



Advent 2015

NEWS



the Society of Mary and Martha at Sheldon

www.sheldon.uk.com

2015 giving reminder

We haven't got round to sending out individual reminders this year. We really appreciate your commitment as Friends to both pray and give in support of the ministry here. If you haven't yet sent along your gift for 2015 there's still time to do so.

Septic tank

Occasionally you will hear a loud "clunk" in the vicinity of the Pig Pens lawn. It's the revived tipper mechanism on the septic tank. Rust and blockages had taken their toll and we recently had to replace the mechanism for £7,000. But it's a wonder of simple engineering and the repair cost a fraction of replacing with a treatment plant.

Recruiting now

See our website for 3 roles we're interested in finding people to fill.

1. A lambing assistant for a few weeks at the end of March.
 2. A freelance Adobe software specialist to help with training and design work.
 3. A Reception volunteer for one day per week, ideally Tuesdays.
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Sign up for the blog(s)

Every few weeks we post a news item on our Sheldon blog. If you would like to get an email when there is something new to read just go to the blog page and enter your email in the "subscribe" box. We love having your comments on our blog posts - the more we hear from you the more you encourage us to post.

Contracts

We're working on an HR project to update all our staff contracts and recruitment procedures. A big project as there are so many rules to comply with. But also a good reminder of the value of all our wonderful staff team members.

Prayer patch

We would especially value your prayers for the following:

- » Members of the Community - health, strength and sanity
- » Andrew and Rhian as Alongsiders testing their vocation - ditto
- » All Sheldon's staff team members and volunteers - ditto
- » All guests who visit Sheldon - especially those going through times of difficulty or distress
- » All people in Christian ministry
- » Members of the Doing Healthy Ministry Together working group
- » Decision making and funding for the DHMT project

A member of the Community is in the Chapel of Christ the Servant at around midday Monday to Friday for a period of intercession for all those who have asked for our prayers. Please do let us know if you would like to be included at any time.

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The charity provides support resources for people in Christian ministry at times of stress, crisis, burnout or breakdown. This specialist work is set within a broadly based retreat and education setting at Sheldon in the Teign Valley. Sheldon is run by the Sheldon Community.

Community members:

Sarah Horsman (Warden), Carl Lee (Lay Chaplain), Sue Lee, Hillary Hanson (Cellarer), Jan Kaye (Housekeeper)

@smmretreat

www.facebook.com/maryandmartha





Sheldon without walls

So, what might Sheldon look like without walls? We're currently exploring the IT equivalents of cob and glass - online space that is sufficiently safe and insulated while also being warm and welcoming. We want to harness some of the real world skills we've learned and take them into the virtual world.

"Sheldon without walls" was a memorable phrase that popped out of Carl's mouth during our Doing Healthy Ministry Together working group residential recently. We've spent 25 years building lots of walls - not to keep people out but to welcome people in. There are cob walls, stud walls, glass walls and block walls; rendered, clad, painted, self-cleaning (ha, ha). All of them are designed to keep the cold out and the warmth in. Sometimes to give privacy, sometimes to bring indoors the light and views from outdoors. We've developed a careful eye for creating good space at many levels.

Our aim is to make the Mary and Martha ministry available to many more people. (In the jargon this is called upscaling and increasing impact but of course we wouldn't use words like that here!)

Of course it's no good just building walls, whether solid or virtual. They are only any use if they are inhabited by real people with real heart and passion. Building walls goes hand in hand with building Community. It will be an interesting journey to discover how our struggles and joys of creating real world Community translate into the

virtual world. Down here in the real world we have misunderstandings and sadnesses, sickness and stress alongside the joys and achievements. The septic tank gets blocked, the wifi slows to a crawl, the jacuzzi refuses to play nicely, the car gearbox seizes up. We are committed to making our virtual space utterly real, utterly authentic. We need the help of architects, designers, engineers and builders to create the space (whether in the virtual world or for the Art Shed), but in the end of the day it will be what goes on in the hearts of these spaces that matters and makes a difference.



