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## Editorial

I wonder how many of us made new year resolutions, and if we did, how many of us stuck to them. Giving up alcohol for the whole of January is a common one. We call it Dry January, the French call it “Défi de Janvier”, and every year it causes a big hoo ha over there because it eez just not Frrrench. According to Euronews, President Macron is furious with his health minister for taking up the challenge and the Mayor of Chateauneuf du Pape calls it “insulting, infantilizing, absolutely unbearable.” Even so, they report that 1 in 4 French people will take up the challenge this year, which is actually slightly more than in UK where the estimate is between a fifth and ¼ of the population. Congratulations anyone in the village who’s giving it a go and stayed with it. You can look forward to sleeping better, as well as having reduced cholesterol, lower glucose levels, lower blood pressure, and 40% less liver fat.

There wasn’t much evidence of abstinence on Wassail day. The revellers were out in force. See cover photo, thank you Yulia Shevchenko, and a full report on page 20.

The Wassail is one of the many traditions that makes our village such an entertaining place to live. But just imagine for a moment what our village would be like if all our volunteers went on strike. No Village Shop and no Post Office for starters. There would be no fête, no quiz, no discos, no Wassail, no Brightfest, no cricket, no lots more things, no *Villager* even - heaven forbid, and the Swan stream would almost certainly be choked up with weeds and sediment. On p3-4 we celebrate the life of John Rodda to whom the village is indebted for all the time and energy he put into voluntary work.

We need more John Roddas and we need a few of them to come forward as Parish Councillors. The current council have been in situ for a good few years and soon it will be time for some of them to stand down and others to take their place. See pages 5-6. You will find several other calls for volunteers throughout this edition.

Meanwhile I have recruited willing volunteer, Hugh Roderick, to guest edit the next edition of *The Villager* as I shall still be ‘down under’ packing up and selling my antipodean home so that I can truly call Brightwell my home when I return. Life here is not the sunny paradise you might imagine. Torrential rainfall last night, planes grounded, hail storms the size of tennis balls and rain forecast for the next week. Plus rolling industrial action on the trains causing delays of up to five hours on popular routes. Sound familiar? May 2025 be kind to you.

*Alison Leigh, Editor*

## John Rodda 1934-2024



One of our village's proudest boasts is the number of distinguished scientists who live amongst us. Sadly, in December we lost John Rodda, renowned in his academic field and revered in his community. Dr John Rodda was a global leader in water, meteorology and environmental research, a pivotal combination of sciences for our age. It was our good luck that he was also a committed member of the village, using his expertise and enthusiasm to enhance our lives as residents.

John's vision was to establish an area in the village where different sports could be played all year. An opportunity arose when Kings Meadow became available for development in the late 1970s. He led an ambitious campaign to persuade the doubters to agree to a 'hard standing' sports ground ('Kings Meadow or Kings Tarmac?' the grumblers wrote to *The Villager* at the time). To coordinate funding for the hard standing, John set up our first Community Association (the organisation that still runs the Fete, Quiz, and many other events that make village life such a pleasure). Later he launched a tennis club to play on the site, and countless village youngsters (and oldsters) have wielded a racquet there for the first time.

On to the 1990s and John was instrumental in forming our Environment Group, responding to the famous Rio Conference on Environment and Development and its appeal for local initiatives. This group went on to create the Millenium Wood, Swan Allotments Wild Area and many other pioneering projects to preserve and develop our environment. It has issued scores of authoritative surveys and reports on the village's natural health, and authored one of the first village conservation plans of its type.

John and Annabel Rodda came to the village in 1964. They had met as Geography undergraduates at Aberystwyth University and married in 1961. John was a proud Welshman. Annabel was English, though it amused her that her maiden name of Edwards was more authentically Welsh than John's Rodda surname with its origins in Cornwall!

John completed his PhD in the early 1960s with a ground-breaking statistically designed experiment using rain gauges. This was a significant time in Hydrology studies in the UK. Commercially grown forests were a popular commercial investment, and there was mounting concern about water wastage caused by 'evapotranspiration' if forests were planted in reservoir valleys. John's research

into monitoring water resources was recognised by the Hydraulics Research Station in Wallingford (now known as the UK Centre for Hydrology and Ecology) and he was recruited as a research fellow.

John and Annabel built their home in Brightwell in 1964, naming it *Ynyslas* after a beautiful seaside resort near Aberystwyth. Annabel taught Geography at Didcot Girls Grammar School before their children were born. Both sons went to the village school and on to Wallingford School. Today, Matthew is Labour MP for Reading Central. His brother, Dr Harvey Rodda has built a thriving career as a hydrologist.

John quickly made his mark in Wallingford, developing a measurement gauge that showed standard instruments underestimating rainfall by 8% and more. After spells working for UK Government, in 1988 John joined the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) in Geneva, the UN agency studying atmospheric science, climatology, hydrology and geophysics. He was later appointed the WMO's Director of Hydrology and Water Resources. It's a measure of John's modesty that few of us (other than former colleagues) have much idea of his eminence in his field. Maybe two events hint at the importance of his work.

In 1992 he played a major role in preparing for the Rio Earth Summit that paved the way for many of today's climate initiatives. John chaired the Organising Committee which established the Dublin Principles, setting standards for managing freshwater resources at Rio and thereafter. And in 2004, his 70<sup>th</sup> year, John was awarded the prestigious International Hydrology Prize by the International Association of Hydrological Sciences (IAHS), supported by WMO and UNESCO, for outstanding contribution to the science.

Keen to support their village, John and Annabel would return from Geneva regularly to attend events and celebrations. John became a regular choir member at St Agatha's. He was also a Parish Councillor for many years, and a member of the Village Hall Committee.

Nothing seemed likely to slow John down, until peripheral neuropathy seriously affected his mobility in later years. At his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday party in Summer 2024, however, John's mind was still sharp as a tack. We will miss him greatly.

