

Contents

Editorial	2
Eric Dore 1940-2026	3-4
Parish Council News	4-5
Community Association	5
In conversation with Father Andreas	6-7
Pray for World Peace	7
Save our Village Hall – a new approach	8-9
St Agatha's Bells	9
Brightwell Preschool	9-10
Get Quilting	10
A celebration of women composers	10-11
Brightwell Toddlers	11
BcS Environment Group	11-12
Save the Children	13
Village Lunch Club	13
Meet ... Parish Councillor, Karen Sherman	14-16
Swan Allotments	16
Village Stores & Post Office / WI / Red Box Gallery competition	17
Book reviews	18
Have your say	18-19
Brightwell Supporting Refugees	19
One Marathon Leads to Another	20-21
The Red Lion	21-22
Become a volunteer (CAB) / Your Cinema needs you	22
Before you spend a penny on solar	23
Village Diary	24

Editor: Alison Leigh 07983 752454 (thevillagerbcs@gmail.com)

Chairman: Anne Brooker

Secretary: Angela Lewis

Treasurer: Tony Guntrip

Advertising: Martin Dix 07767 864735

Assembly: Shena Luck 834543 **Distribution:** Tony Guntrip 07754 690264

Production: Anne Brooker, Angela Lewis, Steve Luck, Susanne Tuffrey

Items for the next edition should be sent to the Editor by 10 November 2026. *The Villager* is published every other month and delivered free to all households in the village.

Editorial

If the news of the last few weeks is to be believed the human race has a good chance of being wiped out by AI within a decade. That's if we don't fry in the meantime. With UK July and August temperatures over 2.5 deg C above average (page 12) we sure seem to be heading that way. In the face of so much anxiety it was truly uplifting to join the Windle Trust's fundraising walk along the Thames path in mid-September. Many of the walkers were refugees, whose lives have already been disrupted by drought as well as war. But as she walked Nyaruach Jal from South Sudan was singing a song full of hope, not despair. "When we walk together, we can change our lives in this world". Check out the short video on the Brightwell Supporting Refugees Facebook and Instagram pages. It is very moving. And see page 19.

It is well known that walking helps shake off the cares of the world and stimulates mental and creative vitality. Father Andreas, our new minister, pictured on the front cover, is a great fan of the power of walking and talking. You will find his thoughts on pilgrimage and other aspects of his ministry on pages 6-7.

It is also well known that the more altruistic you are the happier you will be. So how about taking advantage of some of the vacancies for volunteers that have arisen locally. Janet Harding is leaving the Parish Council after serving for over 5 years. We need someone with some experience of numbers to replace her. You don't have to be a financial genius. If you are that person, contact Janet via the parish clerk and she can fill you in on what is required. See page 4. You could also talk to Karen Sherman about why she thinks the Parish Council is such a valuable institution. Her story is on pages 14-15. Citizens Advice Oxfordshire and the Corn Exchange are also recruiting volunteers, see page 22.

In this edition we pay our tribute to Eric Dore who gave many years of his life to making the community a better place to live, and was a founder member of this magazine. Pages 3 & 4.

We are also saying goodbye to Corinne, Mouse and Ruby at the Red Lion. Corinne is the most dynamic and energetic pub landlady I have ever come across (I wasn't here in Sue's time of course). Corinne kept the pub going even during the Covid pandemic. Always cheerful, always welcoming - a hard act to follow. Zak, the chef, and his family are taking over, so that's good news for all those of us who love his excellent pub grub. Good luck Zak, and good luck with *your* next venture Corinne. I hope it involves a long rest. ☺

Alison Leigh

Eric Dore 1940 – 2026

Eric was born 1 January 1940 in Portland, Dorset. As a key naval base, Portland was frequently bombed so the family moved to the safer surrounds of Bath and then to Dunoon in Scotland, a country Eric was to return to later in his life.

They returned to Bath where Eric went to junior school. One of his earliest memories was being collected from school by his aunt Freda to join the dancing and street celebrations when VE Day was announced.



After completing his secondary education at Weymouth Grammar School, Eric applied to the civil service and was accepted into Customs and Excise. Initially working in London, he was soon posted to Scotland as an itinerant Excise Officer. This entailed visiting and staying at practically every distillery across the mainland and islands. He seldom drank whisky after leaving!

In Aviemore Eric got hooked on skiing. No chair lifts in those days – wooden skis, march up the mountain, tie them on with straps and head down into a blizzard. Then walk back up again. He became a truly accomplished skier and it was a passion he continued throughout his life. He belonged to the Oxford Ski Club and went to resorts in Europe for a week of immersive skiing every year.

In 1964, after the breakup of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, Eric was one of a dozen or so UK Customs & Excise officers recruited by the newly established country of Malawi to train Malawians to take over Customs and Immigration. He was posted to Salima, close to Lake Malawi, as Salima was an inland port with a railway to Beira, Mozambique. Everything from Zambian copper to ground nuts went out this way and goods from India and elsewhere poured in. Here he met Lesley whose parents owned a Customs Clearance business and lived on the lakeshore. Eric took up water skiing and soon became an accomplished mono-skier; dressed as Father Christmas, he delivered gifts to hotel guests after sweeping in off the lake.

He married Lesley in 1965 and in 1969 they set off for London by sea, traveling up the East coast of Africa, then through Suez and Egypt, where they saw the Egyptian army massing ahead of the Six Day War.

