



Advent 2022

Sheldon News

heart & soul for ministry

Read inside for a selection of snippets featuring aspects of our life and ministry over the last few months. As usual, some good times and some challenging ones! We hope you enjoy reading it and hope it might give you encouragement in your support of Sheldon, inspiration for your prayers, and perhaps a hunger for a visit before too long - either as a guest or as a volunteer.

With love and good wishes from all of us at Sheldon.

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Scaffolding

view from the warden's office

During stressful times it's always having support that gets us through, isn't it? From my window I can see the scaffolding which kept everyone safe while working on the roofs. Our ministry at Sheldon is to do our best to support our guests through times of difficulty and distress. I guess, in turn, Friends are the scaffolding of Sheldon with your prayers and your giving and your practical help.

During 2022 we've put 6,500 meals on the table for guests and another 1,700 into their stocked larders for private retreats. Nearly 4,000 guest-nights have been spent under our roof. That's a lot of breathing space offered and hungers fed. We couldn't have done with without the best part of 1,000 days of labour by volunteers. Thank you all. We are keen to recruit new volunteers, especially for next August - do get in touch if you'd like to get involved.

A year ago we asked you to pray alongside us as we sought to recruit new members to our community.

In June we were very pleased to welcome Simon and Debbie who are currently living alongside community as we discern future possibilities together. Debbie is Hillary's deputy on the Cellarer team and Simon is serving as Administrator. We have also entered a process of discernment with Karen who may be heading towards the Housekeeper role when Jan retires to Yorkshire next autumn. Please do continue to pray for all of us on this journey.



Through this autumn we have been especially grateful for extra 'scaffolding' after Hillary's Mum died suddenly at the end of September.

Her compassionate leave coincided with several weeks of the worst Covid-related disruption we've had so far. However, everyone pulled together and we kept the show on the road successfully.

We are pleased to announce the election of two new trustees - Ian Powell and Claire Robson. Our thanks to all the trustees for the time they give to supporting the formal side of Sheldon's governance.

At last, planning consent has been granted to convert the 1990s Animal Barn into guest/living quarters and a large meeting room. The process has taken three years and with so many changes during that time we are going back to the drawing board to work further on the design before taking next steps.

Before that we are refurbishing the six guest bedrooms upstairs in the Pound House. The project includes converting four shower cubicles into wet rooms and then redecorating, recarpeting, re-doing the lighting design and replacing some items of furniture. It is making us think carefully (once again!) exactly what it is guests need from their room when

on retreat here. 20 years ago we designed them to multi-task with the 'hard knocks' needed for youth and school groups. Now that the use is almost entirely adult we can step up a few gears. We are taking the funds from reserves, but if it is something you would like to contribute towards then all gifts welcome! We plan to have the work finished by the end of February and it won't interfere with running the R5 weeks between now and then.

Amongst it all we've grieved the loss of some very old Friends (including Pauline Mortimer, Esther Donne and Martin Mosse). And between us we've had some family gatherings, holidays, dentistry, respite care, a photography course, friends to stay, walks, gardening and making chutney. We answer the phone and clean the floors and cook the meals. We try to keep our hearts open to all who cross our threshold. You know from the news that 'hospitality businesses' face many challenges and we're not immune from them. But we are hugely thankful for the 'scaffolding' of our Friends helping to keep the Sheldon ministry safe.

■ Sarah

Experiencing Sheldon

in their own words

“I have felt so welcomed but also given the much needed space to wander, think and reflect. There is no pressure to ‘join in’ that I have felt in other places.”

“As ever, it’s been a peaceful shelter and refuge, a place of restoration of the soul. The food has been utterly delicious, the team so kind and servant hearted. It’s a place where I feel loved.”



“A wonderful setting, even in bad weather. The sessions in the Art shed were an unexpected joy. Walking the labyrinth in the evening by the light of the full moon, gazing up at the stars and listening to the owl hooting was a wonderful moment”

“Once again Sheldon has held out loving arms and embraced my

battered and bruised spirit and allowed it to breathe in reviving air. Having space to talk was helpful. Thank you. The balance between the silence and talking worked for me.”

“Abiding here is such a pleasure: easily embraced and always a blessing.”

“As always Sheldon so welcoming. It always feels like coming home. Comfortable accommodation, delicious food and caring community. I am still grieving the loss of my dear husband, but I knew coming here would lift my spirit. Bless the community for their compassion and hard work.”

