

# VISION

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## *MINISTRY TEAM:*

**Rev. Dr. Bonni-Belle Pickard (07590 564477)  
and all members of Union Street Church**

*APRIL 2024*



**Union Street  
Methodist Church**

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April	7th	10-30am	<b><i>Service to be held at Tonbridge Road Followed by a bring and share lunch</i></b>
April	14th	10-30am	<b><i>Rev Dr Bonni-Belle Pickard</i></b>
April	21st	10-30am	<b><i>David Newell</i></b>
April	28th	10-30am	<b><i>Rev Dr Bonni-Belle Pickard</i></b>

**Online Services**

*Details will be available on the circuit website  
Laurel will also keep us informed in the newsletter  
Please check the circuit website for details of services  
[www.nkmethodists.org.uk](http://www.nkmethodists.org.uk)*

Recently I started clearing out some of the books from my vestry office at the church. The most urgent prompt is the reality that my office is part of the property which we hope to be selling soon. The longer-range prompt is recognising that my next move as a minister will be to a retirement home, most likely smaller than the current manse Alfred and I occupy. We're not sure when that will be, but I don't really have space at home for all the books that are in my vestry office. So, I began the 'first cull.'



Believe it or not, I've read nearly all the books on my shelves, so for me, parting with books is like parting with good friends – or at least acquaintances. Even if we haven't conversed for many years, part of that book or that friendship remains with me and helps to make me who I am. During the 'first cull,' I said good-bye to books that had accompanied me for a season but are not 'life-long friends.' Some pertained to particular interests; some were required reading for various courses. A few were given to me by others but had not been my own choice. Still, it was a challenge to say goodbye...



During the 'first cull' (which took place over a few weeks), Maxine had noticed some boxes of books in my office when she was cleaning and asked where they had come from. She figured I was accumulating even more books as she couldn't see any new gaps on my shelves. I assured her they had all come off my shelves – some had been 'double parked' for lack of space!

Most of the books in my office have to do with my profession as a minister: books on theology and church history, on worship and pastoral care, on social and mission outreach issues, Bibles and biblical studies, hymn books and prayer books, as well as some devotional books and fiction. I figured that perhaps some might be useful to other ministers, so I loaded up eight boxes of books (about 250) to take to the recent



Presbyteral Synod. Several of my ministerial colleagues poured over the stacks during the lunch break, and two boxes of books made their way to new vestry shelves. I found myself trying not to look to see who was taking what – it was a bit like watching a child or grandchild leave home! At the same time, the boot of the car was lighter for the journey home....

All this book culling has been going on at the same time I've been doing further explorations into our church burial ground. It's been a good reminder that I won't be buried with these books! I can't take them with me forever, so finding good homes for them now is best. I'll continue with a second cull, and I'm planning to take several boxes to the upcoming circuit Local Preachers' Away Day. If any of you would like to avail yourself of some books, then come and take a look as well! Perhaps you're also in a 'clearing out' season. I can't promise that I won't continue to acquire more books, but now is the season to be setting some aside so there's room for the future.

Bonni-Belle

# *Grave Book of the Wesleyan Methodist Burying Ground Union Street Maidstone*

Recently the Kent Family History Society undertook a complete scan and transcription of the *Grave Book of the Wesleyan Methodist Burying Ground Union Street Maidstone*, the tome which includes the names of all those buried on our church premises. We were able to receive on loan from the Kent County Archives a few months ago and are finding a wealth of interesting information! It provides many clues to link Union Street's long legacy of 'hospitality' to the living and the dead of our community.

The book itself is massive: 18" tall, 11" wide, 2" thick (it seems most appropriate to use 'old money' calculations for its size!). It weighs 3.2 kilos and has thick pages inscribed with old-fashioned handwriting. It starts with an Index which lists nearly 3000 names of those buried on the premises and assigns numbers that link those names with the appropriate burial plots. The main part of the book lists the names, ages, and date of burials in each of 290 plots, in the 'Front' (154 plots from the Chapel to the Union Street gates), 'Side' (17 plots on the west side of the Chapel) and 'Background' (119 plots on the Brewer Street carpark side). In some cases, the name of the officiating minister is also included. The last section of the *Grave Book* contains a list of the fees received for burials after December 1864, when the public cemetery was opened in Sutton Road (and thus the church could charge for private burials), and ends with the last burial in 1952, a certain Annie Elizabeth Rankin, aged 77, daughter of Josiah Thomas Baker and Leah Baker, interred in the Charles Baker family vault.

