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Editorial

I stood in for Alison as editor of this issue last year. Looking back at my Editorial, I was struck by the final sentence: 'In light of world events, it's a time to remember how lucky we are to live here.' Goodness! So 'world events' were just as chilling last year, were they... well *plus ca change...*

This issue of *The Villager* is teeming with evidence of how lucky we are to live in our little corner of the world, at this time or any other. According to taste, we can eat, drink, sing, pray, quiz and play cricket to our hearts' content. We can share our interests in veteran cars, art, Scottish music, or tending allotments. If we want to serve the community, the Village Stores runs on volunteers. The Church Spring fair, Village Fete and Save the Children need able-bodied helpers. Brightwell Toddlers, Preschool and Primary School are always looking for support.

When asked to step up for a big project, we can achieve the extraordinary. Build a new shop from scratch? Replace a burned down pavilion? Add a 21st Century extension to our 12th Century St Agatha's Church? As somebody said at the recent Save Our Village Hall fundraiser meeting; 'it's a tough ask, but if anyone can do it, Brightwell can'.

But in light of all these awful 'world events' do we sound a bit pleased with ourselves? The answer is 'probably', but that's hardly surprising. After all, none of our children are dodging missiles daily on the way back from school. The key word is how LUCKY we are to live in our safe-as-houses village, and we know it.

And let's not forget the many villagers who prove we are absolutely not an uncaring and insular community. Brightwell Supporting Refugees is now 10 years old and has raised well over £100,000 through local events and donations to support humanitarian initiatives in Jordan and Uganda. Not long ago, Brightwell responded as quickly as anyone to host families fleeing conflict in Ukraine.

And if we're talking about our global impact, not every village can boast a long-term resident like Alison's husband, Brightwell's starriest TV producer David Dugan. He just happens to be Executive Producer of *Mr Nobody Against Putin*, the winning Best Documentary Feature Film at the 2026 BAFTAs and Academy Awards (aka the Oscars). Lucky or not, what a village!

Hugh Roderick, Guest Editor

Meet ... Peter Card and Ian Smith

Peter and Ian moved to Brightwell five years ago but have worked and lived together for 25 years. They have a joint interest in veteran and vintage period vehicles, and have many stories about auctions, bicycles and early motoring. (Cover pic Peter & Ian in a 1926 MG on VE Day 2018).

They also share an enthusiasm for bringing people together, which they do with their annual Vintage Car Rally and Picnic each summer in Little Martins.

They met through their shared interest in auctions. Peter's career had begun in a very different world. He worked for ICL, the computer company, as a systems analyst back in the days of mainframe computers. The job involved intense periods of work followed by time off, and during those quieter spells he began writing articles for motoring magazines. When an opportunity arose in the mid-90s to run the car department at Phillips auctioneers, he seized the chance. "It seemed a lot more interesting than boring computers," he says.

From there Peter moved to Bonhams, organising auction sales specialising in early motoring items and automobilia. In those days there were no online sales, and helpers were always needed to display the lots as they came up for bidding. Ian began volunteering, holding up everything from mascots, badges, artworks, and books to model cars.

At that time Ian was working in local government in London, initially working in personnel, then as a Complaints Officer dealing with issues relating to schools, libraries and leisure services. The job often involved evening appeal hearings for parents whose children had been refused places at schools, as well as pupil exclusion appeals. In the early 2000s Peter and Ian decided they would like to escape from London by moving to the countryside, and so they purchased a farmhouse in Barrington in Somerset. Using an onsite defunct dairy as a warehouse they set up their own specialist auction company.

Over the next twenty years their business focused on transport related material – fascinating objects associated with early motoring, cycling and so on. Items ranged from books, trophies and photographs to car mascots, badges, lamps and all manner of curiosities. They held several auctions each year, attracting enthusiasts from across the country.

Peter has been interested in vintage transport since childhood. He and his brother spent weekends exploring junk shops in their hometown of Reading, looking for bargains to buy with their pocket money. "I'm still amazed what you could buy for two and sixpence in those days," he says.

That fascination eventually developed into a deep knowledge of early cars and bicycles. He has written several reference books, including a detailed history of Lucas Lighting. He writes columns for *Automobile* magazine and edits various cycling magazines. In recent years he has provided commentary for motoring events, including the London to Brighton Veteran Car run.

Eventually the Somerset house and garden became too much to maintain. They decided to move nearer to Peter's daughters and their husbands (with a total of nine grandchildren), as well as to his brother. They bought their new home in Little Martins five years ago, while it was still being built. Ian quickly became involved in village life. He volunteers in Brightwell's Village Stores and is also a member of the Community Association Committee.

Peter and Ian own several vintage vehicles, including a 1901 De Dion Bouton Vis-a-Vis, and a 1912 Belgian Fabrique Nationale, which featured in a local production of *Toad of Toad Hall*, and also a 1924 Vauxhall, in which they once drove all the way to central France. Driving vintage cars requires patience and anticipation.

"You've got to think half a mile ahead, but the slower pace helps you to enjoy the landscape rather than rush through it." Restoring and maintaining the cars is also a large part of the attraction. "It is the enjoyment of putting something back together again, creating something from nothing, making it roadworthy."

2026 is a busier than ever year for Peter. He has been elected President of the Pickwick Bicycle Club, the oldest cycling club in the world, and the oldest Dickensian Association still in existence. There are major events in plan: the Charles Dickens Dedication on 17 June in Westminster Abbey and the 'Century ride' on 12 July when members re-enact the custom in the 1880s of riding a hundred miles in a day on Victorian 'Ordinary' high wheel bicycles.