Community & Alongsiders with Bishop Richard Chartres in the Farmhouse

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Community Chronicle

The past few months have not been without their challenges, but there have been plenty of highlights too.

Our biggest Community news is that Andrew and Rhian moved in to Mary's Lodge during July (*and invited everyone to coffee - see photo below*). They are joining us as Alongsiders while they test their vocation to life and work here longer term. Already it feels like they have always been here. Their daughters Siân and Claire, and Rhian's Mum Mary, have been to stay and see what their parents/daughter are up to.

Andrew and Rhian were house sitters in September, along with Max and Kerry, which freed the rest of us up to holiday away (Jan in Yorkshire and Hillary on Camino) and at home (Carl, Sue and Sarah).

Just before the holidays we said goodbye to Hilary Todd (Administrator) and Paul Bray (Gardener). Neither of these departures was in the original game plan, but a combination of great opportunities and family caring responsibilities meant the time was right for each of them to head off to pastures new.

The admin team has been re-organised and this has given Andrew the chance to move to the office next to Reception and have a slightly more front line role than we had planned. This comes alongside things like looking after septic tanks, sorting out IT problems and helping with the publicity.

On our return to work in September, Jan and I stepped into our new roles of Housekeeper and Cellarer respectively, and continue to learn as we go. Jan now manages the housekeeping team, and has already made a new appointment to the cleaning team, known as Jan T to differentiate him from "our" Jan. He joins the regulars Sally, Tania, Ann, Anne, Jackie, Becky and Pauline and weekend team member, Maxine who is at college during the week.

Rhian and I are working together to develop her role, making the most of her organisational skills and tidy mind. We will be working together in the kitchen delivering food to guests and in due course we will each be able to manage the kitchen for a week independently of the other.

She is also enjoying gardening, making things with the produce of

the garden, and employing her cake decorating skills in the Christmas baking department.

Sarah has been kept busy monitoring and mentoring all the rest of us as well as her day job! We have decided not to rush into further recruitment at this stage but to wait until things have settled down and we will review the bigger picture and choose the way forward in January.

Many lovely hospitality volunteers have stepped into the breach to help out when others have had to withdraw due to illness or family crises. They have bailed us out at really busy times - so very much appreciated, thank you.

We are planning to reorder the housekeeping office in December and January. This old sitting room and has grown like Topsy into a messy and inefficient space. At least four of us use the office daily and it is much in need of attention.

Most, if not all of us will be at home for Christmas, looking forward to a peaceful time. We wish you a very happy, peaceful and blessed Christmas.

Hilary



Summer Celebrations



Community Rededication

You have to plan these things a long way ahead, but we anticipated a few things to celebrate this summer so a year ago we invited the Bishop of London and booked a mini big top, a band and a hog roast.

With the year having gone (roughly) according to plan we were indeed ready to celebrate. All our house moving had taken place in the previous months and the Farmhouse had been re-organised inside and rethatched on top. We now have the Farmhouse Parlour as a Community sitting/meeting room - the picture on page 3 shows the Community gathered there with Bishop Richard.

Within the annual service of Rededication for the Community we included praying for each of us taking on new roles and responsibilities, and welcoming Andrew and Rhian who had arrived a couple of days earlier. It was a quietly reflective service with symbolic actions to denote

our commitment to Stewardship, Stability and Servanthood.

Afterwards we all tucked into the hog roast (well, all except the vegetarians among us) and let our hair down to the music of Spin2. Sometime between midnight and 9am the big top with its lovely tree-printed walls managed to

get re-organised ready for the Eucharist. Bishop Richard preached and celebrated and it was lovely to have other Friends take part with readings, music and prayers.

The service segued into a noisy procession to the Farmhouse which proceeded to tell its story with voices down the centuries declaiming from the first floor windows. After a trumpet fanfare (well it has to be done) the Bishop then blessed the Farmhouse as a Community space and blessed us all in Greek, with plenty of holy water sprinkled all round for good measure.

You can see lots more pictures on the blog post on the website, and see some video clips of the occasion too. Thank you to everyone who helped to make it such a special occasion. Time we started planning for 2017 ...



