

PARISH CHURCH NEWS

Ss. Peter & Paul, Clare
with St. Mary the Virgin, Poslingford

The Rev'd Mark Woodrow

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(Usual Rest Day: Monday)

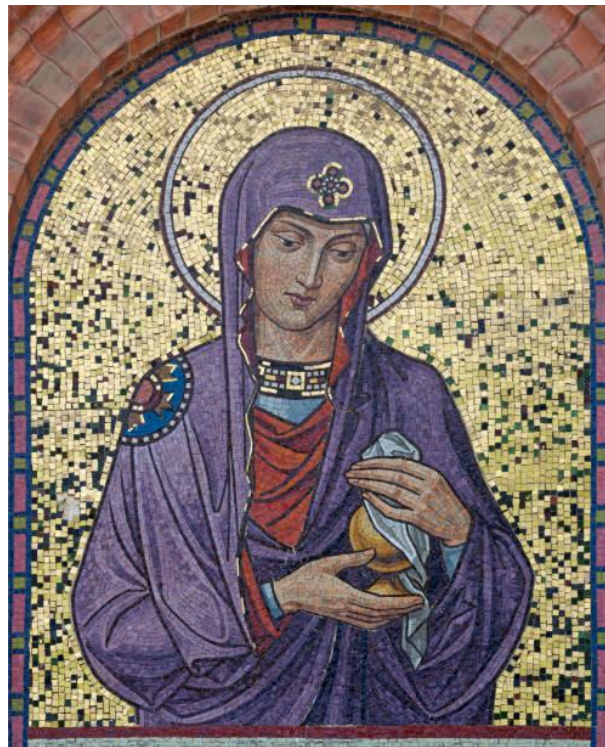
The Rev'd Dr. Karen Smith

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No. 459
July 2026



St. Mary Magdalen
Feast Day: 22 July

Rector's Ramblings – July 2026 (Rooted in Rest)

As we enter July, our countryside is in magnificent, full bloom. The hedgerows are thickening, the fields begin to be heavy with grain, and the long, sun-drenched afternoons present the perfect backdrop for a traditional summer.

For many of us, this is a season of intense activity - fêtes to organise, gardens to tend, holidays to pack for, and children to entertain during the school break. Our diaries quickly become cluttered, and our minds inevitably follow suit. Yet, amidst the vibrant busyness of midsummer, our faith calls us to pause and encounter a profound, sacred counter-cultural truth: the necessity of being rooted in rest.

In our modern world, we often view rest as a luxury, or worse, a sign of weakness. We wear our exhaustion like a badge of honour, measuring our personal worth by the length of our to-do lists. However, a Christian theology of rest teaches us that taking time for ourselves is neither selfish nor optional; it is a spiritual discipline and a divine command. When God established the Sabbath, it was not because He was tired, but to weave a rhythm of restoration into the fabric of creation itself. Rest is an act of trust, a declaration that the world can spin for a moment without our direct intervention, because it is ultimately held safely in God's hands.

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." — Matthew 11:28
Jesus Himself consistently modelled this behaviour. Throughout the Gospels, we see Him repeatedly withdrawing from demanding crowds, seeking solitary places by the hills or the lake to simply pray and be. He understood that to pour out love, grace, and healing to others, He first needed to be filled up in communion with the Father.

If the Son of God required quietude to sustain His ministry, how much more do we need it to sustain our ordinary lives? Taking time for ourselves allows us to step away from the noise, encouraging our souls to drop anchors deeply into the love of God.

To be rooted in rest means allowing ourselves the grace to simply 'be' rather than constantly 'do'. It might mean sitting quietly in the garden listening to the blackbirds, taking a mindful walk through the woods, resting in one of our beautiful churches, or enjoying a slow cup of tea without checking our mobile phones. It is in these unhurried moments that we become attuned to the still, small voice of the Holy Spirit, finding the clarity and resilience we so desperately need.

This July, I invite you to intentionally carve out sanctuary space in your week. Let us relinquish the burden of constant productivity and reclaim the holy gift of leisure. By grounding ourselves in God's peace, we will find that we are better equipped to love our neighbours, serve our parishes, and appreciate the beautiful world we have been given.

