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## Editorial

I am constantly blown away by the talent in our village. Take the Brightwell Players: when the creator of Horrible Histories was invited to give a presentation for BSR in St Agatha's he gamely handed over a couple of his TV scripts for our Thesps to perform on the night. They did us proud. See cover photo (thank you Micky Moore) and p17. The Players will mutate into the Mummers for the annual Wassail, and along with the Morris dancers, the Fire belly dancers and bagpipes, they will have you believe that their antics will give us another bumper crop of apples next year. Here's hoping - see p23.

Then we have our brilliant writers: in addition to the Wassail Mummers play, Thespian cum comic writer Andy Lewis has written an interactive panto which will be one of the many festive events on at the Red Lion over the Christmas period. Check out the pub events on pages 21-22.

And what about all those books on sale in the village shop? Local authors, all of them. We are continuing our series of book reviews which we hope will give them all a bit of a plug, given that they haven't had the advantage of prime-time TV to promote their efforts.

In this edition we are reviewing *Cutsmith* by Tony Guntrip and *The Bid* by Alec McGivan & Hugh Roderick. You may have seen Alec striding out with his walking poles, making a valiant effort to hold Parkinsons Disease at bay. Alec had an extraordinary career – well many careers actually - one of which was running England's bid to host the Football World Cup in 2006. Cruelly, Parkinsons forced him to retire early. Meet the many Alec McGivans (p 3-5).

Others in the village demonstrate their creativity through Arts and Crafts; they will be presenting their wares to you in their Christmas Art Club Exhibition in the Village Hall; see page 13.

What would we do without that Village Hall? On pages 19-20 we are being asked to imagine that real possibility. It's a cry for help from the trustees who need help raising money any which way we can in order to embark on the planned and very necessary improvements to the building.

Finally, at a time when our planet feels more endangered than at any time I can remember in my reasonably long life, a shout out for our preschool teachers who are teaching our little ones to love and respect nature. It gives me hope; see pages 18-19.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to one and all,

*Alison Leigh, Editor*

## Meet .... Alec McGivan



Alec McGivan was born and bred in Bristol, and has supported Bristol City all his life. He never imagined that one day he would be flying around the world in first class sitting next to his childhood hero Sir Bobby Charlton, not to mention nipping in and out of Number 10 Downing Street and enjoying the odd tete a tete with royalty.

In fact Alec had no idea what he wanted to be when he grew up. Maybe a aviation engineer like his Dad, maybe a teacher like his Mum. Maybe a singer – as a boy he was the head chorister at Bristol cathedral. But around the table at home they talked politics. That talk turned into a passion that had him working alongside the big shots in some of the most exclusive boardrooms in the land.

It all began at Oxford. He was the first person in his family to go to university. He studied Modern History at Wadham College, but more than the degree, Oxford, for Alec, was about the opportunity to meet people and share ideas.

As soon as he arrived, he joined the Labour Party and within a year he had become the Chairman of the biggest student Labour body in the country. At the time there was a ferocious left/right battle going on. Alec found himself lining up with the moderate wing led by Roy Jenkins, Shirley Williams and others which led to the famous split and the establishment of the Social Democrats, the SDP in 1981. Alec became the new party's National Organiser, and was soon establishing a reputation as a formidable operator, so when he resigned 1987 to spear head the campaign to merge the SDP with the Liberal party, it was headline news.

That campaign 'Yes to Unity' successfully created the Lib Dems (Liberal Democratic party), but not without much internal rancour, and that, says Alec, combined with our first past the post electoral system, robbed Britain of at least one potentially first class prime minister. "I think Roy Jenkins would have been a very effective Prime Minister. He was an extraordinary man, with a huge intellect,



a huge depth of knowledge and experience across the board. He'd been Chancellor and at the Home Office he'd been at the forefront of many liberal changes, with a small 'l'. I felt very privileged to have had a chance to work with him".

It was time for a change. For two years he ran the City of London's 800 year anniversary celebrations. Then, intrigued by Sam Wanamaker's big idea to rebuild the Globe Theatre on its original 16<sup>th</sup> century site on the Thames, he joined the Shakespeare Globe Trust as CEO in 1990. "Sam was a fantastic guy, a visionary". His stay was brief. The project lacked funding and now married to Liz and with two young children, Flora and Tom to support, Alec needed job security.

3 more years of high-end PR and fundraising for charities followed until one day in 1994 he had a phone call from David Davies at the FA. "He said, Are you interested in football? I said you bet I am". They had heard about Alec's organisational skills and they were looking for someone to manage the media for Euro 1996 which England was going to host.

It was a huge job. 5000 journalists from all over the world were expected to attend, and a lot was hanging on it. Football hooliganism in the sixties and early seventies had given England a terrible reputation and they had been banned from a lot of European competition, so this was seen as England's way to get back in. By now Alec had been moving in high circles for a couple of decades, but this was in a different league. "For me going to football matches had always been buying a ticket and standing on the terraces behind the goal and shouting at the referee when I wasn't happy and I suddenly found myself in the middle of Wembley Stadium with Stanley Matthews and the chairman of the FA. It gave me goosepimples".

England was knocked out in the semi-finals but it didn't matter; the Euros were deemed to be a massive success, and on the back of it Alec was invited to lead the bid for England to host the World Cup in 2006. This is how he came to be travelling the world with one of football's most famous superstars. He and Sir Bobby Charlton lobbied and cajoled the great and the good and the not so good. There was talk of money changing hands. "Someone said to me, why don't you just give each FIFA member (all 24 of them) a few thousand dollars each to decide this issue".