*Hugh Roderick*

The family and I would like to thank everyone for their cards and messages of sympathy on the passing of John. These words are a great support at this difficult time.

*Annabel Rodda*

## Letter from our MP

My warmest wishes for the New Year. It was wonderful to join in local social and festive occasions such as the switching on of Christmas lights. I particularly enjoyed my visit to Brightwell Art Club's Exhibition, and chatting to so many people, including Celia and Angela about Save the Children and Brightwell Supporting Refugees and supporting the charities with my purchases. I was also pleased to see that The Red Lion received a CAMRA Pub of the Season Autumn 2024 award!

Before parliament ended, I was able to address ministers about important matters. These included: how local communities can benefit from clean energy schemes, the need for improvements in services provided by coroners following the sudden deaths of those with epilepsy, and the need to address electoral reform. Some responses were more helpful than others! I was able to speak in debates about the problems faced by those with disabilities, shared concerns raised by poor estate management, and championed the BBC (which I am sure many of us watched and listened to over Christmas).

The Transport Select committee meet to hold the Department of Transport to account. Two key areas discussed have been rail services and infrastructure, and the backlog of driving tests, which so many constituents have aired concerns about. Flooding also remains a significant concern. I chaired a meeting with Thames Water and the local councils to facilitate working together. I will continue to provide updates about this vital piece of work as we need to see real improvements.

My team provides support for all our constituents. Please contact me if I can help, or if you would like me to attend a local event or meet with a local organisation. Contact me on [olly.glover.mp@parliament.uk](mailto:olly.glover.mp@parliament.uk).

*Olly Glover, MP for Didcot and Wantage*

## Parish Council News

Happy New Year to everyone from us all at Brightwell cum Sotwell Parish Council. We are delighted that Nettie Gray has begun work as our new Parish Clerk. She has made a fantastic start and we are very much looking forward to working with her. She will be working in the Parish Office on Monday and Tuesday from 8-12 noon and she will be working from home on Wednesday, plus she will check emails at the end of the week just in case of emergencies.

We are pleased to announce that we have two new Fix My Street Super Users in the village who will be looking out for potholes that need repairing and other highways issues. If you have anything to report please tell the Parish Clerk and she will pass the information on to them.

We are interested in hearing from anyone who would be willing to be co-opted onto the Parish Council in the next year or so. A few of the long serving Parish Councillors do not intend to stand again at the next election in 2 years. If we do nothing till then this would mean we lose over half of our membership all at once which would not be a good situation for continuity. If you think you would like to know more about what the Council does, please feel free to come to a meeting as an observer or talk to any of the councillors informally about what the job entails. It's not onerous and it's a good feeling to give something back to the community (even if it can be frustrating sometimes when things are beyond our control). You can find details of all the councillors on the parish council website [www.brightwellcumsotwellpc.co.uk](http://www.brightwellcumsotwellpc.co.uk).

Sadly, there have been some instances of unneighbourly behaviour in the village over the past couple of months. Logs protecting the verge at the bottom of Bell Lane have been removed for some reason causing the verge to be damaged and the security lights outside the Village Stores were damaged before Christmas. Please be vigilant and please, if there is something concerning you, speak to the Parish Council and we can try to sort it out.

On a happier note thank you to all the organisations and individuals who organised events in the village over December and January – Block printing tuition, Christmas markets, Carol concerts, talks, Wassail – all contributing to the fabulous community we live in. We look forward to many more in 2025.

*Brightwell cum Sotwell Parish Council*

## Village Stores and Post Office

This year we are looking forward to introducing more new products, whilst continuing to stock our large range of local produce. We are also updating and replacing equipment and generally moving our community business forward in 2025.

Please remember that to maintain this we continually need to build the volunteer team on the management committee, shop and Post Office. If you have time or skills which might help us, please leave your name and details in the shop and we will contact you to explain how you could contribute in a big or small way... every little helps.

*The Shop and Post Office Team*

## Meet ..... Lottie Gross

Imagine all you ever wanted to be was a travel writer – and bingo – you are a successful travel writer before you have turned 22. Travel is a niche market, tough to break into but Lottie Gross, 33, has not only cracked it, she has cornered a niche within the niche; she is the author of two books about how to travel well with a dog and they are both selling like hot cakes. She puts it down to talent, determination, hard work and some lucky breaks.

Lottie is a self confessed “sinkwad”, single-income, no-kids person with a dog. Born and bred in Brightwell, she knew from a very early age that she wanted to be a journalist. When she was 15 she did work experience on the Crowmarsh Round and About magazine. Then after spending her gap year backpacking in SE Asia she decided that she specifically wanted to be a travel journalist.

To that end she single-mindedly set about achieving her goal, signing up to study multi media journalism at Bournemouth University, tailoring everything towards some kind of international or travel reporting and doing some work experience for National Geographic Traveller. They gave her her first paid travel commission. She was just 21. First lucky break. Second lucky break: a job came up at Rough Guides. 600 applied. She got it. She ran their digital content for 4 years, moved on to another digital publisher to launch a new travel website for them, and then went freelance. Her clients include The Telegraph, The Times, The Independent, HELLO! Magazine, Woman and Woman's Own and many more.

She got her first dog in 2018. He was a Manchester terrier called Milo. “Lots of women get pangs for having a baby. I haven't got a maternal bone in my body. I got the pangs for having a dog”. But sadly Milo died in 2020 of kidney disease. That year, unable to afford London prices, she bought a bungalow in Greenmere and spent the summer of 2020 doing it up. Then Covid struck. As a travel writer she was grounded.

“After two months of lockdown on my own, without any housemates or anything, and no dog, it was horrific”. Enter Arty, another Manchester terrier.

