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## Editorial

Having spent half my life in Australia, where the only way to keep cool in November and December was to hang out in Santa's grotto in the local department store, I'm dreaming of a white Xmas – sleighbells in the snow and all that. Ah well, if November is anything to go by, dream on. The roses are still blooming and even more unusual, so is the honeysuckle.

The impact of warmer weather is severely impacting the landscape in our area as well as our flora, as I learned recently from landscape historian Jason Debney. Jason is passionate about history and keeping traditions alive and is one of the movers and shakers behind the revival of the annual BcS Wassail, a quaint old custom of beating the apple trees to promote a rich harvest, p5&13.

Last year's Wassail must have done the trick. Although some of us had a poor harvest, it turns out that there were enough apples to display in abundance at this year's Apple Day. But in order to preserve the village fruit growing heritage the Orchard Group has devised a cunning plan that focuses more on preserving varieties than on quantity. See p8 for how we can all be part of it.

We are good at inventing traditions as well as reviving them in Brightwell. Case in point: The Haunted Carnival, an innovative way to celebrate Halloween and a welcome variation on trick or treat, p17.

But hey – if we're talking tradition it is Christmas that dominates the Brightwell calendar for the next month or so. Christmas celebrations at St Agatha's and St James begin on 3 December and carry on till 6 January, see p14. There are so many events and activities being held at the Red Lion that I need a lie down just reading about them. I think Corinne will also need one when it's all over, see p9. There are also many other opportunities on offer to sing carols, eat mince pies, drink mulled wine and generally wallow in festive Xmas cheer. But it is also a time to remember the less fortunate. See p4&11 for ideas of how and where we can offer our support.

I would especially like to raise my glass of mulled wine to a brave Brightwell couple who lost their child at birth, but are putting all their energies into raising money to help support other people affected by the death of a baby. See p7-8.

Snow or no snow I am very much looking forward to an English Christmas, especially to turkey and Christmas pudding, something that never appealed on Bondi beach. Wishing you all a very merry Christmas and a Happy new Year.

*Alison Leigh*

## Parish Council news

### **SODC adopts new Neighbourhood Plan**

We are pleased to report that the new Brightwell cum Sotwell Neighbourhood Plan was adopted at the Full District Council Meeting on 12 October 2023. This will be a very important and valuable asset to the village in shaping its future. We are very grateful to Councillor Jason Debney for all his hard work in the preparation of this document. Copies of this document are at the printers and will be available at the Parish Clerk's office shortly.

### **Neighbourhood Plan Meeting - Tuesday 30 Jan 2024 -7pm**

There will be a meeting at the Village Hall to give the community an opportunity to be updated about the new Neighbourhood Plan and to answer any questions that they might have.

### **Jubilee Pavilion**

Users of the Pavilion may have noticed the new kitchen which has been installed. This was purchased by the Parish Council but sourced and fitted by Stuart Hall and his helpers. We are very grateful and appreciative for their time and hard work in making these improvements.

### **20 MPH Signs**

We know how many people in the village are anxious about motorists speeding. The Parish Council has purchased a large number of adhesive 20mph signs which can be used (on wheelie bins, for example) to remind the motorists in the village where the speed limit has been changed. They can be purchased (for a £1) from the Village Stores, the Parish Office or the porch of Hope Cottage - Mackney Lane.

*James Davys*

## Community Association

### **AGM- 1 November 2023**

The CA AGM took place in Stewart Hall on 1 November. We are delighted that Caroline Annets, Lynn Burrige, Charlotte and Mike Woods, Robert Lidstone, Alison Bloomfield and Tony Guntrip were all happy to be re-elected. Our Chairman James Davys, and Treasurer Tom Rogerson were also re-elected.

Jim Sanger has kindly agreed to be Honorary Auditor once again this year. We are most grateful for his hard work and support in this role for many years.

### **Events in 2024**

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

### **Christmas Hampers**

The Community Association in conjunction with support from the Fairthorne Trust, The 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 direct on 01491 834195. In addition, given these difficult times, the Committee has agreed to offer our hampers to other members of the community who are struggling. If you know of someone in the village who could do with our support, please let me know.

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

*James Davys, Chairman*

*And here is another way to support seniors in the village and elsewhere in the county:*

## Volunteer with Age UK as a phone friend

1 in 5 older people in Oxfordshire report feeling lonely. Currently over 375 people receive a free, weekly telephone call from their 'phone friend', but there are thousands more older people who could benefit from the service. Volunteering as a Phone Friend requires a minimum commitment of just 1 hour per week which enables you to call up to 3 people and can be at a regular time that suits you. Calls can be made from the comfort of your own home and any expenses for call costs are covered.

To register your interest in supporting us to reduce loneliness amongst local older people please call 01295 234 850 or visit [www.ageuk.org.uk/oxfordshire/get-involved/volunteer/telephone-befriending-volunteer](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/oxfordshire/get-involved/volunteer/telephone-befriending-volunteer) for more information.

## Meet .....Jason Debney



I first met Jason when I joined his merry band of villagers 'beating the bounds' back in May. I was impressed by his erudite commentary. Brightwell and Sotwell's history, I learned, can be traced back to Saxon times and ever since the establishment of Wallingford in the early 10<sup>th</sup> century both villages have been jealously guarding their boundaries from their grander neighbour.

