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Editorial

Meteorological spring arrived on 1 March, bang on time. The usual Arctic cold snap swiftly followed however, so we didn’t get ahead of ourselves.

The village quiz is the true start of springtime, of course, and this year’s was groundbreaking. Teams in the past have been known to avoid winning the quiz because that means setting next year’s questions (and bearing the huge burden of Brightwell’s quizzing standards). But in a shock move, this year’s question setters A to Z rewrote the rules. Notsobrightwells won but were told their prize was NOT to have to set the quiz for next year. Instead 2nd, 3rd and 4th placed teams were in serious jeopardy. Wellspring Snails literally drew the short straw and will have no peace until their job is done this time next year.

Sadly, this edition of *The Villager* marks the passing of yet another stalwart of our community. Derek Brooker was an original. Not many people literally stop clocks when they die, but Derek did. He’d wound the Village Hall clock weekly for nearly 50 years, and its mechanism was stopped for 12 hours on one day in February as a tribute. Read Charlie Brooker’s celebration of his father Derek’s life on pages 3 to 5 in this issue. Charlie’s speech in the Village Hall is reported in full on our website www.brightwellcumsotwell.co.uk/.

We’re saying goodbye in a different way to Rev Kev Beer. Kevin is an honorary villager, as he lives in Crowmarsh Gifford where his benefice responsibilities also lie. But honorary or not, Kevin has made a big impression on the lives of many of us during his nine years in post. He married one of my daughters (in the ecclesiastical sense) and christened a grandson.

We tend to think that change in an old village like ours happens slowly. But Rev Kev’s leaving is a reminder that just 25 years ago we had a full-time rector for St Agatha’s and St James’s Churches.

You can find a number of rectors amongst 750 extraordinary images of Brightwell people and places from the last 150 years or so posted recently at www.brightwellcumsotwell.co.uk/history-group-archive by the History Society. It’s fascinating to see how today’s village landmarks looked in the past. Some might regret the differences from then to now: particularly the development of houses where once were orchards and fields. But that’s the thing about a vibrant village. It’s constantly renewing, giving opportunities to new generations to share and contribute to our heritage.

In light of world events, it’s a time to remember how lucky we are to live here.

Hugh Roderick, Guest Editor

Derek Brooker 1941-2024

My dad, Derek Brooker, died on New Year's Eve 2024. A few weeks into the new year, we held a celebration of his life at the village hall. Being the resident family show-off, I was tasked with delivering a eulogy. I tried not to make it too morose or earnest; Dad had an anarchic sense of humour and was constitutionally allergic to sentiment.



But some sentiment dribbled in through the cracks. Prior to me speaking, many people shared warm memories; his social services colleagues called him a “wonderful boss”, and one of my childhood friends (whom I hadn't seen in at least a decade) recalled him being “the coolest dad in the village”. I also heard a shocking first-hand account of what may have been Mum and Dad's first snog beside the phone box outside Bull Croft Park in Wallingford

although sadly that didn't make it into the eulogy. Nor did I repeat it here.

Dad spent his whole life in Brightwell. He was born in Church Lane to his parents Elsie and Joseph, in what was then known as ‘the shop’ (for obvious reasons), and later became ‘Monteith’ (for baffling ones). He went to school in the village hall - I picture his schooldays as a sort of Dickensian reboot of the Bash Street Kids; a childhood photo of him in uniform aged about 9 makes him look like the spawn of Jacob Rees-Mogg.

After school, he trained as an electrician but found time for interests like shooting and rock climbing - two things I've only attempted in video games. He kept a shotgun at home and shot pheasants, presumably legally. A properly rustic lifestyle - he even recalled eating ‘rook pie’ as a youngster. It's quite a life that stretches from eating rook pie at one end to arguing on the phone with Gigaclear Broadband at the other.

In 1965, he married Anne. It was a Quaker ceremony, rare enough to make the Wallingford Herald. They weren't devout Quakers; they didn't have the outfits or anything. Whenever I mention my Quaker background, people assume I grew up in a sort of porridge cult, which is only 96% true.

Soon after marrying, my sister Sam arrived, followed a few years later by me - which was all the encouragement they needed to stop breeding. By 1973,

Dad moved the whole family to live with his parents in Church Lane. Having three generations squashed together under one roof must have been fun, because about ten minutes after moving in, Dad hurriedly built a DIY extension. Construction went entirely without incident - unless you count the near-fatal one when he fell off the roof. A bag of cement broke his fall, bursting and leaving three-year-old me covered head-to-toe in dust, shrieking like an alabaster banshee.

Around this time, Dad also underwent a career change, switching from electrician to social worker, which sounds like a big leap, although both jobs involved defusing situations and getting the occasional nasty shock — such as the time (in the late 80s) when he was attacked by the father of a child being taken into care.

Dad was knifed in the stomach and slashed across the cheek (I'm aware this is beginning to sound like the eulogy for a Kray Twin). He recalled the surgeon reassuring him by remarking that it was “good to be cut with an unused Stanley blade”. Dad finding amusement in the use of the word “good” even in this dark moment perfectly illustrates his pragmatically dark sense of humour, which I inherited and later monetized.

Outside work, Dad's taste in music could politely be described as ‘eclectic’, and impolitely as ‘batshit’. He enjoyed everything from Lonnie Donegan to the Sex Pistols, Kraftwerk to jazz.

