might break down and the nest site will be lost for ever. So, if we lose the 6 remaining nest sites in the village, it will probably be goodbye to the swifts in our villages' skies - a very

sad thought. That is why swift nest boxes can be so important as they provide a permanent home for them without impacting the fabric of the house.

What makes a good nest site?

Swifts are looking for a small entrance into a building leading to a cavity in the stonework or inside your roof space or barge boards. These are often the same sites favoured by house sparrows, our familiar chirpy resident. It is suggested that swifts prospecting for their first nest site are drawn to houses with existing sparrow nests as it suggests the building might be suitable for them as well. Swifts are quite capable of turfing out house sparrows from their home when they arrive back in May, but the best solution is to find a site that sparrows struggle to gain entrance or is too snug for sparrows' rather large and messy nests. Swifts nests comprise of a small cup of fine plant materials and feathers, and bound together with the bird's saliva. All the nest materials are gathered in the air – e.g. strands of grass and feathers. They then lay their eggs in this depression.



Photo Erich Kaiser swift-conservation.org

Swifts particularly favour small holes in buildings that are approached vertically, directly on the wing. Something the rather clumsy sparrows will find hard to fly into as sparrows general grip onto a surface before wriggling

in. Loss of nest sites is the biggest threat they face. Many people will be unaware their home is also a home for swifts, as swifts only appear for 12 weeks a year and even then, may only visit the nest site a few times each day. They are easily overlooked. So, general house maintenance is a particular risk. If you can't tell they use your home, how can you protect them?

Netting can be disastrous. (put up in cities to prevent pigeons) when they arrive back in May, the unnoticed entrance hole may well be impeded as swifts need a clear flight path to enter it. It is frightening to watch the speed a swift flies towards a wall, closes its wings and forces itself through a hole just a few inches across, they have no time or space to move around scaffolding or a newly installed satellite dish. Education is one of the ways to make people aware that your house might be a home for swifts, hence this series of articles. One should feel truly blessed if you have swifts sharing your home, in the same way that storks are considered lucky if they nest on your house on continent. The good news is that swift are very reluctant to abandon their home so if a suitable flight path is maintained they will continue to use the site.

Thankfully swifts will also use dedicated swift boxes if provided at suitable sites. These have the added benefit that they are obvious to future homeowners, meaning they are less vulnerable to disturbance. But more about what we can do for swifts in future articles.



Theconservation.com photo Simon Stirrup/ Alamy Stock Photo

Again, if you would like to help and keep our summer skies alive with this most magnificent bird. Please send an email to shirenewtonswifts@gmail.com

Introducing



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chepstow

A new Anglican church at St.Christopher's, Bulwark



Led by Revds **Zoe & Barney Pimentel**, and Children & Families Pioneer **Clare Edwards**, the new church will have an informal style with an emphasis on reaching those under 40.

During the week Saints will be running activities aimed at children and families - a "Lego Church", a children's community choir, and a toddler group, with Sunday evenings set aside for more Spiritual input and time together over a meal.

If you are interested in learning more, or would like to volunteer, please get in touch!

saintschepstow@cinw.org.uk



Inclusion and equality are some of our core values as a leadership team. Our aim is for Saints to be LGBTQ+ affirming and to achieve the Autism Friendly award by the National Autistic Society.





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THE HUNTSMAN HOTEL NEW PAGE



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25 places of international or world significance within 25 miles

3. The Canal – the Monmouthshire Canal and Blaenavon

In the centre of Newport opposite the university campus building and Newport City Footbridge is a row of houses and a road sign saying 'Canal Parade'. This is the last vestige of a canal through the centre of Newport, 11 miles from Shirenewton, underneath Usk Way. It was a canal of international significance.



In its heyday in the late C18th and early C19th the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal connected the iron works at Blaenavon, 17 miles from Shirenewton, and now a World Heritage site, with the rest of the world through Blaenavon Wharf at Newport. Sadly, the bench in the picture is no longer there marking the location of Blaenavon Wharf between the Riverfront Theatre and Newport City Footbridge. In the days of canals and wharves this was a very rough area.

The Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal was constructed between 1793 and 1796 by Thomas Dadford Jr, who also supervised the building of some of plateways and tramroads to connect ironworks and quarries to the Canal. Eventually there were 30 tramways connecting places of industry with the Canal. Between 1780 and 1830 the UK was transformed by the building of canals – they were the motorways of their day. Horse drawn canal barges could carry 30 tons of coal or limestone or iron, the equivalent today of a lorry, compared with just a ton that could be pulled by a horse on a road. The presence of a canal was a critical part of industrialising the nation at the time

when Wales and the UK were leading the world in the world's industrial revolution and in the production of iron, and iron goods.

For ironworks like Blaenavon getting iron to the coast and out to the rest of the world depended on the new canals. The four big iron works at Merthyr depended on the Glamorgan Canal, and those in Monmouthshire on the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal. The growth of Cardiff and Newport as huge industrial centres depended on their canal links to the industrial hinterland.



Blaenavon Ironworks – founded 1789



'Pig iron' – Blaenavon Ironworks

At this time there were no railways nor steam locomotives, and roads were extremely poor and often impassable. The canal was king! Barrie Morris, of Mynyddbach, pointed out to me that the journey that iron would have taken in the 1820s by tramway from Blaenavon and Garnddyrys Forge 3 miles over the Blorenghe down to the canal at Llanfoist, and then 20 miles by canal to Newport is described in detail in Chapter 6 of Alexander Cordell's book *Rape of the Fair Country* – it was the route of the annual works day outing in 1826 from the Garnddyrys Forge and village, high up on the slopes of the Blorenghe.