Since that was out of the question the odds were stacked against them. Germany won the bid. Two years ago Alec co-authored a book called *The Bid* with Hugh Roderick in which he fictionalises what he calls International football's "murky world of cash bribes and backroom deals". Next up, 2 years at the Dept of Culture Media and Sport where he was totally frustrated by the

competition between different departments and the lack of funding. But then came another phone call, this time from the then Director General of the BBC, Greg Dyke, asking him to head up the campaign to renew the BBC's charter. "That appealed to me because I have a high regard for the BBC as an organization, and I thought it was worth defending".

That went so well that Alec was invited to be Head of BBC Outreach, responsible among other things for targeting harder to reach audiences and taking a leading role in the BBC fulfilling its purpose as a public services broadcaster. He was still working for the BBC in 2011 when he got the devastating diagnosis that ended his career prematurely: Parkinsons disease. He was only 58.

Initially the symptoms were barely noticeable, the odd tremor here and there, but as the disease has progressed he struggles with muscular pain which slows him right down. Drugs keep him alive and control the pain to a degree but he doubts that he would cope without his wife Liz who manages everything for him.

What is especially cruel for someone so used to being the centre of attention is that his voice is barely audible without the help of a microphone and a speaker. Parties are difficult but he likes to see people on their own for one on one conversations. "I like talking to people and I like hearing their life stories. I don't think people talk enough, men especially are bad at sharing their emotions".

When he retired Alec decided that the one thing he would carry on organising would be the Summer Concert, the annual fundraiser in St Agatha's that showcases local talent "...because I wanted to say to other people in my position you can still do things, don't write yourself off". And also because he enjoys the sense of tradition. "I like feeling I'm making a contribution, in a small way, to the community where I live. A hundred years ago this community was probably doing something very similar. We are very much custodians and then we pass the baton on to somebody else".

Looking back, he reflects that the critical turning point in his life was going to Oxford, building the original networks that continued to open the doors throughout his career. These days he has learnt to find pleasure in a quiet life. He walks every day and occasionally he paints. He and Liz regularly visit the Scilly isles, where he is happy simply doing nothing. "There is a lot to be said for just mellowing and relaxing surrounded by wonderful scenery".

*Alison Leigh*

*The Bid* is on sale at the Village Stores, see review page 12.

## BcS CofE Primary School

The first half term of the new school year here at Brightwell simply flew by, yet it felt like we achieved a huge amount! From Roman days to waistcoat making and visits from Paralympian athletes to giant inflatable football pitches, we really have squeezed a lot in.

Through their topic, 'Amazing me and my new adventure', Pippin Class learnt about themselves, their families and friends, and their homes. They also held a Harvest drop-in session where family members were able to join them in the classroom to explore activities and to watch them perform our Harvest songs. Meanwhile, in Bramley Class they learnt all about toys by exploring what toys were like in the past and comparing them to toys they have now – they even had fun designing and making their own moving vehicles.

Russet Class practised their map reading skills, learnt all about what life is like in Kenya, made collages inspired by the African Savannah and took part in an African Maasai warrior jumping dance while in Worcester Class they had an excellent time learning all about the Olympics and Paralympics. They were lucky enough to receive a visit from Brightwell's own gold medallist, Paralympian Frankie Allen!

Further up the school, in Gala Class, we returned to the Romans – the children learnt all about the history of the Roman invasion of Britain and were visited by friend of the school, Jonathan Stamp, who came into school to tell them all about his work in Pompeii and helped them model the Roman road we found under the field last year.

Discovery Class had the opportunity to find out all about the Space Race and moon landings, retro-futuristic art and music from Holst 'The Planets' as part of their topic work and in Blenheim Class the children got crafty and showed off their sewing skills by designing and making - from scratch - their very own waistcoats!!

We set the bar very high last term with incredible learning experiences across the school and we have another very busy term ahead of us - we are kicking it off in style with our Healthy Body, Healthy Mind Week where we aim to give the children a wide range of experiences that excite and challenge them in equal measure. On the menu this year we have invited back our popular cooking expert (making a curry this time), the fabulous Don Rae and his dance workshops, a spot of indoor curling and I may even have been roped in to lead some Clubbercise dance sessions myself... and we haven't even mentioned any of our Christmas activities yet!

*Sue Potts, Head Teacher*

# Community Association

The Community Association AGM took place on 6 November. We are delighted that Caroline Annetts, Lynn Burrige, Charlotte and Mike Woods, Robert Lidstone, Alison Bloomfield and Tony Guntrip were all happy to be re-elected. We are also pleased to welcome Nick Walsh and Amanda Wood as new members of the Committee. Our Chairman James Davys and Treasurer Tom Rogerson were re-elected. Jim Sanger has kindly agreed to be Honorary Auditor again this year, we are grateful for his hard work and support in this role in past years.

## Christmas Hampers

The Community Association in conjunction with support from the Fairthorne Trust, Brightwell Scout Group and the Village Stores is pleased to provide a Christmas Hamper for the senior residents of the village. If you know of anyone over the age of 70 who you believe does not currently receive a hamper but would appreciate one, please telephone me on 01491 834195. In these difficult times the Committee has agreed to offer other members of the community who are struggling one of our hampers. If you know of someone in the village who could do with our support, please let me know.

## Events in 2025

The Community Association is committed to running a programme of events next year. These will include the Village Quiz, a Jumble Sale and the Fete as well as other events to raise money for local good causes.

May I wish you all a very healthy and happy Christmas and joyful New Year.