A highlight of their calendar is their informal Vintage Picnic in Little Martins, recreating an event they used to hold in Somerset. On the last Sunday in July (26 July this year), veteran and vintage car owners bring their vehicles along, park up and enjoy a relaxed few hours chatting with fellow enthusiasts. Villagers are welcome to wander around the cars and talk to the owners. "There's no entry fee, no charity bucket and no car-parking charge," Peter says. "People just turn up, bring a picnic and enjoy themselves."



Alison Leigh

Bryan Lord Myatt – sincere apologies

It is with huge regret that, through a number of compounding errors and miscommunications, Bryan Myatt's obituary printed in the last edition was incorrectly attributed to Sue and Bryan's daughter Sarah, who died in May 2001. The published obituary was excerpts from their son Nick's tribute, given at Bryan's funeral at St Agatha's in October. Our sincere apologies go to Sue, and all family and friends affected by this heartbreaking error.

Alison Leigh and Angela Lewis

Sue Myatt writes:

“The family and I thank the many people who sent cards and kind messages of sympathy following Bryan's death. We are so grateful for all the support we have received.”

The Village Stores & Post Office

January and February are usually quiet trading months, and business has been slower. Living in a village with a shop, Post Office, pub and school makes a vibrant community, is good for wellbeing, and increases the value of your home. But they each need solid local support to be sustainable. The good news is that the team is here to serve and welcome you. We hope to see you soon.

We have been joined by four new volunteers in the shop, one in the Post Office and a new Treasurer on the Management Committee. We continue to help younger members in our community to get experience of volunteering and so gain skills for adult life. Currently, five young people volunteer as part of their Bronze and Silver Duke of Edinburgh awards.

The Village Stores & Post Office Team

Parish Council News

After more than 10 years' service, (many as Chair of the Parish Council) Sue Robson stood down as a Parish Councillor in January. Very hardworking and dedicated, Sue provided vision, patience and consistent strategic leadership. We thank her sincerely and wish her well for the future, and now welcome Matt Freeman as a new Parish Councillor.

Jubilee Pavilion

We are pleased to report that we are making progress with the current application for the redevelopment of the Pavilion, led by Councillor Bob

Neilson. This redevelopment will expand and improve the existing building and the range of uses for the community.

Hedges and verges

We remind villagers that we are in peak growing season and hedges and trees should be trimmed back outside their properties to keep paths and road clear.

Brown waste bin permits

SODC brown waste permits are due for renewal. An up-to-date permit is required for your garden waste bin to be emptied.

James Davys

Community Association

Village Quiz

A big thank you to everyone who came to the quiz this year, to Tom and everyone on the CA team who arranged the evening, and to the Badgers Team who set the quiz. Congratulations to the winners A2Z on their triumph!

Open Gardens - 17 May, 2pm to 5.30pm

Apologies for the error in the last edition of *The Villager*. The Open Gardens Event is on 17 May (not 17 July). We have arranged for a number of lovely gardens to be open throughout the village and are grateful to the enthusiastic and dedicated gardeners for allowing us to enjoy and appreciate their hard work. There will be tea and cakes along with a Pimm's stall to refresh you on your garden journey. Please come and enjoy this special event.

Village Fete - 4 July, 2pm to 4.30pm at Sotwell House

Jenny and David Dobbin have kindly allowed us to hold the fete in their lovely gardens. Full details will be in the next issue of *The Villager* but put the date in your diary and start hunting for those previously loved treasures for the White Elephant Stall, and those bottles at the back of the sideboard.

James Davys

Stewart Village Hall

Save Our Village Hall!

Stewart Village Hall has launched a Save Our Village Hall campaign to raise £500,000 by December 2026 to redevelop our much-loved community building. The hall has been at the heart of village life for generations, hosting clubs, events and community gatherings. However, the building now requires significant improvements to remain open for us all. The redevelopment will

modernise facilities, improve accessibility, increase flexibility for events and enhance energy efficiency while preserving the hall's historic character.

Residents, businesses and supporters are invited to get involved and help secure the hall's future. Over the coming months we'll be organising new events and lots of ways to get stuck in, so follow along via our new dedicated e-newsletter, Instagram and Facebook channels. If you'd like to subscribe to our monthly e-newsletter, please email info@stewartvillagehall.org.uk.

Save the Dates - Save the Village Hall: upcoming fundraising events

18-19 April	Preloved Fashion Pop-up A quality sale of preloved clothes and accessories for men, women and children. Refresh your wardrobe, save the planet, and help save the Village Hall.
5 May	Your Health Wellbeing An inspiring session with renowned nutritionist Maz Packham of Nourishful Nutrition, sharing practical advice for healthier living.
13 June	Charity Auction An evening of bidding, fun and community spirit. Save the Hall – one bid at a time.

We're also delighted to launch the SVH Creators Collective for young people to get involved and help shape the future of the hall. If you're into social media, design, events, storytelling or fundraising, this is a chance to build experience, meet new people in the area and make a real impact locally. Find out more via our social media channels and contact us at info@stewartvillagehall.org.uk for more info.