I wanted to know more so that's how I ended up drinking coffee with Jason in his extensive garden on a beautiful summer's morning in August.

Jason is a landscape historian. He was born in Brightwell. His parents still live here. He left aged 18 to go to university where he did a degree in Rural Environment Studies and a masters in Historic Conservation. He came back to live in the village with his wife Alison after their first child was born. He now has 3 children aged 14, 11 and 9.

"It is a wonderful place to bring up children: that African phrase – *it takes a village to raise a child* - you see that on days like the Coronation and Brightfest; you can talk to a huge circle of friends and your children are out with their friends and every half an hour or so they check in and then they run off with their friends again, and that's beautiful. There aren't many places where you can feel comfortable doing that".

For the last 23 years Jason has been the coordinator of the Thames Landscape Strategy. His job is to bring together all the stake holders along the Thames in SW London - the communities, local authorities and a variety of different bodies and agencies - to jointly manage this area that includes a series of ex Royal palaces and parks and gardens.

He tells me that the Thames used to flow in a giant loop around Mackney and for centuries this land was marshland. This is where the locals got their reeds and willow withies for thatching, basket making, weaving and so on. Even though for the last 150 years or so this land has been drained and put to agriculture it was still prone to flooding. Old diaries of the village school record that children from Mackney often couldn't get to school in Brightwell because the fields were under water.

Much of Jason's work involves making the riverside ready for climate change. "In southern England we are likely to see much hotter summers, intense rainfall periods and very cold snaps in the winter thanks to climate change and I don't think people have got to grips with this yet", he goes on. "We have got to rethink how we manage these places and that may necessitate turning them from dry places back to wetlands".

History is Jason's passion and he loves nothing more than finding interesting ways to celebrate these traditions with as many people participating as possible, *Beating the Bounds* just one example. Another is the *Wassail* on 6 January. Jason was behind the revival of what has now become an annual highlight in the Brightwell village calendar, the custom of wassailing around the village singing and dancing and thwacking the trees. Not to rid the trees of evil spirits, but to wake them up so that they will provide a bountiful harvest.

Last year Jason took over the village history group, coordinating about 20 people working on all sorts of projects from archiving hundreds of photographs of previous generation villagers and village events to transcribing (from Latin) medieval pipe rolls \* which recorded the farming events in Brightwell for three centuries.

Soon they will be starting a program of archaeological digs starting with surveying the school playing field, but later on anyone in the village can volunteer their garden, and be taught how to carry out a proper archaeological excavation. Experts will be on hand to interpret what is found.

Jason may be the first to put up his hand. He has a theory that the ruins of a medieval castle are to be found in his garden, close to where we are sitting, and not in the grounds of Brightwell Manor as is generally believed. If he is proved correct this could be a massive source of surprise and delight for the current incumbents who would then be free of all obstacles to their plans for building a 'newtopian' swimming pool.

Somehow Jason finds time to serve on the Parish Council. The work he did on the Neighbourhood Plan has contributed to keeping housing development in Brightwell to a minimum. As a passionate conservationist he is justifiably proud of many areas where his work has made a difference; the avenues at Hampton Court that go down to the water; the view from Richmond Hill which is protected by an Act of Parliament, Little Martins meadows. "These are places I can take my children to that are there because of my work, and that feels great".

*Alison Leigh*

\*Pipe rolls are the annual financial records of the Crown written on parchment

## A story of our times

One of the newest graves in St Agatha's churchyard tells a sad but all too common story. "Sidney Davis-Rawet, born and died 14 August 2023." Every day in the UK approximately 8 babies are stillborn, and he was one of them. His parents - Natasha and Harriet - are devastated, but their story is not all sad. It is also a story of courage, kindness, love and generosity.

Sadly baby loss, whether miscarriage, stillbirth or neonatal death is a subject which we struggle to talk about and is so often carried silently by grieving parents. Since losing Sidney, Natasha and Harriet have learned that more than anything they want to talk about their baby and help others to talk too. This is their story.

"We moved to the village in July 2022 and got married in February this year. In August our son Sidney was stillborn at 25 weeks and 2 days old.

When we found out we were pregnant, we were so excited to be first time mums and to begin to grow our family in the beautiful Oxfordshire countryside.

After experiencing some pain and bleeding we had a week long stay in the JR, hoping our little boy would make it to 26 weeks which we were told would give him the best chance at life. It's fair to say we expected a premature baby but never imagined that he might die before he was born.

On day 8 in the hospital, the midwives struggled to hear Sidney's heartbeat. A scan found his little heart was still beating but very, very slowly. We then had to make the crushing decision whether to have a c-section to try and save his life - but we're warned the damage was likely already done and he would be unlikely to survive - or to let him drift away in peace and comfort. The doctors left us for an hour and we sat together, rubbing Harriet's tummy and talking to our little boy. When the doctors returned, they scanned again and his heart had stopped. We find comfort in knowing that he never knew pain, only love.

Few good things can come from the death of a baby, but we are determined to honour his memory by living life to the fullest. Eight weeks after Sidney died and was born, we began training for a 25km trail run along the Jurassic Coast in May 2024. This was especially tough for Harriet who lost around 2 litres of blood during our stay in the hospital, through Sidney's delivery and during her subsequent surgery. We started with the NHS Couch to 5k programme and are slowly building our strength, hoping to reach 5km by Christmas and then we just need to do that four more times.