After the blessing of the Farmhouse

New Trustees

We are delighted to welcome three new trustees of The Society of Mary and Martha, all of whom have long associations with Sheldon.

Anyone who has been to Sheldon will have seen the results of **Roger Hands'** work all around them. As a Chartered Surveyor, Roger was Property Controller at the Church Army when it was asked to take over Sheldon and negotiated the original purchase with Geoffrey Fraser. He then acted for the Society of Mary and Martha in their acquisition of Sheldon from the Church Army. Subsequently he has been involved in the design of the Long Barn, Pound House, Pig Pens, Hen Runs and Community Green House.



Now semi-retired and working 3-4 days a week, Roger owns a small farm and woodland on Dartmoor and enjoys sailing and walking as time permits.

Formerly the local vicar for Dunsford & Doddiscombsleigh, **Lynda Barley** served for eleven years as Head of Research and Statistics for the Archbishops'

Council and coordinating chaplain for the National Church Institutions commuting weekly between Devon and London. She is now Canon Pastor at Truro Cathedral and the local parish priest to two parishes. Her long association with Sheldon includes being a member of the Affirmation and Accountability working party, celebrating at one of the annual Eucharists and participating in the first Santiago de Compostela pilgrimage.



Lynda hopes to continue to offer her skills and services to support the continued development of the next stage in Sheldon's ministry as the need for this is ever sharper as numbers decline and more is required from fewer (both lay and ordained).

Regular visitors will recognize **Isabel Garty** who helps as a reception volunteer on a regular basis and featured in the *Volunteer Interview* in the last edition of the newsletter. Isabel has been connected with Sheldon and The Society of Mary and Martha for over 30 years in a variety of ways – including attending and participating in theatre events,



coming on parish residential weekends and attending fundraising events. Isabel is a retired solicitor and over the years has done professional legal work for the charity, particularly relating to planning. She lives locally and worships at St James, Christow. She has a firm belief in the value of the calling, commitment and achievements of The Society of Mary and Martha and its Members, day by day by day.

We also say farewell (as a trustee) to Jean Barlow. Jean has served as a trustee for eleven years and has been associated with Sheldon since 1995. However, we look forward to continuing to see her as a hospitality and workparty volunteer. Read about Jean, and her love of being in the kitchen, in the *Volunteer Interview* on page 11.

The Art Shed - coming soon

Some of our Friends will not be surprised that we are embarking on another building project! However, compared with previous projects, this is very modest.

Many guests at Sheldon benefit from being able to play with art materials as part of their journey whether as part of a programme event or a private retreat. Up to now, we have needed to use space which is not designed for this – with the attendant problems of messing up carpets, storage of materials and lack of facilities for cleaning brushes, hands, etc.

Some people are tempted to have a go at the creative arts but need encouragement or just the availability of the right space and materials at the right time to enable them take the first step to dip a brush into paint or push hands into clay. We have often seen how people can make an imaginative breakthrough in difficult situations by drawing, painting or modelling with clay. It's not about creating magnificent works of art (although

sometimes these as well), but more about engaging the creative and playful sides of the brain that get shut down when we're stressed and locked into a problem.



So we decided it was time we had some dedicated space for the wet or messy arts and to make it really attractive for having a go at other crafts. The proposed location is in a little corner of land just beyond the hedge by the Hen Runs. The style and finish will be similar to the Hen Runs with plenty of natural

light, underfloor heating and with a water supply and washing up facilities.

So far, we have received encouraging noises from the planners and will shortly be submitting a formal planning application with an aim to build sometime in 2016. This initial photomontage (below) gives you an idea of the sort of building that we are planning and its position - in the picture you can see the Perch Hen Run on the left.

We would be pleased to hear from any Friends who have experience of creating or using this type of space so that we can use your expertise to ensure that the space and the facilities are just right.