His other great loves were wine and cycling, sometimes in that order. His passion for wine was legendary. It's fair to say by the end of a meal he was sometimes half-pissed. Sometimes whole-pissed, come to that. But it was his passion for cycling that bordered on obsession.

For their 25th wedding anniversary, in place of a party or a fancy dinner, he celebrated with the impulse purchase of a tandem bike. Their initial test ride around the village was marked by much undignified “wobbling and squealing from the back” (his words, Mum), but they quickly progressed to ambitious trips across France, including an epic 917-mile journey from Narbonne to Cherbourg. In other words, they embraced and appreciated the freedom of movement across Europe. Which is more than can be said for some newer residents of the village. Well, one of them.

In 2014, Dad faced cancer and had his bladder replaced with a ‘neo bladder’ — a true medical miracle performed at the Royal Berks Hospital in Reading. Remarkably, it didn't stop him cycling or enjoying wine. He remained in good spirits, good health, and good shape right until the end.

Dad was also heavily involved in village life: a founder member of the chess club, active in Neighbourhood Watch, and for nearly 50 years he wound the village clock every week, a laborious process which involved climbing three ladders. When he retired just shy of his 80th birthday, Steve Luck calculated that in the course of his duties Dad had scaled the equivalent of Mount Everest twice. Completely unpaid. What a mug.

Finally, in a poetic full circle, Dad died at home in the very same room he was born in – a dizzyingly rare event in the 21st century. On the day of the wake, the village clock, which normally booms out an hourly chime, was silenced in tribute. Thereby providing anyone who turned up late, or indeed not at all, with a brilliant excuse.

If you were there, thank you. It meant a lot. And if you weren't, well, you're dead to me. But not as dead as Dad. That's a tasteless joke he'd have approved of. So there.

Charlie Brooker

Brightwell Supporting Refugees

BSR has been in existence for 10 years and raised over £100,000 for very grateful refugees. Thank you! During that time we have had so many events that have enlightened and entertained us. This milestone year is no exception. On 14 June at St Mary-le-More in Wallingford we will be entertained by Stephen Hope impersonating Victor Borge. More details to come!

The BSR Trustees

Village Stores and Post Office

The shop and Post Office team never has much time to relax. After St Valentine's Day and Pancake Day, we are getting ready for Mother's Day and then Easter, all whilst making sure day-to-day services are being maintained.

We recently held a volunteers get together on a Sunday afternoon in the Village Hall. It was a chance to relax over tea and cakes, a quiz and just socialise with the team. Over the last 14 months we have welcomed new members to the team which has helped share the load. If anyone has any spare time to join either the shop or Post Office team, please do get in touch. There are lots of back office and general maintenance jobs besides serving on the counters, so come and enjoy being part of the team.

The shop and Post Office Team

Letter from our MP

This month, I met many constituents in surgeries, out and about, and online ... technology makes it easier to connect. And of course, our constituency is rich in technology, engineering and science; it was a privilege to meet some of the Harwell Space cluster and visit Williams Engineering.

Often, I meet constituents who need support. Flooding has continued to need attention. Many constituents have contacted me about the appalling track record of Thames Water. I supported Charlie Maynard, MP, in challenging Thames Water's significant water bill increases and ongoing debt-financing and will continue to do so. I am engaging with the agencies responsible for flood management, pushing to see preventative and mitigation work completed as soon as possible.

In Parliament, it was an honour to speak in the debate to mark the third anniversary of the invasion of Ukraine by Russia. The tragic situation has also shown the best of our constituency, and I was able to recognise the huge contribution of families and charities, particularly in Brightwell-cum-Sotwell.

During a rally at Westminster of those who provide adult social care, I was able to show my support. And since then I have voiced, including on BBC Radio Oxford, just how important and urgent the review of adult social care is.

As a Transport Select Committee member, I raised concerns about barriers to bus use, especially in villages, which affect many constituents. With the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Motor Neurone disease (MND), it was an honour to visit the Kings MND Care and Research Centre and see their work.

Finally, I was pleased to hear the local elections are going ahead in May. This is your opportunity to listen to the candidates and vote for who represents your needs. If you have concerns, would like to meet me or would like me to visit you, please contact me at Olly.glover.MP@parliament.uk For more regular updates you can follow me on Bluesky: [@ollyglover.bsky.social](https://bsky.app/profile/ollyglover.bsky.social) and Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/OllyGloverLD/>.

Olly Glover



Could this be you?

What could be better than spending time in one of the village's most tranquil green spaces ... Join St Agatha's churchyard team, and really make a difference. Contact John Dowling on 07979 863649 or johndowling@hotmail.com.

Parish Council

Not much to report this month! Our new Parish Council clerk Nettie is settling in well. If you need to visit the Parish Office for anything she is there on a Monday and Tuesday morning. Other recent news is that posts have now been installed down Bell Lane, so hopefully people will stay off the verge and it will recover in time. Also, our Fix my Street Super Users are very nearly fully trained so we will publicise their contact details soon.

A couple of people have shown interest in joining the Parish Council. We need to co-opt some new councillors before the election in a couple of years but no women have applied! As four of the councillors not standing again are women, it is important we maintain a gender balance on the Council.