As well as giving us a reason to get our trainers on and get out the house, we are running to raise money for Sands (the stillbirth and neonatal death charity). Sands works hard to prevent babies dying and provides essential support to bereaved parents and ensures hospitals are properly equipped and hospital staff are properly trained to care for families in their most vulnerable moments. We will be eternally grateful to the support from Sands, and for the care shown to us by the hospital staff on the antenatal, delivery and bereavement wards. We are not just running for Sidney, but for every little life that was lost too soon.

So if you see us running around Brightwell or up and down The Clumps in our Sands t-shirts, give us a beep or a wave, and you can donate to Sands and leave messages of support at [gofundme.com/TeamSidney](https://gofundme.com/TeamSidney)."

*Natasha and Harriet Davis-Rawet*

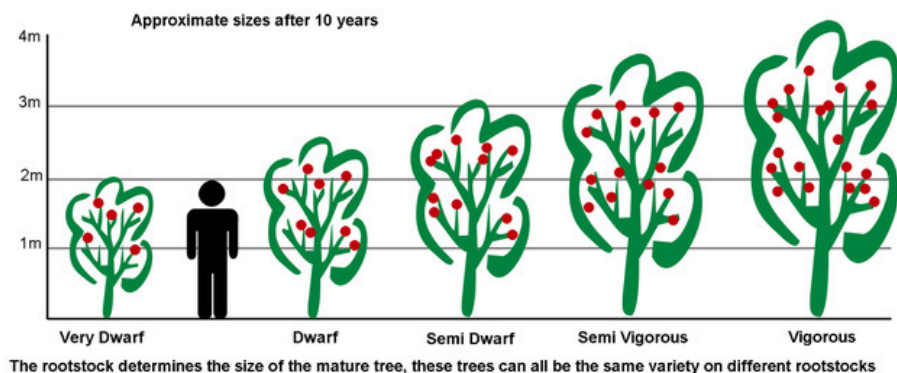
## A piece of village history in your garden?

One of the high points of this year's Apple Day, as usual, was Paul Chilton's magnificent display of apple varieties, all collected from trees in the parish. But whereas there were once 101 different varieties of heritage apples in gardens and old orchards in the village according to a past survey, this number has declined in recent years. We think the number is now about 97; some trees have died, or houses have been sold and gardens redesigned. 97 is still incredible, but we don't want to lose more. Will you help us to preserve our village fruit growing heritage?

2024 will be the ten year anniversary of the planting of the Community Orchard. We would like to mark this by helping you to plant some new trees. If you would like one in your garden, we will pay for and supply the tree and we can advise and help you to choose a suitable tree from a selection of heritage varieties we think are at risk of disappearing from the village landscape. We can also help you plant it in a suitable spot, maintain it and prune it. In return, we would ask you to be prepared to donate some fruit for display each Apple Day. (The money raised this year will help us to maintain the Orchard and all the related activities).

Planting a new tree in your garden might seem a little daunting, however don't be put off by the question of size. The height to which an apple tree will grow depends on the root stock onto which it is grafted. The drawing below illustrates the possibilities, so if you feel you don't have room, think again! If a free-standing tree would not be appropriate, maybe you should consider training an espalier?

If you are not keen on apples, then we can consider planting a plum or a pear. Whatever you choose, you will have a piece of village history in your garden.



Please send your application for a tree to [villageorchardgroup@gmail.com](mailto:villageorchardgroup@gmail.com), explaining what size of tree you would like and where you would propose to plant it. The number of trees we can supply will be limited and they will be planted over the coming winter, in early 2024. Don't miss out because this is a first come first served offer!

*Alison Bloomfield*

## The Red Lion

Here at The Red Lion we are busy getting ready for a manic December with the build up to the big day and we hope to see you over the festive period. Our Christmas menu is now available to view online and we are taking bookings for groups of 6 or more from 1-22 December. For smaller tables, please book in and choose from our December menu which will include some festive favourites. Be quick, as dates are booking up fast. To check out our menu, please visit [redlionbcs.co.uk](http://redlionbcs.co.uk).

We have lots going on before the end of the year including a night of music and our Grand Christmas draw on 17 December. Please pop into the bar during opening hours and buy some tickets for the big draw. There will be upwards of 30 prizes ranging from hampers to bottle of booze, joints of meat and lots more and we hope you can take part. All money taken on the draw will be put into the prize fund so the more we sell, the better the prizes!

There will be live music from the Faith Healers from 6.30-8.30pm so come on down and have a little boogie with us!

For New Year's Eve Eve, we have live music from The Candy Thieves who many of you would have seen playing at Brightfest this year. They have been to the pub a few times and have always gone down well. Once the band have finished, we have fabulous DJ Giles from the village spinning some tunes to see us into the small hours of the night! The theme this year is 'Back to the 80's' and although there is no pressure to dress up, I'm sure most of us have a dodgy shirt in the back of the wardrobe that could pass for the 80's so pop it on and come and party the night away. No tickets are required, it's a free night for all and we would love to see you. Get the date in your diary, book the sitter if needed and come and join in the madness of New Year's Eve Eve!