Backchat from the Blackbird



Here's a pic of me taken by the gardener, who found me hiding in the flower bed outside Reception (I was on the lookout for snails and small grubs). Fortunately for me and the other wildlife here, there is usually plenty to eat. We blackbirds like the hawthorn berries, the foxes and badgers have been making pigs of themselves on the windfall plums and apples, the rabbits have all that grass to eat and smaller creatures than me have many different fungi to nibble on in the shelter of the woods.

The humans seem to do quite well for themselves as well, I noticed 23 huge pumpkins lined up on the garden wall. Might be some tasty seeds thrown into the compost heap later on, I'll keep a look out. There was a lot of cheeping and chirping from the humans about the badgers, as every time they got any carrots to grow, along came the badgers, scaled the walls of the raised beds and chomped their way through the whole crop. A long roll of electric netting has appeared in the Cat Shed ready for next season, they seem to think that might deter old Brock from digging up the carrots. We shall see!

I have to keep a look out for those pesky cats, Tiny and Tibby, as they seem to think that I am a suitable food source (cheek!). Dog Lady is always urging them to do more about the rabbits, and I do sometimes see them dragging rabbits almost as big as themselves home to show to the humans. The dog doesn't seem to do anything useful, except that he does chase the cats which gets my vote. Joe has learnt a few manners since he first arrived and is a bit more polite and less bouncy with the visitors than he was.



I have my favourite perches to sit and sing and where I can watch what is going on. Big excitement in the Barn recently, when the battered old mini tractor got taken away and a shiny new thing called an ATV (all-terrain vehicle) and known as the Mule (because it can carry a lot of "stuff") was delivered. The estate team say it's really useful for transporting tools, wood, cement, fallen trees, rubbish, rubble and all the things they have

to clear up, and Dog Lady says it's much better than the car for manoeuvring the livestock trailer when she moves the sheep from field to field (rather than letting them run loose and go wherever they please). She's had to do quite a bit of that lately.

Six of the young ewes have been sold and gone to live on another farm and form a new breeding flock of Manx Loaghtans; a ram lamb called Mint is away for the winter to run with a different flock of Manx; and Mr Figbiscuit (that's him with the impressive set of handlebars) and Parkie the Dartmoor ram are busily engaged in their most active time of year. That should mean more lambs next spring, just in time for Easter.

By the way, does anyone know anything about sheep and want to come and help at lambing time? I see the humans checking them late at night and early morning every day and think hmm, they could do with some help there. Not sure what a website is (does it have spiders?) but apparently there's some information there. I'll be thinking about finding a mate and making a nest myself then too.



GreenHouse Gas



“Well it’s your age, you know”. These and other great words of comfort were offered to me when I recently suffered a femoral nerve entrapment. More encouragement came from GP and physio. You can expect to be back to something like normal by next spring. What joy! So no Camino for me this year, having spent months setting it up and almost living every detail, this was a very hard call.

Thank you to all those who came to the weekend in July. It was good to welcome the Bishop of London. He has been a support since his days as Bishop of Stepney. We enjoyed his company, plus the small big top and the music etc etc. The theatre season had two concerts called off. One due to rain and the other due to illness. At the end of August we celebrated Sue’s 70th. A great weekend. Many thanks to those who helped, you really are great company.

We owe much to the Workweekers. Much of the shrub planting is over ten years old and needed a serious haircut. Work on the grounds;

food prep; cleaning, carparking, all undertaken in good spirit. Sue and Trevor did their stuff both for workweek and Sue’s birthday, we are fortunate to have such talent available to us. So if you are looking for a way to come to Sheldon join us for workweek and enjoy the work and fun.

I have been asked many times now “What do you think of the Green Report?” Well I haven’t read it! I have always thought that the local church needed admin help etc. But I was keen to see this pass out of the hands of the clergy and to someone trained in that area. It seems that we are now calling ministers to be CEOs. Being called as a pastor, shepherd is no longer required. This present activity seems to be a top down approach. We need a bottom up approach. It’s sad to see prayerful, Godly men and women being passed over for a management style, which has come from where?

One of Sarah’s recent sayings was “Do what you love and love what you do.” Sounds pretty good to me!!!