We have had some serious fly tipping cases recently at the West End of the village. If you see something in the village that you think needs the Parish Council's attention, or if you're not sure who to tell, please email Nettie and she will pass your concern to the most appropriate person. Or you can report fly tipping and similar 'dumping waste' issues direct to SODC.

One of the Parish Council's roles is to comment on planning applications submitted to SODC for approval. We are totally guided by planning requirements and therefore ask that if you are considering alterations to your property, you check the planning requirements first. You can ask advice from a member of our Planning Committee before spending too much on design.

We presented the plans for refurbishment of the Jubilee Pavilion in March and quite a few villagers came to look at them and ask questions. If you were not able to come you can see the plans on the Brightwell cum Sotwell Parish website. If you have any comments, please send them to Nettie, the Parish Council clerk. While looking forward to a long and lovely summer, hopefully, please remember to be kind and have any garden fires in the evening or on a dull, cold day when no one has washing out or windows open.

Save the date - Tuesday 6 May, 7pm at the Village Hall

The Parish Council's Annual Meeting for the village is a chance to find out what the Parish council has been up to this year.

Sue Robson

Brightwell cum Sotwell Parish Council

bcsparishcouncil@googlemail.com 01491 826968

Community Association

Village Quiz 8 March

A big thank you to everyone who came and supported the quiz again this year. I am very grateful to the CA team and helpers who cooked such a lovely half time supper and arranged such a fun evening. We also wish to express our gratitude to the winners of last year's event, A to Z, who set such a challenging and entertaining quiz! Congratulations to this year's winners Notsobrightwells on their hard-won victory.

Village Fete 5 July 2-4.30pm Moreton House

Luke and Emma Clancey have kindly allowed us to hold the fete in their lovely gardens again this year. Full details will be given in the next copy of *The Villager* but please put the date in your diary.

James Davys

"We want to talk about Kevin"

On the Sunday after Easter Rev Kev will do his last service in the Wallingford Benefice which includes the parish of Brightwell-cum-Sotwell. Kevin is retiring after nine years here. We will miss his pastoral care and his sense of fun, and he will miss ringing St Agatha's bells. The bells drew him to the job in the first place. He's never lost his passion for bellringing which began in his teens; he was Tower captain for 18 years in Old Windsor where he grew up. Last month I chatted with Kevin about his faith and his take on the world. I began by asking what inspired him to be a priest:



As a bellringer, I remember walking away from church having rung to call people to worship and wondering what I was missing. So I read the Bible over several Saturday mornings... Matthew, Mark, Luke and John and then before the end of Acts I knew God was real in my life. I challenged my Vicar at the time about why church was so boring when it had this treasure.

To his credit the Vicar responded by allowing Kevin and a few friends to do a monthly service, which they called "Good News at Six": *"we'd just pick our own theme, and we would basically just give our testimony to our own faith and what it meant to us. The seed grew from there."*

When did you decide you wanted to be a minister of the church? *“It was a calling that I answered eventually after running away from it since my early 20s. I just didn’t think I was mature enough. For the next twenty years or so I used my marriage, my family and a successful career in IT as an excuse, but eventually I was ordained aged 47.”*

Give us a sense of a day in the life of the Team Vicar responsible for Brightwell and Crowmarsh, the life you are leaving behind. *“The day starts with Morning Prayer, (these days, like everything else, there is a Morning Prayer app) followed by walking the dog – which may include some random pastoral conversations. I open emails and clear any that can be answered quickly, making mental notes to come back to the others (hopefully!).*

Duties vary: attend coffee morning; lead communion service in church or care home; occasionally conduct funeral or interment of ashes; make phone calls; Continuing Ministerial Development training; lunch – ideally with BBC News but occasionally out with local CTWA (Churches Together in the Wallingford Area) Ministers, Deanery Clergy Chapter... Visit school to lead Collective Worship (assembly). Ideally relax before walking the dog again.

Dinner. Evening meetings: various! Early evening meet Baptism family; or wedding couple or bereaved to plan a funeral; bellringing (Tues teaching); local Air Cadets (Tues/Thurs as Chaplain or “Padre”); chair Parish Church Council meetings; deanery synod; trustee of village charities; Crowmarsh school governor (I finished last year); Street Pastoring in Wallingford on some Fridays, late, or prepare for the next day if time allows.”

Street pastoring? *“It’s mainly looking out for vulnerable people, teenagers mostly who may not be used to alcohol. And there is a bit of a drugs problem too. We’re a group of people from different churches who’ve all had first aid training, so if we come across anything, we can help. We’re basically just extensions of God’s loving parenthood on the streets to make sure everyone’s okay and has someone to talk to instead of drowning their sorrows.*

It must be disappointing for you that folks only turn up to church in numbers for the festivals – Christmas, Easter and so on. *“Yes, this is particularly noticeable in Brightwell. I take responsibility of “the cure of souls” seriously, so I hope people become more than consumers of religious entertainment. That may not count much at the pearly gates.”*

Why is our society becoming increasingly secular? *“Political correctness; relativism; ignorance of the Bible and Jesus’s teaching, not least by some who mis-represent Christianity to justify right-wing politics.”*

But is that all? Could it be that the more we learn about science the harder it is to believe in the immaculate conception and the resurrection? *“Well, let’s talk about the incarnation. Can we create test tube babies? Yes, we can. So is God not greater than us? Of course he is. He invented everything we are. So why should we be able to do something and yet we say it’s impossible for God, it’s just not. There’s no separation between science and religion.”*