Llanfoist – Mon and Brec Canal



Canal in Central Newport – 1920s

The Monmouthshire Canal came right through the centre of Newport along the line of the A4042 dual carriageway, Usk Way, past the Theatre and Friars Walk Shopping Centre. Usk Way was built on top of a railway which served Old Town Dock which itself was built on top of the 1796 canal and its 1808 extension. The canal barges would off load iron on to the riverside wharves from the Town Bridge down to Old Town Dock. Sea-going ships on the River Usk would be loaded from these wharves and iron would go all over the world. As ships became larger Town Dock was built in 1842, and by the late C19th major docks were built south of Newport city centre at the mouth of the River Usk.

By the 1850s the railways had taken over from the canals and Newport, like Cardiff, Swansea, and Barry, became the focus of railways carrying not just iron and other products, but coal, which was in huge demand across the world after 1830. South Wales coal was in high demand for its high calorific value.

Sydney Gilchrist Thomas and Thomas Gilchrist (cousin)

Blaenavon was not only world famous for its iron but on a discovery of world significance which transformed the iron and steel industry of the whole world – and that was the smelting of high-phosphorous iron ore. Most of the world's known iron ore then was high in phosphorous and couldn't be used for steel.

Sydney Gilchrist Thomas was the London born son of a Welsh civil servant in London. Sydney Gilchrist Thomas was interested in chemistry and went to lectures at Birkbeck College, London in his spare time from being a Clerk to the Police Courts in London in the 1870s. His lecturer said that whoever finds the way of smelting high phosphoric iron ore in a Bessemer Converter will be rich. Every evening Thomas studied chemistry and was motivated by this challenge.

Every week-end Sydney Gilchrist Thomas travelled from London to Blaenavon to work with his cousin Thomas Gilchrist, Chief Chemist at Blaenavon Iron works. In 1877 they succeeded, and patented a method using a limestone mixture to line the convertor. The process became known as the '*Gilchrist Thomas*' process. Andrew Carnegie, the Scots-American steel magnate, the richest man in the world before he gave away 80% of it to charitable works including Carnegie Halls and 2,500 Carnegie Libraries throughout the Western World, said – '*These two young men, Thomas and Gilchrist of Blaenavon, did more for Britain's greatness than all the Kings and Queens put together!*'

In 1889 USA steel production overtook that of the UK, and most of it was Carnegie controlled. The enormous industrialisation and wealth of the USA began with iron and steel production and railways, long before oil. The solution to the smelting of the world's high phosphorous iron ore came from Thomas and Gilchrist in Wales, at Blaenavon 18 miles from Shirenewton, and the first steam locomotive ever to haul a train in the USA, was made by John Urpeth Rastrick who also built Chepstow's 5 arch iron bridge, 5 miles away. So, South Wales, within 25 miles of Shirenewton, has significant links with the early industrial development of the UK, Europe, the USA, and the world.

**Monument
at Blaenavon
to Sydney
Gilchrist
Thomas**



That's not the only world link with iron for this area. In the Forest of Dean at the Darkhill Iron Works and the Titanic Steel Works, one mile SE of Coleford, 12 miles NE of Shirenewton, **Robert Mushet** developed '*Mushet special steel*' in 1868 - the forerunner of '*high speed steel*' - vital for machine tools worldwide.

Next month '*Chepstow Bridge – a bridge, and engineer, of world significance*'.
John Burrows

Last month's article, '*The Gondola*', provoked this story from Glynis MacDonald of her experience of the 177 ft high **Newport Transporter Bridge**. Glynis wrote: '*Less enjoyable was zip-wiring from the top of the bridge to raise money for St Davids. I was told you could do fancy dress, so I put on a panto chicken outfit. I was the only one dressed up! I discovered how very difficult it was to climb the girders in big outsized/bird-feet. Also, the idiocy when the bird-head spun backwards as I sped down the zip-wire and I couldn't see a thing. Nobody could hear me screaming. But all in a good cause!*'

SHIRENEWTON LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

Registered Charity No. 1090167

Our Annual Dinner was held at the Two Rivers and our after dinner speaker was Peter Strong. who gave an insight into being a local history enthusiast. I have to say we all enjoyed the company of friends, we laughed at Peter's many encounters during his involvement in local history.

At the March Archive Meeting we are slowly re cataloguing our book collection, we have such a large diverse library of local interest books that I'm sure many people would be interested, so please come along and check out the collection.

Dates for your Diary:

Tuesday, 25th March

'Potlets to Plaques with the odd Pub in Between' Ned Heyward

Wednesday, 9th March

Archive Meeting, Church Room

Tuesday, 29th April

Visit to Trellech, Kate Churchill

Our meetings are held at the Church Room, unless otherwise stated, we start at 7.30pm.

Archive meetings start at 2.00pm – 4.00pm and everyone is welcome.

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Tots and toddlers

Thursday 10 - 11:30
(term time only)

St Christophers Church
Pembroke Road, Bulwark

For pre school children, babies and their carers.
Join us every Thursday from 10 - 11:30 , during term time
for play, crafts, songs, friendship, refreshments, and fun!

Starting January 9th 2025!

