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Editorial

Another year, another Christmas; time to dust off the hymnals and practise our harmonies as the opportunities for singing carols in the village this Christmas are many and varied; in church of course, and round the Christmas Tree on Christmas Eve but also in the Village Hall with the added bonus of a glass of wine and a mince pie and even a chance to win some money on the Clock Tower Lottery. Even the donkeys are joining in. See pages 9, 16, 20 and 23.

Christmas was a magical time in my childhood, apart from Christmas dinner. My mother slaved unwillingly over the stove and then piled everything – the turkey, the gravy and all the vegetables into a ghastly invention called a 'hostess' trolley. By the time dinner was served the roast potatoes were soft and the sprouts were so soggy they resembled boiled cabbage and smelt like bad eggs. Luckily for Sian Norfolk's family their mother is a fantastic cook who's been cooking perfect Christmas dinners since she was a teenager, and recently launched a catering business. Meet Sian Norfolk, pages 6-8.

The village shop already feels very festive with its array of delicious Christmas fare and also lots of books by local authors which would make splendid Christmas presents. See pages 12 and 13 for our latest book reviews and back issues for others we reviewed earlier this year.

As Rev Janice reminds us on page 9, Christmas is also a time to time to reflect on the true meaning of Christmas, and to think about the less fortunate. People in this village are by and large very generous when it comes to supporting good causes, not just with financial donations. Many give their time at village events or bake quantities of food for the tea tents. Check out the array of cakes consumed on Apple Day, page 21. However, when it comes to taking on the running and management of village events and village affairs there is considerably less enthusiasm. For weeks the Parish Council has been advertising for new blood but with no response as yet. Those standing down have served for many years and it's time someone else stepped up. If you have children that use the Village playgrounds you would be an ideal candidate. See pages 3 and 4.

By the time you read this we will know whether Alex Kingston is still in the running to win Strictly Come Dancing. At 25 to 1 against in September, odds dropped to 8 to 1 in early November making her a hot favourite. We salute you Alex and we live in hope.

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to all,

Alison Leigh, Editor

Parish Council News

Pedestrian Crossing

The new pedestrian/bike crossing at Slade End is, at last, operational. This is a prime example of what the Parish Council can do but also of the frustrations in getting things done. This crossing was first requested several years ago by parishioners, particularly parents of young people at Wallingford Secondary School, to enable pupils to cycle or walk to school safely. It has taken this long to actually get it done and huge thanks must go to Pete Sudbury who was until recently the Oxfordshire County Councillor for pushing the project forward. Although we miss Pete who was very active and responsive to our requests, our new Oxfordshire County Councillor, James Barlow is proving equally helpful. We are delighted that he comes to our meetings and listens to our concerns. We are also grateful that AnnMarie the SODC councillor also comes to our meetings. It is always better to be able to ask questions face to face.

Vandalism

Sadly, we have recently been informed of some damage to a local farm and ask that parishioners stay vigilant. If you see anyone causing damage please inform the police. On the same note, if you or your young people are playing football at the recreation ground, please could you stay off the marked football pitches, particularly if it is wet. The football pitch has suffered a bit of damage recently. Most weeks they are used by two football teams who pay for the privilege, so we try to provide a decent playing surface. Thank you.

Fly-tipping

There have also been reports of a few cases of fly tipping recently. Please do not leave rubbish next to a bin. If the bin is full come back another day or use your own bin. This is a particular problem at the rubbish bin by the Millenium Wood. Whoever is dumping feed bags, other household and DIY waste there, please stop! If you see some rubbish that has been dumped, please report it. Search 'SODC fly-tipping' on the internet for the form to fill in, adding the position either by post code or 'What Three Words' position, plus a photo.

Community Speedwatch

The Speedwatch team are now trained and have started to monitor speeds in various areas of the village. Please let us know if you would like to join the group.

Jubilee Pavilion.

We have decided that we no longer need a stand-alone Jubilee Pavilion website so we have decided to move everything you need to know about the Jubilee Pavilion to a dedicated section of the Brightwell cum Sotwell village website: www.brightwellcumsotwell.co.uk. We also have a new email address which is pavilion@brightwellcumsotwellpc.co.uk. Hopefully everything will run much more smoothly now. Please do think about hiring the Pavilion for a party or other event you are hosting; it is a great space and having plenty of parking and a field and play equipment outside is a real bonus.

New Parish Councillor

With play equipment in mind, we urgently need someone to come forward to fill a vacancy on the council. Each person on the council contributes to the smooth running of the village so it is important to have every place filled. It really is not onerous and can be combined with work and family. Just to put this in context, if we don't find a replacement for the councillor responsible for infrastructure at the next election it could result in the closure of the playground equipment; this role includes keeping an eye on playground equipment to make sure repairs are up to date and it is safe. Anyone is very welcome to come to a meeting to see what we do - third Tuesday of every month at 7.30pm in the Church room. Thank you.

Brightwell cum Sotwell Parish Council

A War in Ten Poems

It was a sellout audience at the very moving performance of *A War in 10 Poems* in St Mary's Church Wallingford on 2 November, a week before Armistice Sunday. Through the writings and poems of six poets, skilfully linked together by the words of local author Peter Adamson and directed by Chris Baines, we heard how attitudes changed as the years of war went by.