Clock Tower Lottery

A big thank you to everyone who has supported the Village Hall through the Clock Tower Lottery and helped to spread the word. It has now raised over £10,000 towards the Village Hall restoration project. Every ticket sold helps us move closer to preserving this much-loved building for future generations. Money raised goes directly towards the restoration work, helping to ensure the Village Hall continues to be a place for our community to gather, celebrate and connect. If you're not already part of the Clock Tower Lottery and would like to support the Hall, while also having the chance to win monthly cash prizes, find out more at stewartvillagehall.org.uk/clock-tower-lottery.html

Annette Kilworth

Preloved Fashion Pop-Up

Shop sustainably. Support your community. Save our Village Hall.
Join us for a fabulous Preloved Fashion Pop-Up at Stewart Village Hall

Saturday 18 & Sunday 19 April. From preloved to vintage, designer to one-of-a-kind, we'll have rails and rails of carefully curated fashion just for you. What you'll find:

- Glass of fizz (soft drink) on arrival
- Women's, men's and children's pre-loved clothing
- Shoes, handbags and accessories
- Beauty items
- Sportswear and equipment
- Well-loved contemporary brands and designer pieces

Each item will be handpicked for style, quality and sustainability, giving beautiful fashion a second life. Donations welcome!

- Drop off anytime
- Ring for collection
- Donations also welcome at Stewart Village Hall

Every penny raised over the weekend will support the Village Hall.

Drop off donations to Amanda Hedley, Beauchamp Grange, Old Nursery Lane, or call 07557 436774. (*Unsold items will be saved for future pop-ups or sold at other community events for fundraising purposes.*)

Brightwell Supporting Refugees

BSR is now 10 years old and continues to be successful through the commitment of our supporters in the village and surrounding area, and our great team of trustees. (We welcomed two new trustees in 2025: Luke Clancy and James Stephenson). We are holding our AGM on 15 April in the church room, Stewart Village Hall at 7.30pm. Please do come along to hear more of what we have achieved last year, and about exciting times ahead or to express your interest in joining the team or becoming a supporter.

Our need to be active and raise funds is never more important than in these troubled times. Our next big event is coming up in April:

Mick Fowler: The Mountaineer's Mountaineer Friday 10 April 7.30pm
Legendary mountaineer, Mick Fowler, has made many first ascents of unclimbed Himalayan peaks. As a cancer survivor and winner of three *Piolet d'Or* awards - he continues to inspire generations of climbers. He was voted 'Mountaineer's Mountaineer' by his peers, including Sir Chris Bonnington, in *The Observer* newspaper. Now he comes to Brightwell to check out Wittenham Clumps and look back at his extraordinary climbing career.

Then **Robert Seatter: 'RIVER, a poetic journey along the Thames, from source to sea' Friday 22 May 7.30pm** (see p. 21).

Helen Connor

Book Reviews

***Cogheart* by Peter Bunzl, reviewed by Sue Potts Interviewed by Alexandra de Jong**

What is your book?

My favourite book is actually a children's book called 'Cogheart'. I first read it during the national lockdown back in 2020 when I was teaching a Year 6 class. The book had become the inspiration for our own Steampunk-themed writing and had engaged the children so much that I wanted to make sure they didn't miss out on the ending!

Why did you pick it?

It's full of drama, mystery and unexpected twists, and Peter Bunzl creates such a vivid world that it's impossible not to be drawn in. Even though I was recording the chapters for the children, I never skipped ahead to find out what happened next. I wanted to discover the story alongside them, sharing that excitement every single day. It was a unique reading experience that brought us together as a class, even though we were all in different places. It reminds me of a very unusual time when reading helped keep us all connected.

What's it about?

Cogheart is a Victorian Steampunk adventure that follows Lily and her new friend Robert as they try to discover what happened to Lily's father (an inventor), who has mysteriously disappeared. On their journey, they uncover dark secrets involving mechanical creatures, dangerous enemies and an unusual invention. It's fast-paced, full of mystery, friendship and bravery!

What moral has it left you with?

It's possibly not the most exciting moral, but I would say it definitely left me realising you are never too old to really enjoy a children's book!!

***History of Brightwell cum Sotwell* by Dr Watts Reviewed by Jason Debney, Chair Village History Group**

I first became aware of Dr Watts when I was at university. My father was in the Village History Group and was part of a team that was working on a project to digitise a pile of old photocopied papers that collectively formed Dr Watts's *History of Brightwell cum Sotwell*.

These papers, that were sitting on Dad's desk, had been given to the Group by Joanna, Dr Watts's granddaughter, in the hope that something could be made of them. The title sheet, hand typed of course, had 'Publication delayed owing to wartime restrictions' at the bottom of the page. "What secrets did they contain?" I asked Dad. Instead of sensitive information, Dad detailed all the

incredible information that Dr Watts had compiled into his volume. Old field names, the Saxon manorial charters, church inventories and details of Beating of the Bounds from Georgian times. The list goes on - I was hooked.

The genius of what Dr Watts did was to collect all the texts (about the parish) that he could get his hands on and compile these into a single document. This information sat alongside a collection of anecdotal notes and interesting facts gleaned from his detailed knowledge of the village and villagers. His work still forms the bedrock of all local historical studies, even today, such was the breadth of his writing.

Without Dr Watts, much of the evidence (that thanks to him we take for granted) would probably not be known so easily, lost in some obscure public record office or gone to the grave as villagers passed (at a time when the village was about to enter a period of fundamental population change).

Watts was the village doctor, living up at Sires Hill. His work would have taken him all round the parish, talking with all sorts of parishioners. An ideal job for a budding local historian. He must have been a fascinating man to know (for a history nerd like me anyway). He even dug up his garden looking for the Heathen Burial Graves (listed in the Saxon Charters) that he unfortunately didn't find, but I bet he was convinced to his dying day that they were down there somewhere.