With every blessing for a peaceful and restorative summer,

Yours in Christ,

Mark

The Rev'd Mark Woodrow (Rector)

Church of England thoughts occasioned by hearing the bells of Magdalen Tower from the Botanic Garden, Oxford on St. Mary Magdalen's Day



I see the urn against the yew,
The sunlit urn of sculptured stone,
I see its shapely shadow fall
On this enormous garden wall,
Which makes a kingdom of its own.

A grassy kingdom sweet to view
With tiger lilies still in flower
And beds of *umbelliferae*
Ranged in Linnaean symmetry
All in the sound of Magdalen* Tower.

* Pronounced "Maudlin".

A multiplicity of bells,
A changing cadence rich and deep
Swung from those pinnacles on high
To fill the trees and flood the sky
And rock the sailing clouds to sleep.

A Church of England sound, it tells
Of "moderate" worship, God and State,
Where Matins congregations go,
Conservative and good and slow
To elevations of the plate.

And loud through resin-scented chines
And purple rhododendrons roll'd,
I hear the bells for Eucharist
From churches blue with incense mist
Where reredoses twinkle gold.

Chapels-of-ease by railway lines
And humble streets and smells of gas,
I hear your plaintive ting-tangs call
From many a gabled western wall
To Morning Prayer or Holy Mass.

In country churches old and pale
I hear the changes smoothly rung
And watch the coloured sallies fly
From rugged hands to rafters high
As round and back the bells are swung.

Before the spell begin to fail
Before the bells have lost their power,
Before the grassy kingdom fade
And Oxford traffic roar invade,
I thank the bells of Magdalen Tower.

Sir John Betjeman
(1906-1984)

MARGARET LIVINGSTON, R.I.P.

It was sad to learn recently of the death of Margaret Livingston, a long-standing member of the church here in Clare, who was, in turn, PCC secretary, Magazine editor and, most importantly, a very conscientious churchwarden for many years. She held this position during the incumbency of Canon John Rankin, who, meanwhile, has kindly agreed to write a tribute to her, which will appear in next month's edition of the Magazine.

FROM THE REGISTERS

June 2026



BAPTISM

Albie Hunter Scott Gee Porter



“I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills ...”

(St. Nicholas, Salthouse, Norfolk)



The Vicarage Garden Party

There being nothing quite so very English as tea and cakes on the Vicarage lawns on a Summer's afternoon, the PCC is happy to announce that this delightful occasion will again be held this year on **Bank Holiday Monday, that is, 24 August from 2pm.**

The afternoon will feature the customary attractions, *viz.* Tombola Bottle Stall, Teas & Cakes, Books, Bric-à-Brac, Homegrown produce, Raffle and quite possibly others too. Doors open at 2 p.m.

Jane Turner has very kindly agreed to act as 'overall overseer', so if you would like to help in any way or have items to contribute, please speak to her (jturner4md@yahoo.co.uk / **07931 691547**). Thank you and see you there!

The Parcose Conserved

Nicholas Turner

In last year's October issue of the *Parish Magazine* for the church of Ss Peter and Paul, Clare, the conservation was announced of the late Medieval parclose screen in the south aisle of the church, a pre-eminent example of early ecclesiastical woodwork. Made of oak, most elements of the structure are datable c. 1500–1520. Its original function was to enclose a private chapel or chantry. Accidental knocks and scratches on the outer panelling of the parclose's lower storey (dado) go back decades and have made the screen look shabby, while some of the horizontal timbers at the base have been weakened and disfigured by insect infestation, now dormant.

A fund-raising campaign launched at the same time soon received contributions from members of the church congregation and the townspeople of Clare. Dedicated PCC member Phil Kitchingman secured generous grants towards the project from the following Charitable Trusts: (1) Aurelius Trust; (2) Leche Trust; (3) Alfred Williams Charitable Trust; (4) Society of Antiquaries; and (5) Scarfe Charitable Trust.



Completed some five months ago to great admiration, this essay touches on a number of conservation methods employed, some of the discoveries made and some of the unanswered questions that remain. It also allows the church to pay homage to the individuals and charitable donors who have so generously supported this commendable enterprise.

