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Editorial

I am always struck by the number of people who talk about living in the Brightwell bubble – they mean a place where the community looks out for each other, a place where children can flourish. You have to be especially grateful that this is so while elsewhere in the world children are being bombed and shot, killed, maimed, starved of food and shelter, of education and of opportunity. Every time I spy a little crocodile of two by twos marching hand in hand across Kings Meadow I pray that bubble doesn't burst.

One of the features of the village support network is the Brightwell Preschool. Ever since I began editing this magazine I've enjoyed reading the manager's reports of what our preschoolers get up to, and I thought it was time to meet her. See p 5.

It's not often Brightwell makes National News but we managed it recently; our Wassail Day was reported in the Mail Online. Naturally the Mail was more interested in the participation of our resident celebrity ex PM than in the ceremony itself, but what a day it was. Judging by the numbers something like half the village turned up to take part in the event. Thanks to Keith Brooks for his photos (front cover & p 12).

It's traditional to perform a Mummers play as part of the Wassail, so once more the crème de la crème of Brightwell's exceptional artistic talent was on display, see p 13. Part farce, part pantomime, beyond the jokes the Mummers play had a serious theme: the dangers of climate change. If you think that our weather is getting hotter and wetter, that's because it is. The stats do not lie. See Steve Capel-Davies's weather report p 7. To promote the upcoming visit to the Village Hall from the British Owl project (live Owls included) Steve has also provided us with chapter and verse on the five species of owls native to the UK, some of which can be seen and heard locally.

In a previous life I had a husband who was as useless at fixing things about the house as I am, but all hell broke loose if I paid someone to come in and do the job. I could never understand why he wouldn't be delighted but apparently it was a blow to his ego. I discovered it's quite a common cause of friction between couples. So I am thrilled to tell you that an organisation exists in Oxfordshire that will spare you all this drama. It enables members to exchange skills, goods and services without using money, a bit like an organised barter system. I bake you a cake – you fix my shelf, I give you a lift to Didcot station - you clean out my gutters, that sort of thing. Find out all about it on p 17. And be glad! Happy not so New Year!

Alison Leigh

Parish Council News

Neighbourhood Plan Meeting

There will be a meeting at the Village Hall to give villagers an update about the new Neighbourhood Plan and to answer any questions or queries that they might have. **Tuesday 30 January 2024 - 7pm**

Chair of Parish Council

Our hardworking Chair Sue Robson has now stood down and we are extremely grateful for her kind, efficient and wise leadership over the years. We are fortunate that she is willing to stay as a member of the Parish Council to offer us the benefit of all her experience.

Going forward, the Committee has decided to have a rotating system of leadership. Each councillor will serve as chair for six months. Any correspondence to the Chair should be sent to our Clerk – clerk@brightwellcumshotwellpc.co.uk. Office hours - Monday and Tuesday: 8.30-12.00, Wednesday: 8.30-11.30. Telephone: 01491 826968.

Any urgent matters can be put on the Community Facebook page as several of our councillors check this regularly and can respond accordingly.

James Davys.

Snip and Scoop Fortnight: 1 - 14 February

The Parish Council is asking villagers to help manage our hedgerows and verges. During the first couple of weeks in February (before the birds start nesting) we want householders to check whether their hedges need a trim, particularly where they are starting to grow into any roads or across the lanes at the back of your garden. Vegetation doesn't need to be cut back too far; just enough so that it will not impede pedestrians, cyclists or cars throughout the summer. Please also remove any leaf litter / mud / grass that may have accumulated on the edge of the roads near your house reducing the width of the lane. If everyone snips and scoops a little bit, it will make a huge difference and save the parish council from having to hire a contractor to do the work! If you need any advice, please email the clerk and remember to take appropriate precautions when working alongside the highway.

Jason Debney

Village Stores and Post Office

Many of you will have watched the ITV drama highlighting the Post Office scandal. The Management Committee were aware of much of what was happening in 2015/16 when the Community Shop was offered the POL contract, following the announcement that Mike Powell (Postmaster) was retiring from the outreach post office he provided in the Stewart Room of the Village Hall.

Celia Collett (Chair Management committee) and Gina Coupar (Vice Chair) were charged with negotiating the contract with the Post Office. This took over nine months of negotiations. Celia's experience working in the banking industry, running a small business and District and Parish Councillor for many years together with Gina's experience as a local Magistrate and a Head of Service at SODC helped to ensure that the shop would not be bullied into something which was not of benefit to the community.

As part of the agreement a named Postmaster/Postmistress had to be appointed. Celia agreed to take on the role of Postmistress. As a community business this role is voluntary with no personal remuneration, any post office commission paid supports the Community Shop. Despite this fact the Post Office tried to insist that Celia's name was on the contract. However, Celia and Gina held out that the contract must be in the name of the Community Shop. Through dogmatic determination they won this point, together with negotiating other conditions that the Post Office was trying to impose at the time, such as opening hours etc.