*James Davys, Chairman*

# St Agatha's and St James

With Christmas falling on a Wednesday this year, our festival services are:

- Carol Service at 6pm on Sunday 22 December at St Agatha's
- Crib Service at 4.30pm on Christmas Eve at St Agatha's
- 'Midnight' Communion at 11.30pm on Christmas Eve at St James', Sotwell
- Christmas Day Family Communion at 9.30am at St Agatha's

We extend a warm welcome to all villagers to join us.

We expect the church to be full, but you can beat the rush! You can put this joyful season in its proper context by journeying through Advent with us as we light another candle each week, thinking about the whole story of God's salvation leading up to the birth of Christ. And of course, there are the 12 days

of Christmas, so the Sunday afterwards (29 Dec) will also be full of carols and celebrations - we will delay this 9.30am Sunday service to 10am as we welcome our friends from Wallingford and Crowmarsh to St Agatha's for a Team Communion. Then on Sunday 5 January, we celebrate Epiphany, traditionally the date when the Wise Men arrived to pay homage to the new born King. We will celebrate this at our 9.30am Family Service at St Agatha's.

The extended Christmas season doesn't end until Sunday 2 February when we celebrate the festival of Candlemas, when Jesus was presented in the temple. This is when we hold our Christingle Service (the one with the orange!) at 4pm at St James', with a collection in aid of the Children's Society.

So, we have a choice at Christmas. Like our dinner, we can either cram, stuff and binge for a short period or we can savour the flavours and go deeper for a full appreciation of the reason for the season... that is "Joy to the world" as we celebrate Emmanuel, God with us!

With every blessing and joy in Christ for Advent, Christmas and Epiphany,

*Rev Kev*

# BcS WI

I am starting my report on a sad note.

On the 20 November we said a final goodbye to one of our longstanding members, Mavis, who died peacefully in late October. We had come to know Mavis as a cheerful, sunny lady who embraced the friendship and mutual support of the WI and the neighbourhood to full. We send our condolences to her family.

Looking back over the year, our trip to Waterperry Gardens on a warm, sunny autumn day with lunch on the lawn followed by walks around the colourful garden and woodland will leave a special memory.

Looking ahead, 2025 will be a landmark for the WI nationally. After 100 years of standing up for women's rights and education, it is time for the WI nationally to look at our role and review and confirm the voice of the WI movement in the current world. The WI as a national organization will be taking a close look at:

- what does the WI stand for?
- how are we going to achieve our aims?

A timeline for decision has been set and consultations will proceed throughout the summer ending by September 2025.

For now, here at Brightwell cum Sotwell, we have arranged an interesting program of monthly speakers to start the new year of 2025:

**14 January - 'Advice and Demonstration'** by interns from McTimoney College of Chiropractic

**11 February - Be Safe from Internet Scammers**

**11 March - 'Colour with Confidence'**, tips from a personal stylist

**8 April - 'A Hat for every Occasion'** with a Wallingford Millinery

As usual we meet every 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday in the month at 7.30pm at the Village Hall. If any of these topics are of interest to you, please feel free to come along as a guest or new member. You will be warmly welcomed.

*Karin Matthews*

## Brightwell Toddlers

On Thursday mornings we have been busy playing, singing and have done plenty of seasonal arts and crafts with the youngest members of the community. Since starting a new term back in September we have met lots of new little ones and their parents/carers which has been lovely. If you're thinking of coming along for the first time please do feel free to get in touch with any questions or just drop in!

We are always so grateful for any help to make teas and coffees for the grown-ups, so if you think you could spare a little time on a Thursday morning to volunteer at our group we would love to hear from you.

Brightwell Toddlers runs every Thursday morning during term time 9.15-11am and is suitable for children aged 0-5. The cost is £3.50 cash or £4 online per session. We can be contacted at [brightwelltoddlers@gmail.com](mailto:brightwelltoddlers@gmail.com) or via our Facebook page @brightwelltoddlers.

*Emily Paton-Smith*

## Village Lunch Club

**Help Wanted:** After 24 years, one of our 'cooks' has hung up her apron and we are looking for someone to join our team of 5 (now 4). We cook 4 times a year (March, June, September and December), always on a Tuesday. So if you can spare a few hours (9.30-14.00), we would love to hear from you.

**Xmas lunch:** Our yearly Xmas lunch is on Tuesday 3 December, 12.15 in the Village Hall, £8. If you have not already booked and would like to join us, please contact Eastlyn Horsfield, 01491 832041 or Sue Collett, 01491 836617.

*Eastlyn Horsfield*

## Village Stores and Post Office

The Community Shop and Post Office is about far more than just providing services, it's about being part of a team that shares the same principles and values. Community and people are the foundation of its success.

We would like to share with you a piece written by one of our new volunteers, Ann Browell. Her words help to show the importance of both volunteering and the Shop and Post Office:

*I moved to Brightwell cum Sotwell in January this year to live near family. I was determined to create my own networks and friendships and not be dependent upon my sons. My challenge was where to start when I could walk down Brightwell Street and not meet a soul! The village shop appeared to be the perfect solution so I started working as a volunteer. Over the months volunteering has given me many positives, not only meeting and getting to know people but learning more about the community and playing a role in this vital and valued facility. The shop provides a friendly and welcoming environment and aims to provide goods not found in big supermarkets. Here are a few things I've learnt whilst working as a volunteer:*

- *This is a friendly and welcoming community.*
- *Those who positively contribute to the life of the village are really valued.*
- *People from outside the village come to use the post office because of friendly staff, smaller queues and ease of parking.*
- *The shop supports many local suppliers e.g. bakers, butchers, coffee, eggs, wine, beer, cider and honey producers to name but a few.*
- *The shop can only stay open because of the volunteers and new volunteers are always needed. It is so easy to volunteer, each week you can decide whether or not you can give a couple of hours and if so book a slot online. It is a very flexible system with no pressure to commit every single week.*

*I feel I have quickly settled here and the shop has played a key role. I walked down the High Road the other day and as I passed the bus stop two of the three people waiting for a bus greeted me; maybe a small event but it just added to my new sense of belonging. If you are able to give time just go to the shop and let Celia know. Do give it a go!*

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

*The Shop & Post Office Team*

NB: **Christmas opening times** are displayed on the inside back cover.