Back in the UK, Eric left Customs and joined Westminster Press. He became advertising manager at the Oxford Mail and Times, and after 10 years moved

on to the Newspaper Society in London, the head office of the provincial press, as advertising manager. This brought some glamour into their lives – Royal Garden Parties, black tie dinners, award ceremonies and conferences. Sometimes the family could join them, and sons Lawrence and Gerard discovered the joy of vast help-yourself hotel breakfasts which they thought were the height of luxury.

Eric continued to study, first attaining qualifications from the Chartered Institute of Marketing, then completing an MBA at Oxford Brookes. Feeling ready for a change he joined a management consultancy and ultimately struck out on his own, setting up Oxford Communications Group. The firm offered business and marketing advice to a huge range of clients ranging from Government contracts to Saudi Arabia and India.

Eric and family moved to Brightwell-cum-Sotwell via Abingdon in 1973. He loved village life and threw himself into it. He was a founder member of *The Villager* which was set up in 1976 as a free community magazine. His expertise with local advertising helped to fund it. He designed the first front cover, a compilation of press photographs of Brightwell set on a green background, which lasted for 40 years! In later years he was one of the originators of the village website.

After he retired, Eric truly immersed himself in photography - one of his great passions. He attended classes in Great Missenden for a good ten years and was a committee member of the Wallingford Photographic Society. His photographs featured in the annual village calendar and in the Community led Parish Plans of 2004 and 2014 to 2024. He chaired the Amenities Committee on the team who put together the 2004 Parish Plan - *Vital Villagers: Building a Sustainable Community* and was Parish Clerk from 2010 to 2011.

He will be remembered for his sense of fun, for his endless optimism and for always seeing the best in people.

The family and I would like to thank everyone for their cards and sympathy which have meant a great deal to us as we get used to life without Eric.

Lesley Dore

Parish Council News

After 15 years of dedicated service to the Parish Council, Graham Gilgrass has stood down. He has been an extremely active and hard-working member of the Council over the years and has been responsible for building the infant playground and zip wire at Kings Orchard and the outdoor gym at the rec. He was also instrumental in building the Village Hall car park extension.

Alongside that, Graham has been solely responsible for the upkeep of all the village play areas and also has been our Parsh Council Village Hall Trustee. He will be very much missed by us all, not only for his work ethic but for his fair and intelligent contribution in all council discussions and debates. We hope that Graham can enjoy a well-earned rest.

We have now slowly drifted out of summer and into autumn but we must still ask that everyone with hedges and vegetation which adjoin any public roads or pavements and paths are mindful of their responsibility to keep them adequately trimmed. We have had several complaints over the last couple of months from villagers who have found certain situations dangerous. Under UK law, landowners are strictly responsible for maintaining private hedges bordering a public road or pavement. Under Highways Act 1980 Section 154, “failing to keep a roadside hedge from obstructing or endangering pedestrians, vehicles, or horse-riders, or from blocking road signs and street lights, is an offence”.

On the subject of Councillors, we are still in need of a new Councillor responsible for finance to replace Janet Harding when she steps down. Do you have a few hours a month to give to your community? If so, please contact the parish clerk by email clerk@brightwellcumsotwell-pc.gov.uk or contact us via our Facebook page or website.

Karen Sherman, Councillor

Community Association

It has been a record breaking 12 months for the Community Association and we will be celebrating raising over £10,000 for the village clubs and societies. The Association has received requests for grants from 13 clubs and societies in the village and is pleased to announce that we are able to award all of these grants.

Throughout the year the Community Association holds events to entertain and to raise money for clubs and societies in the village. This year we have four events - the Quiz Night, Open Gardens, the Fete and our **Jumble Sale is on this Saturday 3 October, 2pm at the Pavilion**. None of these events would have been so successful without you pitting your wits, preparing your garden, providing an entertaining stall or rummaging in bargains.

Please come and celebrate this fantastic success at the AGM on **Tuesday 27 October at 7pm at the Stewart Room in the Village Hall**. Meet the team, find out what we do and what the plans are for the next 12 months. The Community Association never has a dull or dry meeting!

Alison Bloomfield

In conversation with Father Andreas

I am delighted to be joining the team ministry in Wallingford and to explore the meaning of God's presence in the churches, schools, local events, social activities, and civic life of the communities of Wallingford, Crowmarsh Gifford and Brightwell-cum-Sotwell. I come with my two children (13 and 9) from Oxford where I served as Vice-Principal and Director of Pastoral Studies at St Stephen's House, an Anglican theological college, for the last 6 years. Originally from Reinbek near Hamburg, Germany and formed in the Lutheran tradition, I enjoy gardening, cooking, early music, and practical restoration projects of old things. I also have a particular interest in pilgrimage and look forward to exploring the pilgrimage paths of this parish.

How did you come to choose this Parish?

I was thinking about the next chapter of my family life. I looked at various things and visited places incognito to get a feel for them, and when I visited here, I very soon had an inclination that this was right. An important aspect of that was meeting Sarah (Nesbitt) the rector. Then I visited Brightwell, again incognito and saw St Agatha's and St James, and realized that they were part of the package, part of the village team. It was a beautiful sunny day in March. I was in St Agatha's churchyard, there were butterflies, and the sun was warm on my back. I thought - I can see myself here. When I met the church community for interviews in April, I was convinced that I would be very willing to share the responsibility for pastoral involvement, as well a leadership and vision planning for what's next for the churches in these parts. And to also find out from people what's important for them when it comes to a village community and a town community, and what events they think the church should be involved in. It felt like we were all singing from the same song sheet.