Once the History Group has found Brightwell Castle (we've already found the exact route of the Roman Road mentioned so many times by Watts) we'll look for those graves for him!

It was a complete pleasure to get a message from Harry Robins to let me know that he intended to publish his great great grandfather's work. I'd already been tipped off by Harry's mum that he may be embarking on the task. Dr Watts would have liked this, I think. The History Group gave permission for its photographs to be used and a year after our first conversation a copy of the book dropped through my letter box.

It is faithful to Dr Watts's work and a joy to read for anyone interested in village history. It is beautifully presented and a long way from that pile of old papers I first saw some 30 years ago on my father's desk. I am pleased that the History Group couldn't digitise and publish the book – the technology to do this, 30 years ago, was simply not up to the task. There is something wonderful that such a publication, embedded in parish history, was completed by one of the author's direct descendants. Local studies are always evolving but they need to start somewhere and for our parish that is 'Brightwell cum Sotwell, A History by Dr Watts' (written in 1939, published 2025).

***Running Away* by Marcus Harris, reviewed by Dariel Burdass**

It was a real treat to be asked to review a novel written by an author who lives in our village and has played such a prominent role in the life of the village and surrounding area. Happily, *Running Away* proves to be a thoroughly enjoyable read.

How many of us, have sat on the train after a long day in London and briefly entertained the idea of simply staying on, passing our stop, and heading off to new pastures and a rural idyll, leaving the stresses of work and city life behind? Marcus Harris takes that familiar daydream and makes it the starting point for an engaging crime drama with murder, fraud, and criminal gangs!

The novel follows JT, a man whose life has begun to spiral out of control. With mounting debts, damaged relationships and the threat of danger closing in, pressures on his life become overwhelming. One day, he makes a snap decision to remain on the train and head for the end of the line in Cornwall, hoping to leave his past behind and begin again.

However, he discovers life is not so easy to escape. With a murder investigation unfolding and the police becoming involved, JT finds himself drawn into a story that becomes increasingly tense and complicated. Living off the grid and earning what he can through casual work, he tries to keep a low profile while quietly attempting to untangle the problems he left behind.

This is a real page turner with short, punchy chapters (perfect for a commute). Harris's easy writing style kept me engaged to the end. The story flows well, never becomes over-complicated, and the characters quickly feel familiar and believable. His descriptions also bring the settings and situations vividly to life, making it easy to picture events as they unfold. It's an engaging debut, and one that, in my opinion, would make a great television adaptation. I look forward to seeing what Marcus Harris writes next.

Two art exhibitions showcasing village talent

Colour & Clay will be exhibiting Jennie Pozzoni's amazing pots, Sue Hollebhone's vibrant textiles and affordable original paintings by Rosemary Greasby during Artweeks **2-10 May** from 11am-6pm daily at Coombe House, Slade End.

17 May Brightwell Art Club Exhibition will be held at the Village Hall, 2-5pm. Whilst visiting the Open Gardens that day, pop over and see what the club has been up to. Some art work will be available to buy.

Village Lunch Club

As the saying goes, you need new friends to help you stay young and old friends to help you grow old. So come on down to the village hall on 2 June and do just that over a lovely lunch. Fish pie with savoury crumble topping, seasonal veg, AND a pudding. All for just £7pp. To book please contact Lynnburridge@gmail.com or 07989270605. Look forward to seeing you there.

Lynn Burridge

Letter from your MP

Spring is finally here, and it has brought some great progress in the constituency, as well as hopeful developments in Parliament. The roads have been a main topic of discussion, particularly the ongoing roadworks near Milton and Culham to improve road safety, and the stepping up of pothole repairs. There is more work to be done, so please continue reporting potholes and other defects on www.fixmystreet.com to make sure they are logged with the County Council.

As a regular cyclist myself, I raised concerns in parliament about the lack of government investment in active travel, which in many areas could reduce congestion, improve public health, and lower carbon emissions. In a Transport Committee meeting, we heard interesting evidence about the future of electric vehicles and the barriers which prevent them from being more widely used. I asked the Department for Culture Media and Sport minister about the much-loved Vale and Downland Museum in Wantage, which, like many others, has battled against funding cuts to keep up the valuable work they do for the community.

In the Westminster Hall Debate on Environmental Protection and Biodiversity, I had the opportunity to raise the outstanding work of many local groups and organisations. Community action groups including The Letcombe Brooke Project, The Earth Trust, and Sustainable Didcot, need adequate support from the government to continue to protect the countryside that surrounds our constituency.

My team has received a significant amount of casework on student loan repayment plans, and I was able to raise two of these cases in a parliamentary debate. The Treasury Committee have now launched an inquiry into student and graduate finance to identify ways to make it fairer. If you are over 16 you can respond to their survey via www.parliament.uk/treascom.

Back in the constituency, I had the pleasure of meeting Carbon-ion Energy, a tech company developing next-generation energy storage, and Agratas Innovation Lab, a cutting-edge research facility on battery manufacturing. At UTC in Didcot, I met students and staff, answered questions about local and national issues, and even shared my own curry recipe.

As always, if there is anything you feel I can help with, please do not hesitate to contact me and my team at olly.glover.mp@parliament.uk or by leaving a voice message on 0207 219 7657.

Olly Glover, MP for Didcot and Wantage

Brightwell Toddlers

While the year started with grey, wet weather, Toddlers was a warm, cosy, fun-filled space for the kids to play and the adults to share a cuppa. Our craft sessions have created rainbows and dragonflies, and to celebrate Chinese New Year, the toddlers created lanterns. Our sessions always include snacks for the kids and finish up with some singing.

