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

Editorial

By now we've all had time to make – and break – our New Year Resolutions. My track record isn't great. I've lost count of how many years I resolved to lose a stone of weight by Easter, which required a strict diet of protein and greens. But my love of Tim tams always got the better of me (Australian chocolate biscuit now widely available in UK). The current exhibition in the Red Box Gallery features Resolutions that are all about getting us up and doing in the village, from selling more local produce in the shop to revitalising our Millennium Wood with a new tree planting scheme. Let us know your resolutions for 2026, and we will check up on your progress later in the year.

As for *The Villager*, we have resolved to galvanise a new wave of volunteers to run the many village organisations in need of new blood. Starting with the Community Association, page 7-9. Hats off to Ian Smith, their newest recruit; to Karen Sherman who recently joined the Parish Council and to Shena Luck and Annette Kilworth who have been indefatigable in their efforts to restore the village hall and who now need your help to move the project into the next phase, page 18. Meanwhile – a horticultural emergency. A whole new team is urgently required to run the annual Flower & Produce Show at the Village Fete. Let's not lose a wonderful village institution simply because everyone thought *someone else* would do it. Page 17-18.

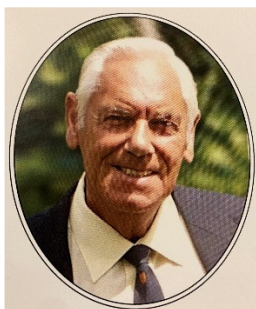
At *The Villager* we've also resolved to "Go All In" and support the government's National Year of Reading campaign aimed at inspiring more people to make reading a regular part of their lives. We are asking our readers and our contributors to tell us about their favourite books. Starting with local poet Robert Seatter. Page 22. Do write to the editor if you wish to share yours.

Back in October the village said goodbye to one of its most colourful characters, someone who served the local community big time. I never met Bryan Myatt but reading his obituary I wish I had. Page 3-4. But I did meet Alex Kingston recently; we chatted about her magnificent stint on *Strictly Come Dancing*. Page 12-14. And thanks to Julia Shevchenko for her Wassail Mummers play cover pic.

I hope you like our insert which you can stick on your wall so you won't miss the many and varied regular activities that help make our village such fun to live in.

Alison Leigh, Editor

Bryan Lord Myatt - 16/1/1938-6/10/2025



Dad's life began in 1938 in circumstances that, for me at least only 35 years younger seem a world away; two up two down terrace in Bolton, blackened with coal smoke, an outside toilet in the yard, no running hot water or central heating and very soon German bombing.

Despite the obvious danger and the family's modest circumstance, going to the bomb shelter was consider

by his father to be "common" and so out of the question. Instead the family huddled under the stairs. One day emerging in the morning, they discovered most of the rest of the street had been flattened. I think this is where Dad's life-long love of Guinness came from - his mother dosing him and his older brother as toddlers so they slept deeply.

Dad was a bright boy and found his way through the dreaded 11+ to Bolton grammar school. A family friend bought his uniform. What might be described as the Myatt family's respectable working class poverty was largely caused by his father having decided to retire in his late 40s and after that keeping the family afloat with odd bookkeeping jobs and a modest portfolio of investments. To be fair he had earned that right, having started work aged 12 after his own father died falling off an industrial chimney he was working on. As for Dad, he was always careful with money and had a life-long interest in investing with some success and hopefully to the profit of some through the Brightwell Investment Club.

Having started work as a metallurgist at 18 he was lured south, aged 21, to research metal fatigue in airframes. Around 1960 he joined the Harwell site of the Atomic Energy Authority then boasting no less than 5 nuclear reactors.

The arc of Dad's scientific career spanned the dawn of civilian nuclear age to the heady days of so-called cold fusion in 1989. Teams at Harwell worked round the clock to try to replicate the Pons and Fleishman experiment without success. In between there were a number of mysterious work trips to the US. Dad would never discuss where or for what purpose. Also, less glamorously a couple of serious doses of radiation from accidents in the lab followed by days of enemas and showers.