On 3 September, you were officially authorised to take up the ministry in our Parish:

The Bishop gives you what's called the "cure of souls", a very ancient term, beautiful term. The Church of England extends that responsibility, invitation, honour and privilege to everybody who lives in a place, whether they have faith or not. Not everybody would want it, and that's fair. You can choose not to accept it. I know the Church can be a place that people find weird or scary, so there's a sort of tension between Church and the world to some extent, but that understanding of the cure of souls and the responsibility for everybody has a universal call. We need to find ways of communicating and bridging and that I think is the challenge for every Christian person, to try and connect with

one another, connect with the world, connect with God. And ultimately, the role of the priest is to be a bridge builder.

All priests and officers of the Church are confronted these days with a situation where congregations are diminishing. It sounds like you'd like to change that:

It's a challenge, isn't it. I'm not quite sure how we're going to do it, but I think it might not all happen on a Sunday morning. People have very many commitments on a Sunday. There is football, there is downtime, because everybody's busy during the week. People want to lie in. So, while we honour Sunday, rather than focus on Sunday there are other ways to touch base. We already have Morning Prayers on Wednesdays, coffee mornings and school engagement. In addition, I want to encourage people to bring their gifts into Church. For example, I love music and one of my hopes would be to encourage people to bring their instrument and just form a band, a bit like the olden days West Gallery band before our organs were introduced. Like under the Greenwood tree, to say let's play together and see God in a new way. I'm hopeful that we will find ways of engaging people on many levels.

What are you especially looking forward to here in Brightwell with regards to your interest in Pilgrimage?

I think Pilgrimage allows you to have conversations without the kind of high threshold involved in formally going to see the priest. Making a confession can be scary, whereas a walk is okay. A bit like in the Men's Shed movement, where people just potter about and fix an old mechanical toy or something, and as they do that conversation starts ...health scares, family problems, divorce, and suddenly you're in a pastoral scenario. That's the kind of conversation I would like to have with people, and walking can be part of that.

Alison Leigh

Pray for World Peace

The 2026 Week of Prayer for World peace runs from 11-18 October. During the week there will be a Day of Prayer on Saturday 17 October in St Agatha's Church, Brightwell-cum-Sotwell: Morning Prayer 8am, Prayers at 12 noon and 4pm, Evening Prayer 6pm. As usual the church will be open all day. You can sit quietly and pray or use one of the prayer stations in the church. Activities for young people and refreshments will be available in the church room from 10am until 4pm. In these times when peace is so badly needed around the world, we hope you will join us.

Rev Janice Chilton

Save our Village Hall – a new approach

Following discussions and feedback from our community, it is clear that we need a realistic and achievable way forward for the Village Hall. Rather than trying to raise a very large sum for one major project, we are proposing a phased approach. This means we can focus on the most important work first, raise funds in manageable stages and, importantly, allow the village to see the improvements being made.

Phase One proposal - focus on essential repairs to the walls, floor and roof, electrical and mechanical improvements, a completely new kitchen and improvements to the internal layout. These changes will create a more flexible and accessible hall, improve safeguarding and provide a modern kitchen suitable for events and outside caterers.

The village remains at the heart of the project. **Please come along to one of our open community meetings at the Village Hall, the next being at 7.30pm on 27 October; your opinion and feedback is vital!**

Buy a brick – Support your Village Hall

Our **Buy a Brick campaign** is a simple way to help secure the future of Stewart Village Hall.

Every brick represents a person, family, organisation or business supporting the hall and helping us demonstrate to grant funders strong community backing for Phase One.

If the Village Hall holds special memories for you, or you simply want to help ensure it remains here for future generations, please consider buying a brick or pledge a donation, **every little helps**.

Charity Auction – Wow! What a night!

A huge **THANK YOU** to everyone who helped make our Save Our Village Hall Charity Auction such an incredible success. We are delighted to announce that, including Gift Aid, the auction raised an amazing **£19,400!** This fantastic result was only possible because of the generosity and support of our village and wider community.

Thank you to the organisers and to everyone who made it possible - our splendid auctioneer, those who donated auction lots, sponsored items, bought tickets, attended, bid, provided refreshments, volunteered their time, helped behind the scenes, spread the word or supported the event in any way.

Please consider becoming a Trustee or volunteering your time, we need your help and opinions to make the right decisions and make this a success.
Email: info@stewartvillagehall.org.uk or speak to any Trustee.

The Village Hall Trustees

St Agatha's Church Bells

This is the time of year when we seek your help - can you join us to ring Handbells for Carols. We could do with a couple more members of our handbell band. All ages welcome! No experience necessary. Please do contact me if you'd like to explore further.

As for our church bells, I have had a good number of folk compliment the peal that a visiting band rang on Bank Holiday Monday - it did sound lovely. And I hope that, by the time this is published, we'll have enjoyed a similarly delightful ring at the end of September.

As ever, if you'd like to see what we do (as well as hearing it!), do get in touch, or pop along on a Tuesday evening around 7.15. Bear in mind that St Agatha's day, 5 February, is on a Friday next year. If you'd like to ring for that, now is the time to start.

John Dowling

Brightwell Preschool

It is time to grow, grow, grow... Thanks to Kit (and her very supportive mother) our new garden is ready to plant up. A big thank you to Sam for donating our planters, John Burdass for his help getting the planters to the right height and to Tom Cottrell Landscapes for our bark chippings, you are all so very kind. Perhaps not a traditional time of year for growing plants but definitely the right time for our new little ones to start their own journey of growth at our preschool. The children arrive like little seeds, ready to bathe with warmth, nourish with knowledge and shower with fun. It may be small, but the new space will have a big impact, giving them time to flourish in all of their senses: digging, planting, watering, weeding, reading books, balancing on stepping stones, listening to the wind and unwinding in a calm safe space.