Travelling with Arty she came upon the many idiosyncracies dog owners have to consider, like where is the nearest patch of grass? Can I bring my dog into the restaurant so that he doesn't bark his head off if I leave him in my room? Is there a secure fence around the property? That said, Lottie says that doggie outings and holidays do not have to be restricted to pubs and going for walks; her books lists tons of things you can do with your dog, from zoos to aquariums to boat trips and



steam trains, galleries and museums. But she wishes people were more responsible and would keep their dogs on leads because “The presence of a dog in some places is enough to stop a wild animal from wanting to make home there”. Let alone the impact on the mosses, lichens and wildflowers.

Then lucky break number 3. She hired a fellow to index her first book who turned out to be a commissioning editor at Bloomsbury. He liked it so much he commissioned her second book *Dog Days Out*.

In March 2022 her mother's cancer returned (she was first diagnosed in 2018). She cared for her until she died in July 2022. “I was spinning out about how can I do this and get my work done until a friend said ‘you'll never regret the time that you spent looking after your mom, but you will regret the time that you didn't’ ... and he was so right.”

Recently Lottie's been travelling with her Dad and her dog researching her third book which will be a curated guide to 25 dog friendly destinations in Europe.

So what's left to aim for when you got your dream job as soon as you left university and you've reached the pinnacle of your career at the ripe old age of 33? “I was so ambitious as a young woman that I very much peaked too soon. But the perspective shift that you get after losing a parent is profound. I'm under no impression that I'm changing lives; I'm not a doctor or a surgeon with a roster of patients who are relying on me, but as long as I am experiencing joy on a daily basis, I'm very happy with it”.

*Alison Leigh*

## Buns and Bells for St Agatha

Not only is St Agatha the patron Saint of our church here, she is also the patron saint of bakers, bell-founders and more. Her story can be found online, but, be warned, parental guidance needed! Her 'feast day' is 5 February and this year we are celebrating it. Join us!

From 10am join us for coffee and a St Agatha bun (the anglicised version). When the buns run out, and as the day moves on, until 4pm, we'll have some further fare of a Sicilian/Italian hue - maybe even some Limoncello - watch out for posts on the BcS Facebook page. The bells will be ringing through the day (with gaps!) And we offer two challenges.... 1. Who can bake a true, Sicilian, St Agatha bun, the ‘Minni de Virgini’? We may even offer a prize/reward :) And 2. Who would like to have a go, and ring a bell, on St Agatha's day, in St Agatha's Church? Come and show us on the day!

Any questions about the day, or on the challenges, please contact me or Mina Barrett. See you at St Agatha's!

*John Dowling*



## The Orchard Group

Our project to add new varieties of apple, pear and plum to the orchards and gardens in the village has been very successful.



This year the group was among several organisations in the village to receive a very generous donation from Janice Chilton's penfriend Michelle Abramson which has funded the trees. Janice and Michelle became 'penfriends' when they were in the Girl Guides/Girls Scouts and wanted a pen-pal badge; they have been writing to each other since 1956.

Adding these new trees to the village means we now have 108 varieties of apple, 12 pear and 9 plum ranging from varieties introduced in the

17<sup>th</sup> century to new varieties from this century, including Paradise Gold. In 2012 it was chosen by the Paralympic Legacy as a new apple to be planted in the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park. We have chosen this variety to celebrate the success of our own rowing Paralympian, Frankie Allen. She won gold in the Paris Paralympics in 2024 and at just 22 is already a 3 times World Champion in the PR3 Mix4.

*Alison Bloomfield*

## Brightwell Preschool

After a tussle outside the stable in Bethlehem at the dress rehearsal, we were all a tad nervous to go straight ahead with a live Nativity performance in front of families, but we needn't have worried because the children pulled it out of the bag once again. They all sang their hearts out and there wasn't a dry eye in the house.

Never underestimate the power of a song. Each year, I am in awe of the growth in confidence we see in the children as they learn a large number of new Christmas songs in such a short space of time. The belief many of them gain in themselves is incredible, with some children singing at home for the first time or perhaps joining more words together than they ever have done before.

Songs play a role in all of our learning at preschool, including outside. We will be exploring the sounds of winter and then spring - from the crack of ice to the trilling of the birds. We will sing about the seasons and use nature to

experience the sounds of the world, such as tapping out rhythms with sticks and hearing the difference in the sound of a tree trunk compared to a metal fence post. Please feel free to join in if you see us. We are still singing Jingle Bells in March, but the squirrels don't seem to mind.

Finally, a huge thank you to Root One for donating a tree again this Christmas. As always, donations of resources and time are always appreciated as we continue to face financial challenges. At this time, aprons for baking or craft, scooters, trikes, plants for our sensory garden would be particularly appreciated. Please do get in touch: [admin@brightwellpreschool.org](mailto:admin@brightwellpreschool.org) or 01491 826387.

*Natasha Hillier*

## Brightwell Supporting Refugees

Our lovely candle lit carol evening in St James' Church in Sotwell in December raised almost £800. Many thanks to all our performers. This brought our total to just over £14,000 raised during the year. This has gone to helping support refugees and asylum seekers suffering hardship in Oxfordshire, refugees in the Hope School in Jordan, refugees in Kenya through GiveDirectly, and in East Africa through the Windle Foundation. The money donated to Windle was done through the Big Give Christmas campaign which doubled the donation. This will be going to assist Sudanese refugees who are victims of an appalling conflict. Windle is going to be working with the refugees to enhance their skills and promote economic and social enterprise and cohesion which aims to help lay foundations for a lasting peace.

We started this year by showing a film **This Blessed Plot** followed by a question and answer session with the writer and director of the film. A very good evening was had by all!

Sir Laurie Bristow will be coming to speak to us on Friday 28 March. He has a wealth of experience as a diplomat around the world. In 2021 he was British ambassador in Afghanistan when the Taliban seized power and foreign troops departed along with many Afghans who had supported them. This will be a fascinating talk so do put the date in your diary.