Contact: saintschepstow@cinw.org.uk for more info.



HELP NEEDED

Would you be able to help us maintain one of the oldest buildings in Shirenewton?

We have a small and dedicated group of volunteers, working in pairs, who spend a few hours, three times each year, to keep the Church and the Church Room clean.

Our group has reduced in number during this year, which of course increases the frequency of cleaning for those of us remaining. Therefore, we would all be very grateful to hear from any new volunteers, both pairs and individuals, who feel they would like to contribute to maintaining our church in this way.

Please contact Mark Broughton at
mark_broughton@btopenworld.com

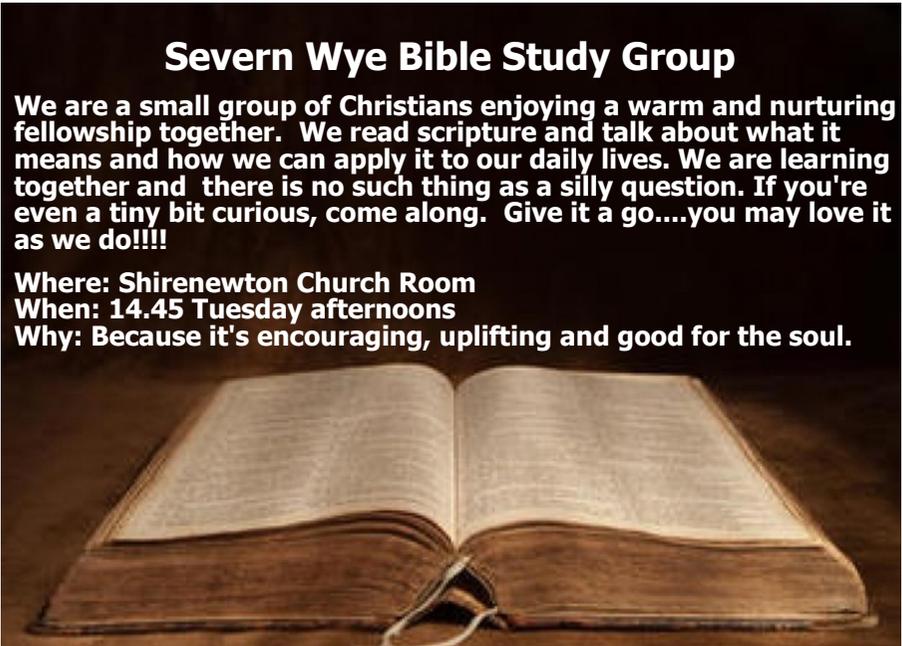
Severn Wye Bible Study Group

We are a small group of Christians enjoying a warm and nurturing fellowship together. We read scripture and talk about what it means and how we can apply it to our daily lives. We are learning together and there is no such thing as a silly question. If you're even a tiny bit curious, come along. Give it a go....you may love it as we do!!!!

Where: Shirenewton Church Room

When: 14.45 Tuesday afternoons

Why: Because it's encouraging, uplifting and good for the soul.



DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

APRIL

Tuesday 1 st 7.00 p.m.	Annual General Meeting Earlswood and Newchurch West Memorial Hall
Wednesday 2 nd 7.30 p.m.	Duke's Yard Singing Club Spring Concert St Tewdric's Church, Mathern
Thursday 3 rd 7.45-9.00 p.m.	Ministry Area Prayer Group St Christopher's Church, Chepstow
Friday 4 th 7.00 p.m.	Quiz Night St Peter's Church, Newchurch
Monday 7 th 7.15	Shirenewton Community Council meeting Recreation Hall
Thursday 10 th 7.45-9.00 p.m.	Ministry Area Prayer Group St Peter's Church, St Pierre
Thursday 10 th 7.15 p.m.	WI—The High Line in NY by Lesley Kelly Recreation Hall
Thursday 17 th 7.45-9.00 p.m.	Maundy Thursday, Ministry Area Prayer Group See Church services
Thursday 24 th 7.45-9.00 p.m.	Ministry Area Prayer Group St Andoenus Church, Mounton

MAY

Thursday 1 st 7.45-9.00 p.m.	Ministry Area Prayer Group St Arvans Church, St Arvans
Saturday 3 rd 10.00-12.00	Chepstow Show Homecraft Coffee morning The Hood Memorial Hall, Devauden
Wednesday 7 th 7.00 p.m.	The Story of the Two Ronnies St Mary's Priory Church, Chepstow
Thursday 8 th	VE Day
Saturday 10 th 10.30 a.m.-1.30 p.m.	Plant Sale and café Earlswood and Newchurch West Memorial Hall
Thursday 15 th 7.45-9.00 p.m.	Ministry Area Prayer Group St Thomas à Becket Church, Shirenewton
Friday 18 th 9.00 a.m.	Good Friday walk followed by breakfast Meet at St Thomas à Becket Church
Sunday 20 th 10.00 a.m.	Easter Sunday service St Thomas à Becket Church, Shirenewton

MAY

Thursday 22nd
7.45-9.00 p.m.

Ministry Area Prayer Group
St Tewdric's Church, Mathern

Thursday 29th
7.45-9.00 p.m.

Ministry Area Prayer Group
St Mary's Priory Church, Chepstow

JUNE

Thursday 5th
7.45-9.00 p.m.

Ministry Area Prayer Group
St Peter's Newchurch

Thursday 12th
7.45-9.00 p.m.