Thank you to everyone who took part in our November quiz, we raised £150 for the pub refurb fund and the winning team donated their £50 prize to a local charity which was very kind of them. Our next quiz is Tuesday 5 December and we hope to see you there. All of our pub quizzes are the first Tuesday of the month and tables get booked up quick so be sure to book your team in if you would like to take part.

Over the Christmas week, our opening hours may vary and below is what we have planned. Please note, these may change closer to the time so please check in house, social media or our website for confirmed timings.

Christmas Eve - 12-10pm

Christmas Day - 11.30-2.30pm

Boxing Day - 11-6pm

27 December - Undecided, may close or open for lunch only

28 & 29 December - 12-3pm & 6-11pm

30 December - New Year's Eve Eve - 12-close

31 December - 12-4pm

1 January - 10.30-4pm

2 January - Closed

Following on from these opening hours, we would also like to let you know that as before, we will be closing for a short time in January for some light refurb work and a rest for us and all our staff. Although the exact dates are to be set, I would imagine the pub will close down on Sunday 14 January and re-open Wednesday 24 January but again, I will confirm these as soon as we have plans in place.

Thank you all for your continued support, we look forward to seeing you over the next few months and remember.....The Red Lion is for life, not just for Christmas!

*Corinne, Mouse and Ruby*

## Brightwell Supporting Refugees

At the time of writing, we are watching events in Israel and Gaza with horror. With over a million people fleeing their homes, the humanitarian crisis is catastrophic. The direct impact on the region has led to increased instability and uncertainty around what the movements of people will be when the borders open. We are standing by to hear how BSR can best help to alleviate the immense suffering of refugees and displaced people there.

Meanwhile, we continue fundraising and offering practical support closer to home. In September, AFC Brightwell Youth and Venda Youth Club won 3-0 in a friendly football match against Asylum Welcome, one of BSR's beneficiaries based in Oxford. Venda Youth Club provides activities for young refugees and asylum seekers. A big thank you to Paul and Brandon from AFC Brightwell for organising the match.

Asylum Welcome have a target to acquire 500 laptops by Christmas. These are to help young and adult clients with their education and to access information and resources online. If you have an unused device, less than 10 years old in full working order with a webcam and charger, might you consider donating it to Asylum Welcome? You can either drop off at Unit 7, Newtec Place, Magdalen Road, Oxford, OX4 1RE or email [brightwellrefugees@gmail.com](mailto:brightwellrefugees@gmail.com) and we will collect and deliver on your behalf.

On **Friday 8 December**, in the Village Hall, we are screening a new film by local resident David Dugan and Bella Faulk. "When Whales Could Walk" (intriguing!) will be followed by a Q&A with David and Bella about film-making in the Valley of the Whales in Egypt's Western Desert. Tickets are now on sale at the Village Stores.

On **Friday 5 January 2024**, Grace Jackson will be talking about her work with the charity Give Directly, another of BSR's beneficiaries. Grace, who grew up in the village, is currently in Malawi as the acting country director. Before joining GiveDirectly in 2023 she worked for DIFID and then latterly at FCDO, including 2 years working on the Ebola crisis in Sierra Leone for which she was awarded an OBE in 2016. We look forward hearing about the unusual approach GiveDirectly takes to the distribution of financial aid, and what more we can do to help the 690 million people still living in extreme poverty. Thank you for your continuing support. You can find us at [bsr-charity.org](http://bsr-charity.org) and on Facebook.

*Sarah Metcalf*

## Seasonal events

### Winter Words & Music

Mike Bartlett's Barndance, a play specially written for the village, was performed this summer in the wonderful and atmospheric Barn at Small's House. Now another opportunity to savour that unique atmosphere - this time with some compelling words and music...

Join writer and performer Robert Seatter as he reads from his latest book - fresh off the press that week and to be heard first at this event! - along with readings from his earlier collections, and a special commission for the Barn itself. Plus there will be a few songs to ring the changes, and mulled wine and mince pies to herald in the Christmas season. Wrap up well and come listen!

Tickets £10 from the Village Stores. Proceeds to charity: Brightwell Supporting Refugees/Poetry Archive.

5.00-6.30pm Sunday 3 December at The Barn at Small's House, Mackney.

### Donkey Sanctuary Carol Service

Our annual Carol Service will be held at Island Farm Donkey Sanctuary at 7pm on Thursday 14 December 2023 and everyone is invited. The Revd Janice Chilton will take the service. The Roke and Benson Brass Band will provide the music, and a couple of donkeys will get involved as well. It is a very traditional event as Christmas draws near. Refreshments including mulled wine and mince pies will be available afterwards. There is no charge for this, but donations are very much appreciated, enabling us to continue looking after the donkeys. Island Farm Donkey Sanctuary is a registered charity (no 1121697) that cares for ill-treated and neglected donkeys, and is located on the edge of Brightwell-com-Sotwell village. Visitors are very much welcome between 11am and 4pm every day. Again, no entrance fee, but donations appreciated. For more information, please call the office on 01491 833938, or visit our website [www.islandfarmdonkeysanctuary.org.uk](http://www.islandfarmdonkeysanctuary.org.uk).