## Apple Day Fun

Most villagers will know that 2024 was a great year for apples. The Orchard Group made the most of a bumper harvest in the village with a tremendous Apple Day on Saturday 12 October attended by over 400 visitors to the recreation ground. Our first visitors were a group of hardy cyclists who had cycled through the rain from Reading just to enjoy the event!



A damp start did not deter our stalwarts from pressing and juicing apples for four hours, whilst Martin's very popular cider tasting under cover provided a welcoming haven for shower-dodgers. The Red Lion's soup, baguettes and chutney were devoured, as was the delicious coffee from Jessie's Coffee Truck. The afternoon offered a variety of diversions and interest, including guided orchard tours and an indoor exhibition provided by Alison Bloomfield. Paul Chilton's wonderful display of 119 apple varieties provided a focus for all the surrounding stalls, whilst the apple and walnut tasting elsewhere provided everyone's five-a-day before indulging in cake. Lots of cake. Even these magnificent confections ran out shortly after 3pm. Younger (and older!) visitors could also indulge in chocolate-covered apples from Kat's chocolate fountain. Books, pickles, vinegars, jams and other produce, all apple-themed, were available from visiting vendors.

Special thanks are due to all our volunteers who ensured that the afternoon went smoothly. Particular thanks are owed to Ava Quantrell for her detailed event planning of 'who, what, where and when'. Thank you to everyone who attended the event, enjoyed the afternoon and provided generous donations.

Would you like a fruit tree in your garden? Last year's project was very popular, and we will use these donations to help us to promote the future of heritage varieties by offering villagers an apple tree to plant in their garden this winter. If you would like a tree, please contact Paul Chilton (2 Fairthorne Memorial, next to the Village Hall clock tower).

*Allan Hutchinson*

## Wanted: Back Up Distribution Manager

A vacancy has arisen for a backup Distribution Manager for *The Villager*, to cover for Tony Guntrip when he's unavailable on assembly and distribution day. This occurs at most once a year, and is about five hours' work. You must be free on a Monday and access to a car is essential. Please call Tony on 07754 690264 if you would like to help.

## Book Reviews

### **The Bid by Alec McGivan and Hugh Roderick**

*The Bid* is a novel about the machinations of the country representatives of an imagined Global Football Organisation deciding where to host a future World Cup tournament, but despite being set in the world of football the book isn't really about football. It's about politics, both with a capital and small 'p'. It's about dealings and double dealings. It's about deceit and greed and opulence. It's about double crossing and intrigue and personal ambition. In short it's about how the powerful will do anything to maintain their power to aid their pursuit of ever increasing wealth.

A fast paced, globetrotting story told from the viewpoint of several vastly different heads of individual country football organisations, *The Bid* delves deep into the minds and motives of those involved in the bidding process, intertwining their football organisation's goals with their own self-centred personal ambitions, highlighting the depths some will go to in order to get what they want.

Purported friendships are sacrificed on the altar of greed, relationship lines are blurred between the professional and the personal, and no holds barred methods of pursuing individual attainment of goals go hand-in-hand with an increasing level of menace.

*The Bid* provides rounded, colourful characterisations of all the main players involved in the bidding process, enabling the reader to really understand what drives them and what they fear. It highlights the insecurities that exist in even the most seemingly confident of people and how a mix of self-determination and those self-doubts can lead to decisions that aren't always for the best for their organisations, or even for themselves.

*The Bid* puts the reader right in the heart of the lavish lifestyles and opulent locations enjoyed by members of the Global Football Organisation, painting a vivid picture of a world many of us can only dream about, a world that once a taste for it has been acquired is one those enjoying it are loath to give up at any cost.

*The Bid* maintains its fast pace and captivating story right through to its conclusion, providing the reader with much to ponder on not only regarding the described underhand practices involved in a football World Cup bidding process, but also on deducing just exactly how the process will end and who among the stakeholders will be happy with the outcome.

*Phil Annets, author of FA Cup 150*

## Cutsmith by Tony Guntrip

It's 1894. When a mutilated woman's body is found in Whitechapel the great fear is that Jack the Ripper is back, six years after his last murder.

Nathaniel Blackstock is a down-on-his-luck surgeon and a reluctant police pathologist. When he examines the victim he suspects that the murderer is not Jack, but one of the surgeons he trained with thirteen years ago... but which one? A subsequent body only confirms his suspicions. Why doesn't he reveal what he knows to the police? By now he's seen enough of the unscrupulous police inspector, who is under great pressure to solve the case, to know that all he wants is a body to hang. Whilst his information puts all his fellow students in the frame, Blackstock is the closest suspect. He decides he must solve the case himself.

Blackstock isn't alone in this adventure. He gathers an engaging ensemble of minor characters on the streets of Victorian London, where we experience the stark contrast between wealth and poverty. Much of the action takes place in the slums of the East End, which he depicts in gripping detail – the dirt, the smell, the crowds and the very real danger of violent crime are all there. The portrayal of the police cells is particularly vivid and you can almost feel the rats and smell the stench. The prose was so evocative that after finishing the book I found myself down an internet rabbit hole exploring sanitation in 19<sup>th</sup> Century London and the development of the underground sewer system, and I love a book that delivers a spin-off interest as well as a riveting story.