A big thank you to our volunteers each week who help to keep the sessions running. We welcome babies, toddlers and pre-schoolers (with their parents or carers) every Thursday during term-time from 9.15–11.15am. Cost is £3.50 (cash) or £4 (online) per session. Contact brightwelltoddlers@gmail.com or via our Facebook page [@brightwelltoddlers](#).

The Toddlers Team

Brightwell Preschool

As we slowly crawled out of the winter months, the sunshine that peaked through the monotony of grey clouds hit the children's faces and recharged their batteries, creating sparks of excitement as they discovered a butterfly, a new leaf unfolding, the chatter of birds and the smell of sweet blossom.

Bees have been rescued and placed on flowers to recharge their batteries too, whilst mud pancake races were had in the park, daffodils discovered in the orchard and ladybirds hiding everywhere along the way; the wonders of the village continue to give joy to our little people. Talking of joy, we are absolutely delighted to share that both of our recent grant applications to the **South Oxfordshire District Council Councillor Grant Scheme** have been successful. This funding will allow us to deliver two fantastic projects to directly benefit our children, families, and the wider community.

Nature Garden Project – £1,000 Awarded

Thanks to this grant, we will be transforming part of our outdoor space into a vibrant Nature Garden designed to give our children daily access to nature and hands-on learning on our doorstep, creating a welcoming space for families to enjoy together. We are aiming to boost local biodiversity with pollinator-friendly planting and embed sustainable practices across the preschool. We've already had brilliant support from parents and volunteers and we can't wait to get planting! As we have limited funds, we would be grateful if you could get in touch if you are able to support us in any way with this project, whether it be time to help with the creation, plant cuttings (herbs would be useful), seeds, planters, benches etc.

Yoga for Children's Health & Wellbeing – £750 Awarded

We are also thrilled to have secured funding to introduce Tatty Bumpkins yoga sessions for children aged 3–5. This programme will support children's physical development, balance, and emotional regulation and provide families with tools to encourage healthy routines at home. It will help us to train staff and volunteers so the benefits continue long after the funded period and ensure all children can access wellbeing activities.

We are incredibly grateful to our local councillors for their support, and to our families and volunteers whose enthusiasm and encouragement helped make these applications successful. These grants represent a real investment in our children's futures, and we will share updates as they start to progress.

Natasha Hillier

Brightwell Primary School

The second half of the spring term has certainly begun with real energy and excitement for our Year 6 pupils. Their long-awaited residential trip to Devon took place recently, and the children returned full of stories, sandy shoes, and huge smiles. With the weather feeling wonderfully spring-like, they were able to make the most of every day outdoors, embracing a wide range of activities that pushed their boundaries and brought them closer together as a group.

A particular highlight was their time on two very different beaches. At Braunton Burrows, the vast sand dunes became both a playground and a challenge. The children climbed, scrambled, and even tried their hand at 'sand surfing', racing down the slopes with infectious enthusiasm.

Later in the week, they explored a much rockier stretch of coastline, which opened up opportunities for beachcombing, creating beach art, and rock

pooling. Armed with buckets and plenty of curiosity, they discovered an array of fascinating sea creatures tucked among the rocks and pools.

The adventure didn't stop at the shoreline. One of the most memorable moments for many was scrambling up a rocky peak to take in the sweeping views of the surrounding countryside. Standing at the top, the children were



rewarded with a sense of achievement and a breathtaking panorama that made the climb more than worthwhile.

It was a fabulous week in every sense: full of teamwork, resilience, laughter, and new experiences. The children supported one another brilliantly, learned to overcome challenges, and returned home not only tired and happy, but also proud of what they had achieved together.

Sue Potts, Head Teacher

BcS Environment Group

General

Following clearance of some trees with ash die-back, over 40 saplings were planted in the Millennium Wood before the new year. Although we had hoped to carry out further thinning in Swan Wood this was delayed until autumn, awaiting a grant. However, some general clearance of the dominant comfrey and brambles will help some smaller saplings planted last year to grow.

February also saw the clearance of the stream and its banks which have become dominated again by comfrey and brambles in addition to nettles and rosebay willowherb. While some are good for insects, their dense growth blocks other smaller wildflowers from growing.

Following advice from English Nature, we will be mowing selected areas in April and May to try to curtail the dominant plants. The areas will be left alone until next year. ('No mow May' is applicable if you are going to carry on mowing throughout the summer.) Hopefully we will see some smaller plants thrive as they do in the orchard area. Interestingly, the stream, woodland and orchard were all sown with the same grass/wildflower seed mix so some may have survived by the stream and in the wood and will now grow.

Anyone who has a pond may have had frogs, newts and possibly toads visiting them this year. In my pond the first frog spawn appeared on 27 February, a week later than in 2024, but a week or two earlier than other recent years.

Weather

The rainfall recorded at Highlands Farm for January was 97.8 mm and for February 82.8 mm. This represents 178% and 200% respectively of the averages for 1999-2012 at Highlands Farm. Taking winter as a whole (December to February), the rainfall was 251.5mm, which represents 160% of the average at Highlands Farm. For the general area the Met Office records indicate that rainfall was also about 160% of the long-term average (1991-2020), mean daily maximum temperature between 1 and 1.5 deg C above average, with sunshine at a little below average.

From the Environment Agency records for mid-February flows in the upper River Thames are generally classified as 'above normal'. From local observation, despite the heavy rainfall, the Thames locally only had some normal local flooding.