Now that the dirt and dust have been removed and the surfaces

freshly coated with a dark acrylic stain matching the older 19th-century repaints, the parclose has gained in aesthetic impact. The unified finish of the whole gives the structure grandeur and presence that it lacked before. Never in recent times has the delicate tracery of the arches and the pierced brattishing, or cresting, featuring vine trails, heraldic carvings, and a crowned M.A.R.I.A. monogram, looked more beautiful against the light.

How does one find a conservator of medieval woodwork these days? Bainbridge Conservation (<https://www.bainbridgeconservation.com>), an independent London firm of conservators, was recommended to the church by Philip Orchard, its consultant architect. Orchard, who is concerned with the maintenance of the church, a Grade I historic building, is an expert on conservation matters. He is partner in Whitworth's, a specialist firm of chartered architects in historic building conservation and ecclesiastical projects across the UK.

Bainbridge Conservation is headed by Abigail and Tristram Bainbridge, and the firm works on the restoration of furniture, decorative arts objects, interior, woodwork, frames, paper conservation, bookbinding, etc. Tristram, who worked for ten years in the Furniture, Textiles and Fashion Conservation Department of the V&A Museum, is the woodwork specialist. One of the firm's guiding principles, as explained in their website, is their belief that repairs should be sympathetic and largely invisible to the untrained eye. Alterations, however, must be distinguishable to an expert so that what is original and what is modern conservation remains clear.

Tristram Bainbridge and his team arrived at the church through the West Door early on Tuesday morning, 7th April, bringing with them throw-cloths, light aluminium steps, great plastic tubs containing acrylic and other chemicals, and promptly began work. Soon the young trainees were up step ladders cleaning the dust and dirt from the brattishing, or on their hands and knees treating

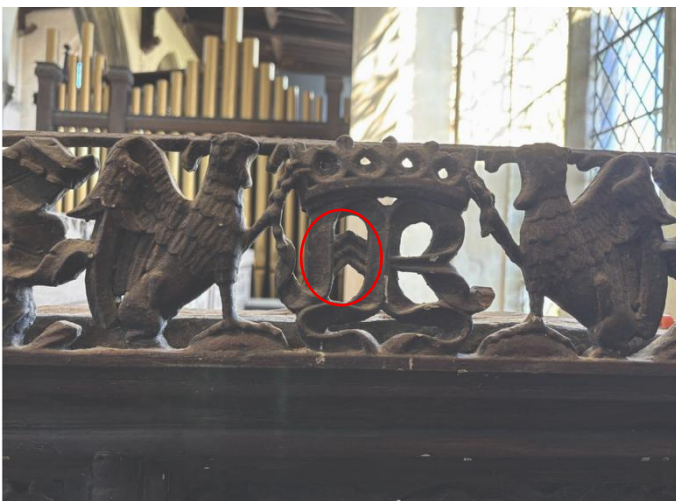




the horizontal timbers (sills) at the parclose base, badly impaired by insect infestation. The sight of eager young people working on the parclose was encouraging. The firm offers apprenticeship training to interested members of the public as well as internships periodically, and evidently good teamwork enables its projects to be carried out quickly and effectively.

Two days before the team's arrival, the church's magnificent new grand piano, which takes a star role in most of the Saturday Coffee Concerts, of which the excellent organist Christopher Moore takes charge, was wheeled a little away from the screen towards the chancel to surrender the space it normally occupies to a repository for team Bainbridge's capacious equipment and materials, ensuring at the same time that it would be safe from any accidental knocks and splashes.

A long and thorough report on the parclose conservation was published by Bainbridge on 14th May and touches on its working methods in detail. This impressive document (<https://drive.google.com/file/d/10gNtboEBmrcoy3QTq6die0apLvAK4MaB/viewit>), which does not shrink from the use of precise technical language, must now be rated as the principal reference point for the history and construction of the screen. Beginning with a short account of the church, it continues with an accurate, well-observed description and appreciation of the parclose itself, which is architecturally a fine example of the Perpendicular style, enriched by densely carved decorations of high quality.