Having the *Grave Book* in hand – and now having the transcriptions readily available on computer – has provided a rich opportunity to better explore and understand this important part of Union Street Methodist Church's history. We are deeply indebted to the Kent Family History Society for their kind and diligent work on our behalf. The fact that, until a few months ago, none of us knew that there were over a thousand bodies buried under the church carpark, prompts me to keep 'digging' metaphorically to uncover this heritage of 'hospitality' literally lying beneath our feet. Several pencilled-in sketches of the layout of the (front and side) graveyard were loosely tucked into the pages of the *Grave Book*; collating those sketches with the names and dates of those buried in the various plots is starting to reveal some interesting discoveries.

According to the *Grave Book* records, most (90+) of the single-burial plots are on the front lawn, mostly on the west side, with another 43 plots containing two bodies. There are a few single and double burials in the back and side grounds. By far the largest number of plots were for families, over 200 in all, each containing up to 10 bodies. And then there are the 'common' burial plots, some 40 in the back and 20 in the front, each containing at least 11 bodies, with the most being 30 – that's thirty bodies buried in one plot! The 'numbers' are only statistics, though; the name of each person is listed in the *Grave Book*, and some have notes added about family connections. Sadly, many of those buried are infants and children, and indeed, there are some plots which contain whole families that died within a few days or weeks of each other. The pastoral responsibility of maintaining a 'burying ground' must have been immense.

Apparently, the burials on the church lawn started with three-year-old Ernest Randle Brownscombe on 3 March 1803: 03/03/03. That's a lot of threes! We don't know much about Ernest Randle, which is not too surprising for a three-year-old. He's buried in a 'family' plot on the front lawn, close to the front gate, just to the right of the centre path when one looks in from Union Street. Some 97 years later, on 5 October 1900, another family member was buried in that plot, an Elizabeth Mary Brownscombe, aged 48. Would she have been a grandmother? A great aunt? Hard to know as they are the only two Brownscombes listed in the Union Street Grave Book, and the only two persons buried in that grave.

There is a note with little Ernest Randle Brownscombe's entry in the *Grave Book* which says that a Rev William King officiated at the burial. And then, according to the *Grave Book*, the very next person buried on the church grounds was Rev King himself, aged 43, and buried a few feet away from young Ernest, on the 20<sup>th</sup> of March 1803, just two weeks later. We don't have any further clues about the causes of these two deaths so close to each other; was there a health concern? Did Rev King contract an illness at the funeral itself?

The next burial was for a Thos Standen Baker in 1810, and then no more interments until 1818 when there were six. At that point, the burials became more frequent, averaging about ten a year for the next five years until 1823, when the Chapel was built. From then on, the annual burials increased to around 50 a year (about one a week!), soon expanding into the west side of the Chapel and around to the back with around 70 plots being opened during the 1820s. In front of the Chapel, these plots were generally close to the Chapel itself, on both sides of the path. In the back, they were laid out along the west wall (next to what is now Hi-Kent) starting from the Brewer Street entrance, with a few of the earliest in the centre of what is now the car park. The 1830s saw an even greater expansion of burial plots, especially filling in between the plots established in the 1820s in the front and back with the front plots moving towards Union Street and the back plots moving eastward. In the front, plots expanded on the west side of the path in the 1840s and then all the way to the front gate on both sides during the 1850s and 1860s, with burials being added, especially to the family plots all along.

The persons buried in these plots would be not only Methodists but other 'non-conformists' from Maidstone who could not be buried in Church of England graveyards. There is no indication in the *Grave Book* about the religious beliefs of those buried, though the name of the minister who officiated is noted for some. We've also not found at this point any record of fees paid for the burials before Dec 1864. Whatever the circumstances, the *Grave Book* reveals a special kind of hospitality offered to the Maidstone community by the Wesleyan Methodists of Union Street.