It started in 1914 when John Masefield, one of our greatest poets, was living near Cholsey and wrote with a group of fellow poets including Rupert Brooke. That was a happy time, walking the Downs, very different from what followed as the war went on ... and on. Their poems written over that time formed a powerful drama. Through the voices of six actors mostly from the village, with visuals on a screen behind them, we experienced the horrors of the battlefields, the carnage on a massive scale and the tragic waste of human life. Poetry has an amazing ability to touch our emotions. The audience were left stunned and silenced as it came to

an end through the reflections of a more modern poet, Carol Ann Duffy, and the scattering of red poppies.

Thank you to all who made this a really special evening a fitting memorial to Armistice Day. Proceeds of the night (£1258) went to Brightwell Supporting Refugees (BSR) whose objective is to support the welfare and education of refugees, especially children. We are very grateful to you all for your support.

Helen Connor, co-chair of Trustees, BSR

Brightwell Primary School

Since returning in September, the children at Brightwell School have been busy learning, exploring, and celebrating together, and what a fantastic start to the school year it's been!

One of the highlights was the Year 4 trip to the Earth Trust site, where pupils stepped back in time to learn all about the Anglo-Saxons. They even had the chance to try their hand at apple pressing, making the most of the season's apples! This enriching experience was made possible thanks to the generous support of the Brightwell Orchard Group, whose subsidy helped bring history to life.

We also gathered as a school community for our Harvest Festival at St Agatha's Church, our first service of the year and a beautiful moment to reflect on gratitude and giving. A huge thank you to everyone who donated to the food bank; your kindness will make a real difference.

Meanwhile, our younger children have been thriving in Forest School, enjoying outdoor learning and getting stuck into nature. One exciting project has been the transformation of the overgrown pond area, which they've worked hard to clear so it can (hopefully) become home to a new fire pit, perfect for future adventures and storytelling.

And let's not forget STEM Week, which sparked creativity across the school! Some classes became architects for the day, using just poles and elastic bands to build incredible structures like pyramids, the Crystal Palace, and even a Ferris wheel (**see cover photo**). The imagination and teamwork on display were truly inspiring.

With so much already achieved, we're looking forward to what's still to come — especially with Christmas now on the horizon. Watch this space for festive fun and more exciting learning ahead!

Sue Potts, Head Teacher

MeetSian Norfolk

A year or so ago, we hired Sian Norfolk to cater for my husband's 70th birthday party. Dinner was a triumph, not just because it was delicious, but also because Sian managed to produce it hot, on time and with no fuss, even though our Aga had packed up. (Her husband Peter did some frantic but covert ferrying to and from her home oven).



At the time Sian was thinking about turning her hobby into a fully-fledged catering business. She is now up and running doing all sorts of events - lunches, dinners, parties, christenings, still mostly local but ready to branch out. See www.relishandsavour.co.uk.

But she didn't plan on being a chef. She read English at Oxford and dreamed of travelling the world as a war correspondent, the next Kate Adie. She did travel the world, not as journalist but as an executive for a Nano tech company, until motherhood responsibilities put a lid on it.

Cooking however was her first job. She and her siblings were brought up in Goring, in a flat above the Lyndhurst nursing home, run by her parents. Aged 15 or 16 she was responsible for cooking the Sunday roast for residents and staff, about 25 to 30 people. "That's how I learnt to cook for big numbers".

Her real apprenticeship began years later when she found herself catering for a couple of supper clubs at the Red Lion. The then landlord introduced her to Malcolm Emery, a professional chef who also lives in Brightwell, and who became her mentor.

The first event was a Mexican Evening. He said "We'll do it your way for the first time, and then I'll show you how to do it properly". The meal went out. "It was fine. Everyone enjoyed it, but it was stressful, I just hadn't approached it in the right way". For the second event, an Indian evening, they did it Malcolm's way, and she learnt the art of choosing the menu to suit the circumstances: "What do we have to work with, how many burners are there? How many ovens are there? how many plates?"

The supper clubs were part of a massive fundraising campaign that involved the whole village. They were raising money to fund Sian's daughter Maeve's medical bills. Maeve was born with cerebral palsy. Just before her sixth birthday she needed surgery to reduce spasticity, or muscle stiffness, in her legs, a major operation. "They actually cut the sensory nerves in the spinal

column which prevents the brain sending incorrect messages to the muscles and makes them completely relaxed. But what happens is you go completely floppy and have to relearn everything”. It requires extensive post operative physiotherapy to be successful.

Maeve began a five-year program of rehab much of which the family had to pay for: physio 6 times a week for the first 6 months, then 4 times a week, then once a week and now that she is at secondary school, a weekly session with a personal trainer. As a little girl she was a wheelchair user. Now she walks with just sticks. Sian is full of praise for her daughter’s guts and resilience and also for the Brightwell community that has been so supportive, but is frustrated that there is not more transparency about the services available – or rather not available, to families like hers. For example, the NHS was only able to provide physio 3 times a week and only in the immediate aftermath of surgery. It was nowhere near enough. Sian understands budgetary constraints, but she thinks it is not fair to allow people to put their children forward for major surgery without explaining that for the best results rehabilitation will need to be provided at the families’ cost. “The disingenuity about what is needed to make the kind of progress Maeve has makes me really sad”.

Her philosophy for success in combining running a business with looking after two children, one with special needs, is simple. The 80-20 rule. “I prefer things to be nice and organised but it can’t always be like that when you’ve got lots of competing needs for things. As long as 80% gets done it doesn’t matter if things are not perfect”.

Except in the kitchen. “Cooking does have to be 100% perfect!”