### Make your own Christmas wreath

Brightwell Pre-School is holding a 'make your own wreath' fundraising event on Wednesday 6 December 2023, 8-10pm at Brightwell Pavilion. Tickets are £35 and include wreath, mulled wine and nibbles.

Contact [secretary@brightwellpreschool.org](mailto:secretary@brightwellpreschool.org).

## Wassail 2024

The 2024 Wassail will take place on Old Christmas Day, Saturday 6 January. Quite a few parents have asked for the Wassail to revert back to its Saturday date this coming year as the school term starts quite late. We will be Wassailing Mackney this year so, Wassailers, please make your way down to Mackney Lane to the first orchard on the left just after the big bend. There will be plenty of signs up.

We will be leaving at 3pm to make our way around the loop back up Mackney Lane to the community orchard for fireworks (around 4.45pm) and the fire dances outside the Red Lion at 5pm. Afterwards there will be singing and music in the pub. During the Wassail I am delighted that we will be treated to the annual Mummers play in the magnificent Smalls House Barn. There will be Armaleggan Morris Dancers, Lamb's Wool cider, Wassail King and Queen and the annual 'Christmas Tree Tossing' competition as we wander round the old Orchards. We will also have some Muzzleloaders joining Master Shotgun so expect plenty of bangs. Please bring something to make some noise as the purpose of the Wassail is to wake the apple trees up as Mid Winter passes.

*Jason Debney*

## Brightwell Art Club Exhibition

Start your Christmas here. Our annual exhibition will be at Brightwell Village Hall on Saturday 2nd Dec, from 10am to 1pm. View paintings in various media, including local scenes. There will also be craft stalls, including hand painted cards. Find that special present! Come along for a warm welcome, meet your friends, browse the paintings and stalls, enjoy a mince pie and coffee, and be lucky in the raffle.

*Stuart Derby*

## Village Christmas Lunch

The yearly Christmas Lunch, with turkey and all the trimmings will be on Tuesday 5 December from 12.15 pm in the Village Hall. If you have not already booked and would like to come, please contact Eastlyn Horsfield, 01491 832041 or Sue Collett, 01491 837617.

## Carols round the Christmas Tree

24 December - Christmas Eve starting at 5.30pm.

## Christmas at St Agatha's and St James'

With Christmas falling on a Monday this year, our Carol Service will be on the Sunday before Christmas Eve. This choir are already rehearsing every Friday from 7.30pm and this year's specials will include "O Holy Night", "Sussex Carol" and "Star of Bethlehem" (with words by Tony Isaacs, one of our villagers who you may remember playing the saxophone at our Summer Concert). Although we do not charge for entry, donations to the church upkeep and maintenance cost are desperately needed and will be gratefully received.

- Carol Service at 6pm on Sunday 17 December (St Agatha's)
- Crib Service at 4.30pm on Christmas Eve (St Agatha's)
- Midnight Communion at 11.30pm on Christmas Eve at St James', Sotwell
- Christmas Day Family Communion at 9.30am (St Agatha's)

We extend a warm welcome to all villagers to join us at these and every other Sunday service at 9.30am at St Agatha's... But why not beat the rush this year and extend the joyful season with us? Our Advent services are a wonderful way to prepare for the festivities ahead as we light another candle on our Advent wreath each week, and hear the readings which anticipate Jesus' arrival as the long-awaited Messiah.

And of course, there are the 12 days of Christmas, so Sunday 31 December will also be full of carols and celebrations. Sunday 7 January, brings the celebration of Epiphany, traditionally the date when the Wise Men arrived to pay homage to the new born King. At Candlemas on 28 January when we remember Jesus being presented in the temple as a baby. We celebrate our Christingle Service (the one with the orange!) at 4pm in the afternoon 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 (teamvicar@wallingfordcafe.org.uk)*

PS> In other news, our next Rector of the Wallingford Team has been selected. My friend and fellow Street Pastor, Revd Sarah Nesbitt, a long term resident and former Church Warden of Crowmarsh, will be installed in early March next year. Thanks to Michael Drury and Andy Lewis who served on the selection panel to represent our parish.

## Village Stores and Post Office

Christmas is coming in our Community Shop, please come in and see what we have to offer. By the time you are reading this, the shop will be full of Christmas stock, and busy selling Christmas stamps, sending your cards and parcels all around the world.

Our Christmas & New Year opening times are as follows:

Christmas Eve (24<sup>th</sup>) - open 9am-12 noon

Christmas Day (25<sup>th</sup>) - closed

Boxing Day (26<sup>th</sup>) - closed

27 December - closed

28 December - open 9am-5.30pm

29 December - open 9am-5.30pm

30 December - open 9am-1pm

31 December - open 9am-12 noon

1 January - closed

2 January - normal opening times resume

Merry Christmas & a Happy New Year.

*Village Shop Management Committee and the team volunteers/staff*

## Save the Children

The children in this community never cease to amaze me in their enthusiasm to help other children less fortunate. This time Dulcie Chandler and her friends held a cake sale in their class and raised £40 for Save the Children. Plus, Ffion and Seren Jenkins tell me they are busy preparing their next fundraising for Christmas. Our thanks go to them, their families, teachers, scout, cub and beaver leaders who support them in their efforts.

On 6 October we raised over £1,300, thanks to Malcolm & Judy showing us how we can create lovely food in our Air Fryers. We all enjoyed sampling the delights.