How worried are you about the many revelations of sexual misconduct and the lack of action by the church authorities? *“It is frustrating, because that’s all people see in the press. And if they don’t see that, it’s arguments about how gay are you allowed to be in the Kingdom of God? People think that’s all the Church of England is about, and it’s not, it’s about street pastoring and food banks and all the rest of it. The Church isn’t going to disappear just because of it being a human institution that has sinners in it. The whole point is there is a good news message for sinners, and that’s what we offer as a church”.*

What matters most to you in this world? *“Health, peace, love, family, Ralph my dog and for me personally, my ministry and getting ordained”.*

And what bugs you? *“Injustice, deceit, inhumanity – all evil!”*

If you could change anything in this world what would it be? *“Make those in power put care of creation and climate change at the top of their agenda instead of corporate profits and unsustainable growth”.*

Are you a glass half full or glass half empty person? *Definitely more full than empty...although it depends whose round it is!*

Looking back – do you have special memories of your time in Brightwell? *All the weddings have been lovely as I get to know the couples beforehand and get to share this special day with them, and indeed, then some Christenings! Funerals of some wonderful Christians, including close friends like Roy Thorpe and Derek Nightingale through bellringing and the choir... but every funeral has been a privilege, and I expect to see them all in a better place.*

Kevin and his wife Lesley-Anne are moving to Abingdon. He will continue as a priest occasionally filling in to support the fulltime clergy.

Alison Leigh (despatched from Australia!)

Summer Concert

Save the date in your diary! The Brightwell cum Sotwell Summer Concert will be held in St Agatha’s Church on **Sunday 22 June**. Watch out for more details.

Alec McGivan

Brightwell cum Sotwell Toddlers Group

Our babies and toddlers have had a fun start to the spring term. We enjoyed World Book Day with dressing up and story time and we have more spring and Easter themed sessions to look forward to. For anybody thinking of coming along for the first time, we're a very welcoming group of parents and carers. We get together on Thursday mornings for playtime, crafts, snacks and singing, and tea and coffee for grownups. Our baby corner is comfortable for those with newborns and younger little ones and has a wide range of toys.

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

Emily Paton-Smith

Brightwell cum Sotwell Preschool

“And now here is my secret, a very simple secret: It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye.” (*The Little Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry). At Brightwell Preschool we know that the biggest secret of all is that very little people already know this: it is attachment, it is love, it is relationships. These have been put to the test over the winter months as everyone has battled viruses, awful weather and fatigue.

We have combated this together: the children have continued to feel the excitement of the cold wind on their faces, the warmth of a hot drink in their hands and the smell of freshly baked goodies wafting out of the windows and doors. Imagination has also been rife with our loose-parts play, which has given opportunities to teach collaboration and respect, resulting in new friendships and hilarious narratives. We laugh a lot at any time of the year.

All children struggle with emotional regulation at some point. Some children battle with it more than that and a few will find challenges at every corner. However, to help support the invisible struggles that some children face, The Fairthorne Trust has kindly donated funds towards sensory equipment that as a Charity we cannot afford on our own. This will make a huge difference to our preschool and how we can help others. What a wonderful community you all are. Thank you!

Natasha Hillier

Brightwell cum Sotwell Primary School

As we make our way through the second half of the spring term here at Brightwell, we find ourselves in what seems our busiest term yet, but we don't mind that – especially now the weather has finally improved and we can have more fun outside! Our term started with a visit from our local PCSO who came in to deliver the PC Ben talk to some of younger classes. PC Ben is a children's book designed to educate children about the role of the police in the community – it helps children to know that should they ever need help or advice, they can approach and engage with the police.

Keeping the children healthy both physically and mentally, is a real priority for us at Brightwell so we were absolutely delighted when we were offered some free football and tennis coaching sessions. Across three days, the whole school – from our youngest to our oldest – put on their PE kits and were able to get out into the sunshine and enjoy some specialist sports sessions, with the main aim being to have fun and to maybe inspire them to want to go and learn more about these sports outside of school!

We were also able to take advantage of another wonderful free experience when Worcester Class visited The Old Farmyard in Gallowstree Common, near Reading. The children learnt about where some of the food they eat is actually grown and how farmers are managing their land to promote wildlife and protect the environment through regeneration. They also played their own part by helping to plant a number of hazel trees – we are hoping to go back and visit in the future to see how our trees are doing!

And then, most recently, it was one of our absolute favourite days in the school calendar – World Book Day! There was a truly stunning variety of costumes on display this year (we were very impressed by some of the creativity shown) and, as always, we kicked the day off with our fabulous catwalk where the children – and staff – got to strut their stuff and show off those fabulous costumes!

Some of the children went across to visit our friends at preschool, where there was the chance to sit with brothers or sisters and share some good books together. There were also some surprise visitors to the classrooms in the form of our families, who had been invited to come in and read a story in their child's class (without the children knowing). If you pop down to the village and visit the Red Box Gallery, you'll see a snippet of the fun we had.

Sue Potts, Headteacher

Brightwell cum Sotwell Environment Group

The Swan Stream was four years old on 9 March and is looking very well established and still with a very good flow thanks to a wet start to 2025 following on from a very wet 2024. Many thanks to the volunteers who help with managing the stream and its banks.