As we know, in 1864, the township council opened its own civic cemetery and crematorium on Sutton Road. Thereafter there were no more 'community' burials on the Union Street premises, though those who had reserved 'family plots' continued to have use of them. These went on throughout the 1800s and into the twentieth century, with the last burial in 1952, as mentioned above.

Photos and some information from the *Grave Book* reveal that some of the graves had headstones; these were moved against the boundary walls of the front lawn in the 1960s when the Church and Community Centre were renovated. Jim Bryant and David Hitch have previously done some work on the gravestones in the past and we have good reports on those, though we can always 'dig' deeper into all of this!

Our explorations into potential property sales and renovations over the past few years have led us to this new appreciation of the historic importance of our burial ground. From time to time, we have enquiries from distant relations of those buried who want to know more about their ancestors' final resting place. Over the past year, we've heard the stories of several who were not only buried on the church premises but had windows or memorials erected in their memory. Though no further burials are allowed on the premises – and, indeed, most bodies are now cremated rather than buried – still we have a legal responsibility as caretakers for this human remains. They also provide a historic reminder of our responsibility for hospitality to our community: this is a place of rest and safety for all. Are we able to extend that to the living as well as the dead?

Bonni-Belle Pickard, March 2024





You ought to discover some principle, you ought to have some great faith that grips you so much that you will never give it up.

Somehow you go on and say, "I know that the God that I worship is able to deliver me, but if not, I'm going on anyhow, I'm going to stand up for it anyway".

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MARTIN LUTHER KING JR



## Answers for the LENT QUIZ

1 Spring

2 Ashes were poured or sprinkled over the head.

3 To follow the example of Jesus' 40-day fast in the wilderness. To help us focus on prayer and devotions. To give the acquired savings to the poor.



4 Pretzels

5 Twice a week.

6 It is to represent the time Jesus spent in the wilderness, tempted by Satan.

7 alleluia.

8 "Christ Beside Me."



9 True

10: Repent their sins. Experience a new birth. Rededicate themselves to Jesus.

# Bible Trivia Quiz: People

## Answers next month!

1. Finish this proverb: "Where there is no vision, ..."  
See: [Proverbs 29:18](#)
2. "And they said one to another, Behold, this dreamer cometh." Gen 37:19 Who is the dreamer in this verse?  
See: [Genesis 37:19](#)
3. Finish this Proverb: "Labour not to be ..."  
See: [Proverbs 23:4](#)
4. Complete this verse: "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth....."  
See: [Isaiah 52:7](#)
5. Complete this verse from Job: "...for the price of wisdom is ....."  
See: [Job 28:18](#)
6. Who does God call: "...my firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth."?  
See: [Psalms 89:27](#)
7. Who said, "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ."?  
See: [Philippians 3:7](#)
8. Who said: "Come now, and let us reason together...though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."?  
See: [Isaiah 1:18](#)
9. What does Paul call the Galatians?  
See: [Galatians 3:1](#)
10. Who begins their book with: "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the LORD hath spoken..."  
See: [Isaiah 1:2](#)



# Circuit Walking Group

The group normally meets every third Thursday of the month for walks of around 5 miles. New walkers are always welcome. If anyone is interested in joining these walks, then phone the organiser Lesley Hitch on 01622 739039 or 07733 046915 .



Before I let you read the, as always very interesting article on the groups February Walk, I feel that I must apologise to everyone for somehow managing to not include the first page of last months walk report in last months Vision.

I hope that Murray and Lesley will forgive me for this mistake and I promise them and you all that I will try and keep my brain in gear in future.

My apologies once again

**Your Editor**

**Dennis**

## And now for the February Walk

### A morning visit to Kent's last surviving medieval Wild Deer Park

History tells us wild deer parks abounded in days gone by. They gained popularity after the Norman Conquest in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Parks were primarily used for hunting but also provided food and resources for building and fuel. Typically, they contained a mix of woodland and grazing pasture.

It is claimed there were once over 3000 deer parks across Britain. During the Civil War they were broken up and either converted to agricultural land or incorporated into post medieval estates. Some 700 remained in the 16<sup>th</sup> century but only a few have survived the 500 years since.