Sadly there seems always to be news of disasters and world events which need help for the children caught up in them. Thankfully Save the Children is part of the response charities; and with years of experience they can take action quickly, with the added assurance that the money and aid sent will go directly to help in the crisis.

We have been working to improve the lives of children in Palestine since 1958. At the moment our Palestinian team are having to face so many challenges and harrowing situations to try and deliver the aid and protection to the children who are totally innocent victims in this war. If you would like to help, please get in touch with myself or one of the committee, we will ensure your donation goes directly and quickly to help them.

We wish you and your families and happy and peaceful Christmas & New Year, and we hope you can join us on Christmas Eve for Carols round the Christmas Tree at The Square (Church Lane) on 24 December – 5.30pm.

*Celia & the Save the Children Team*

## WI News

After the long, warm days of summer we were looking forward to one more celebration at Gill Dexter's lovely garden. Typically, rain threatened on the day but determined not to be denied, Gill kindly opened her house for us all, just in time to avoid the downpour. The party continued with lots of laughter and good food. A big thank you once again to Gill.

At our October meeting we listened to a lively talk on how to extend our fitness, balance and brain by regular exercise. The speaker then invited us to join her in a short but safe routine of daily exercise for anyone to do. Starting slowly, she gradually increased the pace. We all stood up, sat down, bent to left then to the right, soon all of us were breathing more deeply and feeling nicely warmed but refreshed. Most agreed, we need more of this.

By the time of publication, our November meeting will have taken place, with our own crafters showing members how to make quick and easy decorations for the festive season.

Once again, for our December meeting we are planning to close the year with a festive meal and good cheer on Tuesday 12 December at the Red Lion. After which we are ready to look forward to another year's program covering a wide variety of topics and outings.

For anyone interested in joining, we are offering friendship, social activities and new learning. Please contact us on: [brightwellcumsotwellwi@gmail.com](mailto:brightwellcumsotwellwi@gmail.com).

*Karin Matthews*

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***Brightwell Scout Group would like to thank all who supported our Wallingford Food Bank collection to help families in need.***



## Haunted Carnival

Brightwell's first ever 'Haunted Carnival' took place on the Green at Greenmere. I've often wondered why village events haven't been held on the Green. It is such a great space. Turns out others have been thinking the same. But what could that event be?

For trick or treating at Halloween, Greenmere is always the best place to go. So, it was the perfect setting for a group of excitable people to get together to create 'The Haunted Carnival' event for the whole community – something spooky and free!



Professor Lines had always wanted to run a flea circus, so spent months training his fleas. Dr Strange was at last able to put his fortune-telling skills to good use, Andy could finally tell all those strange and wonderful stories he had been keeping to himself, Ricketts could take his revenge in the Creepy Clown Show - and who doesn't love a Man-Eating Chicken? More people came on board. Barbecue Sam's brought delicious food and teams created spooky drinks, creepy cakes and children's games. We also had a pair of mysterious guests – did you get a black spot?

Thankfully, despite the downpours, all went to plan and we had some wonderful feedback: "It was fantastic seeing Greenmere being used for such a great event." "It's the first time anything has ever taken part on the green in 61 years."

There are so many people to thank: the residents of Greenmere, everyone who set up in the morning and took everything down in the dark, those who organised, rehearsed, performed, baked, made props, created decorations, and especially to John Burdass for giving us sound and lighting and the Gows and the Woolhouses for allowing us to use their power.

I hope this is the beginning of many other events in such a fantastic space, and if you have a quirky sideshow idea you have been hiding away, then please let us know. It could be part of next year's Carnival!

*Helen Sheppard & the Brightwell Players*

## Brightwell cum Sotwell CofE Primary School

The school certainly started the second half of the Autumn Term on an energetic note by holding a 'Healthy Body, Healthy Mind Week'. The aim of the week was not only to remind the children how important it is to take care of themselves both physically and mentally, but also to give them opportunities to experience things they might not normally get a chance to do; experiences which perhaps pushed them outside of their comfort zones and maybe even helped them to find a hidden talent!

We started the week with an archery workshop. Our Reception and Key Stage 1\* children had huge amounts of fun in the playground using bows and suction-based arrows to aim for targets. The Key Stage 1 children were encouraged to use their maths skills to help them keep track of how many points they were scoring. Our Year 3 class were invited up to Wallingford School, where they spent the afternoon in the Science labs being taught about the human digestive system before donning the safety goggles and being allowed to carry out a fantastic experiment which showed them what was in certain types of food. A particular favourite was testing the sugar water, which changed through almost every colour of the rainbow once heated!

On Tuesday, we were so lucky to be able to invite a World Champion BMX rider to come in and work with us. Mike Mullen shared the amazing story behind his journey to get to where he is now, along with a few fancy tricks, including jumping over some of our brave teachers laying on the floor! He then spent the rest of the day running workshops with our oldest children and, by the end of it, had lots of them able to perform their own tricks on the BMX, including standing on one leg on the bicycle frame!

Wednesday was a chance for something a little less energetic and more focused on healthy eating as we welcomed Darren Tinkler from Roots to Food in. Darren ran cooking workshops with our children from Year 2 up to Year 6 and taught them all about nutrition, and how to prepare a delicious Spanish paella from scratch. Of course, there was an opportunity for the children to sample the fruits of their labour at the end of the session. Every single plate was left empty so I think it was a success!