The Millennium Wood has also had the attention of volunteers helping to keep the woodland healthy. However, the presence of so many vigorous plants such as hemlock, burdock and cleaver (goosegrass or sticky willie) make for quite a challenge to keep areas clear for other less vigorous wildflowers and even the understorey shrubs that were planted a few years ago.

The last edition of *The Villager* had a very informative article about John Rodda who had done so much for the village. As one of the initiators of the Environment Group in 1995 his tireless work has added so much to our knowledge of local wildlife as well as wider environmental issues such as promoting solar panels and undertaking surveys of properties with a thermal imaging camera. The latter has been available recently and helps people identify where insulation of their homes might be required.

John was treasurer and then chairman of the group from 1998 for many years and key in preparing the Parish Conservation Plan in 1998 which went on to a second edition subtitled Portrait of a Rural Parsh in 2013. This contains a wealth of information including rainfall records for Highlands and Sherwood Farm which I still use to relate latest rainfall figures. His legacy lives on!

Weather

Rainfall recorded at Highlands Farm was 81mm for January and 47.9mm for February, both up to 50% above the 1999–2011 average for Highlands Farm, continuing the prolonged wet of 2024. The mean daily maximum temperature for the area was about 2 degrees C cooler for January but average for February, so the maximum winter (December to February) temperature was about average.

Unfortunately, the most memorable feature was the dense cloud layer that seemed to fill our skies day after day resulting in the sunshine being only around 80% of the 1991–2020 long term average. The beginning of March with almost continuous clear skies has been a very welcome relief.

Steve Capel-Davies

Stewart Village Hall

A message for everybody that uses the Village Hall

As the Trustees continue to focus on the restoration project, raising funds and awareness, our attention is turning to applying for grants. To support these applications we want to show funders how well the hall is used.

Lots of people use the hall for many different activities. We would like all groups to show what is going on by making their own short film or by taking photographs. These will be collated and used to support our grant applications. For videos, we just need a short, engaging two or three-minute piece about the activity, who it includes, and the purpose.

You can have lots of fun telling your story. Feel free to invite someone from outside your group to take the photos or create the video, or do it yourselves. Keep it simple – phone videos or photographs will be fine – but please shoot landscape mode (turn your phone sideways!). Thank you for your help.

Please send photos and videos to info@stewartvillagehall.org.uk.

Clock Tower Lottery

We have held six lottery draws now and carried out all the draws at village events. This has been a lot of fun and allowed us to involve many different groups. The noisiest by far was at the Christmas Carol evening when all the school children wanted to pull out the numbers. The March draw was made during the Forensic Experience, a Village Hall fundraising event. Thank you for your ongoing support to the Village Hall and good luck in future draws.

To join go to <https://www.stewartvillagehall.org.uk/clock-tower-lottery.html>. Lucky winners to date are:

		£200 prize	£100 prizes
		Winning tickets	
October	2024	158	385
November	2024	203	74
December	2024	487	366
January	2025	258	268
February	2025	90	157
March	2025	259	108

Fundraising events

We have had some great fundraising events in the hall. Most recent was the Forensic Experience, led by Hayley Scott, who was a Crime Scene Investigator with the Metropolitan Police for 14 years. Many thanks to everyone who came along and to those who helped on the night.

The third Bridge Afternoon with a delicious tea was held on 25 March, expertly organised by Irene and Tony Lascelles. Again, many thanks to everyone who attended, and to the wonderful kitchen team preparing and serving afternoon tea, sandwiches and cakes worthy of a Michelin star.

The next event is another 'back by popular demand' on 5 April – Ladies Dancing. It's a fun evening of music and dancing for women only (over 18). Tickets from the Village Stores or email info@stewartvillagehall.org.uk. As always, all events, regular groups and classes are advertised on our posters.

Finally, we are very grateful to Paul Chilton for tidying the garden along the side of the hall. We should have another wonderful showing of summer colour thanks to his tending. If you have any questions or suggestions please do get in touch, with a note in the mailbox at the rear of the hall or by email to info@stewartvillagehall.org.uk.

Annette Kilworth, Jennie Pozzoni, Village Hall Trustees

Brightwell cum Sotwell WI

At our February meeting we welcomed Claire Elkin to talk about 'Keeping safe online and how to detect scammers and be one step ahead of them'. Although not new, the topic clearly resonates with many of us, evident by the many people attending and the lively discussion which followed, with many questions and shared stories of those who had been scammed. Apparently, in the UK last year 38 million people reported a scam of some sort.

Our Annual Meeting was on 11 March. We invited a professional stylist, Jo Joynes, to show us how to 'colour with confidence' and demonstrate how to make the best of us with hints and tips on how to look great every day.

Future events and dates for your diary are: 8 April 'A hat for every occasion and how to wear them' – speaker from Louise Claire Millinery: 13 May 'The work of Thames Valley Air Ambulance' (this will be an Open Meeting and we are inviting anyone interested to come along as our guest). We meet at the Village Hall at 7.30pm on the second Tuesday each month. Please feel free to drop by. Guests are always welcome.

Karin Matthews

Save the Children

With world events changing daily, many of us feel helpless. So it is helpful to remember the good work happening all over the world with so many charities and organisations, in sometimes the most difficult circumstances of conflict, famine and climate change. Unfortunately, the government's decision to cut the aid budget will have direct consequences for children and families in the UK as well as around the world.