Our **AGM** will be on Wednesday 26 March at 8pm in the Church Room. Everyone is welcome. The BSR Trustees send you warm wishes for 2025. We are extremely grateful for all your contributions and support. We are now in our 10<sup>th</sup> year thanks to you! For more information about us, our grants and our projects please see our website [www.bsr-charity.org](http://www.bsr-charity.org) and our Facebook page.

*The BSR Trustees*

## Brightwell cum Sotwell WI

Happy New Year to all from the Brightwell cum Sotwell WI. We closed last year once again with an evening of good food, happy music and fun at the Red Lion. Thank you, Corinne, for making us so welcome.

But how time flies! By the time of publishing, January will have almost passed, and our first monthly meeting of the year completed. Members will have learned about the work of a McTimoney Chiropractor, voted on this year's WI resolution and finished our 23<sup>rd</sup> Birthday celebration with cake and fizz and it just occurred to me that these 'activities' sum up nicely the essence of the WI: learning, campaigning and enjoyment. But mostly, as we are reminded by Jan Stockdale, our president, we are about friendship and support for each other and the community around us.

Looking ahead now, our topics for the next few months are: 'Be Safe from Internet Scammers' - 11 February, 'Colour with Confidence' tips from a personal stylist - 11 March and 'A Hat for every Occasion' with Wallingford Millinery - 8 April. We meet every 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday in the month at 7.30pm in the Village Hall. Please feel free to come along. You will be warmly welcomed.

*Karin Matthews*

## Save the Children

Despite a storm and a power cut our Christmas Fair in the Village Hall on 7 December raised £1,618.75. Thank you to everyone who braved the elements to support us. 'Save the Children carols round the Christmas Tree' on Christmas Eve, in its 29<sup>th</sup> year also overcame chronic tech failure to reach the grand total of £820. Thank you to everyone who came and all those that helped either on the night and/or before, and after with the trees and lights, it is greatly appreciated.

This money is already helping with projects in UK and around the world to improve the lives of children, either in times of crisis or helping navigate the disadvantages of being born into or growing up in poverty and inequality.

So many people enjoyed the Air Frying evening with Malcolm Emery Chef Extraordinaire back in October, Malcolm has very kindly offered to host another evening on 21 March. Tickets will be on sale in the shop nearer the date. Coming up later in the year: Annual Plant Sale – 10 May and Ball in the Hall - 28 June; the provisional date for our Fun Dog Show is 6 September.

*Celia Collett*

## What's On in Brightwell cum Sotwell

These are regular daytime and evening classes and activities that take place in the village, at the Village Hall [Stewartvillagehall.org.uk/schedule](http://Stewartvillagehall.org.uk/schedule) (VH), Jubilee Pavilion [bcsjubileepavilion.org.uk](http://bcsjubileepavilion.org.uk) (JP), the churches & St Agatha's Church Room (CR), the Rec and King's Meadow. For further information please phone or email the relevant contact. For further activities and services see [www.brightwellcumsotwell.co.uk/directories/local-services](http://www.brightwellcumsotwell.co.uk/directories/local-services).

Activity	Time	Venue	Contact
<b>MONDAYS</b>			
Silver Swan Ballet for over 55s	5.50-6.50pm	VH	Virgina 07776 150903 <a href="mailto:v.chell1501@gmail.com">v.chell1501@gmail.com</a>
Keep Fit	6-45-7.45pm	VH	Shena Luck 01491 834543 <a href="mailto:shenaluck@btinternet.com">shenaluck@btinternet.com</a>
Cubs	5.30-9pm	JP	Anne Addison 01235 511018
Knitting group (alt monthly)	7.30pm - from Feb	Homes	Shannon Couch 07766 330359 <a href="mailto:Shannon.couch@zohomail.eu">Shannon.couch@zohomail.eu</a>

<b>TUESDAYS</b>			
Quilting (alt Tuesdays)	9.45am	VH	Cynthia Hurley 01491 836509 <a href="mailto:Cynthia-hurley@supanet.com">Cynthia-hurley@supanet.com</a>
WI (2 <sup>nd</sup> in month)	7.30pm	VH	<a href="mailto:brightwellcumsotwellwi@gmail.com">brightwellcumsotwellwi@gmail.com</a>
Bell Ringing	7-9pm	St Ag	John Dowling 07979 863649
Dance classes Mable Gubbins	7.30-10pm	JP	Jenny Cox 07816 335972

<b>WEDNESDAYS</b>			
Coffee mornings	10-12	CR	Janice Chilton 01491 863331
Knitting group (alt monthly)	2.30pm – from Mar	CR	Shannon Couch 07766 330359 <a href="mailto:Shannon.couch@zohomail.eu">Shannon.couch@zohomail.eu</a>
Keep Fit	6.45pm	VH	Shena Luck 01491 834543 <a href="mailto:shenaluck@btinternet.com">shenaluck@btinternet.com</a>
Badminton	8-11pm	VH	<a href="mailto:theterryhurley@gmail.com">theterryhurley@gmail.com</a>

<b>THURSDAYS</b>			
Toddlers	9.15am	VH	<a href="mailto:brightwelltoddlers@gmail.com">brightwelltoddlers@gmail.com</a>
Short Mat Bowls	1.30-4pm	VH	Roger Symes 01491 837175 Adrian Collett 01491 837617

Emmaus bible study (alt Thurs)	PM	Homes	Mina Barratt <a href="mailto:mina.gb@icloud.com">mina.gb@icloud.com</a> 07738 220402
Pilates - 2 classes between:	5.30-7.45pm	VH	Nathan Clayton 07815 735165 <a href="mailto:remedy@live.co.uk">remedy@live.co.uk</a>

FRIDAYS			
Beavers	6-7pm	JP	Hilary Rogerson 01491 839960
Scouts	7.15-9pm	JP	Tim Scane 01235 511448 Tim Daly 07798 766036

SATURDAYS			
Art Club	10-12	VH	<a href="mailto:brightwellart@gmail.com">brightwellart@gmail.com</a>

SUNDAYS			
St Agatha's services	9.30am	Most Sun-days	<a href="mailto:teamvicar@wallingfordcofe.org.uk">teamvicar@wallingfordcofe.org.uk</a>
Community Circuits (PHT)	10-11am	JP	H Harrison 07769 645069

H Harrison (PHT) also provides individual personal health training sessions at the Jubilee Pavilion – contact H on 07769 645069.