In the 60s Harwell had electron microscopes and computers the size of rooms. Firm friendships were made, Chris Smith and Alan Taylor in particular. Dad

and Alan loved mucking about in boats, smuggling cheap French booze and cigarettes rather than people, the 60s being more innocent times. Good times at Harwell came to an end at the end of the late 80s when funding was slashed and Dad moved on to his second and third careers, Didcot second hand car salesman and Reading Crown Court Bailiff. He ran Broadway Service Station with Chris Hubbard.

Dad was deeply involved in the civic life of Wallingford during the whole of the 1970s and 80s. He served on the council for many years and was mayor twice with dinners and parties at RAF Benson, Oxford and Henley; guests included Airey Neave, Michael Heseltine and the Duke of Edinburgh and several invitations to garden parties at Buckingham Palace, a far cry from Bolton.

He founded the old Wallingford Magazine, encouraged the Archaeological Society, helped bring the Castle grounds into public use and I think was a sometime projectionist at the Corn Exchange in the early years of Sinodun Players. After some years in Wantage Road, Wallingford and Crowmarsh, Brightwell became home. As many will know Brightwell is a special place to live.

Finally - the most important and transformative influence on Dad's life: Kate Sue Hamilton. It is fair to say that Dad fell on his feet when after a brief unsuccessful first marriage he met a beautiful young nurse at a dance near Oxford. Neither had wanted to go, Dad dragged there by his housemates and Mum, being late back from shift at the Old Radcliffe and having fought off a would-be attacker on her way home, persuaded out by flatmates. There she met a tall dark-haired scientist with large sideburns and a sports car who gave her a lift home. The rest is history.

In some cases a marriage simply brings love and a life partner, in others a whole new family en masse. Dad's welcome into the warm energy of the Hamilton/Bevan-John extended family and its sheer scale was an eye opening contrast to his own family. If Dad were speaking, he would certainly credit his length of life and happiness to my Mum and her selfless love, support, excellent cooking and nursing care. We all agree he was lucky and right.

Nick Myatt

The Village Lunch Club

The aim of the club is to provide the opportunity for a chat, to get to know one another and make new friends, over a good lunch. For example, shepherd's pie with seasonal veg at the next lunch, with a pudding as well as tea and coffee to

follow, all for only £7. Lunches are held at 12.30 in the village hall. Our next one is on **Tuesday 10 March**, and it's open to all. Pre booking is essential, not only so that we know how many to cater for, but also because spaces are limited! To book, or to discuss anything (eg dietary requirements, which we will try to cater for), let me know ... lynnburridge@gmail.com, or message/call me on 07989270605. We look forward to seeing you there.

Lynn Burridge

Brightwell Preschool

Once again, the children mastered yet another BAFTA-winning performance for their roles in our Nativity performance 2025. As always, a big thank you to Root One for donating a tree that in all honesty, was unrecognisable under the extravagant tinsel, lights and heavy decor; the tree even made a dash for the outdoors one day, collapsing under the burden of young children's exuberance (no-one was hurt during this attempt for freedom). Having made it to the new year after such a busy term with Christmas festivities, we can now celebrate the differences and similarities between our own experiences of the festive season by sharing stories and pictures of what happened in our own lives. Reflecting on events together helps to embed memories and keep connections that make us unique.

Snow and ice has been a highlight of our winter adventures, with little people actively exploring these sensations for the first time, finding frozen leaves, crunching on the icy puddles and watching ice-skating ducks - all worthy endeavours. Our regular volunteers Chrissy and Kit deserve a mention for helping to facilitate these outings, making it safer and more fun for all involved - it can take a long time to get little adventurers ready for the cold damp weather, especially when encouraging independence, so help to support this as much as other things is always appreciated.

With Spring around the corner, we have been busy learning our new poems and songs, although Jingle Bells and Santa getting stuck up the chimney still make regular and sudden appearances. With the change in the seasons, our next project will be to revamp our side-garden to enhance the children's understanding of growing, taking care of nature, recycling, community and to create a calming space for reflection. Friend of the preschool Kit will be taking on this project as part of her Scouts of the World Award (SOWA) and is hoping to re-use and revamp as much as possible, so if anyone has anything they think could be of use to us, please do get in touch with us. Hopefully we will have some progress on this project to report on in the next *Villager*.