In short, Cutsmith is a good read – a real page turner. I devoured it in a matter of days, retiring early to bed to get back to the book and immerse myself in Victorian London.

*Liz McGivan*

\*Buy these books in the Village Stores.

## Brightwell Art Club Exhibition 2024

**Saturday 30 November**, at Brightwell Village Hall, West End, Brightwell cum Sotwell, OX10 0RY, 10am-1pm. As well as a display of our members paintings, there will be a raffle, refreshments, hand painted Christmas Cards, charity and craft stalls. For more information email [brightwellart@gmail.com](mailto:brightwellart@gmail.com) or phone Anne on 07795431151.

*Anne Honeyball*

## Parish Council News

We are very sad that our fabulous Parish Clerk, Gabrielle McAvoy is moving on to pastures new and we must thank her for all she has done to keep us in order for the past two years. We are really pleased, however, to announce that we have appointed a new Parish clerk, Nettie Gray, to start in January. Gabrielle is going to work with Nettie over the next two months to bring her up to speed with what is entailed. This will probably mean that the parish clerk hours will change but we will let you know as soon as possible what the new hours will be.

You may have noticed that after the heavy rain of autumn, there was a lot of moss on the play surface at the Jubilee recreation ground. This has now been cleaned, as has the table tennis table. We want to thank Councillor Gilgrass for organising and Simon Trueman for doing the work. Simon did a great job.

The Jubilee Pavilion upgrade project is moving on slowly as these things do. Since the working party painted and cleaned and the new kitchen was installed it is a much-improved space for any event or party. People who have had children's parties there recently were very complimentary. It has the advantage of the field outside for little ones to run off excess energy (we do get some decent days in winter!) and it is very reasonably priced compared to halls in other villages. It is also available every afternoon and some evenings if you are looking for a space for your business – in the past we have had yoga, upholstery, dance classes etc.

If anyone is going to the Oakley Wood recycling centre in the near future it would be great if you could take the green table and chairs that are leaning up outside the pavilion building.

And a perennial reminder .... We live in a lovely village – let's keep it that way by driving at a sensible speed and picking up dog mess. Thank you.

*Brightwell cum Sotwell Parish Council*

## BcS Village History Group

What a wonderful summer the group has had, notably the success of the archaeological excavation of the Roman Road at Brightwell School in partnership with the Wallingford Historical and Archaeological Society.

The dig proved for the first time that the road did indeed pass through the village and the route that it followed. We now know for example, that the road went right through the school and under the Red Lion before making its way

down what was to become Mackney Lane! What we weren't expecting was to find two roads – one on top of the other. The road would have once connected Roman Silchester to Dorchester on Thames and then to Alcester. The lower road is more than likely one of the first roads built by the Romans after the invasion of 43AD and would have been used by the Legionnaires to invade the rest of Britain. Several small fragments of animal bone were recovered from the clay between some cobble stones (the surface of the road) which have now been sent off for radiocarbon dating.

Seven Roman coins were found alongside many hobnails. In addition, there was Roman pottery, roof tiles, a white tessera (piece of a mosaic) and a very small sherd of window glass. Interestingly this would suggest a nearby Roman farm! One very unexpected find was a relative modern (broken) Chinese coin or token possibly dropped during a school lesson to mark the visit to the village in 1979 of Chairman Hua, Premier of China!

Following the dig, the discovery was celebrated by a fabulous display in the Red Phone Box.

*Jason Debney*

## Oxfordshire500

### **£30,000 raised for local people in need!**

Brightwell-based Oxfordshire500 is about to reach a major milestone. Started by villagers Wendy Roderick and Liz McGivan just three years ago, members of Oxfordshire500 have collectively given nearly £30,000 to people across the county who are struggling financially. The simple idea is that if enough people pledge a small amount of money, together they can make a real difference to local people's lives. Oxfordshire500 now has approximately 100 members donating what they can afford, some as little as £1 a week, but together able to commit £500 monthly to help the local community. We are now in a position to be able to give two £500 donations most months.

Those funds are used in all kinds of ways to ease short-term problems. People helped this year include:

- Single mother with two children under five, fleeing domestic violence and really struggling financially
- Fourteen year old girl, whose mother can't support her due to mental health issues, is being looked after by a kind neighbour but with little money to spare
- Homeless young man who risked going to live on the streets as he couldn't pay the deposit for his accommodation, after failing to find funds from elsewhere

- Family with a severely autistic and non-verbal child needing money to buy an adapted iPad to aid communication with their son.

If you look at our website [www.oxfordshire500.com](http://www.oxfordshire500.com) under the History tab you can view every donation.

There is so much good work going on in the village that it is hard to ask for more. However, Oxfordshire500 has a very particular appeal, donating specifically to people or communities in need in Oxfordshire. So please join. Individually, you may only be able to commit a little amount each week, but together with others you can make a significant difference to someone in trouble. The potential for numbers of members and level of donations is unlimited and we would love to give more. The local organisations we work with constantly remind us how much need there is across the county.

You can set up a Standing Order of a minimum of £1 a week to Lloyds Business account, Sort code 30-98-97 Account no: 46557962 or make a donation. Any amount is very gratefully received. Then email [oxfordshire500@gmail.com](mailto:oxfordshire500@gmail.com) to let us know that you have joined. All members are anonymous to each other.

As a member you will get a monthly invitation to nominate people who you think need our help, and a choice of everyone else's nominations so you can vote on your preference. It is very empowering to know that you are part of a group that can mobilise so quickly to give practical, no-strings-attached help with no administrative costs deducted.