As the preschool continues to be swept along in its cyclical journey throughout the academic year, we said goodbye to our last batch of seedlings leaving for school and will be saying goodbye to our hard-working and amazing committee this autumn. We cannot thank them enough for the time they have forfeited to help the preschool survive another year. It seems fitting

that a preschool built to raise kind and considerate little people, is supported by the kindness and consideration of our local community.

This autumn, our little seedlings will be blowing around the village as we monitor the squirrel action, roll in the leaves and experience the many ever-wonderous types of mud that we will come across on our travels. You will probably hear us before you see us. Give us a wave and a smile, it really does make a difference.

Natasha Hillier, Manager

Get Quilting

Our Village Quilting Group has been running for 22 years, with a loyal group 12-14 members. We would love to welcome more members of all abilities.



Over the years we have made a wide variety of beautiful items for friends and family, as well as for charity sales.

There is always plenty of help on hand for beginners, as well as experienced support for those working on more ambitious projects. We meet at the Village Hall on alternate Tuesday mornings, from 10am to 1pm. If you would like to give quilting a try, why not drop in for coffee and cake at our next

meeting on Tuesday 13 October, or a subsequent meeting. You'll be very welcome. For more information, please contact Cynthia Hurley on 01491 836509.

Cynthia Hurley

A Celebration of Women Composers

How many women composers of choral music can you name? Ask this question about men, and Handel, Bach and Mozart will come to mind without a moment's thought. But even the most ardent music lovers often struggle to identify the many women who have written outstanding works for choirs.

South Oxfordshire Choir aims to redress that imbalance with its tribute concert on Saturday 21 November at 7.30pm in Wallingford's St Mary-le-More Church. Tickets will be available at the door on the night.

Drawing on the anthology Choral Music Composed by Women, the concert will span an extraordinary range of musical history from the Middle Ages to the 21st century. A Celebration of Women Composers includes 10 beautiful short pieces by composers including Fanny Mendelssohn, Clara Schumann,

Florence Price and Ethel Smyth, alongside a pioneering piece written by a talented female member of South Oxfordshire Choir itself.

South Oxfordshire Choir has always been popular with villagers, and we'd love to encourage more to join us. If you're a bass, tenor, alto or soprano, why not see if you like singing with us as we rehearse for the November concert. Just turn up at 8pm on Mondays in St Mary-le-More Church and you'll receive a very warm welcome. No audition required.
www.southoxonchoir.org.

Julia Spence & Hugh Roderick

Brightwell Toddlers

It's been a wonderful welcome back to Toddlers this September and we began with a busy session bringing lots of chatter, laughter and singing back to the Village Hall. The children decorated leaves for our Autumn Tree and shared snacks together while parents and carers caught up over a cuppa.

This year we're running different themes each week and will have sessions focused on woodland animals, trains, monsters and more. Thank you to the volunteer mums and grandmas who are helping us to keep Toddlers running this year. If you'd like to get involved, please chat to us at a session or email us on the details below.

If you'd like to come along, there's no need to book, just turn up on the day. We're there from 9.15-11.15am Thursdays in the Village Hall. The sessions are £4 which can be paid cash or online during the session. We can be contacted at brightwelltoddlers@gmail.com or via our Facebook page [@brightwelltoddlers](https://www.facebook.com/brightwelltoddlers).

The Toddlers Team

BcS Environment Group

Swan Wood

As mentioned in the last *Villager*, we commissioned the Wallingford company Venners Arboriculture to report on the state of the trees in Swan Wood and advise on their future management. They provided a comprehensive document with a table of suggested work and a useful summary:

The tree population comprises a range of age classes, from young to mature specimens. Overall, most of the trees are in an acceptable condition; however management is now needed to maintain an appropriate level of safety for

people using the site and the adjoining land. They have recommended that we remove four ash tree groups due to the presence of ash dieback and the associated decline in structural integrity, which is likely to increase the risk of branch or whole-tree failure, particularly during periods of strong winds or other adverse weather conditions.

There were also recommendations relating to removing dead/dying wood from other mature trees. Discussions are underway with the Village Hall trustees (owners of the wood) and it is hoped that tree surgeons will be able to start the work, which is likely to be phased, in the winter subject to obtaining the necessary funding and permissions.

There will inevitably be a visual impact when some of the groups of ash trees are removed but we plan to carry out replacement planting as soon as possible after the felling. We've already secured an award of trees from the Woodland Trust. We hope the work will allow the wood to thrive for many decades to come!

Talk

Jonathan Stamp has very kindly offered to give a talk, jointly hosted with the BcS History Group, called '**Ghosts at Cock-Crow**' on **3 December** starting at **7.30pm in the Village Hall**, with free entry. This will bring his research into the effects of Black Death on Brightwell and the surrounding area. It is likely to be very popular so arrive early.

Weather

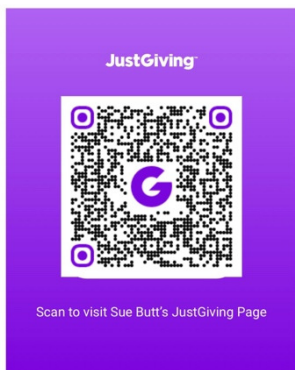
There were 38 consecutive days without rain in July with a short shower at the end of July and no further rain until about the last week of August. The summer has been the hottest on record with the Met Office reporting that both the mean daily and mean maximum temperatures have been over 2.5 deg C above average in both months. For the UK the mean temperature exceeded the previous hottest in 2025 by 0.3 deg C. Sunshine hours were over 135% above average. Overall, a very memorable summer, but what will the autumn bring? Environment Agency records for 1 September show that flows in the upper River Thames have returned to 'normal' although they were below 'normal' for most of July and August. Locally, the flow from Wellsprings (which is fed by groundwater), has still (just) continued. The groundwater level at Stonor Park was, at the end of July, 'normal' while Farmoor reservoir at the beginning of September was 'notably low' at 76% full with Thames Water at Drought level 2 (Level 4 being the most severe).