The groundwater level at Stonor Park is 'normal' while Farmoor reservoir at the end of January was at 80% full, which was below average for the time of year. The area drought status for the Thames catchment moved in late January/early February from 'recovery' to 'normal'.

Steve Capel-Davies

Swan allotments

Perhaps spring has arrived! After a winter where rainfall records tumbled across the British Isles, the ground in many places is still wet, although with warmer temperatures is now dry enough to start sowing. At least the reservoirs and ground water levels have recovered from last summer, so hopefully, the need for a hosepipe ban has been avoided.

Allotmenters and gardeners across the village will already have prepared ground and got some early sowing underway. Those with greenhouses will be ahead of the game and have trays and pots of seedlings ready to plant out. Over-wintering crops already in the ground which survived the wet will now be coming on. Many plot holders will already have onion sets, shallots, and broad beans under way too. The seed potatoes you've had chitting somewhere around the house will also be ready to go in.

With finer dryer weather, most plots over the coming weeks should see activity. They do require work and time spent on them, but are great places to unwind, get some exercise, chat with others, and take pleasure in seeing the 'fruits of your labour.' We wish you all a happy and successful gardening year.

Phil Skipp

St Agatha's and St James'

As we look around us there are signs of new life everywhere. Everything looks much greener, there is colour in our gardens, and in some fields there are spring lambs. In the last week or so we have travelled from Palm Sunday, through Holy Week, and on Sunday 5 April, Easter Day we will reach the climax of the Christian year and begin our service with the wonderful words "Alleluia, Christ is risen! He is risen indeed, Alleluia!"

Jesus's resurrection from the dead fulfils all the Bible's promises about our salvation. We are Easter people and rejoice again at the hope of eternal life. Do come and celebrate with us at St Agatha's on this special day. There will be the customary Easter Egg Hunt after the service.

The Easter season continues into May with Rogation Days, remembered on the three days before Ascension Day, when we ask God to bless the growing crops, the land and the food it produces. Then we have our service for Pentecost on Sunday 24 May to celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit, described in our creed as "the Lord the giver of life", and often referred to as wind, breath, fire or a dove.

God's gift of the Holy Spirit gives us energy, working in and through us that we may use all the gifts God has given us wisely and to try and live our lives as Jesus taught us. Sunday 31 May is Trinity Sunday, when we give thanks for our God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, this will be a Team Service in St Mary's, Wallingford. We hope you will join us for some or all of our services (usually 9.30am Sundays St Agatha's), everyone is welcome. Details will be in all the usual places, including the gate into St Agatha's.

Parish matters

The post of Team Vicar, to work across the parishes of Brightwell-cum-Sotwell, Crowmarsh Gifford and Wallingford, has been advertised in the Diocese and nationally. Suitable candidates will be interviewed in mid April. Candidates will have the chance to see the parishes and meet the folk in them. If a good candidate is identified, they will hopefully take up the post sometime in the summer. It has been a long wait and we pray that God will call the right person to join us in our Wallingford Team Ministry.

Rev. Janice Chilton

Church Spring fair

The Annual Church Spring fair will be held on **Saturday 9 May 2026 2pm-4pm** once again in St Agatha's Church and Church Grounds. If you would

like to be involved, pre-event, during the event or post event we would love to hear from you. Please contact Louise on louise@grassmoon.com. We welcome donations for:

White Elephant
Tombola and Cakes

Books
Bottles for Bottle Tombola

Please email Louise to arrange for drop off or pick up.

Louise Wymer

Organ Recital in St Agatha's Church

A special recital of organ music will take place in St Agatha's on Sunday 31 May at 3.30pm. With a distinguished music career, Andrew Wells is descended from the Wells brewing dynasty of Wallingford and is currently Director of Music at St. George's, Campden Hill.

The recital will include pieces by Handel, Bach, William Hine, and Andrew's own composition. St Agatha's organ is rarely heard at the moment and this will be an opportunity to experience it in its full glory! The recital will be followed by afternoon tea, with proceeds going to church funds. Tickets will be available from the Village Stores nearer the time.

Chris Baines

A good village news story!

For the last ten years my husband and I have been hosting destitute asylum seekers, refugees and vulnerable migrants (typically foreign-born victims of domestic abuse). We do this through the charity, Sanctuary Hosting, now part of Oxford's Asylum Welcome. Over the years we've hosted 30 guests who have stayed with us for between a week and six months. While we haven't been able to stay in touch with all of them, I just wanted to mention a young man from Eritrea who stayed with us five years ago.

Mengye fled the Eritrean dictatorship and the threat of conscription when he was 17, arriving in the UK a year later after a brutal journey across the Sahara, Libya, and less-than-welcoming Europe. When he came to us in 2020, he had been granted permission to stay but was struggling to find work that would enable him to afford private rented accommodation.

From the outset, Mengye was determined to do well in the UK. He didn't just want a minimum wage job; he wanted to earn enough to properly establish himself here and to give back to the only country that had welcomed him. I remember helping him with his English GCSE, explaining the concept of metaphors and similes and encouraging him to read widely.

He spent six weeks with us before moving to accommodation for the homeless in Oxford and then eventually a place in Rose Hill. After an access course, Mengye started a degree course in Radiography in 2022 and this past summer I was delighted to receive a photo of him receiving his degree.

Over coffee recently, Mengye told me that he had been offered a job as a radiographer at the John Radcliffe Hospital in the New Year. It's been 11 years of struggle – battling the asylum system, working in a factory and as a taxi driver all while studying. Finally, he is qualified and he is about to start a professional job in a discipline where the UK has a marked shortage. We are thrilled for him.