Natasha Hillier, Manager

Parish Council News

We were very happy to welcome Karen Sherman onto the Parish Council just before Christmas. Karen moved from Oakley Wood to Slade End in the village 14 years ago. Karen joined the council because she believes that if you have opinions on stuff and want to change things (hopefully for the better) sitting at home and moaning about it is not the way, you have to do something; community is a two-way street and you need to have people who are willing to get involved in order for community to develop. She also said she would have joined a lot earlier but didn't really have the time. She isn't sure she has the time now but realises the council needs new blood so decided to give it a go! The old saying comes to mind "if you want a job doing ask a busy person!" We are still looking for a new councillor so do please have a think about whether you could be interested.

New website and emails: We are in the process of creating a new, updated and improved, website: <https://brightwellcumsotwell-pc.gov.uk>. All the councillors will have new email addresses, available on the new website.

Hedges and verges: Please can we remind villagers about cutting back any overhanging hedges along the roads, lanes and verges including spading back encroaching grass at the side of the road. The Parish Council does everything it can to manage the verges in a sensitive way but without your help we have to resort to using a tractor. Hot spots include Bell Lane, Bakers Lane, and Sotwell Street. We try to strike a balance between wildlife, aesthetics, road safety and natural ways to slow traffic down.

The Community Speedwatch team monitored speeds in a couple of areas in the village in December. It is disappointing that in one hour at Greenmere, they logged 21 vehicles travelling over the speed limit. After so many complaints about speeding and requests for the speed limit to be reduced to 20mph it's a shame that so many people are not sticking to the limit, especially so near the school.

Parking: Residents at Deanfield Orchard request that visitors don't park along the lane by the bus stop on the High Road as this is quite dangerous for traffic coming into the village from the main road.

Fly tipping continues to be a problem, despite our request in last month's *Villager*. A microwave in a box was dumped by the Millenium Wood bin just after Christmas. If you see any fly tipping please report to Fix My Street.

Also, along the same lines, if you are walking around the village and you see an advertising poster which is out of date please take it down and put in a bin.

For those of you who get this in time there will be a very important meeting on **29 January at 7.30pm** to discuss the future of the Village Hall. It is important that as many villagers as possible attend this meeting.

Many thanks.

The Parish Council

The Community Association is recruiting ...

A few years ago, Channel 4 ran a show called Village of the Year. To win residents had to be seen to take pride in their village's history and heritage and in how their village looked. However, equally important in the list of winning criteria were "regular events bringing locals together", an array of activities to keep people entertained.

Our village would surely qualify on all fronts. However, if we didn't have our Community Association we might not. It's thanks to the CA that we have an annual Village Fete and Village Quiz and much else besides.

Brightwell-cum-Sotwell Community Association was founded in 1979 using funds from the Queen's Silver Jubilee local events. It has been running continuously ever since. It is a registered charity underwritten by a constitution and managed by a volunteer committee. James Davys, the Chairman of the Committee explains what they do:

Raising and distributing money:

We raise money for local charities, including the village school and preschool, as well as local clubs and societies based in the village. In the past 24 years that I have worked on the Committee we have raised over £150,000 distributed into the village societies and clubs in our village community. Other recent recipients of funds include Scouts, Brightwell PCC, St James's Churchyard, the Tennis Club, the Cricket Club, the Village Hall, the Lunch Club, the Toddler Group, the BcS website, Brightwell Players, the History Group and the Wassail Group.

Hampers at Christmas

With the collaboration and support of the Fairthorne Trust and the help of our village shop we provide a hamper bag of festive treats for all residents over 70 at Christmas time who are in need or would like one. The bags are distributed with the help of the scouts, cubs and beavers each year. It is a lovely community collaboration.

Welcome Packs

We arrange for all new residents moving into the village to receive a welcome pack. This was introduced about 15 years ago and makes a real difference to new residents.

The Annual Village Quiz

One of our most popular events is the Annual Village Quiz, a friendly but hotly contested test of general knowledge by teams involving around 100 villagers. This is very much a fun event; please come and join in at the Village Hall on the 14 March.