Celia and the Post Office team continue to give this service to the village and the wider community despite the difficulties with having to work with the failed Horizon system and the privatised Royal Mail which is allowed by Post Office Ltd/the Government to impose both low commission and penalties. Across the UK the Post Office rely on the loyalty from both paid and unpaid Postmaster's and Postmistress's commitment to provide these services to their communities. This commitment is continuously being stretched. Hopefully it will eventually be sorted out and they can be credited for the service they give. Throughout the time we have had the P.O. in the shop, nearly 8 years, we have been promised a new IT system. This is now meant to be happening by the end of the year. We continue to work together and keep positive whilst trying to ensure we can keep both the shop and Post Office as viable services.

Please remember, to preserve these services we need new volunteers to join the team.

The Management Committee

Meet Natasha Hillier

Natasha Hillier is the manager of Brightwell Preschool. If you follow her regular reports in *The Villager* you won't be surprised to learn that she loves her job because her enthusiasm for it and enjoyment of it leaps out from the page.



“It’s my passion to help children feel happy and confident”, she says. “Working with young children is a delight. Every day is different. They live in the moment”.

As so often in life it was happenstance that brought her to the job. She studied Illustration at Brighton University, then worked in publishing .17 years ago she and her husband moved to Brightwell and a year later she stopped work to have children. Both children attended Brightwell preschool and when the youngest was 3 she started

working there, qualifying as an early learning teacher along the way.

The main focus of the preschool, she tells me, is to support children’s social and emotional development. And to give support to their families and to give the children security and a sense of community.

“We want the children to be happy and to feel comfortable. To do that we emphasize behaviour expectations, like being kind and sharing, but preschool children are still learning how to control their emotions so we have to help them with that”.

They operate as an extended family, teaching them about taking turns, how to communicate with other children, how to stop and think before doing or saying something and how to know when to ask for help. Crucially they operate a routine. “The routine is really important; it helps children feel settled and grounded and secure”.

Taking care of nature and the environment is another important focus. They go out and about at least 3 times a week, rolling down hills, splashing, getting wet and muddy, experiencing the wind, picking blackberries, slipping on the ice, feeding the ducks. They go to the orchard and the allotments and sometimes to the shop to get a snack.

“All these things help children feel they belong. Sometimes they experience these things for the first time with us and doing it without family gives them a

real sense of ownership. It’s really good for them to feel confident in their own community”.

This focus on helping children understand their community, and their place in it is perhaps a reaction to her own rather chaotic upbringing. Natasha was born in Kent, but spent her early years in Nigeria; her Dad was a water engineer there. They came back to UK to go to school but her parents split up and her Dad stayed there. All her summer holidays until she was 15 were spent exploring and experiencing Africa, then Thailand and the Philippines when her Dad moved on. Meanwhile her mother met and married her step dad when she was about 7. Some years later they split up. I wondered if she had been emotionally scarred by all this instability. Natasha is clearly a glass half full person: She just sees the positives.

“It helps you build resilience, helps you have an open mind and understand how everyone can be different”.

Nevertheless stability and a sense of community is what she wants for her family as well as the preschoolers in her care, and that was why she chose to live in Brightwell. Now 46, she is married to the man she met aged 17. They have two teenage boys and a dog.

“I love living here, and I love that my children have the stability that I didn’t have. 17 years is the longest I’ve lived anywhere”. She loves that they can walk out into the countryside from their front door in Greenmere, and that it is safe for children to go out and explore unsupervised.

Unfortunately, preschools like theirs are not so stable. “To be honest we are in dire straits financially”. The preschool is a charity so they can’t charge fees and they rely on voluntary contributions and fundraising. Funding from the South Oxfordshire district council is limited to approximately £5 pounds an hour for up to 15 hours per child, but they have to ask for top ups because it is not nearly enough. Utility costs have gone through the roof, and staff wages have risen along with the rise in the National living wage.

Clearly Natasha and her colleagues they are not in this for the money, but she regrets that their work is undervalued and would like there to be more recognition of the value of the early learning curriculum which emphasises play rather than the top down structured regimented approach once you hit school. “I just feel that children deserve the best start in life and we can have so much influence and give so much support to families to help children at that young age while their brains are still developing.”

BcS Environment Group

Weather

The rainfall recorded at Highlands Farm was 144.2mm and 88.0mm respectively for November and December with a total for 2023 of 898mm. This is the highest since records started at the farm in 1998, the next highest being 824mm in 2000. This will probably come as no surprise given the recent floods and very high groundwater levels and represents approaching 50% more than an average year. The Thames floods are higher locally than the ones of 2014 and 2003 and indeed are only topped by the 1947 levels in the last 130 years.

Mean daily maximum temperatures for the UK as a whole were higher than the 1991 – 2020 average by 0.83 deg C in the year which makes it the second warmest since 1884 behind 2022.

Owls

As we have a talk coming up on owls on 15 February it seems a good time to give a bit of background about them.

There are five species of owl native to the UK: barn, tawny, long-eared, short eared and little, although the last was introduced in the 19th century. Rarities include the snowy and eagle owls but, although the snowy is a rare visitor the eagle owl is likely to be the result of a release.

All the owls are night hunters although they can sometimes be seen in the day. They are particularly well adapted for night hunting with large eyes set in a flat round face. They have the ability to turn their heads through 270 degrees due to specially adapted neck structure with up to 25 vertebrae compared with 7 in most mammals. Owls have acute hearing with their ears slightly out of alignment which allows them to better fix the direction of their prey.