“Everything you provided was just right for me ; flexibility, standard of accommodation, walks folder, very friendly and helpful staff , beautiful surroundings, very helpful 1:1 sessions.”

The Artist in Residence weeks and labyrinth workshop were lovely ‘extras’ this autumn. Our thanks to Sue, Charmaine and Clare for bringing new and delight-filled experiences.

Retreats spring 2023



Mercy within Mercy within Mercy

A Lenten focus on the compassionate heart of God with Thomas Merton guiding us away from blame/shame.

Br Sam SSF. 27 Feb - 3 Mar

Hiding in Plain Sight

In search of the values, language and ideas threaded through the gospels to help us re-balance our calling and our worth.

Martyn Percy. 13-17 Mar



Finding Nazareth

Before he spoke his message, Jesus lived it in Nazareth. Space for the seed to find the soil it needs to grow within us.

Richard Carter. 22 - 26 May



Read + Rest + Retreat + Relax + Recuperate = R5!

5 hospitable nights of R5 starting 29 Dec (New Year), 29 Jan, 5 Feb, 5 Mar, 16 Apr (Low Sunday)
(1:1 time available if in ministry)



Greenhouse Gas

Sheldon's secret dens



When I was young we had a garden big enough for me to build dens in.

These were places where I could retreat to or the gang could

to meet to plan. They were very secret places and I was endlessly building new ones, bigger and better.

Sheldon has many dens. They include The Sanctuary, The Hermitage, Dingly Dell, The Round House and even the seat at the top of Ten Acre field. All of these places around our site are much in use. They provide that alone place where you can enter your own inner world. Each of us needs that cell within where we can retreat for safety, prayer or just to be with God.

Many folk who come to Sheldon come to do inner work. They enjoy eating together but for most the important

part is resourcing the inner soul. It's wonderful seeing folk being topped up and strengthened to move on with life.

A very different side to Sheldon is the summer workparty and theatre. Although there may be 500 people on site for a theatre night, it's still not too difficult to find a quiet place.

We are very grateful to all those who come to help out with work around the site or running the theatre. This past summer had a wonderful feel to it with folk from many backgrounds and ages all working together. Thankyou.

We soon move into another year, with hardships, virus and who knows what else. We will pray for you. Please pray for us.

■ Carl



Technical fun and games

staying connected

Rather too much of our time is being taken up on essential communications infrastructure ahead of the copper phone lines being switched off in 2025.

In the last news we explained the challenge of getting fibre broadband to Sheldon. The main trunk will be built along the road to Doddiscombsleigh next summer. We are campaigning hard to get a spur to serve the Sheldon lane. Please continue praying for this - the alternatives are extremely costly.

In the meantime we are just in the process of moving to a VoIP telephone system (one that works over the computer network). A good quality telephone connection is essential for our day to day ministry. Enquirers are sometimes distressed and/or using a poor quality mobile line. To be able to pick up on emotional nuance and hear details accurately our own phone line has to be really good. We have tested extensively over many months and hope to have chosen well. (In case you don't recognise him,

the handsome chap listening intently with his headset is our mascot Fred who came with Pat Crawshaw's generous legacy a few years ago).



Another component of the communications system is the WiFi. The team needs it to be able to pick up and transfer external calls, or contact other members of the team around the site. Guests need it for their internet access too. This summer we upgraded our entire WiFi network (£5,000) to have a reliable service ready for the new phone system. The upgrade has also improved the security and monitoring of our computer servers which is essential for protecting our data.

■ Sarah

Grace at Sheldon

before a meal

Dear Lord...

I begin,

As Martha worked with concern and attention

It has been a busy week, with staff sickness and last minute menu changes, and I realise that in all the bustle I have neglected to learn guests' names. We discourage work-related talk, so I have no idea what any of them "do". I've gleaned a few snippets from some, others I've barely spoken to, yet as I look at the bowed heads before me, the bond we share is palpable.

And Mary stopped and sat in stillness to listen

Between the lines of the grace we hold the silence as it holds us – gently, expectantly, playfully.

Let us make around ourselves / Space

as comfortable and warm as a hearth fire glowing;

In my mind the faces of angels flicker around Abraham's fire, sucking beef fat and bread crumbs from their fingers with lips that shine with God's promises.

Within our hearts / Room to receive a guest

An exhausted Jesus invites all who have come to stay and eat with him, serving bread and fish, abundant with God's blessing, to a hillside full of Judean peasants.