Ministry Area Prayer Group
St Mary's Church, Penterry

Saturday 14th
2.00-5.00 p.m.

Village Fete
Shirenewton Recreation Field

Thursday 19th
7.45-9.00 p.m.

Ministry Area Prayer Group
Church of the Holy cross, Kilgwrrwg

Thursday 26th
7.45-9.00 p.m.

Ministry Area Prayer Group
St Deiniol's Church, Itton

JULY

Thursday 3rd
7.45-9.00 p.m.

Ministry Area Prayer Group
St James's Church, Devauden

Thursday 10th
7.45-9.00 p.m.

Ministry Area Prayer Group
St Mary's Church, Penterry

Thursday 17th
7.45-9.00 p.m.

Ministry Area Prayer Group
St Mary's Priory Church, Chepstow

Thursday 24th
7.45-9.00 p.m.

Ministry Area Prayer Group
St Peter's Church, Newchurch

Sunday 27th
10.00 a.m.

Service of Blessing for Reverend Philip Avery
St Mary's Priory Church, Chepstow

Thursday 31st
7.45-9.00 p.m.

Ministry Area Prayer Group
St Peter's Church, St Pierre

severnwyema.co.uk

www.shirenewtonchurch.com

I'm going to start this month by returning to a subject which many of us don't want to think about – that of losing access to your email account permanently. Not through hacking but because the supplier shuts your account down. Why? Well, the report of yet another case of this passed through my inbox recently and it reminded me of the story I told a couple (?) of years ago, whereby a parent had emailed pictures of his son's rash to a doctor at the doctor's request. The Gmail algorithm thought it detected sexual abuse and shut down the parents' account. No amount of pressure on Google resulted in it being reopened and the parent lost complete access to the account – never to regain it.

If that happened to you, what would you lose? Your email history, contacts, any back-ups and photos stored on Google Drive, etc. This obviously applies to the other major providers as well. For example, Microsoft, Yahoo, etc.

It seems that this is becoming more prevalent – or maybe it's just being reported more often. However, the fact remains that Google can and does block access, without notice, to accounts based on mistakes made by their automated algorithms. Despite Google acknowledging that AI algorithms are not 100% accurate and do make mistakes, it seems that once your account has been blocked there is no way to get it back.

So, what are you going to do about it? What do I do about it?

Well, the first thing is that I ensure that any back-ups, photos and such like I have on Google Drive, are also on other storage systems. So, if I lose access to Google Drive I have access to the material elsewhere. Google Drive is just one of my back-up locations.

However, this doesn't cover email. Gmail has dropped support for POP mail (where the emails are stored on your local drive) and now only supports IMAP which stores your emails on the Google server. So, if your account access is blocked you lose all your emails and email history. This is a bad thing.

There are several solutions to this. Google itself offers its Takeout tool which, according to Google, allows you to export and download a copy of the data currently stored in your Google account, including Drive and Gmail. Once downloaded you will have a local copy and can then back it up either local or to another cloud storage service. I've not played with this but may do so when I get bored and, if so, will report back.

If you are technically minded, there is a command line tool called Got Your Back (GYB) which is a free open source command line

utility for backing up and restoring Gmail. Again, I've not played with this but have read good things about it.

The solution I use is Corbett Backup and Restore software (US\$99 for a personal license) which allows me to export my Gmail emails as PDF files onto my local drive. The Corbett software also allows me to filter by date. So, I can select a date range (i.e. since the date of my last back-up) and avoid duplicates. The benefit of this approach is that PDF files are searchable using the Windows search tools so I have, in effect, a searchable email archive locally which I can then back-up to local NAS (Network Attached Storage) devices or other online services. The other nice thing about it is that there is no 'restore' process. I can simply check the back-up has been successful by opening a PDF file and, if I want to access my archive, there is no restore process necessary.

I can't stress enough how important back-up is. Moving on. But not that far.

When you dispose of your old kit be sure to wipe the drives and remove all personal information. Obviously, the best way to do this is to destroy the device or, at least, the drive. Simply selecting files and hitting delete does not delete them fully. I brought this up because a techie in the Netherlands who was also a keen photographer, purchased a number of 500Gb hard disks at a flea market. On getting them home and hooking them up, he discovered that they contained medical data, including the Dutch equivalent of Social Security Numbers, dates of birth, home addresses, medication details, and other GP and pharmacy data. Oh dear!

In other news, in February, The Verge reported that "Microsoft announces quantum computing breakthrough with new Majorana 1 chip". To achieve this breakthrough Microsoft created what it calls the "world's first topoconductor," a new type of superconductor material made from indium arsenide and aluminium. This is a significant step forward in quantum computing which potentially will allow computing to take the next great leap forward. You can read Microsoft's announcement here: <https://tinyurl.com/mk8vj3cx>

Finally, The Register reported that, in February, HP started deliberately adding 15 minutes to the waiting time for telephone support calls in order to push users to self-help online support. At the start of a call to telephone support, a message was played saying: "We are experiencing longer waiting times and we apologize for the inconvenience. The next available representative will be with you in about 15 minutes.". It then directed the caller to the

online support website and chatbot. Throughout the 15 min minimum wait the line repeatedly urged customers to visit the online support. The good news, following a lot of unhappy people making their feeling felt, HP reversed its decision and no longer, allegedly, forces the 15 min wait.

On that happy note, safe browsing until next month.