Thanks to the cleaning and refurbishment of the woodwork, the heraldic references embedded in the foliate decoration of the cresting are more legible. The most important is the sequence of pierced carved monograms of the Virgin Mary, each surmounted by a crown, of such emphatic presence in the monument that the worship of the Virgin Mary was central to the religious purpose of the parclose. What I had overlooked in my article in October last year, in the bar of the 'A'

between the two diagonal strokes is the triple chevron motif of the de Clare family (here encircled in red). The de Clares, a powerful Anglo-Norman family whose influence and wealth extended for much of the Middle Ages, likely paid for the construction of the parclose, although by 1500, around the time of the erection of the parclose, their prominence was on the wane.

Condition and treatment

According to the report, the screen is structurally sound, but has a number of condition problems, of which there is room to discuss only two examples here of 'before and after' treatment. Some damages seem to indicate that the screen has been modified to fit a new

location for which it was not originally built, such as 'minor cutting and shortening of moulding thicknesses, where the rood meets the wall and the screen.'

The beam, or sill, at the base of the east-return, which supports two panels from the 15th-century rood screen - as well as the two others at the front and west return - are misshapen from insect damage. These sills have been consolidated with B-72, retouched and waxed, so that their former pale colouring and dusty texture is darker and less friable.



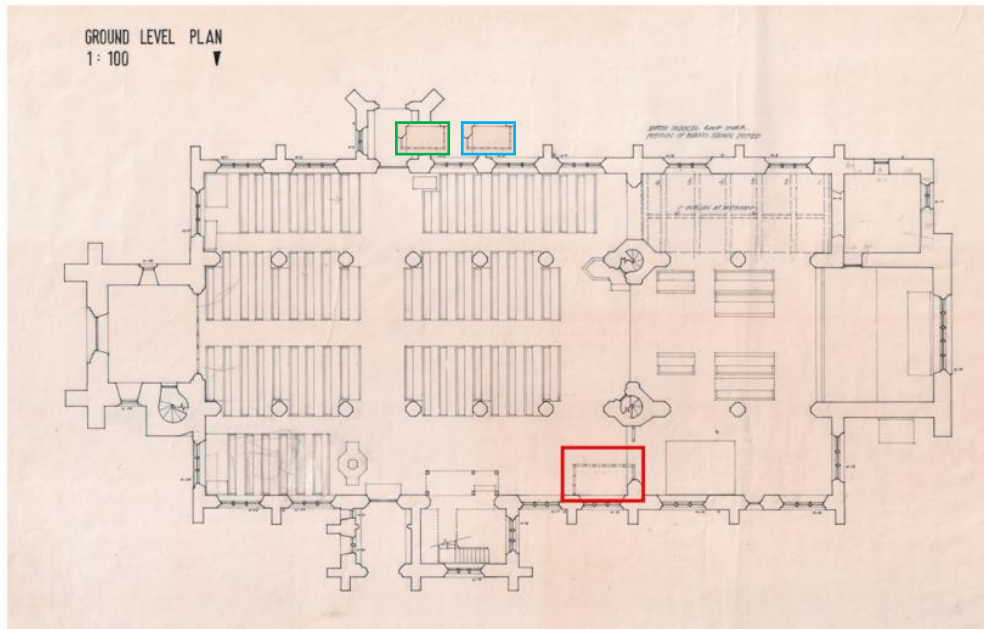
A significant replacement of a missing timber is to be found at the west return, where a lower section of the mullion where it meets the west wall needed to be supplied (illustrations of before and after). This has been skilfully replaced by a length of new oak, stained to harmonize with the rest. The repair is a good example of the vigorous conservation principles of today, so that it is hard for the 'untrained eye' to detect where old and new timbers meet. As our pair of illustration show, this roughly at the meeting-point of the two parclose storeys.



Some unanswered questions that remain

A parclose was normally built to commemorate a deceased patron of means, whose tomb was usually situated in the centre of the interior. Was there once a tomb in the centre of the Clare parclose? If so, still unknown is which family member is commemorated. Although widely assumed that it was built for the church of Ss Peter and Paul, rather than ready-made and imported from another church, the body of the family member entombed in either the north aisle, or the nearby Lady Chapel or the south aisle, where the structure stands to this day, has yet to be identified.