One of our other guests – a victim of trafficking – is now almost qualified as an accountant. Another is at university in Birmingham studying to be a pharmacist. Without exception our guests have been brave, resilient and determined to become independent and useful in their new country. I am proud of them all. If anyone else would be interested in becoming a volunteer host, I would be very happy to talk you through what would be involved.

Kate Bowen 07768 217160

Brightwell cum Sotwell Cricket Club

Time to rummage in the back of the wardrobe for your whites soon! We have an exciting summer of cricket ahead with over 60 fixtures this year across all of our teams.

The men's team are playing throughout May and July, with some excellent new and old fixtures returning this year, including one against the Royal Household in Windsor. We start the season with the Windsor Cup again, with Tony Windsor himself playing his part and showing off his new knee! This is a pairs game, on 26 April, aimed at welcoming new players and villagers, friends and family to the squad so that we have enough players for 15 games this year. Join us through the Spond App using code NAMJF.

The flourishing junior section is underway with All Stars on Saturdays at 10am, which will fill up quickly so do get in touch. The bulk of our juniors over the age of 8 will start Spring Training on 12, 19, and 26 April at 2pm in the nets at Moultsford School.

Fixtures start in April and this year we are fielding two U11 Pairs teams, one U13 T20 and Hundred team, and one U15 T20 and Hundred team (that we are merging with Moreton and Cholsey). We are the lead club for this promising new pathway to provide a high standard of competitive cricket for our older

teenagers. There will be plenty of girls' cricket too this year with coaching support from an international women's player!

As ever, the focus for the club and coaches is on building a passion for cricket so it can be understood, adored and played at any level in the future. To join the youth section please use the Spond App and use code: QUDHG to find us.

We are looking for more volunteers to support the grounds team and welcome any and all support with teas, cake sales, barbecues and parties to support the festivities around the boundary. We have a club shop too, remember, where you can buy caps, shirts, gilets etc. Don't hesitate to get in touch.

Chris Benarr

Red Lion

We are looking forward to warmer days, lighter evenings and lots of goings on throughout spring. Please check details in the Village Diary on page 24.

First up we have Easter weekend which is already looking very busy. On Good Friday we will certainly have lots of fish options for lunch and dinner. After dinner, we have some fabulous live music from local man Sam Lamden. Sam played for our Party in the Pub last year and was a huge hit.

On Easter Sunday, after a busy lunch, we will of course have a bank holiday bumper meat draw along with an Easter draw so be sure to get tickets as soon as you can. After the meat draw, we have the amazingly talented Jamie Felton. Jamie was here last Easter and was also really popular!

The pub will be open all day all weekend, but as usual we will be closed on the Monday so all the staff can enjoy a well-deserved day off with family and friends. Looking ahead, we will once again do 'Live Music Month of May' and have live music every Sunday throughout the month. Each band or singer will start after the meat draw at 6pm, hopefully outside in the Courtyard.

Thanks to everyone for continuing to support the pub. We are getting busier most days so if you want a table for lunch or dinner, please remember to try and book. We hate to turn people away, especially villagers!

Corinne, Mouse and Ruby

Red Lion Scottish Music Session

We have met for a few months now on the second Tuesday of the month (**14 Apr, 12 May**), 7.30-9.30ish and are building a repertoire of tunes and songs. It's a very relaxed, fun evening with a range of musicians, instruments and

singers. Some musicians are really good and some (me) not so yet! Anyone is welcome to come and play, sing, listen, or just enjoy the craic! Contact me for details.

Sue Robson 07905 493690

Celebrating the Thames Path

This year marks 30 years of the Thames Path, creating unique access to England's most important and much-loved river. Perhaps it's a river you know well – as walker on its footpath, rower, swimmer, angler, or maybe as visitor to its historic houses and literary hotspots? Or perhaps you've only half-acknowledged it obliquely as just something always there?

Either way, this summer's anniversary campaign (May-July) aims to bring it to life in fresh and fascinating ways, beginning with the inauguration of a new bench at the river's source in the Cotswolds, followed by a finger post relay across its 200-mile route, varied guided walks and Thames Path tales.

Plus I'll be working with the Thames Path as a writer in residence, creating a trail of 30 short poems to appear via QR codes and as audio on the finger posts. All the poems I am creating aim to evoke what the river means to its many different participants, unpacking varied encounters enroute and revealing the extraordinary emotional pull of the Thames in our lives.

I'll be showcasing the Thames Path project at an event for Brightwell Supporting Refugees on **Friday 22 May (7.30pm at the Village Hall)**, so look out for more information shortly. The Red Box Gallery will take up the watery theme too. So if any villagers have their own Thames stories, memories, mishaps or misdemeanours, I'd love to hear about them. Do contact me at robertseatter@hotmail.com.

Robert Seatter

Save the Children

On **Saturday 25 April** we will hold another 'Save the Children Fun Dog Show' on the Rec between 2pm and 4.30pm. Registration starts at 1.30pm. Fun for all, even if you haven't got a dog. Come and enjoy our refreshment tent (with delicious cakes), stalls, raffle and much more. Something for all ages.

Saturday 9 May 10-12 noon is the Save the Children Annual Plant Sale in the Square. So when you are planting your seeds and/or sorting out your gardens,

please help us by donating your surplus plants. We will turn your efforts into funds for less fortunate children. Whether you donate plants to Save the Children or buy them on the morning, you will be helping grow better futures for children around the world and in the UK.

Celia Collett and the local Save the Children team

Thought about joining Oxfordshire500?