Therefore, I thought it was a good time to reflect on a few of the projects where some money goes to support the work of Save the Children in the UK and across the world. Save the Children has helped 47 million children to get medicine, good food and education, believing that every child has a chance of the future they deserve.

Maternal newborn health – aims to ensure nobody should have to give birth alone and risk losing their baby or their life. Supporting training of midwives in their own communities helps them reach women in very dangerous places.

Education – offers hope to children whose worlds have turned upside down. Save the Children works to help children keep learning in safe environments.

Reuniting Families – family tracing teams work tirelessly across the world to reunite children, parents and siblings even if it takes months or years, against the odds of horrific conflict or natural disasters.

Food – is obviously a critical need for children going hungry in this country and across the world. Save the Children not only provides food aid in conflict, famine and natural disasters, it empowers parents with nutritional training, ensuring that the food and help gives children the best chance to stay healthy.

Medicine – aims to ensure that children should never die from preventable causes. Save the Children has many vaccination and medical programmes and pressures governments globally to deliver the medical support needed.

There is hope if enough good people are determined to make a better world. We hope you will continue to support our fundraising efforts to ensure that Save the Children can continue its work despite our uncertain world.

Our Annual Plant Sale is on Saturday 10 May. If you have any spare plants we would be so grateful if you can donate them to us. This much-loved annual fundraising event has no expenses due to people's generosity and every penny raised goes straight to Save the Children.

Celia Collett

The Red Lion

Here at The Red Lion we are loving the fact that spring has sprung and we have been really busy.

We are pleased to announce that late last year we won CAMRA Pub of the Season for our real ale offerings and we have also been shortlisted for Pub of the Year so fingers crossed. If we don't win, just to be nominated again is such great news for recognition of what a great village pub we have here.

We have some fabulous live music coming up so please add the dates to your diary as we would love for you to join us. Remember, we never charge for live music but we do pay the bands so your support on these nights is greatly appreciated. The bookings we have are all given below (and on page 24) so please check them out. They are all Sundays and they will all follow our 6pm meat draw, so be sure to arrive earlier to get your tickets.

We are also super excited to announce we have secured the date for this year's 'Party in the Pub' - Saturday 12 July. We have four great live acts. Opening up the show will be the amazing Tubthumpers from the village, so please pop this date in your diary, get yourself a sitter if needed, and free up your afternoon and evening to spend the later part of the day with us. I will post more details of the day very soon. Please look out for our socials and email postings. If you are new to the village and would like to be added to our email list, please send an email request to join to info@theredlionbrightwell.co.uk and we will add you and promise no spam from us!

That's all for now, thank you to all those that continue to support the pub and we are looking forward to a very busy summer.

1 April	Red Lion Quiz Night
13 April	Jazz Jam 6-8pm
20 April	Live music at The Red Lion, Singer Jamie Felton 6pm
4 May	Live Music at The Red Lion 'The Greenway Project' 6pm
6 May	Red Lion Quiz Night
18 May	Jazz Jam
25 May	Live Music at The Red Lion 'Who Stoned Who'
3 June	Red Lion Quiz Night

Corinne, Mouse and Ruby

St Agatha's Church Bells

We were delighted to welcome bellringers, guests and visitors from far and wide, as well as locals, to our St Agatha's day at the beginning of February.

We welcomed ringers from many local towers - Abingdon, Appleton, East Hagbourne, Wallingford and beyond. Even one lady from Melbourne, Australia! In the morning, we were ringing a varied selection of methods. This included a ring of all eight of our bells for 251 changes, to celebrate the birth and death of St Agatha in the year 251 AD, with many breaks to enjoy our St Agatha's buns! Lunch followed with a range of simple, yet excellent, sandwiches for lunch, donated by our stalwart supporters. Thank you to them.

After lunch we rang two longer sessions (around 45 minutes each). The first was sadly brought to an unexpected end, a few minutes early, by our dog entering the ringing chamber. The prospect of him being sent flying towards the ceiling put everyone off! This was followed by a ring of 'Plain Bob doubles', which one of our friends from Cholsey achieved for the first time. Congratulations to her. Our bells continue to be popular with visitors as they are such a joy to ring, as well as to listen to. If you'd like to find out more, please do drop me a line at johndowling@hotmail.com.

John Dowling

Brightwell cum Sotwell Cricket Club

Winter training for our juniors has started at Moultsford School on Sundays at 2pm. All kids in the village are welcome to come and enjoy a try out and have some fun. So far 30 children have attended with 10 new players joining.

Nets for the hard ball U13 team, the Colts, adults and even our social members start on Friday 4 April at 6.30pm, again at Moultsford School. We will also practice on the 18 April and 25 April to warm up the shoulders for the coming season.

All villagers are encouraged to join the club as a social member. This costs just £10 and will ensure you are invited to all our events, will be included in updates about important fixtures and can play occasionally if you wish. Please ask a member of the club for details when you see them about the village or contact Chris Benarr, the Secretary.

Chris Benarr

Red Box Gallery: call for exhibitionists!

Oxfordshire's smallest art space is looking for new exhibits for 2025. Natasha Zalinski has joined me on the curatorial team, and we are looking for stories and artefacts to get everyone involved in making this a focal/talking point for the village.