God bless this space and time together

Our meal is more than what the volunteer team and I have made in Sheldon's kitchen. It is blessing, promise and sacrament. A covenantal oath – we eat it in God's presence, in welcome, in safety, and in love.

...I have forgotten to put the apricots in my "Chicken with apricots"! – I raise my head and smile, preparing to dive back into the kitchen for a last minute tweak –

Amen.

■ Debbie

(Prayer – in italics – by Neil Paynter)



Hotting up

nature notes in a hot dry summer

I will remember the Summer of 2022 for the sunshine and the endless round of watering things. Summer volunteer Bob spent his time emptying our water butts on to the planted containers, even surplus water from the tables in the dining room was poured on plants!

It was also a challenge looking after the sheep, as the grass turned crisp and I had to start feeding hay to the flock. By the end of August we had used up what should have been our winter supply so I was glad that our neighbours made a bumper crop with surplus to re-fill our barn. I swapped a ram with a fellow breeder (an exchange accomplished in the motorway services carpark!) and Fairwater John is busy ensuring next year's crop of lambs.

A funny year of cropping too, with almost no sloes (sorry gin drinkers, it's going to be in short supply) and a prolific crop of rather small apples. We picked more than 40lb each of blackcurrants and redcurrants and most of the vegetable crops did well. Despite the drought, the badgers stayed away from the carrots (it's often in dry conditions that they raid our veg patch).

Work Week was, as usual a pleasure, with the volunteers (age range teens to eighties) accomplishing a great deal including decorating, weeding, harvesting, repairs, cooking, cleaning and providing front of house team for the theatre concerts.

■ Hillary



Everything you need to know

putting guests at ease

We are always seeking additional ways to ensure guest feel comfortable at Sheldon. One of those ways is to make sure they have all the information they need.



As the Hosteller, my desk is in Reception so I'm often the first person to greet guests when they arrive. Often the first thing I say to them (especially if it's their first visit) is "You don't have to remember anything I am about to say. Everything you need to know is written down for you."

This puts their minds at ease instantly and they begin to relax. Sheldon is quite a big site so I show them to their room and they start to get to know

their way around. This time of year they are often arriving in the dark so they don't get to enjoy the full beauty of it until they wake up next day.

In their room they will find an "Arrival Pack". On a programme event this contains their timetable and a map of the site. For a private retreat it includes any current updates different from the details in the main reference folder. All folders are reviewed regularly to keep them up to date and to ensure guests can easily find important information.

I prepare packs at the end of every week, ready for new arrivals. Sue often helps me with putting the papers together.

A typical pack contains information about our current Covid mitigations, the wifi code, parking note, reception hours, and appointment details if they have a 1:1 session or a massage booked during their stay.

■ Esther

Cleaning carpets

No more kneeling!

The housekeeping team and myself always keep an eye to carpets. We like the floors to look clean and fresh for our guests. Sometimes there are marks, coffee spills and dried mud on carpets and they can be quite difficult to get out.

It is a case of getting on your hands and knees and with the carpet spray and cloths dabbing up the stains. Sometimes you are lucky and it comes out straight away other times it can take two or three goes to shift that stubborn mark. Also for some of us getting down on our hands and knees is not that easy now!!



Jan T has been very good these last few weeks dealing with stains and there have been a lot of them to do.

Now we've bought two carpet cleaners. Just one of the lovely things Friends can do! One cleaner is great for having to do bigger areas and the other for doing small spot areas and steps.



So the housekeeping team and I are learning how to use them as none of us have used them before.

We were also sent a free steam cleaner which is great for the wooden floors in the Hen Runs.

■ Jan K

On high

the time to repair the roof is when the sun is shining

Ridges topping two of our main thatched roofs had become weather-worn in recent years.



Thankfully, local thatchers Richard and Pete were able to fit us in to do new ridges during a warm dry spell in October.

The wheat straw used on this occasion came from North Devon. The Hazel spars which pin and decorate the straw are in short supply nationally. What better source of Hazel than our very own Sheldon Copse? One day dozens of long straight 'rods' from Hazel 'stools' were harvested from our woods. Then cut to length, split into quarters

lengthways, given a sharp point and twisted in half, the very next day they were being used to pin the new straw onto our roofs.

A team of volunteers nipped in and took advantage of the scaffolding to re-decorate and replace weather seals on hard-to reach windows of the Pound House bedrooms, and repaint high level walls on the chapel.

The new ridges will keep the main 'coat' of thatch protected from the weather for up to another 10 years. We've started saving £10,000/year for when the whole roof needs rethatching in 2032.