One path to perfection involves practising on the family. “I will often do a dish several times to make sure it is spot on before wheeling it out to customers. The week before your party, we ate a lot of moussaka.”

Sian loves cooking Middle Eastern food, and anything spicy; a Spanish seafood stew with smoked paprika is a current favourite but she can also rustle up a fine traditional afternoon tea. Although having recently been up until 2am baking cakes for a party of 400, ‘tea’ might be confined to smaller groups from now on. Her plan is to expand the business by doing meal kits, along the lines of Hello Fresh and Gousto, where you get sent all the ingredients and you put the meal together yourself, except that she would like to offer a service where people can pick up as and when and not have to subscribe. She hopes it will appeal to busy people who haven’t time to think up recipes and then source the ingredients as well as to people living alone who can’t be bothered to cook. It could also suit people who want to avoid ultra processed

food. “If you are cooking from scratch you know exactly how much sugar and salt is going into your food”.

Living with Maeve has taught Sian a lot about resilience in the face of tough challenges. “Rather than stressing about the big picture and what things are going to look like in five years or ten years, just focus on the next thing and do that next thing. One step at a time. That’s how you get through things. And make sure you wring every last bit of joy out of life that you can. You never know what’s going to happen”.

Brightwell ‘Tartiflette’

Here is Sian’s suggestion for an easy and delicious recipe to make after a long winter walk...

Ingredients

750g waxy potatoes
Twin pack of bacon lardons
4 shallots, sliced in rings
1 large clove garlic
250g brie or other similar cheese, rind left on
Glass of white wine
Small tub of single cream
Pinch of thyme
Freshly ground black pepper

Method

Pre-heat the oven to 200°/180° Fan/ Gas 7.

Par-boil waxy salad potatoes, allow to cool, and slice in rounds.

Fry the bacon lardons until slightly crispy, using a slotted spoon remove from the pan and put to one side. Soften the shallots in the bacon fat, don’t allow them to colour - add a little extra oil if needed. Add the garlic and cook for one minute more, again not allowing it to colour. Remove shallots and garlic and add to lardons. Deglaze pan with white wine (this will also help with the washing up!) and reduce until syrupy.

Now assemble the dish in a 1.5 litre ovenproof casserole – layer potato rounds, bacon and shallot and pieces of brie (including the rind) until everything is used up. Combine the syrupy white wine with the single cream, add a pinch of thyme and a good grind of black pepper and pour the whole lot over the assembled dish. Put in the oven and bake for 30 mins or until bubbling.

Let rest for 5 minutes and serve with cornichons and a green salad.

Alison leigh

St Agatha's and St James'

It seems that commercially Christmas has been around since August, but much of the Christian world doesn't start thinking about it until the beginning of Advent, which this year we celebrated on 30 November. This marks the end of our church year and the beginning of a new one; it is a time of waiting and preparation, a time to pray, to seek forgiveness before we give thanks and celebrate the birth of the most precious gift we have been given, God's son, Jesus Christ, who came and lived among us as an ordinary person, with an extraordinary message of love and care for all, a light to the world and our salvation. With all the business of the preparations for Christmas Day itself we forget this sometimes, so take some time to reflect on the true meaning of Christmas, and to help and remember those for whom there will be no celebrations this year because of their financial situation, ill health or war or persecution. If you can, please DO join us at St Agatha's and St James's and find the peace that we all strive for and is promised us.

Our Christmas services start on Sunday 21 December with our service of Lessons and Carols at 6pm in St Agatha's Church, and our Crib Service will be held at 4.30pm in St Agatha's on 24 December. We are very grateful that the Archdeacon, David Tyler has agreed to come to the village and do the Christmas Eve Midnight Communion service at St James', Sotwell at 11.30pm; always a very special and moving candlelit service at the very heart of what the arrival of Jesus means.

Our Christmas Day Family Communion will be at 9.30am and the following Sunday 28 December we will host our final service of this year, a Team Communion service in St Agatha's at 10am, a slightly later time than usual. And then a new year dawns and on the 4 January 2026 at 9.30am in our Family Service, we will celebrate Epiphany, a word that describes a moment of sudden and great revelation. We will be remembering the revealing of Christ to the Gentiles in the visit of the magi, wise men to the infant Jesus with their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

As far as we are able during the interregnum we will maintain our normal pattern of services but please check the church notice boards and the church gate for details of each monthly service. There will be no Community Coffee Morning on 24 or 31 December; we will resume again on the 7 January 2026 and hope to see you then. On behalf of all at St Agatha's and the Wallingford Team, may I wish you a joyful and blessed Christmas and a happy and healthy New Year.

Rev Janice - Associate Priest

St Agatha's Bells

With the Remembrance Service so well attended, many folk will have heard our bells being rung 'half muffled'. We put a leather pad on one side of the clapper to partially muffle it. The effect is like an echo and can be very moving on such occasions. It was also lovely to have one of our youngsters ringing, before joining the parade. Aside from our church bells, we are currently practising carols on our handbells. Let's hope we'll be ready in time!

I also need to start thinking and planning for how we might celebrate St Agatha's Day. She is patron saint not only of our church, but also of bellringers and bakers, among others! Her 'Day' is 5 February. We will celebrate the 1775th anniversary of her death next year (albeit the precise actual date of her death is unknown!). Watch this space (and suggestions welcome).

For now though, let the bells ring out for Christmas 😊

John Dowling

The Red Lion

Here at The Red Lion we are gearing up for hopefully a busy few weeks as we get ready for Christmas and we hope to see you over the festive period.