*Wendy Roderick & Liz McGivan*

## Brightwell Supporting Refugees

Back by popular demand – **Carols at St James'** on Monday 9 December at 7pm. Kick off your Christmas with an evening of popular carols, songs and poems by candlelight in this beautiful setting. Space is tight at St James' but that makes it all the nicer we feel, so get your tickets soon before they run out at the village shop (£10 adults, children free but will still need a ticket so we know numbers).

BSR will also be at the Art Club exhibition on Saturday 30 November with a market stall of home-made jams, chutneys, knits, Xmas decorations and other goodies. Hope you can pop by.

Next year's programme of Friday night talks etc is currently being finalised. On Friday 17 January we will be showing *This Blessed Plot*, a film about a Chinese filmmaker's strange experiences in an English village, 7.30pm in the



village hall. We are also excited to be welcoming Sir Lawrie Bristow, ex ambassador to Afghanistan, on Friday 28 March to give a talk about experiences there. Please make a note of these dates in your diary.

Our recent event, Horrible Histories in St Agatha's in October, was hugely successful, raising nearly £1000. Richard Bradley, its creator and the Brightwell Players made it a memorable and funny evening, enjoyed both by adults and lots of children, some of whom went home to watch more of it on the BBC (in particular the 'frozen poo'!). Special thanks to Chris and Helen Baines for producing the Players and to John Burdass, our lighting and sound maestro.

Funds raised recently from this and other recent events and donations are going once again to The Big Give Christmas Challenge (where they are doubled). It is focused this year on emergency education for Sudanese refugees. We will also be continuing our support to the Hope School in Amman Jordan and will be donating to Asylum Welcome Oxford's Hardship Fund. You can read more about these on our website - [bsr-charity.org](http://bsr-charity.org).

*BSR Trustees*

## BcS Environment Group Report

### Moles

There seem to have been more mole hills in recent months than for some time. This is often the only evidence that we see as the small mammals spend nearly all their time underground.

The mole is readily identifiable as it is a stocky animal covered in a velvety fur with small eyes, pink nose and two large spade like front paws. It grows to about 15cm long plus a 4cm tail and uses its paws to dig tunnels to hunt for food, with earth worms being its favourite food. It can dig up to 20 metres of tunnels a day, the smooth coat allowing it to easily move through the soil.

Moles live in a network of permanent deep tunnels which can extend to several hundreds of metres in length and can be used by generations of moles. These deep tunnels give protection from extreme weather and also can be used for storage of food with over 400 worms having been recorded in a single chamber. The more obvious shallow tunnels and associated molehills are often short lived and are dug when their prey is close to the ground surface. The young are raised in an underground nest lined with dry vegetation. The babies leave after 5 to 6 weeks by venturing above ground when they are most vulnerable to being preyed upon. If you are annoyed by the mole hills on the lawn please remember that, overall, moles are very beneficial as they eat

underground grubs that feed off crops and the tunnels help to aerate the soil and improve drainage.

### Events

The workshop run by the Owl Conservation Project to examine owl pellets in October was attended by around 25 enthusiastic participants. They had a fascinating time teasing out the very small bones of the owls' prey which was mainly wood mice and voles. Ziggy, the beautiful barn owl, kept an eye on operations!

Jonathan Stamp will be giving his talk 'The Lost Library' in the Village Hall on Thursday 5 December at 7.30pm, free entry. Unearthed in 1750, during excavations at Herculaneum on the Bay of Naples, it is the richest privately owned Roman villa ever discovered. It is also, even more importantly, the site of the only library from the ancient world ever to be found in situ. The talk explores the extraordinary story of the Villa's excavation. It will focus on the game-changing scientific breakthrough of 2023 that permits the papyrus scrolls found in the Villa finally to be read after more than two and a half centuries spent trying. It will investigate the tantalising possibility that there are more scrolls still to be found in an as yet unexcavated part of the Villa.

### Weather

The rainfall recorded at Highlands Farm for September was 182.4mm and October 61.8mm. The incredibly wet September was over 4 times the average measured at the farm between 1999 and 2012 whilst that of October was about average. Across Oxfordshire the September rainfall was over 3 times the average making it the third wettest on record and the wettest since 1918!

*Steve Capel-Davies, Brightwell-cum-Sotwell Environment Group*

## Brightwell Preschool

Autumn sneaks up on us every year, surprising our senses, immersing us into the first crunch of a crispy brown leaf, the first discovery of a smooth shiny conker, the first feel of a cold wind tantalising our skin; it is truly magical. These can feel like new sensations for the little ones as they make new pathways in their brains like the lanes of Brightwell; we are helping them to build language to describe Autumn for themselves, to ask questions about it, to notice shape, colour, smells, sounds, animals, and patterns in nature. At preschool we teach children to respect nature and help them to form memories, sensory memories that they can build on each season, reflect upon and as they grow up, begin to understand the changes that are happening to

our planet. The children have also experimented with mark-making by rolling conkers in paint to make pictures, printing with leaves, making leaf rubbings, creating clay snails with conkers, drilling wood to make catherine-wheel spinners and much much more. As you read this, we will be busy celebrating Christmas and wrapping-up warm for our winter walks with a sneaky hot chocolate.

Our new committee will be busy fundraising over the Christmas period with a wreath-making workshop and our Christmas raffle, with kind donations from local businesses boosting our ticket sales. As always, we must continue to raise funds for essential maintenance and for projects, such as our on-site allotment plans and a revamp of the tired playroom. We also ask for volunteers from around the community to come in and either help with a project or spend time with the children reading stories, baking, gardening or helping with our Forest School sessions. If you are interested in making a difference to the smallest members of our village, please contact me at the preschool [admin@brightwellpreschool.org](mailto:admin@brightwellpreschool.org) or 01491 826387 to find out more.