If the south aisle (see red rectangle on plan on next page) is not the original site of the parclose, where in the church might it have been first intended, and when and why might it have been moved? In my article about the screen for the October issue of the *Parish Magazine*, I wrongly assumed that because the east return incorporated the last remaining section of the earlier rood screen, it was conceived with this intention. As Bainbridge and others have pointed out, there is evidence that it may have been moved from the northeast of the church, but if so, when?



David Hatton (*History of Clare*), among others, believed that the Marian iconography of the cresting linked the parclose to the Lady Chapel in the northeast of the church (see blue rectangle), where a stained-glass window of the *Assumption of Virgin* (?destr. by Oliver Cromwell's henchman William Dowsing, on his visitation to the church

in 1643) and further pointed out that there was a guild of St Mary in Clare.

Bainbridge favours Hatton's view that the Lady Chapel, or somewhere along the north aisle, might well have been the parclose's original location as the width of the screen is approximately that of the width between the piers in this northern part of the church (see blue and/or green rectangle). With the parclose rotated 180°, so that what is now the east return would be the west return and the front of the screen would face in the opposite direction than as present. As the west return, facing into the nave its façade might have included decoration referencing the Virgin Mary and, though pure speculation, this might have been the cause of its destruction in either the mid-16th-century English Reformation or, more likely, when Dowsing visited in 1643, and hence its absence from the screen as it survives today.

If the screen were moved to its present site from the north side of the church, when would this have occurred? Since the original west return (now the east return) was apparently missing when the structure was moved, then this could well have prompted the improvised use of a remnant of the rood screen, which has nothing to do stylistically with the rest of the parclose. The existing east return includes two surviving fragments of the late 15th-century rood screen, attributed to the Sudbury workshop of Thomas Goche, which, save for these two fragments, was thought to have been destroyed during the 16th-century English Reformation. Rood screens were destroyed as they embodied what was thought to be the 'heretical' interpretation of the Eucharist as practised by the Roman Church.



An oak dentil cornice in the classical style, datable from the 17th century or later, closes off the top of the cusped ogival arch of the upper rood screen panel with an emphatic horizontal. This may hint at a 17th-century or later date for what Hatton regarded as one of the parclose's aberrations, namely the replacement of a section of the cresting at the

east of the screens long front, which also does not fit in stylistically with the rest: 'The chantry's cresting has an odd piece attached to each end. One of these bears a motif very different from all the others. It consists of a more elaborate crown surmounting a quatrefoil with cherubim as supporters.'

The execution of the carving is charming but naïve. The two nude putti, each kicking a leg in the air, support a crown over the 'head' of an anemone with leaves as points to the crown (perhaps those of the anemone).

There is something of the naivety and frivolity to this later addition that points to the Restoration period, towards the end of the 17th century, which seems to suggest when the perhaps incomplete parclose was fitted into its present place. What Hatton describes as the 'odd piece' of cresting is not as anomalous as it first seems as the anemone motif picks up with apparent understanding of its significance a floral motif of likely religious significance, that is seen multiple times across the interior of the parclose. Perhaps the classical dentil cornice and Hatton's 'odd piece' of carving with two putti supporting a crown over an anemone flower, both additions from the 17th century or later, are a *terminus ante quem*, or the latest possible date for the adaptation of the parclose to its new site in the south aisle of the church?

The possible connection between the still unidentified deceased member of the de Clare family and Catherine of Aragon (1485–1536), the first wife of Henry VIII of England (*reg.* 1509–47), has often been referred to since a pomegranate is one of her heraldic devices. A pomegranate burst open at its middle and so about to release its fruit alternates with the more prominent monogram to the Virgin Mary in the cresting. At the top of Catherine of Aragon's pomegranate is a crown, calyx or floral star, while the carved pomegranate motif on the screen is topped by an anemone and may have some religious symbolism. The floral and vegetative symbolism, which understandably is not central to the restoration of this important piece of woodwork, is another avenue of research that could add meaning to the devout significance of the screen.