Leading up to Christmas! we will have our huge Christmas Draw on 14 Dec along with some fabulous live Rock n Roll music from the band 'Move it'! They were here late summer and were a huge hit so we've asked them back to entertain you again. The draw will take place at 6pm and the draw sheet with numbers to buy are up in the pub. Every single pound raised from the draw is spent on the prizes so please do support if you can. On 21 Dec we will have our bumper Christmas meat draw and fingers crossed some live music; as I type I have yet to confirm a band.

The pub panto is booked in for Tuesday 16 Dec. Timings are tbc from the organisers but as usual, it will be a fun and slightly mad evening with a host of local faces popping up to entertain you. Look out for more details. Finally, we have New Years Eve Eve, our yearly tradition of partying on 30 Dec. The pub will open at 6.30pm. We have live music from Sam Lamden and then we will pop the tunes on to dance the night away until the early hours.

If you want to book a table for anytime over Christmas, please do so as early as possible as we are getting booked up, especially in the evenings. Likewise

tables are already being booked for our New Years Day brunch (10.30am) so book now.

In January we will remain open until the evening of Sunday 11 Jan and we will then close down for our January break for us and all our staff and for some light maintenance work. The pub will re-open Wednesday 21 Jan. We hope to see you during December and please remember, your pub is here for you all year round and not just for Christmas.

Herewith Christmas and New Year projected opening times, but please note, these will be updated constantly and may change. Look out for social media posts, our emails or if in doubt, check the hours on Google.

Christmas Eve – Open all day, 12-11pm Lunch & Dinner served	
Christmas Day	11.30-2pm (drinks only)
Boxing Day	11.30-5pm Lunch served 12-3pm
27 Dec	12-5pm Lunch served 12-3pm
28 Dec	12-8pm Lunch served 12-3pm
29 Dec	Closed All Day
30 Dec	6.30pm til Close – New Years Eve Eve party
31 Dec	Closed All Day
1 Jan	10.30-5pm Brunch & Lunch 10.30-3pm
2 Jan – 11 Jan	Back to normal

NB Pub closed 12 Jan – 20 January, reopens 21 January.

Corinne, Mouse and Ruby

Red Lion Scottish Music Session

Some of you will already know about the music session we have started in the Red Lion. It's something I wanted to give a try after going into pubs in Scotland where it is quite common to see a group of musicians playing together. The aim is for folk to get together to make music in a relaxed setting for fun; it's definitely not a concert although anyone is invited to come and watch and join in the singing if you want. Please do come along if you fancy it – in these dark days of winter, music is good for the soul. Second Tuesday of every month 7.30 – 9.30

Sue Robson

Village Lunch Club

Our yearly Xmas lunch is on Tuesday, 2 Dec at 12.15 in the Village Hall, £10. If you have not already booked and would like to join us, please contact Eastlyn Horsfield, 01491 832041 or Sue Collett, 01491 836617.

Book Reviews

Blenheim by Peter Adamson and Rod Craig

These two come together through poetry and painting to share their love of Blenheim, the 12,000-acre estate of gardens, lawns, lakes, woods and pasture belonging to Blenheim Palace. By way of introduction, Peter Adamson provides a short history of water colour giving the general reader a valuable insight into the challenges involved. Rod Craig speaks with real passion describing it as “the most energetic, vibrant, exciting, unpredictable medium, far more exciting than oil”.

The authors express the hope that their book will add to the enjoyment of those who visit Blenheim and those who might like to. Moreover, Peter Adamson underlines that the paintings stand in their own right as a collection of work by one of the country's leading watercolour artists.

It was 50 years ago that I first stepped inside Blenheim's very special natural world. As students we could escape academia and head on our bikes to this beautiful paradise to laugh and to play and sometimes to cry. Between them, Peter Adamson and Rod Craig have produced a profound portrait of a unique place. The paintings combined with the poetry will stir your emotions. They capture the moment. They capture the changes in mood and the changes in the seasons. In the precarious world we now live in we have to hope that the Blenheim experience will still be there in years to come. Get a copy of Blenheim, it's ideal for Christmas. Then make hotfoot to the gates of Blenheim. Enter in and enjoy.

Alec McGivan

New Tales of an Old Land by Cindy Zudys

In 'New Tales of an Old Land' Cindy Zudys creates magical fairy tales embedded in the varied and enchanted landscapes of the UK. They draw upon the ancient and unchanging but are laced with events that are very much of now.

The author's voice has an immediacy and lyricism, rooted firmly in the oral storytelling tradition – the book is written exactly as you could imagine the stories being told late at night, while gathered around the fire.

The book is made up of a series of fables, each one with a lesson to be found at its heart. These fundamental truths, from the importance of following your heart's desire, and of being interested in, and taking care of the world around you, to the worthiest leaders being those who have greatest care for their

fellow creatures, are woven through the tales. The landscapes are beautifully described, with some of them being reminiscent of places local to us, from the ‘City of Bells’ found on a beautiful river beyond ‘a patchwork of fields and small woodlands’, to the ‘Great Chalk Horse’ on the Barrow Downs. There is a sense of these stories being rooted in our environment, making the truths even more relevant to us, and the here and now.

There is humour as well as wisdom to be found, and you put the book down with a comforting sense that not everything can be so bad in a world where nefarious gangland activity ends up benefitting the local primary school, an unscrupulous property developer is seen off by wolves, and a Tory MP ends up dancing under starlight on Glastonbury Tor, under the tutelage of the Enchanters, or those ‘who dare to dream’.