In addition, at the **BcS Recreation Ground:**

BcS Cricket Club (Apr-Sept)

Senior section games (May-Sept)	Sunday 1-8pm	Chris Benarr
Senior net practice (Apr-June)	Wednesday 5.30-9pm	07813 154006
Junior 8-15 Development Group coaching (May-July)	Friday 5.30-8pm	Alex Pearmain 07989 437414
All-Stars 5-8 years (May-July)	Saturday 10-11am	Alex Pearmain 07989 437414
Juniors U11s games (May-July)	Sunday 10-12 noon	Alex Pearmain
Junior U13s game (May-July)	Thursday 6-8pm	07989 437414

AND at **King's Meadow: BcS King's Meadow Tennis Club**

This friendly club has access to 2 all-weather courts near BcS Primary School on King's Meadow. Club sessions - Tuesday and Thursday 7pm to dusk and Sunday 9-12 noon April to September. New members welcomed – contact Tony Windsor 07909 848098 [tony@bcskingsmeadowtennisclub.org.uk](mailto:tony@bcskingsmeadowtennisclub.org.uk).

## Book Reviews

### *I Know You* by Russell Govan

'*I Know You*' is set across a diverse range of places from a small village in Scotland to a refugee camp in Ethiopia to a talk show set in the USA, and even more intriguingly the story moves over a wide scope of time from the Blitz to the present day, with several stops in between. The story's protagonist is Eilidh, a Scottish girl who has just finished school, or is that Patti, who has fallen for a talented young footballer named Walter Buchanan? Intrigued? Read on....as I did voraciously once I started this book.

Govan's book explores a fascinating concept about our souls and the possibility of time travel. As readers, we are introduced to this idea gradually, as is Eilidh herself. We are allowed time to absorb the strangeness of her situation as well as becoming invested in what happens to her. All the characters throughout the novel are developed convincingly and the dynamics of Eilidh's family produce many humorous moments, amid other more emotional ones. I particularly enjoyed the role her little brother Scott played and the loving relationship Eilidh had with her mother and granny.

As I raced on in my reading of the novel, I found myself drawn deeper into the puzzle of what was happening. Clues are deftly woven into the story, so much of the time we are left on tenterhooks as much as Eilidh herself.

Like all good stories this one is a real page-turner, with many effective and memorable moments. It encompasses so many themes in its broad sweep: loss; memory; nostalgia; family, to name a few. But, like all the best stories, this ultimately is a story about love. Its real power lies in its resolution, which provides an unexpected and highly emotional ending, to close the exploration of this universal and time-defying concept.

*Abbie Stephenson*

### *Unleashed* by Boris Johnson

Whatever you think of former Prime Minister Boris Johnson, his new book *Unleashed* is hardly likely to change your mind. The Daily Mail helpfully calls it The Political Memoir of the Century. At 748 pages, it's certainly one of the biggest: a mammoth platform to explain his political life between 2008 (two terms as London Mayor), through 2016 (Brexit and its aftermath), to 2019 as PM, and ignominious defenestration in 2022. It's an extraordinary story, and he tells it in vivid detail. He's well aware of the strongest charges against him and he doesn't shy away from them.

Boris devotes 15 pages to refuting suggestions his Brexit stance was motivated by self-advancement. Number Ten partying (while the country was locked down 'like a Victorian boarding school') was no reason for him to resign as PM (the 'hooha' was orchestrated by Dom Cummings after a feud with Dilyn the dog). Giving evidence to a Select Committee that British Iranian prisoner Zaghari-Ratcliffe was teaching journalism when she was visiting her family in Iran – and thus seriously jeopardising her release - should have been picked up by his officials before it was reported to the Iranians.

If you're a Boris fan, you'll be persuaded by these and many other interpretations of events over 16 years. Otherwise, possibly not. There's lots to like in *Unleashed*, though. It's an easy read, and Johnson's Wodehousian style is great fun. Theresa May, his troubled predecessor at Number Ten, is 'old grumpy knickers'. Bertie Wooster would be proud to describe Aunt Agatha the same way.

Boris happily admits to goofs and gaffes throughout his own life. However painful to watch on telly at the time, his story about mixing up pages of his speech to the CBI, and spending 10 minutes extemporising on Peppa Pig, is simply riotous. Remember an inebriated Lucky Jim Dixon faltering through his academic lecture on Merrie England?

At risk of reading too much into the Johnson psyche, *Unleashed* feels like a life of two halves. Clearly he loved his eight years as Mayor of London, heading a team of committed and loyal public servants, with important and clear objectives, decent sized budgets, and the good luck to host the global Olympic Games. As he lay in his ICU bed at St Thomas's Hospital recovering from Covid just a few years later, despite his self-admitted failings as Prime Minister and the joys of his new family, he must have wondered where that golden era had gone and why his political fortunes had changed.

*Hugh Roderick*

## Brightwell cum Sotwell Cricket Club

Let's just take a moment to close our eyes and think of sunny afternoons ahead, with the warm sunshine on our faces and the comforting sound of willow on leather down at the Rec. We are looking forward to a busy summer of cricket and hope more of the village can be involved.

Winter nets for the youth section will commence for an hour on the Sunday afternoons of March. More details will follow. Youth cricket and the All Stars will commence around the end of April, early May, depending on the weather. We will be playing pairs cricket in all age groups this year to ensure a full game for everyone and will be hosting some tournaments for the girls on behalf of the county too.