The Village Fete

Our biggest event is our annual village fete. While it is one of the few traditional summer fetes still running in Oxfordshire, new stalls, items and activities are regularly added (think the human fruit machine! – or the Pimms stall). It is attended by over 600 people each year. To run the Village Fete we rely on the help of many of the organisations we support, in running stalls and games. We are also grateful to all the residents of the village who donate treasures for the White Elephant and bottle stalls. The fete regularly raises in excess of £4500 each year (after costs). This event and its regular success allows us to give grants annually to all local charities that apply for them each October.

Additional Events

The Community Association also runs other events in the village annually and biannually including jumble sales, safari suppers and open garden events. The Open Gardens gives other surrounding villages and communities a chance to experience our village and what we do here. The safari supper usually involves over 100 villagers and provides a nice way for new residents to get involved, meet new people and eat lovely food.

Capital Projects

In terms of capital projects, we have helped to support groups raising funds for the refurbishment of the tennis courts, rebuilding of the preschool, and contributing to the pavilion and church room at St Agatha's.

Like all committees, the CA Committee is always looking for new members, but especially now. Many on the committee members have served on and off for 20 or more years and they want to make provision for succession planning. It's time for the next generation to step up.

They have not been able to recruit a secretary for several years. This is a fulfilling role involving attending friendly and sociable committee meetings 4 or 5 times a year, agenda preparation and taking the minutes (these days AI

can do that for you in seconds), planning and marketing new and existing CA events and helping out on the day with a friendly team to help and support you. There are also opportunities to get involved in the publicity for our events. Committee members have a similar role minus the paperwork.

Here's why some of the people currently serving on the committee do it and why **you** might like to:

"I first joined back in 1991 and it was a great way of getting involved in village life. I, rejoined as I moved towards retirement to give something back to the wonderful community we have here, it is a pleasure to be involved and with enough willing people helping, it is not a chore!"

"I wanted to be more involved in the village community. This is an excellent and fun way of being able to give something back".

"Having just moved into Brightwell cum Sotwell we thought this was a great way to meet new people and hopefully lead to friendships. We believe it has succeeded all round".

"I was told I was doing it!! - but have thoroughly enjoyed it. And if I can do it, anyone can do it!"

If you would like to join this friendly organisation, get in touch with Chairman, James Davys at james.davys@icloud.com.

Alison Leigh and James Davys

Community Association Report

We are pleased to report that over 35 hampers were delivered to residents in the village before Christmas. We are very grateful to Celia and her team at the Village Stores for their help in sourcing and preparing them, to Hillary and her team leaders who together with the Brightwell Scout Groups delivered them in time for the festive season and to the Fairthorne Trust for their generous financial support in providing these gifts.

Plans for 2026

Village Quiz 14 March 2026 -7.30pm – Village Hall

If you are interested, please contact our team on the new BcS CA email address at bcscommunityassoc@gmail.com for an application form by 24 February. Tickets are £10 per person which includes a chilli supper - please bring your own drinks, plates, glasses and cutlery. Tickets are limited and we recommend early booking.

Village Fete – 4 July 2026 - 2pm – Sotwell House

Open Gardens - 17 July 2026 2-5.30pm

Jumble Sale - Autumn 2026 - Jubilee Pavilion -

More details will follow in the next *Villager*.

James Davys, Chairman

Save our wall, 1983 and 2026!

The 1983 April/May edition of *The Villager* ran an article under the heading "Save our Wall", written by Keith Owen, chairman of the Village History Group. It was an appeal for funds to repair the ancient thatched cob wall between St Agatha's churchyard and Fairlight House. He wrote:
A section of the wall about 20 feet long is all that now survives in a repairable condition – a stretch that has been protected by overhanging yew trees. Even this length is unlikely to withstand another winter. It seemed important to the History Group not to allow all trace of such walls to disappear completely from the village – particularly since the churchyard had been kept in good repair by successive generations of villagers right up until the 1960s.

The History Group went on in 1983 to raise the sum of £370 to rethatch the wall, through coffee mornings, Bring and Buy sales and a scheme whereby villagers were asked to sponsor an inch of wall for £1. Those giving £1 or more were given a hand-written certificate designed by Pat Owen. The wall was saved!