David Cornwell
webmaster



Shirenewton Fete will be on Saturday 14 June 2025

Everyone – please make sure it is in the diary!

For those who have regularly carried out tasks, or run stalls, please, please, do so again – it is vital.

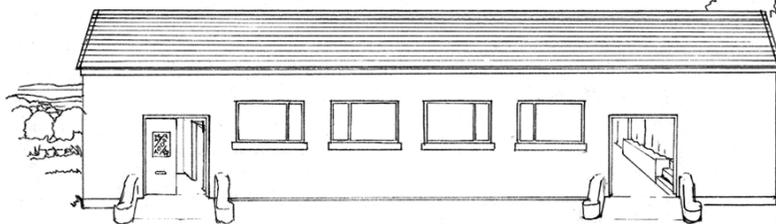
And for **new volunteers** to run events or stalls please contact us on – shirenewtonfete@gmail.com

We will contact all volunteers in April / May to discuss arrangements and needs.

For the Fete Co-ordinating Team (and anyone who wants to join the Team) the next meeting is on Tuesday 15 April 2025 at 7.30pm in the Carpenters Arms.

Andrew Baker/John Burrows - shirenewtonfete@gmail.com

Earlswood & Newchurch West Village Hall



Plant Sale & Café

Saturday 10th May, 10.30am - 1.30pm

Come to see what plants and flowers are for sale, stay for soup, cake and a chat!

- ❖ Plant donations welcome
- ❖ Tables available for traders: £5

More information: 07889 762 840 / 07855 301 806

info@earlnew.com

Upcoming Events

2025

Saturday 10th May

Plant sale and café

Saturday 29th November

Christmas craft fair

Saturday 13th December

Xmas Quiz

Visit www.earlnew.com for more information about the Hall and facilities. We have a mailing list! Email booking@earlnew.com to join!

WHAT HAPPENED AT EASTER?

According to eyewitnesses, Jesus Christ demonstrated his power over death. After he died on a cross and was buried, He suddenly appeared to them alive on the third day. Then he was seen by others, including 500 people on a single occasion. Soon word spread everywhere that Jesus had risen from the dead. So does the resurrection have proof based upon verifiable historical evidence?

Jesus Predicted His Own Death and Resurrection

Seven hundred years before Christ, the prophet Isaiah had written in Isaiah chapter 53 about a future Messiah, who would suffer and die for our sins, but later be restored to life. Jesus claimed that he was that Messiah who would be betrayed, arrested, condemned, spit upon, scourged, and killed. But then three days later he would come back to life.

Exactly as Jesus predicted, eyewitnesses report he was betrayed by one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot. Then in a mock trial under the Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate, he was condemned, scourged, kicked, spat upon, brutally whipped, and finally crucified on a wooden cross. Jesus suffered on the cross for approximately six hours. Then, at 3:00pm in the afternoon Jesus cried out, "It is finished" and died. Suddenly the sky went dark and an earthquake shook the land. Pilate wanted to verify that Jesus was dead before allowing his crucified body to be buried. A Roman guard thrust a spear into Jesus' side. The mixture of blood and water that flowed out, according to eyewitnesses, was a clear indication that Jesus was dead. Once his death was certified, Jesus' body was taken down from the cross, tightly wrapped in linen and buried in Joseph of Arimathea's tomb. Roman guards then sealed the tomb with a large stone and were under strict orders to watch the tomb 24 hours a day. Jesus' disciples were so utterly devastated by his death on the cross that they fled for their lives, fearing they too would be captured and killed. But then something incredible happened. Shortly after Jesus was executed, his followers were suddenly galvanized from a baffled and cowering group into people whose message about a living Jesus and a coming kingdom, preached at the risk of their lives, eventually changed an empire. Something happened, but what?

What Would a Sceptic Think?

That Jesus' resurrection was mythical! What have sceptics tried to prove since then. There are at least five possible explanations:

1. Jesus didn't really die on the cross.
2. Jesus' body was stolen.

1. The disciples were hallucinating.
2. The account is legendary. Or, It really happened.

1. Was Jesus Dead?

About 200 years ago, a few sceptics started saying that Jesus didn't die on the cross, but merely lost consciousness, and was revived by the cool, damp air of the tomb. This became known as the "swoon theory." However, the following facts supported Jesus' death: All the historical accounts affirm he died; Pilate verified he died; During the lifetime of the eyewitnesses no one disputes his death; and secular and contemporary historians, Lucian, Josephus, and Tacitus cite his death as factual. So Jesus Christ died on the cross, in the full physical sense of the term seems to be one of the certainties of history.

2. Was Jesus' body stolen?

Did the disciples fake the resurrection story by stealing Jesus' body, and then claiming he was alive? That might be plausible if the tomb was in an obscure area where no one would see them. However, the tomb belonged to a well-known member of the Sanhedrin Council, Joseph of Arimathea. Since Joseph's tomb was at a well-known location and easily identifiable, any thoughts of Jesus being "lost in the graveyard" would need to be dismissed. Not only was the location well known, but the Romans had assigned guards to watch the tomb 24 hours a day. This was a trained guard unit comprised of four to 16 soldiers. Any Roman Guard unit was committed to discipline and they feared failure in any way. It would have been impossible for anyone to have slipped by the guards unnoticed and then move the stone. Yet the stone was rolled away, making it possible for eyewitnesses to enter the tomb. And when they did, the body of Jesus was missing. If Jesus' body was anywhere to be found, his enemies would have quickly exposed the resurrection as a fraud. As one Lawyer said "With an event so well publicised, don't you think that it's reasonable that one historian, one eye witness, one antagonist would record for all time that he had seen Christ's body? The silence of history is deafening when it comes to the testimony against the resurrection." So, with no body of evidence, and with a known tomb clearly empty, Jesus' body had somehow disappeared from the tomb.

