

## Rector's Letter - Rev'd Jeremy Trew - June 2023

Dear All

I visited an old Puritan Chapel recently whilst on retreat. 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; 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. Amen, and pass the cork-screw.

As a side note: A couple of people have suggested that they might like to be confirmed, as a means of exploring their faith. I'm more than happy to do that, and suggest we form a group to begin meeting after the Summer holidays. If you would be interested please do send me your contact details and I'll work on setting some dates and times.

Yours

Jeremy

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