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

Save the Children

In northern Nepal many children were leaving their family homes to make their way to, or were already, at school. Those that managed to escape the flash floods through the quick action of the adults are now left homeless, many with their family members & friends missing/dead and homes destroyed. The Save the Children Team is on the ground helping. With so much devastation it is going to be a challenging time in the short-term to make sure these children are fed, have shelter and protection, and in the long-term to ensure these basic needs are maintained, along with education, physical and mental care, love and protection. Save the Children doesn't do this work in isolation, they work with other charities, organisations and governments who share their values and ambitions.

You may have seen the Channel 4 news interview with Nepal's Foreign Minister Shishir Khanal on 5 September. He spoke with extraordinary compassion and empathy. Khanal refused to rise to anger, instead he demanded compensation from the nations like China, US and India and the largest greenhouse gas emitters to take responsibility for what is happening to his country.



If you would like to help our local Save the Children team in our quest to help these children, you can donate via the just-giving page, scan this QR code, or donate by bank transfer in our branch bank account:

Save The Children UT21,
Sort Code - 08-02-28
Account Number - 65587186,
Reference "Nepal".

Both ways will ensure your donation goes straight to Save the Children.

Celia & the local Save the Children team

Village Lunch club

We would love to see you at the village lunch on **Tuesday 1 December**. The usual Christmas fare with a glass of fizz on arrival and a little Chrimbo Bingo on the side. 12.30pm start £10 pp. Please contact Lynn Burridge on 07989 270605 or Lynnburridge@gmail.com to make your reservation.

Meet ... Parish Councillor, Karen Sherman

Imagine, at 19, talking your way into a job you're not remotely qualified for and ending up, 20 years later, the only female director of an air conditioning company in the country, and retiring aged 39. That's Brightwell resident Karen Sherman, self-confessed "most Virgo of all Virgos you've ever met".



At 17, disenchanted with school and college Karen quit her hotel catering course and started her first full-time job as an office junior at a PR agency in High Wycombe on £17.50 a week, filing paperwork and modelling for them in their clients' medical journals. Glamorous it was not, pictured with colostomy bags and the like. Meanwhile June, the office bookkeeper showed her the ropes. When a friend mentioned that her partner, Henry, needed someone to do his typing and filing, Karen went along – and found him running an air conditioning firm out of a caravan in his front garden, with three engineers and paperwork in chaos.

She blagged her way into the job. "He said, can you do wages?" "Yes", she lied, thinking "It can't be that hard – I can add up. June will help me". What followed was pure graft. Karen started asking the kind of questions nobody else was asking – how do you know what you've sold and what you've spent if nobody writes it down? – and building the systems to fix it. June helped with her questions. Henry made her financial director at 19, handing her 20 % of a company that, at the time, made no money at all. "He was the one promising the earth (to his clients). I was the one who had to make it happen."

By the time she left, after 20 years, the company had grown from a turnover of £80,000 a year to £6 million with a staff of more than thirty, but it very nearly killed her. "I used to be at my desk at 7.15 every morning and I wouldn't leave till 8.30 at night. I'd open the curtains and if it was a beautiful sunny day, I'd think – oh God, please let it rain". Sunshine meant broken air con units and a phone that wouldn't stop ringing.

She spent five years engineering her exit, clearing the mortgage so retirement would be a bonus, not a necessity. Then, three weeks before she was due to walk away, Henry had a heart attack and needed a quadruple bypass. She stayed until he was back on his feet.

When she finally did stop, she swore she'd never work again, and for about a month she meant it: sleeping in, cooking bacon sandwiches for no reason, striking up conversations with strangers in Waitrose because until her husband

Andy came home from work, she would go all day without seeing another human. "I thought, stopping strangers in Waitrose to talk about fish fingers, that's a sorry state of affairs." So, she took a job waitressing – work she'd loved as a teenager – purely because it had no next day carry over. "My proper job had never stopped. I wanted something that stopped when I went home."

Two decades after “retiring” she has never actually managed to retire. She drifted back into freelance bookkeeping – and eventually landed at Revotec, a small Wallingford firm making cooling systems for classic and racing cars.

Then there's the unpaid job: Karen is one of only two women on the Parish Council. They need more people to come forward, especially women. She's worried that unless more people join, the council will be populated by individuals provided by SODC – and “that would be bad news for the village. Lots of villagers think the Parish Council do absolutely nothing, but they just don't see how much actually is done, because **it's all done quietly**”. The Parish Council helps avoid undesirable planning applications, sorts disputes between neighbours and looks after village amenities. She says that lots of people complain about lots of things all the time. “If you don't think things are quite right you should go on to the Parish Council and do something about it.”

When a fellow Parish Councillor warned her that the Village Hall was in danger of falling down unless it was fixed, Karen came up with the idea for the celebrity auction fundraiser with Brightwell's most famous resident as auctioneer - Boris.