I would like to declare here that these new ideas for buildings etc, do not come from me. People look at me and grin, when I say this face to face. They are good moves to enhance our ministry, but I am not driving them – honest! The Doing Healthy Ministry Together project is an area I am delighted to be involved in. It’s a great encouragement to find that support is coming from all directions. People actually asking if they can

help in any way. Sarah and I have recently been to London and Oxford to meet with folk wishing to help. It’s nice not to have to beg. I sometimes despair at the number of Friends who do not read this Newsletter. I am still faced with the “How’s retirement going?” When you join a religious community, you change roles, you don’t pack up work! I packed up work in my early twenties when I went to train for the Church Army ministry. The main difference in my life is the amount of time I spend walking from the GreenHouse to the Great Barn office.

So enjoy life, do what you love. If you are not the CEO type, don’t worry, God still has work for you. Joseph wouldn’t have made a CEO as he hadn’t pre-booked his bed for the night. But he was called to be Dad to our Lord. Oh, and no I don’t want to go into the theology of that last remark...

May this Christmas time move us to adore and follow our Lord.



Get some good space in your diary

Retreats open to all

» New Year R5

Always a good time to grab a few days of space to **Rest, Retreat, Relax, Read or Recuperate** from the work and/or family demands of the Christmas period. Warm indoors whatever the weather throws at us. Sociable bar and mealtimes. Plenty of time to do your own thing. £55/night. 10% discount 5 nights. 20% ministry discount.

29th December - 4th January

» Candlemas weekend

Whether you want to work or play there's a warm welcome this weekend. We will have a candlelit procession and blessings around the site on Saturday evening. Practical tasks indoors and out for the volunteers. Good food and company for all. £12/night for volunteers, £59/night for retreatants.

5th - 7th February

» Let him easter in us

No that's not a proof reading failure this time. The title is a quote from a Gerard Manley Hopkins poem playing with the verb "to easter". John Pritchard (former bishop of Oxford) has taken it as the theme for his Lenten retreat - a silent preached retreat open to all. £360 (20% ministry discount).

22nd - 26th February

For people in ministry

» 12,000-mile Service

With Easter falling early in 2016 we decided to pop in a 12,000 week for you just before Lent. The original and still the best, exclusively for people in ministry and/or spouses. £460 fully inclusive (of accommodation, meals, workshops, 1:1 time, massage as available, Jacuzzi if we've got it fixed by then ...)

31st January - 5th February

» R5 with ministry extras

We've put this mid-Lent R5 week together with people in ministry in mind (although the R5 part is open to everyone). Accommodation and food are available all week, and then you can add in either or both of the workshops.

With the various discounts, just £280 for Sunday to Friday including the workshops.

28th February - 4th March

» Discernment in Christian Leadership

The second time we have run this excellent workshop. Every hour of every day in ministry seems to include decision making of one sort or another. What informs the processes? How do we discern the will of God amidst all the competing pressures around? Led by **Andrew Walker**. £100, exclusively for people in ministry.

29th February - 1st March

» Biology Bites

This could refer to bite-size pieces of biology, or the way that biology has a habit of biting us in painful places when we're under stress. A workshop for people in ministry to understand, harness and maybe sometimes outwit our Stone Age biology as it (and we) struggle with 21st century stresses. £30. Led by **Sarah Horsman**.

2nd March

Your very own copy of our 2016 programme should already be with you - we've gone back to a single booklet this year covering both ministry and open resources. We have **plenty of copies available to distribute** so please do let us know **how many copies you would like** for your diocesan conference, cell group, synod, chapter ...

Full details are always handy on our website too, along with information about private retreats, group bookings etc (thank you for hitting the social media share buttons occasionally ...)

www.sheldon.uk.com/visit/events

The Volunteer Interview

I am 72 years old and live in Glastonbury, Somerset. I find it very interesting being here as the spiritual life is all around in so many various and surprising forms. I have three children, my son lives in Virginia, USA and is married to a Pentecostal Minister. My two daughters are within easier reach - Bristol and Alsager, in Cheshire.