More than 40 years have since passed, and the wall is again in poor condition, with dilapidated thatch and major cracks in the cob. And once again the current Village History Group is hoping to raise funds for restoration of this remaining section, but now needing to raise £10,000 for rethatching and cob repair. Individual members of the Group have already pledged nearly £3,000 and we are asking other villagers to likewise pledge their support. A JustGiving platform is being established, details of which will be on the village website and Facebook in due course. Or you can email either of us below for a pledge form or further information, wthorsfield@yahoo.com or dfoxuk@aol.com.

With your help we can once again make the cob wall a historic asset of which Brightwell can be proud!

Bill Horsfield and David Fox

BcS Environment Group

Clearance of some of the trees suffering from ash die back in the Millennium Wood commenced in late December allowing us to work off some of the season's excesses! Replanting with saplings will follow in this wood as well as Swan Wood.

In December Jonathan Stamp gave a fascinating talk entitled *'The Summer of 43' - Was 'our' Roman road used in the very first year of the Roman invasion in 43AD?'* Jonathan presented compelling evidence that the road was very likely to have been one of the earliest conquest routes running from the south coast near Chichester north, through Silchester, to Alchester (near current Bicester). This hypothesis was supported by a vote in the hall! There will be another opportunity to hear the talk on Wednesday 11 February at St Mary le More church in the centre of Wallingford. Starting at 8pm it is hosted by The Wallingford Historical and Archaeological Society (TWHAS). It is open to all and is free to TWHAS members, £5 for visitors.

Weather

The rainfall recorded at Highlands Farm for November was 88.6mm and for December 70.9mm representing increases of 33% and 17% respectively of the averages for 1999-2012 at Highlands Farm. Despite the wetter than average autumn, the exceptionally dry spring and summer made it the driest year, with a total rainfall of 552mm, at Highlands Farm since 2011 when 464.7mm was recorded.

For the general area the Met Office records indicate that rainfall was about 85% of the long-term average (1991-2020), mean daily maximum temperature between 1 and 1.5 deg C above average, with sunshine at 20% above average. This accords with personal experience with a very wet winter, a long hot dry summer and a wet autumn.

From the Environment Agency records for mid-December, flows in the upper River Thames are generally classified as 'normal' or above. The groundwater level at Stonor Park is 'normal'. Farmoor reservoir level at the end of November was at 93% full which was above average for the time of year. As of 19 December, the Thames catchment has moved from 'Prolonged Dry Weather' to 'recovery'. The Thames Water Drought Order was lifted on 27 November. In summary, a very eventful year's weather with many extremes but water flows etc ended up about normal. I wonder what 2026 will bring?

Steve Capel-Davies

Strictly Alex Kingston

As a child Alex Kingston wanted to be a princess and marry Prince Andrew. Luckily she dodged that bullet. But she did fulfil another childhood dream. Alex is a hugely successful actress. She has played so many roles over the years it would be impossible to mention them all, but they include Dr Elizabeth Corday in the long running TV series ER, River Song in Dr Who and the leads in many of Shakespeare's most famous plays: Desdemona,



Titania, Lady Macbeth and most recently Prospero in the RSC's 2023 production of The Tempest. She and husband Jonathan moved to Brightwell in 2022. In 2024 she was diagnosed and treated for uterine cancer, but she bounced back, quite literally, joining the cast of hopefuls in Strictly Come Dancing 2025. In early November she was a hot favourite to win, but an injury put an end to her chances. She was eliminated in week 10 just before the quarter finals. Alex reflected on the experience with me and with Strictly fan Alexandra de Jong before heading off to Italy for Christmas.

You previously turned down a number of invitations to participate in Strictly, so why did you agree to do it this time?

My agent wouldn't let me before. Agents have traditionally been slightly snooty about Strictly; they used to say that serious actors only did Strictly if their career was in the ditch and they needed to try and reconnect with an audience. Which is really disrespectful because all actors are serious actors and it doesn't matter whether you're in a soap on television or if you're at the RSC, you're all looking for work and if you get a job you're all thrilled.

So what changed?

It was because of my cancer. My agent gave it his blessing He said "Life's too short! After everything you have been through – go for it!"