Barn owls are probably the most recognisable with a wingspan of 80–95cm, a white face and light brown feathers. They are clearly visible at dawn and dusk as they quarter a field looking for mice or voles etc. They have been seen in the Haycroft behind Brightwell Street during this last year.

Tawny owls, with a wingspan of up to 1 metre, are the most common and prefer wooded areas to hunt for small mammals, bats and earthworms. They are the owl most associated with the twit–twoo call which is the female (twit) followed by the male responding (twoo). It is thought that there are many subtle variations which allows communication relating to size and dominance.

Short eared owls, again with a wingspan of around 1 metre, and having mottled brown bodies breed in Scotland and Northern England and inhabit coastal and wetland areas. Long eared owls are named after the tufts on their head which are not ears but appear to be used for communication and also camouflage. It is most commonly seen around the coasts and when in roosts of 20 or more birds. Little owls have a mottled cream coat and yellow eyes and hunt both in day and night searching for invertebrates. They can be seen around farmland and rural villages often perched on fence posts.

Owls feature in our folklore with their night-time presence frequently being associated with ill omens although in recent centuries they have become forces for good and seen as wise with positive influences – especially in ‘Wind in the Willows’ and ‘Harry Potter’.

Please don’t forget 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!

Steve Capel-Davies, BcS Environment Group

WI News

After rounding off 2023 with an excellent meal and some fun with boogie bingo at the Red Lion, for our first meeting of the year, 9 January, we invited Jordon Morris from the Abingdon Distillery, to talk about their three handcrafted products, London Dry Gin, Spiced Rum and Chocolate Rum. Providing small taster samples, he challenged us to identify the many different botanical ingredients. None of us managed to identify all 7 of them for the spiced rum but we had great fun trying and comparing the very different flavors.

January is also the time for WI members to start the process of voting for this year’s national resolution for the annual campaign. The four topics open for voting this year are: Dental Health Matters, Health Impacts of poor housing conditions, Say ‘no’ to advertising gambling and Improving outcomes for women in the criminal justice system. Each branch member’s vote will be collated and passed on to be added to the national vote. A final decision will then be announced later in the year.

The New Year has brought big changes for WI members. The sale of Denman College has ensured that the core principle of empowering women through ongoing learning will be maintained by providing ‘Free Online Learning’ for all its members. The new **Online Learning Hub** will have opened by the end of January.

Upcoming events include joining other branches on a trip to see 'Oliver' at the New Theatre in Oxford on **Thursday 1 February** and on **Tuesday 13 February** we are having a talk by Sandrine Arnould on "how the fashion houses of Chanel, Dior and YSL influenced women's fashion in France".

For any women thinking to join the WI, we are offering three initial free meetings. Our meetings are held **every second Tuesday, 7.30pm in the Village Hall.**

Karin Matthews

Save the children

The Save the Children Christmas Trees and Christmas Eve around the tree in the Square has become a much-loved tradition in our village; for many years it has brought joy and happiness to both young and old alike. This year, thanks to our sponsors and all our supporters, we raised £1223.06p from the bucket collection, the Just-Giving page and donations over the Christmas period. Also, our youngest volunteers Ffion & Seren Jenkins made Christmas decorations and gifts and held a stall on King's Meadow after school. They raised £70. What little stars they are! All this money will greatly assist the work of Save the Children in the UK and around the world.

The young people in the village are part of the next generation that give us faith that there is the possibility of a fairer world where people's lives matter more than profit and power, making it possible for so many children to have a better future than what is being offered them at the moment. However, unless the adults act and work together on the problems that face the world, we are going to make it hard for them to achieve their goals.

Date for your diary – 1 June Save the Children Country Fare and Dog Show on the Recreation Ground; further details in the next edition of *The Villager*.

Celia & the Save the Children Team

Brightwell Toddlers

As we go into a new year at toddler group it has been nice to look back and reflect on how much we've enjoyed our Thursday mornings together. The group isn't just a time for the little ones to play, it's a chance for parents and caregivers to connect, make friends and support one another. The group has such a strong sense of community with everybody working together to get toys set up, teas and coffees made and songs sung! If you haven't had a

chance to bring your little one/s, please do come along, we would love to welcome any new faces to our very special and welcoming group.

We would also like to say a huge thank you to Ellie who has been a key part of running toddlers for the past year and will now be stepping back. Thank you so much Ellie!

Toddlers runs every Thursday morning during term time 09.15-11am and is suitable for children aged 0-5. The cost is £2.50 cash or £3 online per session. We can be contacted at brightwelltoddlers@gmail.com or via our Facebook page @*brightwelltoddlers*.

Emily Paton Smith

Brightwell Preschool

I am surprised that producers from the West End haven't knocked on our door after the success of the children's Nativity live performance in December; it was a real triumph: Mary and Joseph found somewhere to stay, the angels found the shepherds, the kings followed the star to the correct location and the donkey was on best behaviour. December was a hustle and bustle of Christmas fun thanks to our amazing staff team and wonderful families. A huge thank you must go out to Root One for donating our tree again this year; the decorations looked like they had been blown on by a strong wind from Lapland, but the children did really enjoy hanging up the baubles and draping the tinsel onto it themselves.