■ Sarah



The Kitchen Table

a genuinely free space www.sheldonhub.org

Some of the comments on a thread that arose spontaneously in the Hub recently. It's a mutual/peer support ministry Sheldon is quietly facilitating out of the limelight:

"I value the hub as a place where it's safe to speak the truth as I see it, and to not have to play the game of minimising negative/hurt/abused feelings and pretend nothing is 'rotten in the state of Denmark' as I have to for the rest of my professional life."

"... the knowledge that there is a place like this that cares ..."

"I agree that the Hub is a valuable place where I/we are able to be honest and offload, without having some of the anxieties we would have in public ministry, without living with a fear of what someone may say about us to another, or how we are labelled or perceived by those in authority if we do make feelings and thoughts known. It feels like a genuinely free space in which to talk. God bless Sheldon for this."



When the lights go down

Sheldon Open Air theatre

The wonderful dry, sunny weather in July matched the excitement of the audiences returning in their droves after missing two years of concerts due to the pandemic. Esther devised a new ticket system which worked well. Lots of people who left it too late were disappointed we sold out!

There is a lot of work involved in getting the theatre concert-ready. The estate team got the grass cut and the lights up. The housekeeping team dealt with two years of cobwebs in the control box and dressing room. The fairy lights and signs were put in place. The summer workparty

crew provided the front of house team along with local volunteers. It was great to welcome back happy audiences, all of whom seemed so pleased to be here. Lots of singing along and joining in, a glass or two enjoyed from the bar in the theatre and hundreds of burgers and sausages sizzled and served.

Theatre events bring many hundreds of people to Sheldon who wouldn't otherwise have a chance to visit. They all enjoy a lovely feel-good evening which gets Sheldon known and talked about fondly in the local area.

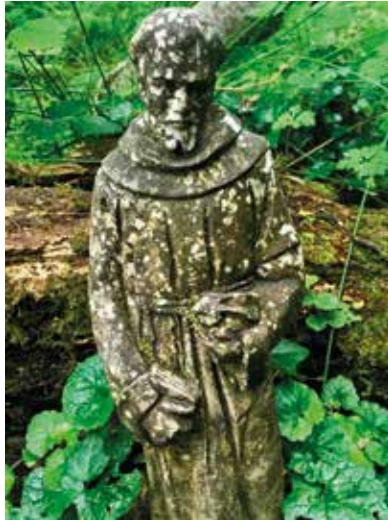
■ Hillary



Encounter

Green Sheldon

The defining spiritual encounter of my life was meeting St Francis of Assisi. He introduced himself to me gently, unassuming, in the joyful smile and twinkling eyes of an elderly friar, the sardonic wit of a burnt-out priest, the relentless charm of the Dorset countryside, and in all the beautiful, messy people who became my first experience of a Christian community, almost ten years ago.



Ever since, St Francis's love of the natural world and passion for social justice have remained close to my heart. There is a lot for a Franciscan to love here at Sheldon. We steward our 45 acres of gardens, fields and woodlands carefully with a view to minimizing our impact, protecting native species and nurturing biodiversity.

Various buildings have solar water

heating and solar panels, and the most recently built community accommodation benefits from ground source heating, improved insulation, and a green roof, making it far more energy efficient than conventional buildings.

The community recently took the decision to buy another vehicle, after one of our cars was damaged in an accident, and I was excited to be

involved in the purchase of a one-year old Volkswagen ID3, which is fully electric and makes sense for us environmentally and practically.

These are all encouraging steps, and as a community we are keen to grow our green credentials further – so watch this space for possible further Franciscan updates!

■ Simon



We are a lay Christian Community running a beautiful retreat centre in the Teign Valley. Our specialist work is supporting people in ministry both at 'real world' Sheldon and through the online Sheldon Hub. Many of our retreats are open to everyone. Sheldon also hosts a variety of small to medium size groups looking for good space for their own event.

This newsletter is for Friends (and potential Friends) of Sheldon who underpin our work with prayerful, practical and financial support .

Community members:

Sarah Horsman (Warden)

Carl (Lay Chaplain) and Sue Lee

Hillary Hanson (Cellarer)

Jan Kaye (Housekeeper)

Esther Nyame (Hosteller)

Alongsiders:

Simon Munro (Administrator)

Debbie Bambrick (Deputy Cellarer)

Follow/sign up/engage to keep in touch

Twitter: @smmretreat @thesheldonhub

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