3. Were the Disciples Hallucinating?

Were the disciples so emotionally distraught that they hallucinated and imagined Jesus' resurrection? Unlikely. Psychiatrists usually describe hallucinations as individual occurrences. By their very nature, only one person can see a given hallucination at a time. They certainly aren't something which can be seen by a group of people. To be honest, it would be inconceivable that five hundred people of average

soundness of mind would experience the same hallucination. The hallucination theory, then, appears to be another dead end. What else could explain away the resurrection?

4. Is it just a Legend?

Some unconvinced sceptics attribute the resurrection story to a legend that began with one or more persons lying or thinking they saw the resurrected Jesus. Over time, the legend could have grown and been embellished as it was passed on. However, legends simply don't develop while multiple eyewitnesses are alive to refute them. The resurrection news spread too soon and too quickly for it to have been a legend. Even sceptical scholars admit that Christian hymns and creeds were recited in early churches within two to three years of Jesus' crucifixion. Legends develop by oral tradition and are not supported with contemporary historical documents. Yet the Gospels were written within three decades of the resurrection. Also, the legend theory doesn't adequately explain either the empty tomb or the fervent conviction of the apostles that Jesus was alive.

5. So, did the resurrection really happen? Is there evidence to support it?

Women saw him first

Each eyewitness account reports that Jesus suddenly appeared bodily to his followers, the women first. Why would conspirators would make women central to the plot. In the first century, women had virtually no rights, personhood, or status. Conspirators would have portrayed men, not women, as the first to see Jesus alive. And yet we read those women touched him, spoke with him, and were the first to find the empty tomb.

There were multiple eyewitnesses

The disciples claim they saw Jesus on more than ten separate occasions. They say he showed them his hands and feet and told them to touch him. He ate with them and later, on one occasion, appeared alive to more than 500 followers.

In Caesarea, Peter told a crowd why he and the other disciples were so convinced Jesus was alive. "We apostles are witnesses of all he did throughout Israel and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by crucifying him, but God raised him to life three days later. We were those who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead."

Jesus own brother James, a man who had believed his sibling was completely delusional, realised the truth when he met the resurrected Jesus. He later became one of the senior leaders of the Jerusalem Church.

The Apostles and Disciples motives were consistent to the end

So, what were the motives of Jesus' followers? Something extraordinary must have happened, because the followers of Jesus ceased mourning, ceased hiding, and began fearlessly proclaiming that they had seen Jesus alive. These eleven former cowards were suddenly willing to suffer humiliation, torture, and death. All but one of Jesus' disciples were slain as martyrs. If they had taken the body, would they have sacrificed so much for a lie? Something happened that changed everything for these men and women.

This itself is a very significant fact that the resurrection really happened. You cannot explain away the profound conviction that came on this small group of people – a change that can only be explained by the fact that Jesus had risen from the grave and that they had met with Him.

Professor J. N. D. Anderson and author of "Evidence for the Resurrection" concurs, "Think of the psychological absurdity of picturing a little band of defeated cowards cowering in an upper room one day and a few days later transformed into a company that no persecution could silence – and then attempting to attribute this dramatic change to nothing more convincing than a miserable fabrication. That simply wouldn't make sense."

Why did the Church grow?

This tiny insignificant movement was able to prevail over the cunning grip of the Jewish establishment, as well as the might of the Rome Empire. Within twenty years, the claim of these Galilean peasants had disrupted the Jewish church, and in less than fifty years it had begun to threaten the peace of the Roman Empire. By all rights, if there were no resurrection, Christianity would have died out at the cross when the disciples fled for their lives. But the apostles went on to establish a growing Christian movement. Clearly something incredible happened. Jesus' death and resurrection has made a lasting impact on our world. What is that legacy? Look at just some of Jesus' impact:

- Time is marked by his birth, B.C.– before Christ; A.D. – in the year of our Lord.
- About 100 great universities were established to spread his teaching — including Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Dartmouth, Columbia, and Oxford.
- Jesus' teaching that all people are created equal laid the bedrock for human rights and democracy in more than 100 countries.
- The high value Jesus placed on each person regardless of sex or race led his followers to promote the rights of women as well as abolish slavery.

Humanitarian works such as the Red Cross, World Vision, Samaritan's Purse, Mercy Ships and the Salvation Army were founded by his followers.

It would have been impossible for the disciples to persist with their conviction that Jesus had risen if they hadn't actually seen the risen Christ. Jesus' resurrection convinced his disciples that he was the Messiah who had died for our sins. He was "the only way to God," and "the resurrection and the life." They now knew Jesus alone had the power over life and death, and they gave their lives proclaiming him as the risen Lord. Although he was originally a sceptic, Oxford scholar C. S. Lewis explains how Jesus' resurrection was unique among all events in human history. "Something perfectly new in the history of the Universe had happened. Christ had defeated death. The door which had always been locked had for the first time been forced open."

So, what does Jesus' resurrection mean to you?

