

Rector's Letter - Rev'd Jeremy Trew - June 2022

Dear Friends,

I visited an old Puritan Chapel recently. Lovely place. Simple, even austere, but possessing a serenity through its simplicity; a place to unwind, meditate and pray. The Puritans are regarded as having had their heyday at the time of the Commonwealth – those years following the civil war – and to have provided a legacy that shapes our society even now. Attitudes towards work and play are two very important areas where Puritans are said to have left a lasting influence. But often their story is wrongly told.



In the world of work we hear of the “Protestant work ethic”, supposedly shaped largely by the Puritans, though actually owing more to economic thinkers such as Adam Smith whose celebration of self-interest is a driving force in Conservatism even today. His works have fed the concept that work is at the heart of our personal identity and that it rightly demands any level of sacrifice required on its altar. The Puritans themselves had a much healthier attitude, believing that work was to be our servant, meeting our needs and the needs of others, but always remaining subservient to justice and personal freedom.

Likewise, in the world of leisure and play the Puritans have done undeservedly badly. We all remember the tale of how Christmas was banned for a time, and this certainly seems a cut-back too far. This, though, was in the context of a society that celebrated so many high and holy days that nearly half of the year was lost to public holidays. The economy was collapsing through an excessive and not always sincere dose of religion. The Puritans merely believed that religion, work and play should all be held in balance and viewed collectively as our worship of God – God was not just experienced on Sundays and Festivals, but also to be found in our labour and in our leisure. In fact, the Puritans held views on leisure, alcohol, sexuality and many other things that would often seem liberal even by the standards of today: If you have ever wondered why the Prayer Book Marriage Service puts such a heavy emphasis on child-bearing (and who hasn't!), it is because the Puritans encouraged couples to cohabit until the first child was on the way.

So, maybe we should give the Puritans the credit they deserve; for thinking around the problems their culture faced to seek to build a healthy and just society centred on the Gospel; for encouraging a balanced and rewarding lifestyle; and for recognising that true Christianity is found in the workplace and on the beach as much as in the chapel. Heaven is in the ordinary, and now nothing can ever be ordinary again.

Amen, and pass the cork-screw.

Yours

Jeremy

Previous copies of our Rector's Letter

[May 2022](#)

[April 2022](#)

[March 2022](#)

[February 2022](#)

[Dec 2021 - Jan 2022](#)

[November 2021](#)

[October 2021](#)

[Aug-Sept 2021](#)

[June 2021](#)

[May 2021](#)

[April 2021](#)