The little ones were fighting off a lot of viruses before the end of term, but this did not stop them decorating stockings, making hot-chocolate reindeer, creating winter-themed cards, dressing up in Christmas headbands and antlers, watching the school Nativity performance, making tree decorations in Forest School, singing many many songs and finally enjoying a Christmas dinner with their families in preschool.

Separating from loved ones after a break from preschool can be difficult. It makes all the difference to have a strong bond with the adults who will be looking after them, which our children are lucky enough to have. When we all return, it is like a family reunion where we all arrive back to our preschool family: lots of smiles and sharing of stories. We will continue celebrating families by sharing recipes and baking favourite ideas from home; after all families are at the heart of all we do. Do think of us tucking-in to some delicious bakes as you wander past, if you're lucky you might get a whiff of something tasty.

Natasha Hillier, Manager

The Vicar writes

With Easter coming early this year, Lent will begin in mid-February, and all associated dates will also seem early, for example, Ash Wednesday falling on 14 Feb, Mothering Sunday will be on 10 March, our Palm Sunday Procession with the donkey on 24 March which begins Holy Week and the main event, Easter Sunday on 31 March. During Lent we will be following the Bishop of Oxford 'Come & See' sermon series which is about God's Love as revealed through the Ten Commandments, so please do come and see for yourself.

We will celebrate Pentecost this year with a very special service of Confirmation of Adults and Teenagers on Sunday 19 May. We are delighted that Bishop Gavin of Dorchester will be leading our 9.30am service to confirm adults and teenagers from our Wallingford team of churches, so if you would like this to be you, please let me know! Ahead of the service there will be a series of preparation sessions so that candidates can explore what this means for them, including a youth group especially for teenagers. This group may continue afterwards if there is sufficient demand and volunteer helpers.

In a nutshell, Confirmation celebrates the presence of the Holy Spirit within us and in many ways is a continuation of what has begun at our baptism, whether that took place when we were babies or later in life. At baptism we all become part of Christ's church, but as that happens when we are very young, others, of course, speak on our behalf. So having the opportunity to speak for ourselves - to literally 'confirm' our faith when we are old enough to understand the journey we are making - is at the heart of Confirmation today.

If you are interested in finding out more, do please contact me, Rev Kev (teamvicar@wallingfordcofe.org.uk) as soon as possible.

Rev Kev

P.S. Church members are welcome to attend the licensing service for our new Team Rector, Revd Sarah Nesbitt, on Wednesday 6 March at St Mary-le-More by the Bishop of Dorchester.

Village Lunch Club

Our next lunch will be on Tuesday 12 March at 12.15pm in the Village Hall, £5. If you have not already booked and would like to attend, please contact Eastlyn Horsfield, 01491 832041 or Sue Collett, 01491 837617. The lunch dates for 2024 are: 12 March, 4 June (not 14 as on card), 10 September and 3 December.

Eastlyn Horsfield

Wassail 2024

More than 500 villagers joined the annual Wassail on Saturday 6 January. This year it was Mackney's turn to be wassailed, the flooding from Storm Henk causing a few logistical problems! Wassailers met at Fieldside, one of the only dry places in the hamlet and were entertained by several Morris dances from Armaleggan, before the first orchard was wassailed. Following more dances from Armaleggan and Julie Bellyfire, the group made their way into Small's House Barn for the annual Mummer's Play. Although based on the traditional Mummers format, the play is specially written each year following a current theme, usually introducing a potential threat to the fruit crop.

Wassailing brings people together as they process between orchards with the purpose to wake the fruit trees up following Mid Winter. This year, the Wassail also gave a warning to Old Jack Frost whose visits to the village in May (during the blossoming time) often devastates our apple crops. Extra noise was made to warn Jack Frost that he should stay away this year or else!

After the Sheard's orchard was wassailed and the King and Queen were crowned, the group made their way up Mackney Lane to the pub. A spectacular fireworks display entertained everyone followed by a final volley from the guns that this year included the Thames Valley Muzzle Loaders, who added extra noise and powder to the Wassail. To finish the procession, Armaleggan and the Bellyfire dancers performed their annual fire dances, before everyone made their way into a heaving Red Lion. Wassail songs were sung and music played by folk group Cornucopia and the village's own Tubthumpers. All in all, a wonderful day.

The potential date of the Wassail 2025 is Saturday 4 January.

Jason Debney



Mummers Play

Mummers plays are quite traditional, both in their history and their format. They are local plays, normally performed in rhyme and by local amateurs and have been since the Middle Ages. In format there is normally a hero (often St. George) who engages with a villain, who the hero eventually defeats, only after being wounded and then revived by a doctor character. The Brightwell Mummers originally had traditional villains, but we've developed plays looking at contemporary 'villains', such as Putin, Covid and Trump.

The Brightwell Mummers have been performing now for many years. Originally galvanised by Jason Debney, we started in the Community Orchard in 2016, we being Helen Baines, Robert Seatter, Sue Robson, Bob Devey and me, with Jim Sanger as the doctor. Over time we've been joined by Clare Thomson, Micky Moore, Dariel Burdass, William Watkin, Roy Lines, Ben Manning and David Dugan. This year was our most ambitious with Ann Linton, Bea Marshall, Peter Norfolk (again) and Cat Woolhouse joining the show and a much longer script.