The Apostle Paul, who had also initially been a fierce sceptic of Jesus' resurrection and deadly persecutor of Christians, explains its impact on our lives. "*For Christ has completely abolished death, and has now, through the Gospel, opened to us the shining possibilities of the life that is eternal.*" —2 Timothy 1:10. Jesus' death and resurrection opened the door for you and I to have eternal life with Christ. But, one obstacle remains. The apostle Paul explains, "*You were his enemies, separated from him by your evil thoughts and actions...*"—Colossians 1:21.

The obstacle to us having eternal life with Christ is that we have sinned and rebelled against God. Although God loves us beyond our understanding, his perfect justice requires payment for our sins. The penalty is death. So why would an all-powerful, loving God not just forgive us without punishing us for our sins. Why does he demand justice? Imagine entering a courtroom and you are guilty of murder. As you approach the bench, you realise that the judge is your father. Knowing that he loves you, you immediately begin to plead, "Dad, just let me go!" With tears in his eyes he responds, "I love you, son, but I'm a judge. I can't simply let you go." Presenting the evidence against you, he bangs the gavel down and declares you guilty. Justice cannot be compromised, at least not by a judge. But because he loves you, he steps down from the bench, takes off the robe, and offers to pay the penalty for you. And in fact, he takes your place in prison.

This is what we celebrate at Easter. God stepped down into human history, in the person of Jesus Christ, and was crucified on the cross for us. Jesus is not a third-party whipping boy being punished for our sins, but rather he is God himself. Stated more bluntly, God

had two choices: to punish us for our sin, or to receive the punishment himself. In Christ, he decided to pay the penalty for us so that we could join Him in eternal life if we repent of our sins and believe in Him.

In other words, God's perfect justice is completely satisfied by the death of his Son, Jesus Christ. All of our sins—no matter how bad they are or have been—are completely paid for by the blood of Christ. Good deeds don't get us into heaven. Eternal life is a gift from God, because you and I can't do anything to earn our way into heaven. The Apostle Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, explains God's amazing grace. "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast." Ephesians 2:8-9. For a gift to be ours, we need to actually receive it. Like any gift, you can choose to accept or reject Jesus Christ's pardon for the penalty for your sins. This was made clear by the apostle John. *"This is what God told us: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life, but whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life."* 1 John 5:11-12.

If you repent of your sins, believe and place your faith in Jesus' and trust in His resurrection you will receive the amazing gift of eternal life. If you don't, when your time comes, He will simply say to you "I never knew you". It is a choice that you alone must make. No one else can do it for you. Have a blessed Easter.

Paul Morcombe



Gardening Corner

At long last the weather has changed for the better and it is a case of all hands-on deck. Cold nights, but dry in the day are helping to dry things up enough for the gardening team (aka Head Gardener and 'assistant' Head gardener) to start blitzing the flower borders and vegetable beds. The vegetable beds are the quickest 'hit' so whilst Felicity is cutting down all of the dead top growth etc. in the flower borders, I am tackling the weeding in the raised veggie beds. I have said many times that this is the easiest way to grow produce as the relatively narrow beds allow access virtually all the time, regardless of the weather. It means lighter work overall, as weeds never really get established that well – hence the speedy end result. The flower borders are different, as you can't walk over them if the soil is wet, or even dampish, as you do too much damage to the soil structure. Weeding therefore often gets left, which allows the darn things to establish more and thus take much longer to remove them. The worst weeds that we have to deal with are couch grass, blackberry, creeping buttercup and bittercress – not to mention the copious numbers of ash tree seedlings and oaks, where acorns get buried by jays and squirrels the previous autumn. The bitter cress flower very early in the year (like now!) and the seed heads pop open, flinging the tiny seed far and wide at the slightest touch. Bittercress is meant to be edible, but I can't say I have ever been tempted to give them a try! With the rotten weather last year, and lack of gardening time, it means that most of the flower borders now have weeds that are well established and so the task is much more difficult. It is a soul-destroying job, but one that has to be done in order to do the flower borders justice. Many of our plants are now well established, with some of the large clump forming perennials such as day lillies, hostas and agapanthus now pushing themselves out of the ground. Inevitably the biggest bramble or ash seedling will have found it's perfect germinating place right in the middle of the largest plants and is often the reason why they get left. The only way round it is to dig the root ball out and then cut it into pieces which not only allows you to remove the said weed, but it also allows you to rejuvenate the flowering plant. The oldest less vigorous parts, get thrown on the bonfire, whilst the outside, more vigorous parts can be replanted (some anyway) to carry on flowering and fill in the ground more. At the end of the day, vigorous perennial growth is one of the best ways to reduce the amount of future weeding, as they shade out much of the weed seed and struggle to germinate or thrive. Any spare bits of flowering growth will get planted in any gaps in other beds, or will be taken off to the greenhouse to be potted up and to be used elsewhere in the garden at a later date or found a new home in

someone else's garden!. Talking of which, there is a plant sale at Earlswood hall on Saturday 10th May, to help raise funds for the Hall upkeep. Keep an eye out for posters / adverts for time and any update! We are hoping to be there with a selection of flower and vegetable plants.