March launches with a celebration of World Book Day (*shown on the front cover*). Our youngest residents – at Brightwell Primary School – have tackled this theme with flair and vision, offering reviews of their favourite books, catwalk characters and even some examples of extreme reading....

Coming up, we have more contributions from them, plus there are national moments such as VE Day 80th, our unique festivals of Apple Day and Wassail, stories from BcS history and stories from farther afield via Brightwell's connection with the wider world.

We'd love to hear from anyone who'd like to get involved in the Red Box Gallery. It's whatever you are passionate about – photography, art, gardening, allotments, music, history, bee-keeping, food... So do get in touch:
robertseatter@hotmail.com/ 0773 9300258.

Robert Seatter

St Agatha's Church Spring Fair

Our Spring Fair will be held in the church and grounds on **Saturday 17 May from 2-4pm**. We would welcome donations: tombola prizes, white elephant, children's games, jigsaw puzzles, books, DVDs etc along with bottles for the bottle tombola. Please email me on louise@grassmoon.com if you have items to donate to arrange a suitable time for drop off or if you require collection.

Volunteers are always welcome to join the team, from helping in the church yard with grass cutting and tidy up on 9 and 16 May (mornings) to getting the tents up on Friday afternoon from 2pm on 16 May or to help on the day. Or perhaps you could bake a cake for tea stand do drop me a line if your able to help in any way.

Louise Wymer

NB Easter Church services are listed in Village Diary, page 24.

Police and Crimes Commissioner

Online SCAMS...how to cut the risks

Whilst many crimes are falling, such as burglary - down by a third since before the pandemic - sadly we are all more at risk online. We can all feel the benefits of living our lives in a more connected way, but with the convenience that technology brings, there are also risks. However, a huge amount of cyber crime and fraud is preventable.

Scams can take place online, on the phone or in person. Here are some of the ways fraudsters may try and target you and the signs to spot to help you protect yourself:

Mail scams - common types of postal scams include fake lotteries and prize draws, offers of investments and inheritance windfalls.

What to look out for: irresistible offers that are too good to be true; unfamiliar branding; not using your name; bad spelling and grammar.

Telephone scams - common telephone scams include investments, pension or computer support scams. The person calling often sounds professional and may pretend to be from a trusted organisation such as your bank, the police or a company you recognise.

What to look out for: callers asking you to share personal or financial information or a passcode or pin; callers asking for remote access to your computer; callers trying to rush or pressure you into making decisions.

Doorsteps scams - criminals pose as legitimate business people selling goods or services that are faulty, overpriced, poor quality or non-existent.

What to look out for: being asked for money upfront before providing any goods or service; no ID or proof of who they are; telling you they're doing work for neighbours to try and gain your trust.

Email, text or website scams - in what is known as Phishing, an email or text may appear to be from your bank or other company in order to trick you into revealing personal details. You may be asked to click on a link which takes you to a fake website where you will be prompted to enter your details.

What to look out for: spelling or grammar mistakes in emails or texts; they may not use your name; an unusual email address which may be similar but doesn't match the company email; strong encouragement to click on a link.

Remember, anyone can be a scam victim. If you spot a scam, always report it. You can also look out for other people who may be vulnerable to scams by joining friendsagainstscams.org.uk to help raise awareness throughout your community.

For more information visit stopthinkfraud.campaign.gov.uk.

Matthew Barber, Police and Crimes Commissioner Thames Valley

Do You Aspire to Any of These Skills?

DEXTERITY, CONCENTRATION, CONVERSATION, A SENSE OF HUMOUR, THE ABILITY TO SIT OR WALK AND EXCEL AT REPETITION? If you have just TWO HOURS OF SPARE TIME for a major village cause, up to 6 times a year; this could be right up your street?

On the last Monday of every second month, for a couple of hours from 10am, 9 specially selected individuals meet in the Village Hall. Not the same 9 each time, but those who are available.

- 5 of the team follow each other around the tables picking up sheets of paper in order. These operatives are called ‘walkers’.
- The collated sheets of paper are then placed in front of 2 fully trained and seated individuals who pick them up, give them a tap to make them neat, then carefully fold them in half, and then using a whalebone (actually it is a piece of plastic these days) carefully fold the papers into a good crease. These operatives are called ‘boners’.
- They then pass them along to another highly skilled and seated individual, with a special electronic machine that clicks twice with a staple! This operative is called a ‘stapler’.
- The completed result is given to a highly numerate individual who makes up bundles of 10. He/she is called a ‘packer’. Most important because they have to bundle up the finished work for distribution.

Throughout these processes there is a lot of chatter, much laughter, interaction, getting up to speed with village life etc... and at half time there is a break for coffee or tea and some cake! Have you worked out what it is? This anagram might help it - GET RAVE HILL

If you would like to be part of this highly skilled and important team, then please get in touch with steve@tooleys.co.uk or 01491 834543.

Steve Luck

Earth Trust

Earth Trust has received funding from the Garfield Weston Foundation, supporting its mission to enable people and nature to thrive together. This grant will help Earth Trust expand its work, ensuring more people have opportunities to engage with and care for the natural environment. It comes at a pivotal moment as Earth Trust refines its strategic focus - ensuring its work is both impactful and financially sustainable for the long term.

Earth Trust stewards some of Oxfordshire’s most cherished green spaces, including Wittenham Clumps and seven community nature reserves, welcoming over 200,000 visitors annually. This funding will directly support outdoor learning, volunteering, and public engagement activities, strengthening Earth Trust’s role engaging communities while driving national impact through innovation and demonstration.