A brilliant read by a great modern Bard, perfect for taking us through the darkening days at the end of the year.

Sian Norfolk

Anya and the Magic iPad by Peter Adamson and Anya Smith

This book is absolutely fantastic. I was laughing every other page. It’s a funny story about revenge, written in verse. Eleven-year-old Anya asks the local witch to put a spell on the tyrannical new king and get her dad out of the dungeons. Instead of a spell, (after a looooong chat), the witch gives Anya a magic iPad, which can change everything about the King’s palace. Anya uses the iPad to create crazy chaos and make the king think he is going mad!

The rhyming is very imaginative with an easy-to-follow plot. I love the way Peter Adamson has put 21st century ideas into his book such as: ‘No one liked him [the new king] on Facebook or followed him on Twitter’. My favourite character should be the heroine, Anya, but the witch trumps all of them. She wears one sock (and uses the other one to tie presents), she has a vast microwave, and the password to her website is ‘tiddlyompompompom’ – very witchy! My favourite line is: “The moon-shaped screen showed letters and numbers ... and curious symbols like stars and cucumbers’! It was extremely inventive and made me laugh!

Anya is an easy-to-love protagonist. Every night she makes the king’s life miserable and then sends a teasing anonymous email. The illustrations (drawn by Peter’s grand-daughter, Anya) are absolutely incredible. I could never draw like that in my life! Overall this book is AMAZING, and I am very happy to have it on my shelf!

Alexandra de Jong

The Village Stores & Post Office

It's a busy time at the shop and Post Office; we are stocked with lots of local suppliers' goodies to hopefully tempt you. Please do come in and see what we have to offer as presents or treats for you and your family and friends.

In the Post Office we are ready for the last-minute posting of parcels and cards. Christmas stamps are on sale, and don't forget we are your local bank for depositing and withdrawing money.

After all this the team will deserve a well-earned Christmas Break with their family and friends. We wish you all a very Merry Christmas & Happy New Year. Please see below our hours for Christmas and the New Year:

Wednesday 24 Dec	9am – 1pm
Thursday 25 to Sunday 28 Dec	CLOSED
Monday 29 Dec	9am – 5.30pm
Tuesday 30 Dec	9am – 5.30pm
Wednesday 31 Dec	9am – 1pm
Thursday 1 Jan	CLOSED
Friday 2 Jan	9am – 5.30pm
Saturday 3 Jan	9am – 1pm
Sunday 4 Jan	9.00am – noon (shop only)

The Shop and Post Office Team!

Stewart Village Hall, Clock Tower Lottery

Firstly, thank you to all the lottery participants who attended our event to celebrate the first year of the Clock Tower Lottery. Over a glass or two of wine, we reported that after setup costs for the scheme including an SODC licence, leaflets, advertising and IT design the lottery raised nearly £5,500 in the first year. Over the year we had 23 separate winners and one lucky ticket holder winning two prizes. The only challenge this year has been recruitment, we have just 100 households taking part and have set a goal to double this over the next year. So, we have launched an exciting promotion for the next 3 months:

If an existing supporter introduces a friend, neighbour, husband, wife etc and they enter by 1 Dec 2025, 1 Jan or 1 Feb 2026 we will give you free entry for the equivalent number of tickets for three months from their 1st payment. This obviously depends on them continuing to pay for the three-month period. Whether you are an existing ticket holder and can take advantage of the above offer, or a new participant, there is an exciting chance to win a cash prize just

before Christmas. On the flyer enclosed with this copy of *The Villager* you will see there is a special, one-off prize of **£500** in the December draw; this is in addition to the regular £200 and £100 prizes.

The proceeds of the lottery go towards the restoration project and as well as adding valuable funds, it is one way for us to show in our grant applications that the community supports this project. If you can, please support the Hall and join the Lottery, go to: www.stewartvillagehall.org.uk/clock-tower-lottery.html, scan the QR code on the enclosed leaflet or pick up an application form from outside the Village Hall. For further information: info@stewartvillagehall.org.uk, 07867 726008 or leave note in the mailbox.

Annette Kilworth

New Exercise Classes at Stewart Village Hall!

Resistance Band Full Body Workout

Every Friday at 7am: Resistance bands are a fantastic way to strengthen and tone your whole body while being kind to your joints. One of the best things about using bands is that you can choose your own level of difficulty — simply adjust the tension or resistance to suit your ability and goals. Whether you're new to exercise or more experienced, this class is designed to challenge and support you at your own pace. All equipment is provided, just bring yourself and a bottle of water!

Seated Yoga and Movement

10 am Mondays from 1 Dec: This gentle, guided session focuses on improving flexibility, mobility, and balance, all from the comfort and stability of a chair. It's ideal for anyone looking to increase movement, reduce stiffness, and enjoy a calm, mindful start to the week.

Both classes are open to all ability levels, with modifications and support provided throughout by Devon Wright, qualified Personal Trainer, Yoga Instructor and Fitness Instructor to make sure everyone feels comfortable and confident. Improve your fitness, strength, and wellbeing in a friendly and welcoming environment and enjoy a positive start to your day. Book through www.trainwithdevon.com or contact on 07840893436 for more information.