So, whilst I am making inroads into the vegetable beds, the 'other' Head gardener is forging ahead in the flower borders, cutting off all of the dead growth and removing any larger weeds that can be tugged out. I will then follow along behind doing the digging out and cutting up and replanting/potting on work. We do have a selection of plants potted up from last year, which get planted in any gaps that might remain. If there aren't enough to go round at this moment in time, gaps will be filled in the future by annuals that we will be growing for producing cut flowers. This planting out operation will be in a few weeks' time, at which time a further, but hopefully much lighter weeding exercise will also take place – weather permitting of course. The hot bench in the small greenhouse was turned on a few weeks ago, and all of the early crops were sown. This included all of the salad crops, which require the longest growing period such as sweet and chilli peppers, tomatoes, and cucumbers, as well as the first broad beans, peas and French beans. It is early for the French beans, but once germinated, these will be planted in the large tunnel and protected from late frosts should these occur. This means that you have fresh beans in the first weeks of May – a time when there is little fresh veg available from the garden. Sometimes this doesn't always work as even with protection, a particularly hard frost can take these very tender plants out. Get it right and you are on to a winner. It never works outside though, so I suggest you don't try this no matter how warm it might feel outside today!. We have also sown a wide mix of cut flower seeds as well, and these are germinating well at present. It is a bit damp outside again as I write this, so order of the day later is to start pricking out the many seedlings that have now appeared. In the tunnels and large greenhouse, I have already planted the first crops up. These comprise of the first early potatoes (Casablanca), early cauliflowers, garlic and shallots (all of which were started off in pots a couple of months or more ago). The garlic and shallots will normally be ready for harvesting in June, and when removed, the ground will then be used for planting up with the peppers and/or tomatoes. These are usually plants that have been potted up into special pots (usually in the next few weeks). These pots allow the roots to grow out of the bottom. The pot can then just be placed where you want them to grow, you don't need to plant in the traditional sense. Liquid feed is given in the top of the pot and watering is

done around the bottom of the pot. This method allows for easy replanting and is meant to achieve the best results. It also means that you can ensure the risk of a last frost has passed by keeping them in the warmth for as long as possible. In the coming weeks there will be further sowings of peas and various beans, which will help to extend the harvesting period for as long as possible.

With the warmer weather of the last couple of days, I have taken the opportunity to go through our remaining bee hives. We had eight active at the start of winter, but are now down to six. The two weakest hives have clearly succumbed to the cold, wet weather. Advice is that you never open a hive up unless the air temperature is above 15 degrees centigrade, otherwise you run the risk of chilling any brood that might be present. I had one hive that had been quite aggressive last year when I tried to resolve an issue with a load of wild comb – this is comb that isn't built on the modern wax foundation, but rather just built by the bees in open space. The bees had been a swarm that I had captured and put in a new hive. As always, I feed a swarm with sugar syrup to help them to get established in their new home, but they were so active they built new combe all around, and attached, to the feeder itself, as well as the new frames I had inserted! I managed to remove the feeder, but was loath to remove the wild comb due to all the work and copious amounts of honey already present. The bees just said thanks and then filled the hole left behind after the feeder was removed. It has been a problem knowing what to do, especially as the bees had acted very aggressively. Hopefully I am on the way to resolving things now. Time will tell. At least this time the bees were much more chilled out, so working with them was 100% pain free – not like the last time!

Happy gardening until next month, Steve and Felicity Hunt.



STARGAZING



The seven stars of the Plough lie pretty much overhead. It is one of the “circumpolar” constellations that are always above our horizon. Its classical name is Ursa Major, the Great Bear. The two stars furthest from the handle point to the North Star. The North Star or Polaris is approximately 400 light years away. This is a distance of approximately 2,000,000,000,000,000 miles! The light we now see from this star left the North Star 400 years ago.

American slaves in the southern States of the USA were taught a song in childhood. The first verse runs:

When the Sun comes back
And the first quail calls
Follow the Drinking Gourd
For the old man is a-waiting for to carry you to freedom
If you follow the Drinking Gourd

The song gave a time, after the December solstice, when the Sun begins to climb higher into the northern sky and the calls of migratory quail can be heard in the southern United States, and a direction – the Drinking Gourd is the Plough and lies to the North. This gave slaves the vital information which allowed them to escape to the North and to freedom.

In the evening, at the beginning of April, the bright planet Jupiter is low in the west at sunset. The slender crescent New Moon forms a triangle with Jupiter and the bright star Aldebaran on 11th April, and is just above the star group Pleiades.

On clear nights, when the Moon is new and seen as a fine crescent, the rest of the Moon can often be seen as a very dark grey against the black sky. Whilst the bright crescent is directly illuminated by the Sun, the rest of the Moon is in its own shadow. The shadow is dark grey rather than black because of “Earthshine”, where light reflected from Earth illuminates the Moon very faintly.

Joke: How does Jupiter hold up his trousers? With an asteroid belt.

NASA has some beautiful images of astronomical objects on the internet at apod.nasa.gov/apod/.

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Holy Week Events

Sunday 13th April 10.00 **Palm Sunday** Eucharist with Hymns
Tuesday 15th April 19.00 **Evening Prayer**
Friday 18th April 09.00 **Good Friday** Village Nature Walk
and Treasure Hunt with Hot Breakfast in
the Church Rooms

(RSVP for catering numbers and any special dietary requirements to Reverend Zoe - 07754 306229)

Sunday 20th April 10.00 **Easter Day** Eucharist with Hymns

Group Service – No Service at Shirenewton Church

Sunday 27th April 10.00 **Group Eucharist** Service at **ST PIERRE**

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Information of services at the other eleven local churches within the SevernWye Ministry Area is at www.severnwyema.co.uk



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