I am now retired, but have been a clergy wife most of my life, first in Whitstable Kent, then various places in Wiltshire in the Salisbury diocese. I always enjoyed working with Sunday Schools, Mothers' Union and, when my first husband was made Archdeacon of Wilts, working with clergy wives. We retired to Chippenham in 1998, and after his death I helped with Special Needs children at a school close by.

I first visited Sheldon in 1995 to help on the Clergy Family Holiday. John, my first husband, had heard about what went on at Sheldon from the Diocese. We had already helped on family holidays with the Mothers' Union on the Isle of Wight, so thought we knew more or less what to do. Wrong - Sheldon does it differently! Carl and John bonded over stoking the BBQ and soon we realised what good work went on. We helped with two family holidays and were booked in for the one in 2000, but unfortunately John died suddenly before it.

On my own, I started volunteering to help in the kitchen and have been there ever since. Jan was a tremendous support at that time and was endlessly patient as I did dreadful things to cakes.

I do love being in the kitchen, preparing food for people who need and appreciate it. I enjoy the meat and fish department most, but will try anything with the good recipes provided. There are usually old and new friends there and we laugh a lot!



I come back because I believe that what goes on is really worthwhile and if my chopping and peeling helps, then I'll do it.

The biggest crisis in my life was the sudden death of my husband in 2000, soon after he had retired. My family and friends were wonderful and very supportive, but you still have to face a new life on your own. I always felt God was with me and I hung on with both hands.

One of the best things to happen with Sheldon is that my second husband, also John, with no clerical background, has come to love and support it as much as I do. He came on the first Santiago trip, not with the walking group, but with Sue and others who stayed near to the cathedral and visited the

surrounding area. Now he helps at work parties and celebrations. We go to St John's Church in Glastonbury and are blessed with a lovely vicar and superb choir.

Memories that are happiest are several - the evenings in the Cider Press with Sue and Trevor singing, cannons going off for the 21st anniversary, and a pile of empty plates with no scraps in the bowl after a meal. A worse moment is when I realised I hadn't multiplied the recipe and had only prepared food for 14 not 48!

If I had a magic wand to reduce clergy stress, I would wave it and turn the whole church organisation upside down! The parish clergy would be the really essential people and those in other roles would help and appreciate what they do. Hopefully that front-line ministry would be seen as a true vocation, not as a first step on a career ladder.

My Fairy Godmother wand would wave to give Good Health to all those who work here, and perhaps a few more healthy volunteers too.

I was honoured to be asked to be a Trustee in 2004 and now feel it is time to hand over to new people. It has been a fascinating time with a lot of changes and building work completed.

Every good wish to the Trustees in the future.

Andrew Lane was talking to Jean Barlow



In Ministry?

We've created new **good space** for you **online** to share, think out loud, discuss problems, reflect or grumble.

Make it what you need it to be.

Just log in to our website **www.sheldon.uk.com**, get your ministry details validated, create a forum username and get started.

We're also looking for some volunteer moderators to help this thing get wings.

Doing Healthy Ministry Together

We're getting an inkling that this project could become something really significant in the life of the church. We're starting a grass-roots and collaborative process to create a one-stop online hub for people in ministry. We want to create space for signposting, educating, meeting, collaborating, developing ideas, rating resources and seeking help.

The public launch is a couple of years away but you can sign up for the project blog (through our website) to keep in touch as it develops. In due course we will be looking for test users and content contributors. At this stage, we'd like to hear from you if you have IT expertise/contacts that could be relevant.



How many can you distribute?

If all has gone according to plan you received a copy of our 2016 programme a week before this newsletter. Well done all you early birds who've been making your retreat bookings already!

Please can you help with distributing more copies?

We would love to get copies out through local ministerial fellowships, clergy conferences, synods, chapters, clergy spouse groups, etc, etc.

Just let us know how many copies you can use and if there is a specific date by which they need to arrive. It really is an enormous help to have Friends on the ground helping to get the word out. Thank you in anticipation.