The senior team needs more players from the village this year. We don't want to become a Wallingford club or one that is topped up by leftovers from Didcot or Abingdon. Cricket has been sustained in the village since 1858 by locals and we'd like to encourage more of you to play a couple of times a year for us. Any anxiety you have around the standards required can be quickly assuaged as we are very much a village team of mixed abilities and play gentle friendlies against similar village teams locally and several long standing touring sides that love coming to us.

To support the introduction of new players we will commence this year on 27<sup>th</sup> April with a new fixture called 'The Windsor Cup' that will be played in a pairs format with the focus very much on new players coming in to enjoy themselves. We will also be firing up the BBQ more regularly this season and running several shorter fixtures that finish earlier on a Sunday afternoon focusing on our village families having a nice afternoon at the Rec.

The Windsor Cup is so named in honour of our dear friend, Tony Windsor, who after contributing massively to the resurgence and growth of the club for over 20 years has handed over the last of his responsibilities, except for the grass cutting. His efforts cannot be understated and the club and village owe him an immense amount of gratitude for all his tireless voluntary work.

*Chris Benarr*

## 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 Hilary 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.

The CA is currently working on plans for the following events this year:

**The Village Quiz** returns on **8 March 7 30pm** in the Village Hall. Why not get together with a group of 6-8 friends or family, and pit your wits or scratch your heads to challenge for the trophy! We recommend early booking as tickets are limited. Tickets are £10 per person which includes a chilli supper - bring your own drinks, plates, glasses and cutlery. Please contact our team on the new BcS CA email address at [bcscommunityassoc@gmail.com](mailto:bcscommunityassoc@gmail.com) (or 01491 839960) for an application form by 24 February.



**The Village Fete** will be held at Moreton House on **5 July at 2pm**. We are grateful to Luke and Emma Clancey for giving us permission once again to hold the Fete in their beautiful garden. Please put a 'save the date' in your diaries.

Following on from last year's success we are hoping to run another Jumble Sale in the autumn - more details will follow in the next *Villager*.

*James Davys*

## BcS Environment Group

The Swan Stream has had a very good flow for most of the year which has made it more attractive to wildlife as well as people, the waterfall by the recreation ground proving very popular. This is quite a relief as, when planned in 2020, we were unsure whether flow would continue throughout the year, especially as the area of land feeding the local springs is fairly small. It is centred on Sinodun Hill to the north of the village. Hopefully the good flow will continue but there will always be a chance of a drought restricting supplies as once was recorded in 1891 in the Parish Diaries when the vicar's well ran dry and the village stream didn't flow for some eight months with the drought affecting the whole country.

A Hen Harrier was noted on the Haycroft at the turn of the year which is a very rare sighting for this area. They once preyed on wild fowl, hence its name, but they have the sad record of being the most persecuted bird in the UK. Their natural home is in the upland areas of the UK with only a few breeding pairs still nesting in England. They are slim medium sized birds with owl-like faces. Males are blue-grey above with a paler underside and black wing tips. Females are mainly brown but both sexes have a white rump, yellow beak with a black tip and yellow legs. Maybe you'll get lucky and see one.

## Weather

The rainfall recorded at Highlands Farm was 82.1mm for November and December 34.3mm. The total for 2024 was 849.8mm which made it the second wettest since 1999 with the total for 2023 being slightly higher at 898mm. The average 1999 to 2012 was 640mm.

For 2024 as a whole, the Met Office record for rainfall shows this area to have had between 25 and 35 % above the 1991–2020 average. The mean maximum temperature between was 0.5 and 1 deg C above average. Our sunshine was about average although across the country it was somewhat below average. Certainly, memory has it as having plenty of gloomy and wet days. Over all, according to the Met office, 2024 was a warm and unsettled year for the UK. The year began with Storm Henk on 2 January, bringing damaging wind and rain to central and

southern parts of the UK. The 2023/2024 storm season was a busy one, culminating in Storm Lillian in August, the first time 'L' has been reached in a single storm season since the naming system began in 2015. It was the fourth warmest on record since 1884. It will be interesting to see what 2025 brings.

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

## Stewart Village Hall

It was a busy festive season in the Hall with many parties and celebrations, including a very welcome return of the traditional Christmas Carol evening, not held in the Hall for many years. After the success of this event, we have had lots of requests to keep it in the calendar, and we are more than happy to do so. The December Clock Tower Lottery draw was held during the evening, and two lucky winners had a cash boost of £200 and £100 before Christmas.

Now we return to a more normal calendar of events, and many of the groups and clubs that use the Hall regularly would welcome new members. So if you fancy joining WI or taking part in Badminton, Indoor Bowls, Quilting, and many other activities, you will be very welcome. See pages 12 and 13.

An exciting new fundraising event is being planned for 15 March: 'The Forensic Experience' will be led by a former Metropolitan Police Crime Scene Investigator. While investigating a crime scene you will have the chance to listen to recorded interviews with suspects and examine the crime scene evidence including taking fingerprints, looking at footwear comparisons and much more to help you solve the crime. More information will follow; tickets will be limited and on sale in the Village Stores.

The Village Hall is hosting a Bridge afternoon, on Tuesday 25 March, 1 for 1.30pm. It includes a lovely tea and a great raffle plus prizes to be won. Cost £60 a table or £15 per player. Tables are provided, but please bring your own bridge cloths, tea cloths, cards and pens. Contact Irene Lascelles 07925 667569 or [i\\_tlascelles@hotmail.com](mailto:i_tlascelles@hotmail.com) for booking details.

We are also hosting two discos: Saturdays 22 February & Ladies only 5 April.