In the middle ages the parks were often remote to the houses they were associated with. However, later their aristocratic owners wanted to show off their parks and moved them either around their mansions or adjacent to them. No doubt this was much more convenient for the house hunting parties, where the lord of the manor showcased his wealth and hospitality.

Kent's only surviving wild deer park is the Knole estate. The earliest recorded owner of the estate was Robert de Knole in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. By the early 15<sup>th</sup> century, we find it owned by the Bishop of Durham. Was this an investment as a retirement home? It could hardly be a weekend retreat; it's a bit far from the 'office' on a Sunday morning, particularly when they hadn't yet invented high-speed trains! A subsequent owner expanded the estate by purchasing adjacent land, sometimes forcibly 'on pain of death', as also happened in some later sales. But this was to catch up with him when a hastily convened 'Royal Commission', in response to the Jack Cade rebellion, found against him leading to his execution. No beating around the bush in those days, with interminable 'commissions' which struggle to reach a verdict!



By the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century, the then Archbishop of Canterbury obviously thought his palace in Otford wasn't big enough and he moved up the road to Knole. Well, at £266 it was a bargain, wasn't it? And he still had a few quid in his back pocket to pay for some extensions. He probably also liked some of the mod cons of the day, not least the spring water on the estate and the abundant supply of trees to heat the house. Oh, and if his servants had forgotten the shopping, there was always a ready live-stock supply outside the front door.

But enough of history, I never really liked it at school. One last fact before I move on. Many different owners modified and extended the house such that the house now ranks as one of the top five of England's largest houses.



So, who was visiting and why? Therein lies another story. Last summer I had many chats with Lesley. We were despairing of preparing monthly walks for the circuit walking group where next to no one turned up. As is the case of so many church groups, we pondered the future. We were aware a few of our members had health issues. We were also mindful of people playing catch up on visits, or things to be done, which were not possible in the pandemic; indeed, we ourselves were in that camp.

In one of our many moaning sessions on the phone, we decided we would choose walks for the next six months which didn't require much, if any, preparation. We chose a walk at Knole for the possible final walk, if numbers didn't pick up. Why Knole? Lesley declared it as one of her favourite walks. And, as the long standing organiser, the choice just had to be hers so she could 'go out on a high'.

Since then, numbers have picked up, albeit on occasions the weather most certainly hasn't! Keenly observing our group, we noticed that the promise of a café or pub on the walk seemed to increase numbers, even on very wet mornings like our potter in autumnal Mote Park. Desperate to push this further, we now seemed to have saddled ourselves with another problem – which pub/ café to base our walk around? Lesley's massive file, on walks we've done through the years, highlights how many places of refreshment on those walks have disappeared. But we will battle on for now and hope that ideas, and even alternative leaders, may be forthcoming from our increased numbers.

The walks we have done, around Knole Park, have recently been in the early months of the year. The sandy soil means there is less risk of sinking in the winter mud. This year our group of 10 started from Godden Green. The omens were good: South Eastern Water completed work on the road from Seal to Godden Green early, thus avoiding our need to use a diversion. Despite the very wet February weather, we had a lovely clear sunny morning.

Everyone was there early!!! So, we had a very prompt start. The group paired off and conversations were in full flow, perhaps as well to take minds of the muddiest of section of the walk, the result of large-wheeled vehicles having passed along the track. We entered the deer park; we could see no deer! This was very different to my previous visit in the autumn with our grandson. Deer were everywhere that day. It was the rutting season. The groaning and belching noises of the stampeding stags, battling for their mates, was almost deafening in places. Our grandson was certainly not running too far away from parents and grandparents that day!



It is hard to believe at times, as you wander round Knole Park, how close it is to Sevenoaks town centre. It is so quiet, and, in many parts of the park, there is no visibility of the town. But, given its high position, there are some good views over the North Downs and the Darenth Valley. The trees also provide shelter from any cold winds. We circumnavigated the outside of the House. But, given the National Trust new policy that the car park is only for visitors to the house, their café had to forgo our trade. The unanimous decision of the group was that we make use of their 'other facilities' before completing our walk and partaking of refreshments in Godden Green. But would those 'thespian' walkers in our group have been so keen to leave had we been in Knole a few days earlier? I read that Sky had been filming a period drama series in Knole in the weeks before our walk. Perhaps they might have fancied an 'extras' role. As it is, they'll just have to make do with their small parts in the April production by the Willington Players.