*Natasha Hillier*

## Stewart Village Hall

At our AGM our Treasurer reported for the year 01.04.23-31.03.24 our income was £30,692 and expenditure was £24,220 giving a balance of £6,472. It was noted that the income from grants, donations and fundraising activities was £10,919 showing how important these activities are to the hall. If you would like to see a full copy of accounts, please get in touch.

We reviewed the hall activities for the year including highlighting the restrictions our current layout imposes on our ability to accept all bookings requested.

Looking forward, we gave an update on the renovation project, explaining that while we are investigating available grants we are finding that some grant making bodies require 75% of funding to be in place, or give deadlines on when the money must be spent by. We are not able to meet these demands yet.

Therefore we are looking at where we can get support in this area. We are members of Community First Oxfordshire and Oxfordshire Community and Voluntary Action. We have met with/spoken to/visited several other village halls who have gone through refurbishment projects. It has all been very useful, and while all this collaboration is very important, the most important collaboration is this within the village, all of you! If you use the hall for any purpose, you are supporting it. We ask that when planning events or

activities, then please support the Hall by using it whenever you can. This is a critical year for the Hall; we have planning permission, but we must secure significant grant money for us to make progress with the project, and showing we have the support of the community is vital when applying for grants.

Remember, this project started because a condition survey carried out in 2017 highlighted some significant issues and we can be sure the situation has not improved with age, 7 years of deterioration!

To be clear, we are talking about saving the hall. We do not want to be in the position in the future where a significant structural failure means the building must suddenly close. The impact on the whole community would be huge. Many activities and clubs would suffer, plus the physical impact of possible boarded up windows or scaffolding round the roof or worse, a building that fails and closes permanently.

The Trustees really believe now is the time for action, we've had lots of messages of support, but now we need people to step up and help, in whatever way they can, be it buying a lottery ticket, attending events, holding events in aid of the Hall, helping us with the vital search for funds through grant applications. Become a trustee or volunteer and get involved. The trustees need help, if not you, then do you know someone else we can speak to? Please get in touch. Help us save the hall.

*Annette Kilworth*

## St Agatha's Bells

A special mention goes to three of our new young ringers, as well as a well-established young ringer, for ringing for our November Remembrance Service (let's call them F, I, R as well as A). They made it possible to ring all eight bells, half-muffled. A fitting salute in remembrance. Thank you to our adults as well.

We have recently launched into Handbell ringing, in anticipation of carols for Christmas. Another string to our youngsters' bow(s).

Also underway are our plans to attempt a three hour ring (a 'peal attempt') at the end of April, to mark the occasion of our stalwart, Rev Kev's retirement. More info on that in the next edition (plans and copy space permitting!).

In the meantime, best wishes to all for the festive season; and ...."let the bells ring out for Christmas".

*John Dowling*

## Save the Children

Save the Children is part of the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) Middle East Humanitarian appeal. As the violence in Gaza has spilled into Lebanon it is inflicting unfathomable suffering on the children in the region, many will never be the same. The injuries, fear and displacement inflicted on these innocent children is unimaginable. Looking at one's own children and grandchildren it is so hard to comprehend the suffering they are going through. We are trying to raise money to support Save the Children's work in this region; we would be really grateful for any support you can give.

**7 December** – Please do join us at the Village Hall, we will be open from 10am-3pm. Please pop in and enjoy lots of things on offer throughout the day:- coffee, tea, cakes and light lunches, Christmas cards and gifts, raffle, children's activities and Father Christmas.

**Christmas Eve** – ‘Save the Children carols round the Christmas Tree’. This has become not only a tradition, it is one of our major fundraising events. It raises much needed funds for children in the UK and around the world and gives joy to all ages in our community. There will be a collection on the night or you can donate beforehand; information will be on the posters by the Christmas trees. Wishing you a happy and peaceful Christmas,

*Celia & the Save the Children Team*

## The Red Lion

As the team here at The RL are busy preparing for 'silly season', we thought this would be a great opportunity to let you know all the plans for December. We have lots going on and it would be great to see you here at the pub enjoying the festivities we have planned.

If you are a lover of live music, we have 2 live bands booked for Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> and Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup>. On the 15<sup>th</sup>, we have the fantastic Faith Healers who are an Oxford based trio offering their own rock songs with hints of blues and soul influences, as well as some fantastic covers that you will all know. These guys have played Brightfest and we've had them in the pub twice before so do come along. On this night we will also be doing our huge Christmas Draw! The tickets are on sale in the pub so please come along and pop your name down and then come along to try and win one of our great prizes.

For Sunday 22 December we have a 70s Glam Rock night booked. Glam Resurrection will be entertaining you from 6.30pm after our huge bumper Christmas meat draw so pop this date in your diary and come down and dance

the night away and although there is no dress code, perhaps fish out a bit of sparkle from the back of your wardrobe!

Also in December we have just confirmed the date of the Red Lion panto and this is on Tuesday 17 Dec. Written by the amazing Andy Lewis and put together by Marcus and his band of merry helpers, this really is a night like no other where anything goes, and goes wrong it nearly always does!