This year, the Villain was Climate Change, and given the downpours that occurred during rehearsals, was aptly chosen. As normal, we also break out into song pre-recorded and wonderfully performed by Sally Jackson, Maddie Lowe and John Linton. All of it is only possible through Chris Baines' exceptional direction and Lisa de Jong's stage management and of course, John Burdass' technical genius. *

We were very fortunate this year that Dani Brown allowed us to use Small's Barn for our performance which then enable us to house our largest audience to date. Many thanks to Dani. We hope our audience enjoyed it as much as we did performing it.

We have now been recognised by far-flung locations, such as Wallingford, who engaged us to perform at last year's inaugural Curfew Bell celebrations and again this year, scheduled for 6 July.

Andy Lewis

**Andy Lewis is far too modest to say so, but none of this would be possible without his hilarious scripts. This year the gags, the songs, the dancing and general slap stick gave the director and the performers enormous scope to display their prodigious comic talents. ED*

Swan Allotments

Spring is coming and with it thoughts turn to the growing season. Do you like growing and eating your own fruit and vegetables? Would you like an allotment? If you are interested, please let us know, we can show you what is available or put you on the waiting list. Email us on collett.c.2@gmail.com.

Celia and Clive

Community Association

New Year Greetings to you all from the Community Association!

We are pleased to report that over 40 hampers were delivered to residents in the village before Christmas. We are very grateful to Celia and her team at the Village Stores for their help in sourcing and preparing them and to Tim and Hillary who together with the Brightwell Scout Groups delivered them in time for the festive season. We would also like to thank the Fairthorne Trust for their generous financial support in providing these gifts.

Plans for 2024

Village Quiz – 7.30pm on 2 March in the Village Hall

Pit your wits or scratch your heads to challenge for the trophy! This is a popular, fun event and we look forward to welcoming you back. Why not get together with a group of 6-8 friends or family. Tickets are limited and we recommend early booking. If you are interested, please contact Tom our Treasurer at tarogerson@aol.co.uk or tacrogerson@gmail.com for an application form by 17 February. Tickets are £10 per person which includes a chilli supper - please bring your own drinks, crockery and cutlery.

Village Fete – 2pm on 6 July at Sotwell House

We are grateful to David and Jenny Dobbin once again for giving us permission to hold the Village Fete in their beautiful garden this year. So please put a save the date in your diaries.

Safari Supper – 7pm on 18 May

We plan to hold another Safari Supper again this year, the tickets will cost £20 each. For full details please contact Lynn Burrridge - lynnburrridge@gmail.com

James Davys

(And stand by for news of a jumble sale later in the year in the Pavilion).

St Agatha's Church Bells

As I write this, we have just completed a good number of rings on our bells over the festive period. In particular, we 'rang out the old' and 'rang in the new', either side of midnight of the new year. Unfortunately, our numbers were limited due to the dreaded covid and one member convalescing. Nevertheless, having re-established this tradition, we'll be aiming to maintain it in future.

Bellringing marks many major life events. And this year, bellringers all over the world are being encouraged to ring out for peace. On 6 June, at 6.30pm local time, to make a joyful noise together in a call for peace. All being well, we'll be doing so here at St Agatha's. Listen out for us.

As ever, if anyone would like to find out more about this ancient craft, please do contact me on 07979 863649 or johnedowling@hotmail.com, or Rev Kev.

John Dowling, Tower Captain

Stewart Village Hall

The application for the redevelopment of the Village Hall, which includes the feedback from the parish council, village shop, village surveys and people attending meetings and events, is now online as Planning Application P23/S4152/FUL. We reached out to our hall users, supporters and the village community asking them to support the application and now must wait for the decision, due in February.

When we started off on this journey, we had 3 options, to do nothing and eventually the Hall would not be fit for purpose and would close. To fix what we have (roof, electrics, damp etc), at considerable cost, but with no improvement in layout, facilities or storage. Or, go for a project to redevelop, increase capacity, improve the flow within the building and give a flexible multi-purpose venue, securing the hall for our community for many years to come. The feedback we received was that the hall was an important village asset, at the heart of the community and there was a desire to save and improve it – which brings us to where we are now.

Our focus now moves to how we can raise funds to achieve this ambitious plan. We have a group of people helping the Trustees, looking at different aspects, researching grants and trusts and planning a fundraising campaign but more help would still be appreciated to move this forward. Any fundraising, administration or project management skills would be great, but what we most

need is drive and enthusiasm for the project. If you can help then please do get in touch, we would love to hear from you.

In the meantime, we must continue to maintain the hall for current and prospective hirers and we have a list of maintenance tasks including some decorative work and repairs. If you can help with this, please let Shena know. 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 or contact Shena at shenaluck@btinternet.com or on 01491 834543.

Annette Kilworth

Brightwell Supporting Refugees

Following its hugely popular Bistro Evening in 2022, Brightwell Supporting Refugees is hosting another musical extravaganza:

Eats and Beats – Food, wine and music from five continents

With Martin Dix and his ensemble providing the music and Caroline Oakley in charge of the food, this is an evening not to be missed.

The venue is the Village Hall, 7 for 7.30pm on **Friday 8 March 2024**. Tickets will be available from the Village Stores from 1 February, priced at just £40 per head to include a glass of fizz. Wine and drinks available from the bar. Places are limited so get your ticket soon.