Devon Wright

Stewart Village Hall Carol Evening

17 December 6.30 for 7pm - Performances from the School choir - Ks1, Tubthumpers, Barber Shop Singers, Christmas Carols with pianist Gabe Clements, M.C. Marcus Harris, and the Clock Tower Lottery draw with a **BIG £500 extra prize!** Adults £5, children free with ticket which includes mulled wine and mince pie/juice and biscuit, in the interval.

Tickets from the Village Stores, or via info@stewartvillagehall.org.uk or phone Shena 01491 834543.

Shena Luck

BcS Environment Group

The Millennium Wood benefited from its annual visit by employees of Vertex Pharmaceuticals in September and we are very grateful for their help. We propose further tree work for the winter to remove trees suffering from Ash dieback, followed by replanting with trees donated by the Woodland Trust. We plan a similar exercise for the Swan Wood. Not all trees will be felled to ground level as some will be reduced to a height of about three metres to be used as posts for bird boxes. Trimming the banks of the Swan Stream is also planned for later this year.

As mentioned in the last report, there are likely to be some trees available for planting elsewhere in the village. If you know of any suitable location please let me know.

A reminder that Jonathan Stamp will be giving a talk entitled 'The Summer of 43' *"Was 'our' Roman road used in the very first year of the Roman invasion in 43AD? Come and hear the evidence, and decide for yourself!"* It will be held in the Village Hall on Thursday 4 December starting at 7.30pm. No booking is required, and entry is free. It promises to be a very interesting evening and all are welcome.

Weather: September's rainfall was the first time that the value exceeded the average since last winter. Adding September and October together shows an increase of 17% above average. Hopefully this paves the way for groundwater and river flows to recover over the coming months.

The Thames catchment is still categorized as 'Prolonged Dry Weather' and Thames Water Drought Order is still in place for this area and is expected to last into 2026.

Steve Capel-Davis

WI

As I am writing this, I am looking out into the garden which is glowing with wonderful autumn colours. The best I have ever seen. I am reminded of our very successful October meeting when Robert Seatter took us on a reflective journey of discovery through Kelmscott Manor, home of William Morris, using his own poems, supported by photos to bring this very special house and garden alive.

Crafting, colours and shapes were the theme for our November meeting. WI members and friends had an opportunity to try their hands at creating 5 very different Christmas decorations for their own homes or for gifts.

Once again, we will be closing the year with a delicious meal at the Red Lion on 9 December before starting afresh in the New Year.

Our Dates for 2026

13 Jan - WI Resolutions and a talk titled 'Driving Miss Daisy' by Ken Merry from the Institute of Advance Motorist

10 Feb - 'Losing England's Landscape and Climate change' by Chris Churchman

10 March - Annual Meeting plus activity tba

14 April - 'The role of a TV and Film extra' with Rob Brewer

If any of these topics appeal to you, please feel free to come along. We are a friendly group and we always welcome guests. We meet every second Tuesday in the month at 7.30pm in the Village Hall.

Karin Matthews

Community Association

The Community Association AGM took place on the 1 November. Our Chairman James Davys and Treasurer Tom Rogerson were re-elected. We are delighted that Caroline Annets, Lynn Burrige and Charlotte and Mike Woods, Robert Lidstone, Alison Bloomfield, Nick Walsh, and Tony Guntrip were all happy to be re-elected and we are also pleased to welcome Ian Smith as new member of the Committee. Jim Sanger has stood down as our Honorary Auditor after 25 years. We are very grateful for his hard work and help over the years and wish him well in the future.

The Community Association is committed to running a programme of events next year. These will include the Village Quiz, a Jumble Sale and the Fete as well as other events to raise money for local good causes.

Christmas Hampers: The Community Association in conjunction with support from the Fairthorne Trust, The Brightwell Scout Group and the Village Stores is pleased to provide a Christmas Hamper for the senior residents of the village. If you know of anyone over the age of 70, who you believe does not currently receive a hamper but would appreciate one, please telephone me on 01491 834195. In these difficult times the Committee has agreed to offer other members of the community who are struggling one of our hampers. If you know of someone in the village who could do with our support, please let me know.

May I wish you all a very healthy and happy Christmas and joyful New Year.

James Davys, Chairman

Brightwell Preschool

The squirrels have been the absolute highlight of our autumn this year. We have watched them climbing, running, digging and best of all, collecting and burying walnuts. The children watched with fascination as the warm winds blew their faces and the leaves fell on their heads. They have learnt their new autumn poems and songs, baked items with lots of apples and spice, explored slimy pumpkin seeds and splashed (and laid down in) puddles, made bonfires and had plenty of cosy story time with their friends huddled under blankets. Now the weather is changing and the colder winds are blowing the leaves away to reveal the muddy, dark winter ahead. Hurrah!! This means it's time for even more story-telling, singing and poems, plus we will have the Christmas celebrations to prepare for.

We continue to explore our wonderful village. Thank you to you all for making this a magical experience for them, with friendly smiles all round. Thank you for picking up your dog's mess, we rarely see any nowadays and also for what you grow in your allotments for us to come and discover. Thank you also for the orchard, which we like to explore in all weathers, and for keeping the paths and stream clear for the children to venture along. We are grateful for the hidden work that you all do to help our community stay safe and exciting for the littlest ones.

Natasha Hillier

Brightwell Toddlers

This autumn the village hall has been bursting with seasonal activities. From the creation of crowns to shining shells and shooting stars, the children have been using autumn leaves as decorations and making colourful firework

pictures. Our Halloween session saw ghosts jumping high on the parachute and more than a little squealing from the excited little ones running underneath.