With the way Christmas falls this year, our hours will differ slightly and although not 100% set in stone, these are the hours we are planning on opening/closing; please check our website and social media pages for updated hours:

Up to 22 December - Open as normal

23<sup>rd</sup> - Not sure, possibly closed, TBC

24<sup>th</sup> - Open all day, lunch served 12-2.30pm

25<sup>th</sup> - 11.30-2.30pm, drinks only

26<sup>th</sup> - 11.30-6pm, lunch served 12-3pm

27<sup>th</sup>-29<sup>th</sup> - Open all day, food service as normal

30<sup>th</sup> - New Years Eve Eve Party 6pm-1am

31<sup>st</sup> - CLOSED ALL DAY

1<sup>st</sup> Jan - New Years Day Brunch, 10.30-6pm

2<sup>nd</sup> - Back to normal

If you are joining us for our annual NYEE party, this year the theme is Back to the Movies. Please come as your favourite character from the big screen and although fancy dress is not essential, it is great fun! Last year we had a huge number of people turn up and we were full to capacity and if it happens again this year, we will have to limit the numbers so please arrive earlier rather than later to guarantee your entry.

As you will see, we are closed all day this year on New Years Eve but we will re-open at 10.30am New Years Day serving brunch and then lunch. Please book in for the brunch as each year we have done it we have been fully booked so get in early.

After all this fun, January arrives and as usual, the pub will close to give us all a break and to do our general maintenance work in the pub. We will be closed from Monday 13 January and will re-open on Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup>.

Lastly, a quick thank you to everyone for their continued support, we've had a great summer/autumn and we are looking forward to what next year brings as we get very close to celebrating our 5<sup>th</sup> birthday! Keep your eyes peeled for details of a little birthday party we may be having.

*Corinne, Mouse & Ruby*

## Wassail 2025!

It's that time of the year again when we start to wake our sleeping apple trees following their Mid Winter sleep. Last year, we made extra load noise (helped by our Muzzleloaders!) to frighten off Old Jack Frost who always seems to make his way to the village during the May Blossoming Time. He must have been rightfully scared off as this spring there was no sign of him and as a result we enjoyed a bumper crop of juicy apples.

The 2025 Wassail is to take place between 3-5pm on Saturday 4 January. It will have all the usual traditions including the Morris Dancers, the Fire Belly Dancers, bagpipes and the Brightwell and Sotwell Mummers. We'll finish at the pub for fireworks and fire dancing before songs and well-deserved refreshments inside the Red Lion. We look forward to seeing as many of you as possible. More details near the time. Wassail!

*Jason Debney*

## Stewart Village Hall Carol Evening

**18 December 6.30 for 7pm** - Performances from the School choir - Ks1, Tubthumpers, Barber Shop Singers, Christmas Carols with pianist Celia Chapman, M.C. Marcus Harris. Interval mulled wine/juice and a mince pie. And the Clock Tower lottery draw! Adults £5, children free with ticket. Tickets can be purchased at the Village Stores, or [info@stewartvillagehall.org.uk](mailto:info@stewartvillagehall.org.uk) or phone 01491 834543.

## What's on in our area

- **The Waterperry Opera** on 8 December in St Mary-le-More in Wallingford, an intimate, candle-lit performance of Handel's Messiah using period instruments, in aid of Wallingford Food Bank. Tickets from the website: [Home - wallingfordfoodbank.org.uk/](http://Home-wallingfordfoodbank.org.uk/)
- Wallingford & District Art Club's free **Winter Art Show** 29 November-1 December at Centre 70 in central Wallingford, 10am-4pm each day.
- At the Earth Trust: **Christmas Market** on 7 December. Screening of the film **Six Inches of Soil** on 10 December, followed by a panel discussion with producer Claire Mackenzie looking at the critical importance of regenerative farming. [www.earthtrust.org.uk/whats-on](http://www.earthtrust.org.uk/whats-on).
- **The Cholsey Repair Café** will be open on Saturday 18 January 2025, from 11-13.45. No charge is made for help, although the cost of any spare parts supplied must be covered. Any domestic item can be considered, as well as bicycles, mowers and the like. See [www.cholseyrepaircafe.com](http://www.cholseyrepaircafe.com).

## VILLAGE DIARY

**29 November Barn & Belly Dance Brightwell School Hall 7.30pm**

**30 November Brightwell Art Club exhibition 10-1pm Village Hall**

## December

2	Festive Block printing	VH	
3	Village Xmas Lunch Club	VH	12.15
5	Jonathan Stamp talk 'The Lost Library'	VH	7.30pm
7	Save the Children Christmas market	VH	10-3
9	BSR Carol concert	St James'	7pm
10	WI Christmas Dinner	Red Lion	
18	Stewart Village Hall Carol Evening & Clock tower lottery draw	VH	7pm
22	Nine Lessons & Carols Service	St Agatha's	6pm
24	Crib Service	St Agatha's	4.30pm
24	Save the Children Carols around the Xmas tree	The Square	5.30pm
24	Midnight Communion	St James'	11.30pm
25	Christmas Family service	St Agatha's	9.30am
29	Team Communion	St Agatha's	10am
30	New Year's Eve Eve Party	Red Lion	6pm

## January

4	Wassail!	StartTBC	3-5pm
14	WI talk 'Advice & Demonstration' by interns from McTimoney college of Chiropractic	VH	7.30pm
17	BSR 'This Blessed Plot' film showing	VH	7.30pm

## Advance Notice

- 2 February Christingle service, St James' 4pm
- 28 March BSR talk Sir Laurie Bristow, ex-ambassador to Afghanistan

## Refuse Collection (Food waste each week)

- Grey bins Thursdays 5 & 19 December  
**Saturday 4**, Thursdays 16 & 30 January
- Green (& brown) bins Thursday 12 & **Saturday 28** December  
**Friday 10** & Thursday 23 January

## Village website

For more information about Brightwell-cum-Sotwell visit the village website: [www.brightwellcumshotwell.co.uk](http://www.brightwellcumshotwell.co.uk).