Finally, on Thursday, we had another World Champion come to visit – this time it was a scooter champion! Terry Price inspired us with his story and stunned us with his back flip before taking our Lower Key Stage 2 children off to enjoy an opportunity to learn how to do their own tricks! Meanwhile, the rest of the school were busily involved with a huge mindfulness art project in conjunction with our friends at Wallingford School. Their art department,

along with some Sixth Formers, spent the day with each class contributing to some giant murals, which will eventually be hung up around the school. It was wonderful to see the mixture of age ranges working together and we can't wait to see the final results!

*Sue Potts*

*\*The Early Years Foundation Stage is for ages 3–4. Primary education is divided into Key Stage 1 for ages 5–6 and Key Stage 2 for ages 7–10. Secondary education is divided into Key Stage 3 for ages 11–13 and Key Stage 4 for ages 14–15.*

## Brightwell Preschool

In the past our Autumn term has always been our 'quiet' term, but this year with numbers boosted, we are nearly full to the rafters. This is good news for the future of our preschool and therefore, tremendous news for our families. The Autumn Leaves song has nearly blasted the roof of our little wooden building, with the gusto behind so many little voices this year and the pumpkin cakes were devoured very quickly. The blustery wet weather does not stop the patter of tiny feet splashing in the puddles and squelching in the mud around the village, in fact the ducks are getting a little fat on all of the special preschool duck food after so many visits. The Red Box Gallery is also a favourite place to hang out when you're three or four, it appears, the children just love to shut themselves in and pull faces on the windows (sorry!). Going out and experiencing the seasons at this age is special. Although the children will have experienced the seasons before, the changes are now noted, explored and given life through new vocabulary and ideas; each year will bring a new connection, especially when exploring with preschool friends.

With the weather closing in and Christmas upon the horizon, the children are learning how to be independent to get ready for the colder weather and to sing songs for our Nativity performance. The 'upside-down coat-trick' is working well to get those coats on whilst singing songs about stars, sheep and donkeys. Despite higher-numbers of children, government funding does not cover staffing or running costs so our wonderful committee is working hard to raise funds, with Christmas raffles and wreath making on the cards. They have also organised a working party of parents to carry out general maintenance and gardening works around the preschool this term, which will help ensure our outdoor spaces are safe as can be for our army of adventurers; you will know by now that winter does not stop the climbing, running, rolling and fun the children have outdoors.

*Natasha Hillier*

## Brightwell Toddlers

Our Thursday mornings at toddler group have been busy with lots of fun playtime, crafts and singing for the little ones, and of course a cuppa and cake for the grown ups. We recently enjoyed a Halloween session with dressing up, spooky crafts and a disco.

We feel very lucky that our lovely group is supported by volunteers who help us set up, make hot drinks and close at the end - thank you to all that have stepped in to help keep our group running. If you would be interested in volunteering, we would love to hear from you. As we approach the festive season we'll be looking forward to lots of exciting sessions and we hope to continue welcoming new families and care givers, as well as all of our existing regulars!

We meet at the village hall on Thursday mornings, 9.15-11am. The cost is £2.50 cash / £3 online per family and the group is suitable for children aged 0-5 years. We can be contacted at [brightwelltoddlers@gmail.com](mailto:brightwelltoddlers@gmail.com) or via our Facebook page, [@brightwelltoddlers](https://www.facebook.com/brightwelltoddlers).

*Emily Paton-Smith*

## Brightwell cum Sotwell History Group



In 1979 Chairman Hua, paramount leader of China met children from Brightwell School during his state visit to the UK. I was one of them (circled in the photo). During his visit Chairman Hua toured Sherwood Farm in Mackney and had lunch with a local farming family.

The Brightwell Village History Group is looking to update its photographic collection. We are especially looking for any images of people, events and places from the 1950s to the present day.

If you have any images that you would be happy to be added to the village collection, please email them (along with information about the photo) to [bcshistorygroup@gmail.com](mailto:bcshistorygroup@gmail.com).

*Jason Debney*

## Stewart Village Hall

After a lengthy process of consultation with you, our community, we are ready to submit our planning application for the redevelopment plans for the Village Hall.

The project was initiated because of the findings of a full building survey which highlighted key issues with the roof, gutters and downpipes, rising damp, electrics and the fact that there is no insulation in the building so heating the hall to a comfortable temperature for users is always a challenge. As well as providing an attractive and practical venue the redevelopment will address these key issues.

Two village surveys were carried out, the first to gather information on your views on the hall and its facilities as it is today. The second focussed on what you would like the hall to look like in the future and what facilities would mean the hall could continue to thrive at the heart of the village. We have attended the Spring Fair, Brightfest and the Village Fete to share ideas and gather input and feedback. All of this has been collated and considered when creating the plans we have presented.

As soon as we have the planning application reference, we'll share the link with you so you can see it online and, we hope, register your support for the plans.



This project has a long way to go; once planning permission has been granted we will start to apply for grants and donations and a key part of our bids will be to demonstrate the support from the village. Please do keep an eye out for the information on the planning application and register your support.