We'd like to say a special thanks to Barbara and the volunteers from the WI who helped us this half term. We're looking for volunteers to help us going forward, particularly helping in the kitchen, so if you'd like to join a fun bunch of little ones for the morning, then please contact us on brightwelltoddlers@gmail.com for more information.

We welcome children up to school age and recently our youngest member has been just 3 weeks old. We've got lots of babies at the moment so please join us with babies or toddlers from 9.15-11.15am in the Village Hall, Thursday mornings in term-time. The cost per session is £3.50 (cash) or £4 (online).

Sam Bailey-Davies and the Toddlers crew

Brightwell Supporting Refugees

We have had two great BSR events in the last couple of months, very well supported by you - the Jazz, Soul and Blues Evening in the village hall, organised by George Potter, and the performance of Peter Adamson's 'A war in 10 poems' in St Mary's Church, Wallingford. Both were memorable evenings. Thank you to George and Peter. Along with several sizable donations, it means that we have enough funds to meet our pledge to give £3000 in December to The Big Give and our commitment to pay teachers' salaries at the Hope Centre in Amman, Jordan through to July next year. The 2025 Big Give is Windle International's key fundraising effort. Donations are matched, so from our £3000 given, Windle will receive a massive £6000. This year's campaign is focused on several refugee education initiatives across East Africa including secondary school bursaries, a school digitisation pilot programme rollout, and professional training for students.

Earlier in September, Robin Shawyer led the annual Thames Walk, a 26-mile journey on foot from Wolvercote to Brightwell by Windle students, supporters and donors. The walk raised £15,000, so well done everyone who walked or sponsored it.

At the time of writing, we are planning several events and activities in early 2026 so watch out for posters about what's coming or look on our Facebook page or website bsr@bsr-charity.org. You will also find more information there about donating.

The BSR Trustees

Save the Children

This year will be the 30th Anniversary of Carols around the Christmas Tree on Christmas Eve. Preparations are well under way, all brought to you freely by volunteers and sponsors' generous contributions.

All the money raised goes to Save the Children so please consider adding a small donation to your Christmas present list, as a small gift for the Children of the World, helping to ensure as many children as possible can enjoy the magic of Christmas.

If you are unable to join us, but have enjoyed walking past and seeing the trees and lights and would like to donate, our local branch bank details are:

Name of Account - Save The Children UT21

Sort Code - 08-02-28

Account Number - 65587186

We hope you can join us on Christmas Eve at 5.30pm to celebrate the 30th Anniversary. We are hoping to create a little bit of magic for you all!

Celia & the local Save the Children team wish you all a very Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

Celia Collett

Wanted: Villager Distribution Manager

You've seen *The Post* or *All the President's Men*; you yearn to *put a story together*, to *hold the front page*. To *get the story out there*. You're in luck, because that last bastion of hard-hitting independent local journalism, *The Villager*, needs you!

- You can indeed *hold the front page* – and all the others – by joining the printing team, a commitment in alternate months (or less often if more volunteers come forward)
- You can *put a story together* by joining the assembly team in the Village Hall, again every couple of month or less
- You can *get the story out there* by becoming the Distribution Manager, bundling up the copies on assembly day and delivering them to the network of street distributors (car essential).

Please get in touch with any committee member if you can help – their details can be found on the contents page. Thank you.

Tony Guntrip

News from your MP

In Parliament, Olly Glover secured a commitment from the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care to help unblock progress on the GP surgery in Great Western Park. At Prime Minister's Questions, he challenged the Prime Minister on the Government's decision to delay SEND (special education needs and disabilities) reforms until 2026, asking what he has to say to parents and education staff who are deeply worried by these delays. He also led a debate on the proposed cuts to funding for the International Baccalaureate (IB) programme - an issue that affects many families at Europa School - and spoke on the need to improve statutory maternity and paternity pay.

In the constituency he made further progress on improving the Orchard Centre, where parking is now free after 7pm every day.

Do not hesitate to contact him and his team if there is anything you need help with at olly.glover.mp@parliament.uk, or by leaving a voice message on 0207 219 7657.

Olly Glover, MP for Didcot and Wantage

Apple Day

Glorious dry weather and autumn sunshine helped draw a record crowd of around 700 visitors, to our 13th Annual Apple Day on the Jubilee Recreation Ground on Sunday 12 October. It was our largest Apple Day yet.

Visitors enjoyed a wonderful range of stalls celebrating everything apple. Our heritage display featured 120 varieties, collected mainly (over 95%) from within the village with such lovely names as Dumelow's Seedling, Emperor Alexander, Joy Bells, Irish Peach and Tickled Pink. There were more than 20 apple varieties to sample, including a delicious selection of late-season russets (Ribston Pippin, Egremont Russet, D'Arcy Spice and Tydeman's Late Orange).

The juicing station was a family favourite, with children eagerly helping to load a bounty of Blenheim Orange apples into the mincer and tasting or taking home the freshly pressed juice. Those seeking something stronger enjoyed a selection of four different home-brew ciders, including a batch fermented from last year's Apple Day juice and an extra-strength "Devil's Harp" for the brave-hearted.

Our visitors devoured over 500 portions of cake, ranging from Dorset apple cakes and apple flapjacks to loaf cakes and quince curd tarts. The children kept busy with apple-printing art and our unusual automatic apple-peeling

machines. This year's guided tours of the orchard featured a beautiful art installation from Robert Seatter, exploring the history, folklore and facts surrounding orchards, as well as the story of the orchard's formation in 2013-14. The theme continued with a display of Paul Chilton's favourite apples and pears, hosted in the Red Box Gallery opposite the Red Lion and available to enjoy throughout the month.