We're a community fundraising group that makes gifts of £500 each month to local families and individuals facing financial difficulty. We would love it if you would join us! Run by Brightwell villagers Wendy Roderick and Liz McGivan for nearly four years, Oxfordshire500 is based on a simple idea. If enough people pledge a small amount of money each month, we can help to tackle local hardship in a modest way – at least in the short-term.

Oxfordshire500 now has approximately 100 anonymous members donating what they can afford, sometimes as little as £1 a week. This commitment means we can give at least one £500 monthly payment (at the moment we are managing two £500 payments). Altogether we have so far nearly reached £50,000 in £500 monthly donations.

Local people who have had funds recently include:

- A mother and daughter fleeing domestic abuse, who had been moved to an empty flat which had no furnishings
- A grandmother with direct responsibility for two grandchildren, and having given up her job had no money to support them
- A parent ill in hospital with too little income to cover the needs of the family.

Each month people who need urgent support are nominated by responsible local agencies such as Homestart, Flexicare and Citizens Advice Bureau. We also consider nominations from Oxfordshire500 members themselves. Members then vote on the cases presented, and the £500 payment is quickly paid directly to recipients with no administration charges.

It's not surprising that we have more people nominated each month than we can help. The more members we have in Oxfordshire500 means the more support we can give. So please join. Your contribution can be as little or as much as you feel you can afford, but the minimum is £1 a week or £52 to cover your year's membership.

Simply set up a Standing Order to Lloyds Business account, Sort code 30-98-97 Account no: 46557962. Or if you prefer, please make a donation via the

same account. Then email oxfordshire500@gmail.com to let us know that you have joined. If you have any questions, please contact Wendy (0777 3608694) or look at our website at sites.google.com/view/oxfordshire500 where you can find details of all the donations we have made.

Wendy Roderick

WI

Some villagers may have spotted a small group of ladies (and occasionally men) meeting each Wednesday morning throughout the year outside the Red Lion to set off on a circular route around the village. This regular walk always delights us with the changes of the season and an appreciation of the countryside we still enjoy. Our changing landscape was the topic of our speaker's talk in February. Chris Churchman explored threats and opportunities for our landscape, including climate change.

Our AGM was held at the March meeting. The current committee agreed to stand for another year and was duly elected by the members on the evening. After completing the business part of the evening, we asked Mr. Peter Buchan-Symon to demonstrate the art of Origami to us. We all had a go and some fabulous shapes and figures emerged from a flat piece of paper.

Events Coming up

- **14 April** Rob Brewer on 'the role of a TV film extra' and anyone can do it.
- **12 May** Liz Woolley on 'a history of the Ultimate Picture Palace.'
- **9 June** Hopefully our summer garden party: venue to be confirmed.

If any of these topics are of interest to you, please feel free to come along. Guests are always welcome. Our meetings are held every second Tuesday in the month at 7.30pm in the Village Hall.

Karin Matthews

Red Box Gallery - calling exhibitionists!

I hope everyone's enjoyed our recent exhibitions: New Year resolutions, things we love about the village (as rain poured down upon the beleaguered telephone box gallery), historic restoration and World Book Day revelations.

Coming up from the smallest gallery in Oxfordshire are springtime pre-school creativity, some glorious pots, stories of the River Thames and later this summer our first photography competition - which must feature something RED. More details to follow. If anyone would like to book a display in the Red Box, do get in touch: robertseatter@hotmail.com.

Robert Seatter

VILLAGE DIARY

(For Easter & other church services, see page 17)

April

3	Live music Sam Lamden	Red Lion	9pm
5	Live music Jamie Felton	Red Lion	6pm
7	Red Lion quiz	Red Lion	7pm
10	BSR talk by mountaineer, Mick Fowlerr	VH	7.30pm
14	WI talk on 'The Role of a film extra' by Rob Brewer	VH	7.30pm
18-19	Preloved Fashion Pop-up: Sat 4.30-9.30pm, Sun 10-4.30	VH	
19	Jazz Jam	Red Lion	6pm
25	Save the Children Fun Dog Show	Rec	2pm

May

2-10	Colour & Clay exhibition, Coombe House, Slade End		11-6pm
3	Live music Bangers & Mash	Red Lion	6pm
5	Your Health Wellbeing talk by Maz Packham	VH	7pm
9	SCF Plant Sale Spring	The Sq	10am
9	Church Spring Fair	St Aga	2pm
10	Rogation Sunday Beating of the Bounds, after service	St Aga	
10	Live music The Mysteries	Red Lion	6pm
12	WI talk on 'A history of the Ultimate Picture Palace'	VH	7.30pm
17	Open Gardens & Brightwell Art Club Exhibition (VH)		2pm
17	Jazz Jam	Red Lion	6pm
22	BRS talk - Robert Seatter, Thames Path poet 2026	VH	7.30pm
24	Live music (TBC)	Red Lion	6pm
31	Organ recital by Andrew Wells	St Aga	3.30pm
31	Live music	Red Lion	6pm

Advance Notice

7 June - Summer concert (TBC), 9 June - WI Summer party (TBC), 13 June - Charity Auction VH, June - 'Fearless', a talk by Kevin Porter VH (date TBC)
4 July - Village Fete, Sotwell House

Refuse Collection (Food waste each week)

Grey bins (Fri) 10, (Thurs) 23 April, (Fri) 8 & (Thurs) 21 May
Green (& brown) Thursdays 2, 16 & 30 (extra brown) April, 14 & 29 (Fri) May

Village website

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