Other ways to support the hall are to come along to events and activities; our *What's On* posters show the range of events and activities regularly held in the hall. These posters are also displayed inside and outside of the hall and on the noticeboard at the top of Swan Walk (near the allotments). More information on the activities is on the *Schedule* page of our website [stewartvillagehall.org.uk](http://stewartvillagehall.org.uk).

Thank you - if you have any comments, questions, or feedback, you can use the contact page on the hall website, pop a comment in the mailbox at the rear of the Hall or speak to any Trustee.

To book the hall please visit our website: [stewartvillagehall.org.uk](http://stewartvillagehall.org.uk) or contact Shena at [shenaluck@btinternet.com](mailto:shenaluck@btinternet.com) or on 01491 834543.

*Annette Kilworth*

## Cosy Cafe – 70, 700, 7,000 challenge!

Starting on Monday 8 January there will be a weekly café in the Stewart Room, from 10-11.30pm; the entrance is at the rear of the Village Hall. Drop in for some homemade cake and a hot drink, and catch up with your friends in the warmth. There will also be other items for sale. All proceeds going towards my challenge of raising £7,000 for the Village Hall Project and The National Kidney Foundation. Please contact Shena if you would like to help 'occasionally' in the cafe or make a cake, 'once in a while' - 01491 834543 [shenaluck@btinternet.com](mailto:shenaluck@btinternet.com).

## BcS Environment Group

### Swan Stream and Woodlands etc

The stream and its immediate surrounds have become overgrown rather rapidly, partly due to the weather but also some dominant species and a fertile soil. Up until now we've maintained it on an ad hoc basis so we think it's a good time to put in a longer term management plan in a way that would benefit a mix of wildlife and recreation, especially for children. With the help of advice from a Ranger from the Earth Trust, the idea is to divide the stream into three main sections, ie alongside the allotment, the orchard and the woodland. These would be subdivided so that any maintenance could be phased over a period of time to ensure adequate cover and food would be available to wildlife.

Some of the trees bordering the stream through the woodland are suffering from ash die-back. This is a disease that affects many ash trees and results in them dying and potentially dropping branches or falling down, especially in windy conditions. Unfortunately this means that these will need to be felled or trimmed before too long. The plan would be to replace at least some of them with other trees or shrubs. We are looking to get plans under way in the coming weeks with our band of volunteers.

The Millennium Wood also has trees suffering from die-back and some of these will be removed before the spring. We were fortunate to have a work group arranged by James Davys who spent a day in September clearing dense weeded areas etc.

During the year we constructed and installed an owl box for a tawny owl on the edge of St Agatha's churchyard and we are very pleased that a person from the British Owl Project will be coming to give a talk at the village hall on 15 February 2024. This will start at 6.30pm to allow younger villagers to attend as there will be real owls to see!

### Weather

Total rainfall Sept-Oct recorded at Highlands: 195mm, around 80% above average for both months. Mean daily maximum temperatures for this area were higher than the 1991–2020 average by over 2.5 deg C in September and a little less for October making them both very warm months. River flows and groundwater levels in the normal range.

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

## Wallingford Photographic Club

Wallingford Photographic Club (*wallingfordphoto.club*) meet on Thursdays from 7.30pm at Crowmarsh Pavilion. 7 December: an online session with Paul Mitchell who presents his 'Woodland ways' (via Zoom/Google Meet). 14 Dec: Members' evening at the Pavilion - Bernard Novell on wildflowers and other wildlife he encountered in Western Australia. We break for Christmas /New Year and reconvene on 11 January with another members' evening, '8x10' where eight members present for ten minutes on a topic of their choice. 18 Jan: Tom Way at the Pavilion - big game in Africa and other work. January closes with the third 'no set subject' competition on 25<sup>th</sup> (also at the Pavilion).

*Phil Swarbrick*

# VILLAGE DIARY

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## December

2	Brightwell Art Club Exhibition	VH	10am
3	Winter Words & Music with Robert Seatter	Barn	5pm
5	Village Christmas lunch	VH	12.15pm
5	Red Lion quiz	RL	7pm
6	Playgroup 'Make a Wreath' workshop	Pav	8pm
8	BSR 'When Whales Could Walk' film and Q&A	VH	7.30pm
14	Island Farm Donkey Sanctuary Carol Service		7pm
17	Carol Service at St Agatha's		6pm
17	Red Lion Christmas Draw and live music	RL	
24	Crib Service St Agatha's		4.30pm
24	SCF Carols around the Christmas Tree on The Square (bottom of Church Lane)		5.30pm
24	Midnight Communion at St James'		11.30pm
25	Christmas Family Service St Agatha's		9.30am
30	New Year's Eve Party	RL	

## January

5	BSR Grace Jackson talk (see page 11)	VH	7.30pm
6	Wassail		3pm
8	First weekly Cosy (Stewart Room)	VH	
28	Christingle Service at St Agatha's		4pm
30	Neighbourhood Plan Meeting	VH	7.30pm

## Advance Notice

15 February 2024 Environment Group Owl talk

## Refuse Collection (Food waste each week)

Grey bins	Thursdays 7 & 21 December <b>Saturday 6</b> & Thursday 18 January
Green (& brown) bins	Thursday 14 & <b>Saturday 30</b> December <b>Friday 12</b> & Thursday 25 January

## Village website

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