Going into this year, the Trustees will focus on the restoration project, raising funds and awareness, and continuing to gather your input and feedback. As we wrote in the previous *Villager*, this scheme is all about saving the Hall for the future, so please get involved and support the Hall by using it for your events and activities.

Finally, we would like to pay tribute to two of our valued and long-term supporters. We join the whole village to mourn the passing of John Rodda, a

Village Hall Trustee for over 20 years, and Derek Brooker who diligently wound and maintained the clock for over 40 years. Both contributed greatly to the Hall and are sadly missed.

If you have any queries, comments or feedback, or want more information and contact details for all groups and activities or if you would like to book the Hall, please visit our website: [stewartvillageHall.org.uk](http://stewartvillageHall.org.uk) or contact Shena: [shenaluck@btinternet.com](mailto:shenaluck@btinternet.com) or 01491 834543.

## Clock Tower Lottery

In December the lottery draw was held during the Carol Concert in the Village Hall. The lucky winners said “Thank you to the Clock Tower Lottery for a most unexpected and exciting win! It’s wonderful to be able to support this worthwhile project, and a bonus to win such a lovely prize (£200)!”

Another winner said “As a long-time resident within our wonderful community, I always try to support community activities. The Village Hall Restoration Project represents a really bold initiative to restore and improve a vital community asset. I was therefore surprised and delighted (and slightly embarrassed) to be the lucky winner of £100 from the Clock Tower Lottery draw in December. Thank you so much to the trustees of the Stewart Village Hall - what a great early Christmas present!”

By the time this edition of *The Villager* is published, the January draw will have taken place and two more lucky winners will have been announced.

To support the Hall and have the chance to win monthly cash prizes go to: <https://www.stewartvillageHall.org.uk/clock-tower-lottery.html> or email [info@stewartvillageHall.org.uk](mailto:info@stewartvillageHall.org.uk) or collect an application form from the entrance of the Hall.

*Annette Kilworth*

## Village Lunch Club

The next lunch is on Tuesday 11 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.

And, we are still looking for someone to join our cooking team. So, if you like cooking and have a few hours to spare (9.30 -14.00) 4 times a year on a Tuesday, we would love to hear from you. Contact details above.

*Eastlyn Horsfield*

## Cosy Cafe

Numbers were low before Christmas, so I have decided not to continue. However, in the past year alone The Cosy Cafe has raised over £1,000 towards my £7,000 challenge. Thanks to everyone who came.

Please help raise more funds for the Hall by attending the many exciting events coming up, see page 18 and the Diary on page 24.

*Shena Luck*

## Wassail 2025

Wassail has become one of the most anticipated events in the village calendar, attracting large crowds, and this year was no different. Starting at the Red Lion, nearly 600 people processed, arriving at Sotwell Manor for the traditional Mummers play, with Thames Water as this year’s villain, a very popular choice! Orchards were visited, fruit trees woken up, and shotguns fired. Such a great noise that ought to scare off Old Jack Frost from visiting the village during blossoming time in May. The Wassail King and Queen were crowned, and Wassailers treated to a Lamb’s Wool cider punch. As usual, everyone then returned to the Red Lion for folk music, singing, dancing, beer, and hot chilli! The evening was rounded off by the fire dancers and a spectacular firework display. Thanks to everyone for making it happen. For more on Wassail, video links and Yulia’s pics, please see the village website [www.brightwellcumssotwell.co.uk/community/wassailing-and-mumming](http://www.brightwellcumssotwell.co.uk/community/wassailing-and-mumming).

*Andy Lewis*

## BcS Toddlers

We had a very fun end to the Christmas term at toddler group with a fantastic party and a visit from Father Christmas! We’re now back into the swing of things for a new term and look forward to seeing all of our regular little ones and of course look forward to meeting any new families who haven’t been before.

Brightwell Toddlers runs every Thursday morning during term time 09.15-11am and is suitable for children aged 0-5. The cost is £3.50 cash or £4 online per session. We can be contacted at [brightwelltoddlers@gmail.com](mailto:brightwelltoddlers@gmail.com) or via our Facebook page [@brightwelltoddlers](https://www.facebook.com/brightwelltoddlers).

*Emily Paton Smith*

## Earth Trust

Is 2025 the year you'll discover the wonderful world of volunteering? Earth Trust has over 300 brilliant people who help with every area of the charity's work. Why not join them and learn new skills, make new friends, have fun and make a difference!

Earth Trust is currently recruiting for volunteers to help their Education team, so, if you have experience of working with children, share your passion for the natural world and be part of their inspiring learning programme; or, if you love meeting people and being involved in the buzz of big events, how about joining the Programming volunteer team? No experience necessary, just bags of enthusiasm!

Find out more at [www.earthtrust.org.uk/get-involved/volunteer/](http://www.earthtrust.org.uk/get-involved/volunteer/) or drop the team a line to arrange for a chat at [volunteering@earthtrust.org.uk](mailto:volunteering@earthtrust.org.uk). To hire a barn for weddings & celebrations go to [www.earthtrust.org.uk/venue-hire/](http://www.earthtrust.org.uk/venue-hire/) or drop the team a line to arrange for a viewing at [fison.barn@earthtrust.org.uk](mailto:fison.barn@earthtrust.org.uk).

Make a booking and you'll also be supporting the charity's vital work championing green spaces for all.

*Sharon Squire*

## Wallingford Accessible Boat Club

Wallingford Accessible Boat Club (WABC) is seeking volunteers to help expand our services in 2025. In 2024, we saw an incredible 61% increase in passenger numbers, and we're preparing for even more growth as we move to a new base at The Riverside, Wallingford.

Our charity, a totally voluntary organisation, enables disabled and less mobile individuals to enjoy the River Thames aboard *WOW-one*, a purpose-built accessible wheelyboat. In 2025, we aim to operate **seven days a week** and introduce special activities like fishing, nature watching, and photography.