We are extremely grateful to everyone who contributed cakes and apples and helped setting up, running stalls and tidying away. The event simply would not be possible without the tremendous community effort behind it. Funds raised from this year's Apple Day will go towards maintaining the community orchard, its surrounding hedgerows, as well as supporting future apple-related projects in the village. The day was a wonderful reminder of how the humble apple continues to bring us all together.

Martin Suttle

Wallingford Emergency Food Bank

In recent months, the numbers needing food bank donations has more than doubled. Their App, "Bank the Food" is designed to prompt you as you enter a store with a donation point - but you can use it to check what is especially needed when you are shopping anywhere. You can download it in the usual way and put in your postcode - then 'follow' Wallingford food bank. For ideas as to what to donate besides tinned fish and baked beans and dried pasta, please consider tinned vegetables, long life milk and juice, jars of coffee and tea, tinned potatoes, tinned meat meals, tinned rice pudding and custard and cereal and jam.

This message, from someone who is happily in the position of no longer needing Foodbank help, illustrates the value of all the donations and the volunteers' hard work.

'I remember when our first food bank delivery came. The kids thought it was like Christmas even though it was ordinary food. The thoughtful little extras at Christmas and Easter made us feel that the world cared. The foodbank was an absolute lifeline at certain points in our journey. It meant the children have never had to experience real hunger or go without a meal. Having come from domestic abuse it was more than just food. It was knowing the world cared and there were good people doing good things. It meant a lot! More than you can imagine.'

Alice Penney, Manager- Wallingfordfoodbank.org.uk

Out and About

Earth Trust Christmas Market

Experience the magic of the season at our Christmas Market, a festive celebration of sustainability in the beautifully decorated Fison Barn. Browse stalls from talented local artisans, makers, and food vendors, enjoy hot chocolate, mulled wine and marshmallow toasting, with kids' activities and songs from local school choirs. **Friday 5 Dec, 6–9pm & Saturday 6 Dec, 10am–4pm**, £3 entry (under 16s free) at Fison Barn, Earth Trust Centre, Little Wittenham.

Carols with a donkey

There will be an yet another opportunity for villagers to sing carols at the Island Farm Donkey Sanctuary service led by Rev Janice Chilern on **Thursday 18 December, 7 for 7 30pm**, featuring the Roke and Benson Brass Band and a guest appearance from one of the donkeys.

Cholsey Repair Cafe, January 2026

Give or take a pandemic, **Cholsey Repair Café** will open its ninth year of operation on **Saturday 17 January 2026** at the Cholsey Pavilion, **10-12.45**. The volunteer fixers offer help or advice on all manner of repairs to domestic items, from tool sharpening to bicycles, electricals, small furniture, textiles and even ultrasonic cleaning of small things like watch straps or jewellery. Help is always free of charge although a modest donation towards operating costs is appreciated. Their website www.cholseyrepaircafe.com provides more information or you can email repaircafe@cholsey.com.

Wallingford Photographic Club

4 December: intriguing talk 'Under Tracks' from Ted Kinsey, a photographer specialising in black & white images, shot only on film; 11Dec: a club social; 8 Jan: sharing progress on our themed assignments - black and white images; 15 Jan: online - external competition versus a photography club based in Spain; 22 Jan: club night, selecting images to enter into the upcoming 'Intimate Landscapes' competition; 29 Jan: an unthemed competition. We meet on Thursdays from 7.30pm at Crowmarsh Pavilion, with a handful of sessions online during the season. www.wallingfordphoto.club.

Corn Exchange – for' Hansel & Gretel' January panto performances + full cinema and theatre listings, see www.cornexchange.org.uk.

VILLAGE DIARY

December

2	Village Lunch Club	VH	12.15
4	Environment Group talk	VH	7.30pm
9	Scottish music session	Red Lion	7.30pm
9	WI Christmas dinner	Red Lion	
14	Christmas draw and live music from 'Move It'	Red Lion	6pm
16	Pub panto	Red Lion	TBA
17	Stewart Village Hall Carol Evening	VH	7pm
18	Island Farm Donkey Sanctuary Carol Service		7pm
21	Bumper Christmas meat draw and live music	Red Lion	6pm
21	Carols & Lessons	St Agatha	6.30pm
24	30 th Carols around the Christmas Tree	Square	5.30pm
24	Crib Service	St Agatha	4.30pm
24	Christmas Eve Midnight Communion	St James'	11.30pm
25	Christmas Day Family Communion	St Agatha	9.30am
28	Team service	St Agatha	10am
30	New Year's Eve Eve Party	Red Lion	6.30pm

January

1	New Year's Day brunch	Red Lion	10.30am
3	Wassail (+ singing & music at Red Lion after)	TBA	3-5
4	Epiphany service	St Agatha	9.30am
7	Community coffee morning resumes	St Agatha	
13	Scottish music session	Red Lion	7.30pm
13	WI talk 'Driving Miss Daisy'	VH	7.30pm

Advance Notice

3 February Red Lion quiz

Refuse Collection (Food waste each week)

Grey bins Thursdays 4 & 18 December
Saturday 3 January, Thursdays 15 & 29 January
Green (& brown) bins Thursdays 11 & **Saturday 27** December
Friday 9 & Thursday 22 January

Village website

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