Leaving the house, we crossed the golf course. It was difficult to see any golfers as there were so many deer brazenly grazing the fairways. One of our walkers informed us the golf club is trying to amend the public rights of way in the area of the golf course. Perhaps this was a 'deer protest graze' on behalf of we walkers. But then if you are a member of the Knole herd going back to King Henry VIII time, a stray golf ball is as nothing to the dangers of the aristocratic hunts talked about above. Perhaps statistics even show them that the fairway is a safe place to graze as so many golfers stray into the rough.

On our return to Godden Green, there was only one thing to do: change footwear and visit the aptly named Bucks Head. All the party indulged; the food was enjoyable, as was the chat around the tables.

**Murray Gibson**



## Centrepiece February Meeting Report



At our February meeting, members brought along memorable items which had belonged to a parent or other relative. Included were much-loved items of tableware, a gas mask, a wooden carved animal, ornaments, photographs, a very old (still working clock), watches, as well as many other beloved pieces. All brought back happy memories which were shared with us.



At our March meeting, members shared memorable pieces of music or a song with us. (More of that in the next Vision).

Our next meeting, on 24 April, we shall be holding a Beetle Drive.

[www.usmc.org.uk](http://www.usmc.org.uk)

WILLINGTON PLAYERS PRESENT:

**Charity Night: 7.30pm Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> April 2024**

Leonard Vole stands accused of murdering a rich widow. The stakes are high with shocking witness testimony, impassioned outbursts from the dock and a young man's fight to escape the hangman's noose. Generally regarded as one of Agatha Christie's most accomplished plays, this suspenseful thriller keeps audiences guessing until the very end.

**Please help raise funds for the church by selling tickets to your friends, family or neighbours.**

**Tickets are £17.00 (£7.36 per ticket going to Church Funds) are available from Alan Townend.**

**Tickets are also available for the other shows:**

**Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup>, Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> – Friday 26<sup>th</sup> 7.30pm**

**Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> 3pm**

Also, each ticket purchased entitles you to a pre-theatre 2 course dinner £15 at Frédéric's Bistro, Market Buildings, Maidstone.

Please book directly with Frédéric's on 01622 297414

# ROTAS for APRIL

		<b>Vestry Steward</b>	<b>Pastoral Steward</b>
,April	7th	Service at	Tonbridge Road
April	14th	Ian Jenkins	Pete Smith
April	21st	Christine Cox	Laurel Townend
April	28th	Dennis Makowski	Maxine Makowski

		<b>Door Steward</b>	
,April	7th	Service at	Tonbridge Road
April	14th	Michael Packer	
April	21st	Ada Allwright	
April	28th	Margaret Smith	

		<b>Projection</b>	<b>Sound</b>
,April	7th	Service at	Tonbridge Road
April	14th	Paul Smith	Ernie Munn
April	21st	Paul Smith	Ernie Munn
April	28th	Alan Townend	Ernie Munn
		Alan Townend	Ernie Munn

		<b>Reader 1</b>	<b>Reader 2</b>
,April	7th	Service at	Tonbridge Road
April	14th	Debbie Taylor	Lesley Hitch
April	21st	Maxine Makowski	Peter Herrin
April	28th	Paul Smith	Laurel Townend

		<b>Intercessions</b>	<b>Organist</b>
,April	7th	Service at	Tonbridge Road
April	14th	TBA	Ransford or C.Ds
April	21st	Margaret Smith	Ransford or C.Ds
April	28th	TBA	Ransford or C.Ds

## Communion Stewards

# FOOD BANK

The box for your gifts is in the front entrance of the church.

Your continued support would, I am sure be much appreciated.

If you have any questions Jan Hinchliffe can be contacted on 07976 444015 or 01622 735198



## ***Material Needed for the May 2024 Edition of Vision!***

Please send copy for the May edition of *Vision* to the Editor By Monday 15th April or by email to

**[vision@usmc.org.uk](mailto:vision@usmc.org.uk)**

***Dennis Makowski***