She says it was the hardest she'd worked since leaving full-time employment – borrowing tablecloths, calling in favours, and security-vetting an entire guest list, since nothing involving a former prime minister could be advertised or sold to strangers off the street. But, “It was worth every minute of the stress. Boris nailed it. He worked the room. He was hilariously funny. And massively generous.” As well as encouraging the punters to raise their bids way beyond what they had intended, when it came to the auctioning of the first brick in the Buy a Brick campaign, Cynthia Hurley paid £1000 for brick number 1 – bravo Cynthia - Boris paid £1000 for brick number 2. Karen is also full of praise for the generosity showed by everyone involved on the night – especially Amanda Hedley who organised the event with her, Sian Norfolk who provided the food at cost price and estate agent James Gesner who put up all the advertising boards and charged - zero. “It was a real team event and wouldn't have been possible without the villagers who attended and spent handsomely on the night and those who donated lots for auction and money to the event”.

As it turns out it is remarkable that Karen is still here to tell her story. In 2021 she was diagnosed with clear cell carcinoma, one of the fastest-spreading ovarian cancers there is. A hysterectomy was booked for the following week. The numbers, she learned afterwards, were stark. "The consultant who carried out my operation told me after the event that I had a 5% chance of even qualifying for the full operation, because 95 per cent of people at that stage are too far gone to bother. And of the hysterectomies he does, only five per cent come back completely clear." Hers did. "He said, Karen, go and buy a lottery ticket."

She's since discovered she's also carrying a dormant lung condition, sarcoidosis, the same illness that killed her mother, found purely by chance on the same scans. She takes it, like everything else, without much fuss, beyond admitting the whole saga has turned her into "a bit of a hypochondriac. Every little ache, you think – that could be it. I hate that part of it." What it hasn't done is slow her down, or tip her into self-pity. "If you've been given a second chance, there is no point wasting time moaning about how unfair it was that you nearly didn't make it. I've had a great life. Something is going to kill you eventually”.

Alison Leigh

Swan Allotments.

It's official – 2026 has been the hottest, and one of the driest years on record. This has been a challenge not only for allotmenters, but for commercial growers and farmers too. Yields have been low and prices are rising. During the long weeks of drought, plot holders were busily watering, either early morning, or during the evening, in an effort to keep crops alive. In some cases, it made sense to harvest early rather than waste effort on vegetables that were not making any growth.

It wasn't all bad. Tomatoes, courgettes, runner beans, beetroot, and sweetcorn all did surprisingly well, given enough water. It's already forecast to be hot again next year, so perhaps we should consider growing crops more adapted to a warmer climate? Aubergines, peppers, sweet potatoes, oranges, chickpeas, and grapes are now in the conversation.

Whatever we choose to grow, trying to retain moisture in the soil is important. Mulching, shading crops, and the 'no-dig' method can help, and if we are to avoid more hosepipe bans, improving ways to collect and conserve rainwater is a pressing issue.

Phil Skipp.

The Village Stores & Post Office

We continue with the compiling of our business risk assessment plan. Thank you to everyone who has given feedback so far, it has been very useful. We are encouraged by the value the responders have put on having a shop and PO in the village and want both to continue. We welcome the suggestions regarding sustainability, reinforcing many of the things we need to keep both shop and PO viable: attract new volunteers and customers, focus on local suppliers, progress the business through stock and good service and not to stand still.

We need your help in many of these ambitions. We are here to listen and respond and we welcome any contributions. Our next big project is to build the extension to our store room; we hope to achieve this in 2027.

The Management Committee

WI

After a short summer break, we restarted on 8 September with an evening of 'Fun and Games', a relaxing and sociable time of good old-fashioned card and board games, but will it have brought out the ladies' competitive spirits?

Looking ahead, our programme is as follows:

Tuesday 13 October: 'Sustainable Garden Design'. We have invited Alison Quantrell to advise and discuss options for planning and designing members' gardens, bearing in mind our locality and of course climate change.

Tuesday 10 November: 'Crafty Christmas' and more novel ideas for decorating your home for Christmas.

Tuesday 8 December: Once again we are hoping to close the year with a traditional 'Christmas Meal'.

If you have ever wondered what else goes on at the WI, please do come along and meet us or just pop in for a chat. We meet every second Tuesday in the month at 7.30pm in the Village Hall. You will always find someone ready to welcome you. Or email: brightwellcumsotwellwi@gmail.com.

Karin Matthews

Red Box Photo Competition

Last call for entries! Photos can be of anything but must feature something RED! Send entries to robertseatter@hotmail.com by end September/beginning October for autumnal display in the Red Box Gallery.

Robert Seatter

Book Reviews

Beyond The Valley by Veronica Wood

I thoroughly enjoyed this book and didn't want it to end. The story tells of a family living on an isolated farm in a dystopian world and the frustration of the two main characters, Sissy 18 and Joel 15, realising they want more from their dreary lives. Joel runs away to join a circus and has adventures on the way, while Sissy experiences a brief romance which gives her more self-worth, assertiveness and the discovery of her extra-sensory abilities.

The book has an exciting and imaginative story line, it is very well written and researched. The ending hints of a sequel which I very much hope will be published soon. Beyond The Valley would appeal to young adults and older readers.

Veronica Wood has written numerous short stories, some of which have been published in local and national anthologies, others have won literary prizes. Beyond The Valley is Veronica's first published novel.

Irene Lascelles

Jonathan Key by Sheila Davie

Jonathan Key is a fast-paced, intricately plotted thriller reminiscent of Raymond Chandler in its wealth of incident and complexity of interwoven sub-plots.

When Jonathan opened his detective agency, I doubt he expected to be hit on the head and trussed up on his first assignment. From that moment on, this enjoyable thriller leaps from one exciting event to another, keeping you guessing until the end. The novel is full of intriguing characters and interesting venues, from back stage at a music festival to Provence in France. Jonathan is a likeable, well-rounded character in his black leathers on his beloved motorbike. You will be rooting for him throughout the novel.

