

Bernard's Blog no. 27- Some Easter musing

Some warm days at last. After the long death of winter this year a trip to the churchyard shows that young life has returned and spring is around us. Old gnarled, bare branches are suddenly sprouting fresh little lime-green shoots and bulbs are bursting from the dark soil. Life has returned, and we feel it. There is a rising energy in us. If it hasn't quite reached you try to get outside and catch some of it.

Come through the lychgate and take the path in front of the flagpole. Beside a group of bright blue grape hyacinths, beyond the kissing-gate, nestles a clump of cyclamen. Not the usual spring-flowering variety and our visiting expert Jane McLaughlin thinks they are *C. repanda*. She will check but is also quite excited that our last year's discovery of Meadow Saxifrage is showing stems and leaves which we hope will avoid the strimmer. The path and grave borders are lined with Red Dead-nettle. Not really red (more purple), nor is it dead and it doesn't sting like a nettle, but they flower early and are beloved by the first bees, providing much-needed food as they wake from the winter. More swathes of bright blue grape hyacinths lead you to the yellow Daffodils trumpeting the arrival of the first tulip flowers and the Aconites are flowering amongst the Primroses again.



Those bees are not the sociable type and they don't sting either. They are Red mason bees, more ginger than red and are absolutely fantastic pollinators, welcomed by commercial fruit growers to increase their yields. Red mason bees like to nest in soft brickwork so you may see them scouting out old holes in the church walls. Luckily we have provided them with bee hotels near the Tamberlin Room and on the bank by the school gate.

Easter falls this month and is, of course, an important Christian festival, but it also has themes that are echoed in the natural world around us and the date of Easter is determined by the full moon of the month. Like the sun, the moon rises roughly in the east and sets roughly in the west. It also rises around 50 minutes later each day. The full moon will rise near sunset time opposite the sun, so in the east as the sun sets in the west. The new moon will rise at sunrise, in the same part of the sky as the sun (and so cannot be seen).

The full moon has been integral in tracking the months and seasons since ancient times and have been given names, commonly English interpretations of native American, Celtic or Anglo Saxon origins. April's full moon is known as the 'Budding Moon' or the 'Seed Moon'. Sometimes the 'pink moon' corresponding to the time our Garden of Remembrance is filled with pink blossom on the trees and carpeting the ground. It is also the Paschal Full Moon or the Ecclesiastical full moon and Easter is celebrated on the first Sunday after the Paschal full moon.

My Easter treat has been a few days with family in Dorset. The pace of life is slower and I have been able to experience and appreciate how the evenings start to lengthen. The sun slows imperceptibly towards sunset, offering the promise of the endless evenings to come. If there is some warmth in the evening air, now is the time to get outside. Put on another layer, prick

up your ears, in the half hour after sunset the chorus commences. Blackbirds, perched as high as they can fill the spring evening with song. The dawn chorus is amazing but it takes some effort to get up for that. The blackbird chorus by contrast involves finding a place with a few trees around you and an early evening drink in your hand.

By day the welcome warmth has brought out the big, butter-yellow first butterfly of spring, the Brimstone. As soon as the temperature rises, this will shortly be followed by the next true butterfly of spring, the Orange Tip. Hopefully these will appear in the churchyard as they love the garlic mustard and cuckoo flowers that grow around the church. It's a bit early for cuckoos but not too early for the cuckoo flower, a delicate plant of damp areas. It has fine, pale pink flowers poking up above the grass on a slender stem and also goes by the name of Lady's smock.

'When daisies pied and violets blue

And ladies smocks all silver-white

And cuckoo-buds of yellow hue

Do paint the meadows with delight'

(from Love's Labour's Lost, William Shakespeare, 1598)



St John's has its share of ferns within the churchyard. Specialists of damp and shady places, an easy one to spot is the Harststongue. It is named by its fanciful resemblance to the tongue of a deer, and in April the long pale green undivided leaves unfurl from the late winter leaf mulch and within the church walls. The young leaves open with the characteristic fern-like spiral. You cannot miss it.

Back here in Dorset my day has been spent in the countryside enjoying the new spring lambs gambolling in the fields and sitting watching the young rabbits exploring the edge of the woods avoiding the circling buzzards. A beer in my hand at the local hostelry and the evening sun warming my face, I feel blest.

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