Conclusion

The renovation of the parclose has revived appreciation among the congregation and visitors to the church of what is one of its major historic monuments. This is especially welcome as for too long this fascinating structure had been scarcely understood and for long overlooked. The removal of centuries of dirt has allowed the carved mouldings and details to gain proper definition for the first time in ages. The mark of a successful restoration, be it of a painting, sculpture or a piece of furniture, is the impression that it looks no different after treatment. This test was fully met by Bainbridge's restoration. One of the first members of the PCC to see the newly conserved parclose, told me in jest: 'don't be disappointed.' Inadvertently, he paid the conservators the greatest compliment.

COFFEE CONCERTS

ST PETER & ST PAUL, CLARE

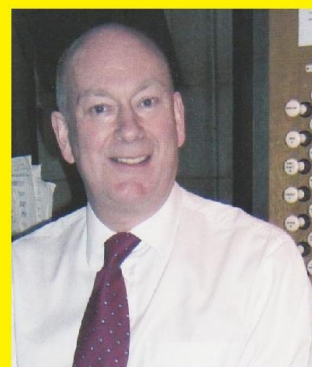
Coffee is served from 11.00; concerts start at 11.30 and run for approximately 45 minutes



Saturday, **18 April**: talented teenage musician **JAMES BARKER** plays popular music on piano and organ



Saturday, **16 May**: local organist **CHRISTOPHER MOORE** presents a programme of music for organ



Saturday, **20 June**: London-based flautist **ANDREW MORRIS** – a varied programme of music for flute and piano



Saturday, **18 July**: the **ASADI PIANO QUINTET** presents the magnificent Quintet for piano and strings in A major by Dvořák



Saturday, **15 August**: professional pianist **JILL CROSSLAND** gives a concert of fine music for piano

Saturday, **19 September**: music for clarinet and piano played by husband and wife team, **KOREN WILMER** and **ANDREW PARNELL** from Ely



Admission is free, with a retiring collection. After expenses, remaining funds will support the work and fabric of St Peter and Paul Church, Clare.

Stour Valley Benefice - Services for July 2026

Sunday, 5th July: Fifth Sunday after Trinity

Stoke by Clare:	09:00	Holy Communion	<i>Led by The Revd Mark Woodrow</i>
Cavendish:	10:30	Morning Prayer	<i>Led by The Revd Dr Karen Smith</i>
Clare:	11:00	Holy Communion	<i>Led by The Revd Mark Woodrow</i>

Sunday, 12th July: Sixth Sunday after Trinity

Hundon:	09:00	Holy Communion	<i>Led by The Revd Dr Karen Smith</i>
Stoke by Clare:	09:00	Morning Prayer	<i>Led by The Revd Sarah Smith</i>
Cavendish:	10:30	Holy Communion	<i>Led by The Revd Mark Woodrow</i>
Clare:	16:00	Evensong	<i>Led by The Revd Mark Woodrow</i>

Sunday, 19th July: Seventh Sunday after Trinity

Stoke by Clare:	09:00	Holy Communion	<i>Led by The Revd Liz Paxton</i>
Cavendish:	10:30	Morning Prayer	<i>Led by The Revd Sarah Smith</i>
Clare:	11:00	Holy Communion	<i>Led by The Revd Liz Paxton</i>
Poslingford:	16:00	Evening Prayer	<i>Led by The Revd Sarah Smith</i>

Sunday, 26th July: Eighth Sunday after Trinity

Stoke by Clare:	09:00	Morning Prayer	<i>Led by The Revd Sarah Smith</i>
Wixoe:	09:00	Holy Communion	<i>Led by The Revd Mark Woodrow</i>
Cavendish:	10:30	Holy Communion	<i>Led by The Revd Mark Woodrow</i>
Clare:	11:00	Morning Prayer	<i>Led by The Revd Sarah Smith</i>
Hundon:	16:00-18:00	Pimms & Hymns	

Sunday, 2nd August: Nineth Sunday after Trinity

Stoke by Clare:	09:00	Holy Communion	<i>Led by The Revd Mark Woodrow</i>
Cavendish:	10:30	Morning Prayer	<i>Led by The Revd Sarah Smith</i>
Clare:	11:00	Holy Communion	<i>Led by The Revd Mark Woodrow</i>

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