Myron Edwards

Both books are available in the Village Shop, on Amazon and in some book stores.

Have Your Say

The Didcot and Wallingford Neighbourhood Policing Team regularly hold small pop-up community engagement events in local villages including Brightwell. These events provide residents with an opportunity to speak about any local issues or concerns they may have, ask questions, or simply come

along to meet their local neighbourhood team. Have your say in the **Village Stores on 4 November between 11am and 11.30am.**

Marie Deacon - Police Community Support Officer

Brightwell Supporting Refugees

BSR has a new goal: in addition to supporting two teachers at the Hope School for refugees in Jordan we are planning to pay for a teacher at the Rhino Camp High School in Uganda. To this end we have pledged £3000 to the Windle Trust, who will double that sum with the support of the Big Give Match Funding programme. So, we need your help. Come to our

Indoor Rowing Racing Bonanza: Friday 9 October in the Village Hall: Row, row, row your boat and be coached by **Team GB Rower and Olympic Coach James “Stevo” Stephenson and Team GB Paris Paralympic Gold Medalist Frankie Allan.**

Tickets from Village Stores or apply to bsr@bsr-charity.org, rowers £10 per head, spectators £5 a head (12 and over), children under 12 free. You can come as a team or come on your own and join a team. We'd love to see lots of young people from 10–18, but there is no age restriction - everyone is welcome, beginners and experienced rowers alike. You will be able to buy sausages and buns and drinks from the bar.

Our autumn fundraising journey got underway on Saturday 12 September when BSR trustee David Dugan joined the Windle Trust's annual walk along the Thames Path. Several BSR trustees provided weary walkers with tea, sandwiches, cakes and biscuits and David completed the entire walk, all 26 miles of it. You can sponsor the walkers directly by going to this link: <https://donorbox.org/thames-walk-2026> and clicking on the donate button.

BSR now has an active Instagram account in addition to our Facebook page (thank you Sally Jackson, our new publicity and marketing officer) so please follow us online to track past, current and future events – and please share our posts widely.

There are other BSR events in the pipeline, not least a screening of “**AI – Probably Nothing to Worry About**”, an ironic title if ever there was one. **Village Hall. Friday 30 October** (Q & A with Director Nick Holt afterwards). Look out for more information on Instagram, Facebook and our website <https://www.bsr-charity.org/>. (This is a sneak preview before the official BAFTA screening in London the following week).

Alison Leigh, Co-chair BSR

One Marathon Leads to Another

...and the journey continues. What started as a personal running challenge in memory of Alex Lewis has taken me much further than I ever imagined. I am delighted to share that I have secured a place to run the London Marathon 2027 as part of Team Bones for the Bone Cancer Research Trust (BCRT). I have been set a fundraising target of £2,500.



I am incredibly grateful to the generosity of our community, family, friends, and fellow runners from Run Wallingford, who have already helped me raise £651 towards that target. Thank you to everyone who has supported me so far. Every donation, however large or small, is helping me to continue this journey and, most importantly, raise awareness of bone cancer and the need for vital research.

Specifically, I am running in support of the Alex Lewis Memorial Fund for Bone Cancer Research. Thanks to the incredible generosity of Alex's family, friends and supporters, the fund has now passed the remarkable £400,000 milestone. Alex's family are now hoping to take that total to £500,000, which would be an extraordinary achievement and a wonderful testament to Alex's life and the determination of his family and supporters to make a lasting difference. I am very much just a small cog in that wheel, but I am proud to be playing my part.

The running has certainly tested me along the way. By the time you read this, I will have completed my first 50km trail run at the Race to the Stones, and after that another major milestone in my training, the Richmond Running Festival on 13 September, my first road marathon. (That's me on the right with Lucy Baines, who has also been running for BCRT). The focus will then turn firmly towards London Marathon 2027.

Training has been tough. Dealing with heatwaves, a gut that's over sensitive to energy gels and simply finding the time for the long runs has tested my determination. But I keep reminding myself that a difficult training run is nothing compared with the challenges faced by those living with bone cancer and their families.

The Bone Cancer Research Trust is the UK's leading charity dedicated to bone cancer research, funding vital work to find new and better treatments while also providing much-needed support, trusted information and hope to those affected. With continued investment in research, there is hope that one day we will find a cure for all bone cancers.

Dariel Burdass's JustGiving Page



And then there's Christmas...The fundraising won't stop when the running shoes come off. I am organising a **Festive Disco** at the **Village Hall**, a fun, funky, glittery and sparkly way for the village to kick off the Christmas season – while raising more

money for this important cause. Please save the date: **Saturday 5 December 7pm**. More details will follow nearer the time.

There is still a long way to go – both on the road to London and with the wider fundraising efforts for the Alex Lewis Memorial Fund – but I am incredibly grateful to everyone in the village who has supported me so far.

At 65, London Marathon 2027 will be the biggest challenge of my running journey yet. I'm looking forward to sharing the journey with you. Thank you for being part of it.

Dariel Burdass

The Red Lion

Here at The Red Lion we are busy preparing for the sale of the pub. We are very much looking forward to handing over the reins to Zak and his family and all going well; they should be ready to take over from early November.

Before we go, we have some fabulous live music lined up for you and we hope you can join us including our first 'leaving do' on Saturday 10 October and Sunday 11. We have live acts booked for both so come on down and listen to some great live music and be a part of our party weekend.