“We are incredibly grateful to the Garfield Weston Foundation for recognising the importance of green spaces in fostering wellbeing, biodiversity, and climate resilience,” said Ian Barrett, CEO at Earth Trust. “This funding comes at a crucial time as we focus on what we do best—engaging people through our nature-rich landscapes. By strengthening our core work, we can create even greater impact locally while showcasing innovative solutions that inspire change more widely.”

Through its work, Earth Trust demonstrates how natural green spaces can be managed to support both people and wildlife. With this new funding, the charity will enhance nature-based education, conservation volunteering, and community participation, ensuring that future generations have the opportunity to experience and protect the natural world.

For more information about Earth Trust and its initiatives, visit www.earthtrust.org.uk.

Alexandra Crisp

Wallingford and District Art Club

Join the friendly Wallingford & District Art club on Tuesday 15 April, 7.30pm, for a live demonstration as professional artist, Rodney Kingston, paints a still life in oils. Rodney’s inspiration comes from everyday life – people, places, still life objects – and the challenge of translating three-dimensional subjects into a convincing two-dimensional oil painting. Centre 70 (off Goldsmiths Lane in Wallingford) 7.30pm-9.30pm, free for club members, £5 for visitors. For further info on WADAC www.wallingfordartclub.org.uk or email admin@wallingfordartclub.org.uk.

Wild Oxfordshire

The curlew's wonderful 'bubbling' call is one of the most evocative sounds of springtime in meadows and pastures across Oxfordshire. Something we cherish, but which is sadly under threat. The curlew is arguably the most pressing bird conservation priority in the UK, where nearly half the breeding population has been lost over the last 25 years and where range contraction has seen curlews disappear from many traditional sites.

Our 'Curlew River' film explores the work of farmers and volunteers to help our wonderful curlews and highlights the ancient meadows and wet grassland habitats that they inhabit here. www.wildoxfordshire.org.uk/projects/curlew.

Thank you so much for all you have done for nature's recovery in the last year. Together we have brought people together, created more space for nature, and inspired more people to act for nature. Many people contribute to Wild Oxfordshire, and this support enables us to create a more natural, resilient, and biodiverse Oxfordshire for the benefit of all. If you would like to join in and are able to, we would greatly appreciate a contribution towards our work, either through a one-off or monthly contributions. Check out www.wildoxfordshire.org.uk to find out more about our recent achievements and the many ways you can support us.

Mike Pollard, Wild Oxfordshire Curlew Recovery Project

Wallingford Corn Exchange

The wide programme of live performance, live screenings and cinema can be checked and booked on www.cornexchange.org.uk. Tickets from £10 adults, £5 for 16s; doors open for the bar 30 minutes before performances at 2.30 & 7.30pm, and films with subtitles will be shown on Wednesday afternoons.

The April programme includes:

Live - folk musician Phil Beer 25 April.

Cinema - Twiggy 2 April, Bridget Jones – Mad About the Boy 3/4 April, Erin Brockovich 5/6 April, Ernest Cole – Lost and Found 7 April, Becoming Led Zeppelin 8/10 April, The Dawn of Impressionism – Paris 1874 9 April, A Working Man 13-15 April, Wicked Sing Along 16 April, Black Bag 22-24 April, Mr. Burton 26-28 April, Anora 29/30 April.

Live screenings -The Royal Opera – Turandot 1 April, Billy Elliott The Musical Live 2 April, Six The Musical Live 11/12 April, A Night with Janis Joplin The Musical 9 April, The Importance of Being Earnest - NT Live 23 April, Dr. Strangelove – NT Live 30 April.

VILLAGE DIARY

April

1	Quiz night	Red Lion	7pm
5	Ladies only disco	VH	7.30pm
8	WI 'A hat for every occasion & how to wear them'	VH	7.30pm
13	Palm Sunday Procession with donkey from St. James to St Agatha's & service		10am
13	Jazz Jam	Red Lion	6pm
17	Maundy Thursday Supper Service	TBC	7pm
20	Easter Sunday Festival Communion	St Agatha's	9.30am
20	Live music with Jamie Felton	Red Lion	6pm
27	(Kevin's last) Team Communion, St Mary-le-More		10am

May

4	Live music with The Greenway Project	Red Lion	6pm
6	Parish Council AGM	VH	7pm
6	Quiz night	Red Lion	7pm
10	Save the Children Plant Sale on The Square		10-12
13	WI 'The work of the Thames Valley Air Ambulance	VH	7.30pm
17	Church Spring Fair	St Agatha's	2-4pm
18	Jazz Jam	Red Lion	6pm
25	Live Music with Who Stoned Who	Red Lion	6pm

Advance Notice

3 June	Village Lunch Club, 12.15pm Village Hall / Red Lion quiz
14 June	BSR 'Face the Music with Hope' St Mary-le-More
22 June	Summer Concert, St Agatha's church
5 July	Village Fete, Moreton House
12 July	'Party in the Pub' with live music

Refuse Collection (Food waste each week)

Grey bins	Thursday 10 & Friday 25 April
	Friday 9 and Thursday 22 May
Green (& brown) bins	Thursday 3 (+ extra garden) & 17 April
	Thursday 1 & 15, Friday 30 May

Village website

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