Our **AGM** will be held on **Wednesday 27 March** at 7.30pm in the Church Room, St Agatha's. All supporters are welcome. Come and hear about the success of our charity in the past year and future plans.

Helen Connor and Ann Linton, co-chairs of the Trustees

Invasion of Ukraine: Voices from the Home Front

Short stories (and some music) in English, based on real experiences of Ukrainians who came to the UK since the start of the war in February 2022, and the volunteers who support them. 5-6.30pm **Sunday 25 February** at the Stewart Village Hall, entry free but donations welcomed. Contact Justin Robinson on rybalka@btinternet.com to reserve your place.

South Oxfordshire Local Exchange and Trading Scheme

Do you need a hand with some DIY or gardening, or someone to water your plants when you're on holiday, or to feed your cat, or a lift to the airport, or a lift to hospital, or ironing, or a special cake for a birthday or anniversary?

LETS is a friendly group based in Wallingford, Cholsey, Henley, Benson and surrounding areas, which enables members to exchange skills, goods and services without using money and is a bit like an organised barter system. It is a very helpful way of borrowing something you don't have – such as an electric drill, a tyre pump, a fish kettle or jam-making pan, a ladder, a canoe, a lawn-mower, a leaf-blower, china for a party; the list is endless.

It is a very simple system, and has been working in the South Oxfordshire area for over 20 years. Members trade skills, goods and services and pay using our virtual currency, called Castles. They earn Castles when they provide help and pay Castles when they receive help.

We are a part of a national organisation of community-based mutual help networks. A voluntary, non-profit-making group, run and managed by the members and we also organise social events, outings and an annual holiday.

Why not join us? For more information *email info@southoxfordshire-lets.org.uk*, or telephone Simon on: 07758 550525.

Maureen Buch

Citizens Advice – Volunteers wanted

Are you looking for a new challenge, and want to contribute something to your community? Oxfordshire South and Vale Citizens Advice is looking for volunteer advisers, IT specialists and others to work in our friendly offices in Abingdon, Didcot, Henley or Thame.

Citizens Advice gives people the knowledge and confidence they need to find their way forward - whoever they are and whatever their problem. In a typical year our 127 volunteers support over 9,000 people. We are currently looking for:

Advisers: After comprehensive training you will be giving advice to clients in person or via the telephone or webchat. We advise on a broad range of topics including debt management, benefits, employment, housing and relationship issues. You will need good IT skills and a desire to help people in your community. A new adviser training course begins in Feb 2024, so apply now!

IT specialists to help to maintain our IT systems and support the service. Help staff and volunteers with day-to-day IT issues, for example with trouble logging on, connecting to Wi-Fi and locating files. We also would welcome support to maintain our local Citizens Advice website.

Administration, fund raising, communications and human resources volunteers.

We would like you to be available for two sessions per week if possible, either mornings or afternoons or for a whole day. We offer a rewarding, flexible and supportive working environment. You'll also learn new skills and meet new people in the course of your volunteering

To apply, please follow this link:

<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/local/oxfordshire-south-vale/volunteer/>

Or, if you would like to discuss these volunteering roles, please email: *recruitment@osavcab.org.uk* and one of our team will contact you.

Darius Halpern

Wallingford Photographic Club

The Club (*wallingfordphoto.club*) resumes with talks, presentations, competitions and practical sessions for 2024 on Thursdays from 7.30pm at Crowmarsh Pavilion. Some sessions are online, when we make the most of inviting speakers from far away. A packed February programme starts with 'You are the judge' session on 1st, where members critique and score selected images. On 8th Chris Palmer describes his approach to 'The prints & the paper', followed by a club competition 'No Set Subject 4' on 15th, a members' evening on 22nd (topic TBC) and an inter-club competition with Abingdon Camera Club on 29th. In March there are 3 meetings: 7th Ric Gillams presents his 'self-drive safari' in Namibia'; 14th our annual Portfolio and Travel competition when members display any 4 images from their travels, and on 21st Tony North presents 'The art of macro' via Google Meet. We hope to see you in person or online.

Phil Swarbrick

Wallingford and District Art club

AGM at Centre 70 from 7.30pm-9.30pm on Tuesday 20 February. Plus leading local artist and lecturer, Anthony Wilder, will give a talk on Wallingford's Victorian artist dynasties, together with illustrations of their work. The meeting is free for club members, £5 for visitors at *www.wallingfordartclub.org.uk* or email *admin@wallingfordartclub.org.uk*

Nicola Webb

Cholsey Repair Café

The Repair Café opens its doors on the third Saturday of odd-numbered months, meaning that the next session will be on **Saturday 16 March**. Doors are open from **11-13.45**. As usual, the volunteer fixers can tackle bicycles, electrical (and sometimes electronic) items, sharpening of tools, textile repairs, gluing, soldering and a good deal more. If a repair cannot be made, further advice is available. All work is free of charge although a donation towards operating costs is appreciated.

More information, including contact details, can be found at www.cholseyrepaircafe.com.

Ian Wheeler

Treehouse School 5k or 10k Family Run

Are you looking for a challenge for 2024? Train for the Treehouse School 5k or 10k run, set in and around the village of Cholsey, Oxfordshire – Sunday 24 March 2024. The course is almost entirely off-road. The full 5k and 10k routes are shown on the website. We use chip-timing, wooden medals and offer to plant a tree or to give a t-shirt to all pre-registered runners. For more details or to book your place, or if you would like to volunteer, visit <https://treehouse10k.org.uk/>.