Please pop Saturday 14 November in your diary our third Christmas Market, TBC but I'm planning this as I write. This will take place after we have gone

but Zak is keen for this to continue. For 2 years you have come down in your hundreds to support local sellers and we hope you can do the same this year.

Finally, a last thank you to all of you who have supported our near 7 year run here at The Red Lion, we simply couldn't have done it without you. We have made some wonderful lifelong friends, some ever-lasting memories and for that we thank you. You made us feel very welcome from day one. Having an 'outsider' take over a village pub is never easy but the welcome we got was truly wonderful and the three of us will be forever grateful.

Goodbye and much love as always,

Corinne, Mouse & Ruby xx

Become a Volunteer

Citizens Advice Oxfordshire is looking for dedicated and compassionate volunteer advisers to work in our offices. You will need to be confident with computers and have both a willingness to learn and a positive desire to help people with problems in the areas of debt management, benefits, employment, housing and relationships (no prior knowledge necessary). After extensive training you will be giving confidential advice to clients, mainly on the telephone at first, and then later by emails, in person or by using webchat.

If you would like to discuss these volunteering roles, please email: volunteer-recruitment@caox.org.uk and one of our staff will contact you.

Darius Halpern

Your cinema needs you

The Corn Exchange Wallingford is recruiting volunteers and is holding a Volunteer Open Day on **Saturday 3 October from 10am-2pm** to demonstrate what goes on behind the scenes at the Corn Exchange - both the cinema and theatre. Free guided tours are available and their volunteers will be on hand to chat you through the myriad volunteer roles available. These include: Front of house managers, box office, bar staff, ushers, lighting and sound crew, stage management, projectionists, set design & painting, set construction, acting (we do four plays and a panto each year), directing, producing, costumes, props/set dressing plus many other vital behind the scenes roles covering accountancy, HR, marketing, website, building maintenance and health & safety. Just turn up. No need to book.

Nicola Webb

Before you spend a penny on solar

The heating goes on for the first time around now. It's a small moment, and it's also the one where the bills start climbing again.

So here's something I probably should say, given we install solar for a living. For a lot of homes, panels aren't the first thing to buy.

Start with the setting almost nobody touches. A combi boiler usually has two dials. One for hot water, one for the radiators. That second one is the flow temperature, meaning how hot the water is when it leaves the boiler. Most are set at 70 or 80 degrees. Turn it down to 60 and the boiler runs more efficiently. Nesta, an independent charity, reckons that cuts a typical home's gas use by about 8%, or around £65 a year. It costs nothing and takes two minutes. Your house still gets just as warm, it just takes a little longer.

Then the cheap jobs. Draughtproofing the windows and doors of a whole house costs roughly £250 and saves about £55 a year. Capping an unused chimney costs from around £150 and saves about £45. A jacket on an old hot water cylinder is about £30 and saves £45 a year, which is the best return of anything here. Turning the thermostat down from 22 to 21 degrees saves roughly £120.

Be careful, though, because “insulate first” gets repeated as if every measure is worth doing. It isn't. If you already have 120mm in the loft, topping it up to the recommended 270mm costs around £600 and saves about £17 a year. That's a 35 year payback and I wouldn't bother. A bare loft is a different story. Around 2.7 million households in England still have less than 100mm up there, and for them the £750 is money very well spent. So go and have a look before anyone sells you anything.

Older properties around Brightwell-cum-Sotwell lose heat in unglamorous places. Gaps under floorboards, an open chimney in a room nobody sits in, a cylinder in an unheated airing cupboard. None of it is interesting. All of it is cheaper than a roof full of panels.

One thing worth being clear about. Everything above is about heating, which for most homes means gas or oil. Solar is electricity, and that's a separate bill entirely. So it isn't a choice between the two. It's just that the heating bills are the ones about to jump, and the fixes are cheap, so do those now if you can.

*Llewellyn Kinch, Director
MakeMyHouseGreen.com*

VILLAGE DIARY

October

3	Corn Exchange volunteer open day	CEx	10am
3	Community Association Jumble Sale	Pav	2pm
9	BSR Rowing event	VH	6-8pm
10	Party night with live music at the Red Lion	RL	7pm on
11	Live music at the Red Lion (Thomas Hepell)	RL	6-8pm
13	Village quilting group open to visitors	VH	9.30-1
13	WI Sustainable Garden Design talk	VH	7.30pm
17	World Day of Prayer	StAg	(p.7)
18	Jazz Jam	RL	6pm
27	Community Association AGM (Stewart Room)	VH	7pm
27	Open community meeting - Save the Village Hall	VH	7.30pm
30	BSR event 'AI – Probably Nothing to Worry About'	VH	7pm

November

1	Live music at the Red Lion (The Faith Healers)	RL	6-8pm
4	Have A Say with Community Police team	Shop	11am
10	WI Crafty Christmas	VH	7.30pm
14	Christmas Market at the Red Lion	RL	1-5pm
21	South Oxfordshire choir concert – St Mary le More	StMIM	7.30pm
29	Pre-loved winter clothes and Xmas party wear sale	VH	10-4

Advance Notice

1 December	Village Lunch Club Xmas meal 12.30pm (VH)
3 December	'Ghosts at Cock-Crow' Jonathan Stamp talk (VH)
5 December	Festive Disco (VH)
17 December	Traditional Christmas Carol evening (VH)
3 January	Wassail 3pm start, 5pm fire dances, Red Lion till 9

Refuse Collection (Food waste each week)

Grey bins	Thursdays 8 & 22 October Thursdays 5 & 19 November
Green (& brown) bins	Thursdays 1, 15 & 29 October Thursday 12 (plus extra Brown) & 26 November

Village website

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