We're recruiting for **Operational Volunteers** to assist with boat trips and passenger support and **Marketing & Fundraising Volunteers** to help promote our service and secure vital funding.

Make a real difference to your community. Join us and be part of a friendly team of 35 volunteers. Free training provided—no prior experience needed.

Email: [john.jenkins@wabc.org.uk](mailto:john.jenkins@wabc.org.uk) Mobile: 07976 297835

Visit [www.wabc.org.uk](http://www.wabc.org.uk) for more details.

*John Jenkins*

## Cholsey Repair Café

Cholsey Repair Café will be back on **Saturday 15 March**. Doors at **The Cholsey Pavilion** will be open from **10-12.45**, and our team of repair experts will try to help you fix all manner of household items. We have to give fair warning that modern coffee machines tend to be a bit too complex for their own good but many other tools, kitchen gadgets, electrical items, items of clothing and even smaller pieces of furniture can often be restored to working order. We make no charge for help, although spare parts must be paid for and we appreciate a donation towards operating costs. Our dates for 2025 (all Saturdays) are as follows: 15 March, 17 May, 19 July, 20 September and 15 November. See [www.cholseyrepaircafe.com](http://www.cholseyrepaircafe.com) for more information and advice.

*Ian Wheeler, Co-ordinator*

## Wallingford and District Art Club

Join our friendly Wallingford and District Art club on **Tuesday 18 February**, for our AGM, where committee members will outline achievements in 2024 and plans for 2025. Following the AGM, professional artist, Julia Sorrell, will talk about her artistic life and her recent works. Her versatility is such that she can be developing an imaginative 'dreamscape' painting, move onto a straight drawing of plants, then follow that with a highly observed portrait in oil.

Venue - Centre 70 (off Goldsmiths Lane in Wallingford) 7.30pm-9.30pm, cost £5 or free for club members. For further information about this event or other club activities, please visit the club website at [www.wallingfordartclub.org.uk](http://www.wallingfordartclub.org.uk) or email [admin@wallingfordartclub.org.uk](mailto:admin@wallingfordartclub.org.uk).

*Nicola Webb*

## Cutting rural crime

Rural crime - specifically defined as things like the theft of farm machinery, equipment, damage to crops and offences such as hare coursing - can have a huge impact on farming businesses, not to mention the real issues of safety for individuals. Thankfully rural crime is falling locally. Across Thames Valley it is down 24% over the last 12 months and in southern Oxfordshire it's down 33% but that's not by accident.

Last year I secured additional funding from the Home Office for work focussed specifically in Oxfordshire. Thames Valley Police have teamed up

with local District Councils, forming a Rural Crime Partnership and delivering the following:

- Using undercover cameras and off-road bikes, officers can now better monitor remote areas and track down offenders who think they can't be reached.
- Farmers have received free security reviews and DNA marking kits for their equipment, making it much harder for thieves to get away and easier to return stolen items if something happens.
- Rural Crime Advisor: A dedicated advisor was recruited, to be out in the community, offering helpful advice, meeting with local farmers and businesses, and keeping rural industries safer.
- Tackling Fly-Tipping: New surveillance tools are helping councils catch and prosecute those who dump waste, keeping rural areas cleaner and more beautiful.

More officers have been recruited to the Rural Crime Taskforce, making it one of the largest and certainly one of the most effective in the country. They recognise that many of these offences are part of organised crime. The taskforce are identifying and focussing on the most dangerous and prolific offenders. In fact they have been so successful that whilst there have been reduction in crime here, other police areas have seen increases as criminals target other places. None of us are safe, unless we're all safe; so we've now established a South East Partnership Against Rural Crime - joining together neighbouring police forces so that we can target criminals all the way from the farms they target to the ports where they try to export stolen goods.

With these measures, our rural areas are becoming safer places thanks to the hard work and dedication of Thames Valley Police officers.

*Matthew Barber, Police and Crime Commissioner, Thames Valley*

## Corn Exchange

A full programme of cinema and live performance returns after the pantomime run, starting with BAFTA nominated 'Conclave' on 2 February – see [www.cornexchange.org.uk.whats-on](http://www.cornexchange.org.uk.whats-on). Live screenings include:

Tues 4 & Mon 17 Feb 7pm Les Miserables – 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Staged Concert  
 Thursday 6 February 6.45pm The Tales of Hoffman from the Royal Opera  
 Thursday 20 February 7pm The Importance of Being Earnest from NTLive  
 Thursday 27 February 7.15pm Swan Lake from the Royal Ballet  
 Tuesday 4 March 7pm Jesus Christ Superstar Live  
 Tuesday 25 March 7.15pm Royal Ballet Romeo & Juliet  
 Thursday 27 March 7pm Dr Strangelove NTLive

# VILLAGE DIARY

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## February

5	Buns & Bells for St Agatha	St Ag	10-4
11	WI talk 'Be safe from Internet scammers'	VH	7.30pm
22	Disco	VH	7.30pm

## March

8	Community Association Village Quiz	VH	7.30pm
11	Village Lunch Club	VH	12.15
11	WI talk by personal stylist 'Colour with Confidence'	VH	7.30pm
15	A Forensic Experience	VH	7pm
21	Save the Children - Malcolm Emery on 'Air Frying'	VH	
25	Bridge afternoon	VH	1pm
26	BSR AGM	CR	8pm
28	BSR talk by ex-ambassador to Afghanistan, Sir Laurie Bristow	VH	7.30pm

## Advance Notice

5 April	Ladies only disco, Village Hall
10 May	Save the Children Annual Plant Sale
28 June	Save the Children Ball in the Hall
5 July	Village Fete, Moreton House
6 September	Save the Children Fun Dog Show

## Refuse Collection (Food waste each week)

Grey bins	Thursdays 13 & 27 February
	Thursdays 13 & 27 March
Green (& brown) bins	Thursdays 6 & 20 February
	Thursdays 6 & 20 March

## Village website

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