Jo Ryman

Wallingford Methodist Church

There will be flipping good fun at the annual big book sale and pancake event at Wallingford Methodist Church on Saturday 10 February from 10am-1pm. If you have books to donate, please contact Nicky Lidstone on 01491 836649. On Saturday 16 March TV antiques expert Jonty Hearnden will be hosting a ‘What is it worth?’ evening at the church, from 7pm. Tickets, including supper, are £10. For further details, including what you can bring along for valuation, go to wallingfordmethodistchurch.org.uk, or email wmleadership@outlook.com.

Nicola Lidstone

Two years ago, 24 February 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine. Soon after, the UK opened its doors to families fleeing the bombs and the missiles. Brightwell took in 13 families. Asylum seekers from other war-torn countries around the world haven't been so universally welcomed. Yet back in World War Two accepting troops and refugees into ordinary homes was common practice as Brightwell resident Olive Sutcliffe recalls. Olive grew up in Bradford, Yorks.

August 1940 – Recollections

Troops were being recruited and trained countrywide and I can still picture the very upright Billeting Officer with his clipboard who arrived one day to march my mother round our rented but quite large-roomed house, counting how many single beds could be squeezed into any of the ‘spare’ spacious rooms. Then twelve iron bedsteads with bedding and towels arrived, swiftly followed by twelve young RAF recruits. If you had the space, there was no choice, you had to comply. There was a war on!

Fortunately, the powers-that-be must have realised that this was far too many for one household and the numbers were dropped to eight. The RAF dealt with their laundry and mum had an aunt who came weekly to help with cleaning. No mod-cons like vacuum cleaners back then. So, with the aid of the extra ration books, mum provided ‘the boys’ as she called them with breakfasts and a meal in the early evening and there must have been some kind of financial provision as well. Over time, they morphed into ‘her boys’. But think about it. In our big kitchen the black-leaded open fireplace with its oven and back boiler heated all the hot water and was augmented by a small early gas oven in the scullery where there was a deep stone sink for washing up. Heaven only knows how she managed to do it all! But she often said afterwards that they were some of the happiest days of her life. There were many letters from grateful mothers thanking mum for looking after their young sons. I remember a slightly damp cardboard box arriving in the post containing Devon violets as a ‘thank you’.

Then the RAF were moved on and were replaced by six young women in the ATS – Auxiliary Territorial Service. One of them had been called-up from her Gaelic-speaking father's croft on Skye, and was struggling to learn English. I was delighted with the arrival of the ‘girls’ as I could sometimes sneak into their sitting room when my mum wasn't looking and they would let me watch their Friday night beauty routines – nails, face-masks, hair-do's etc. I was enthralled! Other evenings were devoted to buttons and shoe polishing. When the ATS also left it wasn't long before a lesson at my primary school was interrupted by the news that bombed-out refugees from London had arrived at Bradford Exchange Station and if any of us thought that our parents

might be able to take someone in, we were to go home and pass on the message straight away. So, you can guess, can't you? I ran home. When I returned again after school, a lady with three children had been settled into a couple of rooms and made welcome! Mum had come up trumps again – bless her! They were only with us for a few months before they were able to return to London but they were lovely.

In 1947 the war might have been over – but we weren't done with helping out. We took in four Polish Army Captains who would have been executed by the Russians had they stayed in Poland. Captains Jan Czsternastek, Tadeus Javorski, and Captains Pietrutski and Pashka – whose first names I can't recall – were obviously gentlemen of some standing. I recall my mother being very impressed as they came smartly to attention with a click of the heels and slight bow of the head when greeting anyone. Not to mention kissing the back of her hand! But they weren't above getting stuck into hard work and found jobs in the mills. They paid rent but were self-sufficient with small gas rings in their rooms. That old house still had gas, which had been used for lighting pre-electricity, piped to every room.

When my mother and I left that house in 1951 after my father's death, Pietrutski took over the tenancy but our friendships carried on. Tadeus and his wife were guests at my wedding in 1957.

Olive Sutcliffe

News from David Johnston MP

David Johnston advises that he has been in contact with the Environment Agency about the recent flooding across the constituency and our flood defences. He will be also be meeting with the Council about the measures they can take to prevent flooding. Please email him if you have anything that you would like him to raise with them. Government support is available to help people recover from flooding. This support will be provided through local councils who will announce further details on eligibility and how to apply.

Constituents are requested to share our experiences and thoughts about the issues on our roads by completing the Local Roads Survey currently on his website at www.david-johnston.org.uk/RoadsSurvey. The more responses the better the data to push for change.

From now until 31 March, working parents can get an HMRC code that will entitle them from this April to the first 15 free hours of childcare for their 2-year-olds. Visit www.childcarechoices.gov.uk for more information.

david.johnston.mp@parliament.uk

What's on at the Earth Trust?

For one weekend only, 17/18 Feb, **an Archaeology Festival of Discovery** will bring together the archaeologists and experts behind the recent digs at Earth Trust Centre, to share their fascinating discoveries in a series of specialist talks and unique hands-on workshops. The team from DigVentures unearthed a previously unknown Roman villa and a vast Iron Age settlement at the foot of the Wittenham Clumps. From the contents of a prehistoric pantry to the arrival of the first pet dogs in Britain, the results have provided a glimpse into these ancient lives.

See artefacts from the dig up close, hear first-hand from the scientists about what they can reveal, and learn how techniques like ancient DNA, isotopes, and examination of clues etched into bones can illuminate the long-lost details of daily life. See earthtrust.org.uk/events/archaeology-festival-of-discovery/ for more information or to book places for the talks and workshops.

For information on foraging workshops, a stargazing event with Newbury Astronomical Society (Tuesday 13 February) and various workshops for children over half-term (19-22 February), see earthtrust.org.uk/whats-on/.

Birthday parties

Why not celebrate your child's birthday with an Earth Trust Adventure Birthday party? Parties include two hours of tailored activities and eco friendly spaces to enjoy whatever the weather. Our barns are available year round for all kinds of celebrations – email us to find out more about celebrating a wedding, anniversary, birthday or any other special occasion. The barns are equipped with a PA system, projector and large screen, tables and chairs and a food prep kitchen.

Hire a desk

Looking for desk space? Our Innovation Hub offers low cost rental by the day or month with all the facilities you need and an inspiring setting. Get in touch to arrange a look around or to book. All hires support the work of the Trust championing access to green spaces for all. Get in touch via our webpage.

Colin Shone

Can you help distribute *The Villager*?

The Sotwell *Villager* Distribution Manager (Adrian Wood), is looking for a deputy to bundle and distribute the magazine when Adrian is unable to do so. It's two to three hours work, once or twice a year. Please contact Tony Guntrip on 07754 690264 if you can help. Thank you.

Its not just Santa that visits at Christmas!

Every year on Boxing Day, Blue Cross ponies Bubbles, Treacle and Candy take a trip around the village, collecting donations for the horse unit of the Blue Cross in Burford www.bluecross.org.uk/oxfordshire-burford-rehoming-centre. This year we raised a total of

£265 for the horse unit, which will be put to good use helping them to rehabilitate rescued horses and ponies. The three ponies are rescues themselves - Candy and Treacle

passed through the RSPCA before arriving at the Blue Cross centre. Bubbles was from a stud that closed

down, and came into Blue Cross care with 36 other miniature Shetlands, all of whom found homes. Thank you to everyone who supported us on our annual venture. Your donations are gratefully received.



Joanna Robins

What's on at the Corn Exchange

Regular **cinema** performances normally start at 7:30pm, subtitled on Wed/Sat at 2:30pm, check the website (www.cornexchange.org.uk) for updates. Tickets £10 for adults and £5 for under 15s unless otherwise stated.

3-4 February	Maestro	5-7 February	One Life
9-12 February	Corn Exchange Archive Evening		
19-20 February	Anatomy of Fall	21/23 February	Wonka
21/24 Feb	Peppa Pigs' Cinema Party		
24/25 February	The End We Start From	28/29 February	The Holders
27/28 February	Painting the Modern Garden: Monet to Matisse - Exhibition		
Live:	16 February	Jazz & Blues Divas	
	17 February	A Night of Frank & Louis	
Live Screenings:	1 February	Dear England, NT Live	
	7 February	Manon, Royal Ballet, Covent Garden	
	8 February	Kinky Boots, Adelphi Theatre	
	14 February	My Favourite Things, Musical	
	22 February	Vanya, NT Live	
Coming Soon Live:	13-16, 20-23 March	Chitty Chitty Bang Bang	

VILLAGE DIARY

February

1	WI trip to New Theatre Oxford 'Oliver'		
13	WI talk Sandrine Arnould 'French fashion houses' influence'	VH	7.30pm
14	Ash Wednesday Morning prayers St Agatha's		9am
15	Owl Project talk with live owls	VH	6.30pm
17/18	Earth Trust Archaeology Festival of Discovery		
20	Wallingford & District Art Club AGM & talk Centre 70		7.30pm
25	Invasion of Ukraine: Voices from the Home Front	VH	5pm

March

2	Community Association Village Quiz	VH	7.30pm
6	Licensing of Revd Sarah Nesbitt St Mary-Le-More Church Wallingford		5.30pm
8	BSR 'Eats and Beats'	VH	7pm
10	Mothering Sunday service St Agatha's		9.30am
12	Village Lunch Club	VH	12.15pm
16	Cholsey Repair Cafe		11
24	Palm Sunday procession & service from St Agatha's to St James'		10am
24	Treehouse School Family Run		
27	BSR AGM - St Agatha's Church Room		7.30pm
31	Easter Sunday service St Agatha's		9.30am

Advance Notice

18 May	Safari Supper (Community Association)
1 June	Save the Children Country Fayre & Dog Show
30 June	Summer Concert at St Agatha's
6 July	Village Fete (Community Association)

Refuse Collection (Food waste each week)

Grey bins	Thursdays 1, 15, 29 February
	Thursdays 14, 28 March
Green (& brown) bins	Thursdays 8, 22 February
	Thursdays 7, 21 March

Village website

For more information about Brightwell-cum-Sotwell visit the village website: www.brightwellcumsotwell.co.uk.