And was it a worthwhile experience?

Dancing has been a revelation. I would do it again in a heartbeat. It was so worthwhile. I learned so much about myself, I learned what my body was capable of and I discovered the extent of my physical and emotional stamina. You are dancing intensely for 6 days a week and even on Sunday, your one day off, you are in a constant state of tension.

Did your experience of stage and screen help you at all?

When you are doing a play – or film – you know who you are. You know the character you are playing. So on Strictly I realised that I needed to know what my dance story was. I would say to my partner Johannes –who am I? who are we? For example the Viennese waltz felt ‘film noir’; I decided I was a temptress who was going to win this man back even though I didn’t really deserve him. When we danced the foxtrot I was Dolly Parton and Johannes was paying court to me, so it was flirtatious. If I know who I am in my head. I feel secure. If I don’t, I feel vulnerable.

How did it feel scoring a 10 in the rumba and getting a hug from Shirley? I was in shock – a score of 10 for the rumba had never happened before, and getting a hug from Shirley meant a lot. But the thing is at the end of each dance my mind was a blank. I never heard the critiques and even when I had a chance of winning, and I was being pushed to answer how I would feel if I got to the final, I would always say I’m taking it day by day and then in a sense you stay present and then each time you go through it’s a lovely surprise.

Will Strictly remain part of your life and will you “keep dancing”? Johannes and I will definitely remain close, and Karen (Carney) is going to take me to Nandos, because I’ve never been. The lovely thing is that throughout the competition even though we were in competition people were genuinely rooting for each other. And I will most definitely keep dancing. In fact I’ll be helping Angela Rippon promote National Dance Day which is on 8 March. (See <https://lets-dance.org.uk/>). Dancing is so good for one’s physical and mental health, whatever our age.

Why did you keep quiet about your cancer initially but then go public towards the end of your time on Strictly? I didn’t want that to be my Strictly story. It was not about sickness. I wanted it to be about living my best life, not taking life for granted. But then I made a Freudian slip on one of the morning TV shows. I said that my motive for doing Strictly was “to prove that I’m not dead below the navel”. The presenter’s jaw dropped! So then I had to explain the context, that I’d had a hysterectomy, and why.

Did cancer affect your attitude to life? I’ve always been that person. I think it might be partly to do with a mistake that caused my middle sister to be born severely mentally brain damaged. Susie lived with us until my mom could no longer look after her. It was a twist of fate that changed all of our lives and her life very profoundly forever and so I think that’s one of the reasons why I don’t take a single day my life for granted.

Just before your diagnosis you played Prospero in the RSC production of the Tempest –the first time that the RSC had cast a woman in that role. That was quite an achievement.

I’m really proud of that production. The Tempest suddenly made more sense to me when I was in it and playing Prospero as a mother protecting her daughter. I think it also worked better for the audience, because you can relate a lot more to a woman stuck on an island trying to protect her daughter from aggressive male figures prowling around than to a father who’s trying to marry off his 15 year old daughter. The stakes are much higher.

You lived in LA for 22 years – then London – and now Brightwell, so how come Brightwell?

We’d decided to buy a house in the country, and this one popped up on Right Move. Although we didn’t know the area we decided to check it out. It was May or June. I remember driving through the village past the church and the gardens full of roses and sweet peas and I literally I said to Jonathan “I feel like we’ve gone through a portal into another world, and we’ve just come into Brigadoon”. As soon as I saw the house I knew that we were meant to live there. What’s more I had decided, with Jonathan’s agreement, that wherever we ended up living I would keep bees. And incredibly there were two beehives at the bottom of the garden. The owner left one behind so I became a beekeeper. The first spring I made 72 kilos of honey. But the following year the bees died, my father died and I got cancer. It was a terrible year but that’s now all past and next year I shall start a new colony and get going again.

In the village we really appreciate that you are happy to take part in our activities, the summer show, the pub panto and so on.

I never wanted to live in a village because I imagined a village to be full of curtain twitchers and here we are bang in the middle and no curtain twitchers at all. What I love is that everybody’s really respectful of my privacy. I can chat to people in the pub and know that what I say won’t be reported in the local news. I feel like I’m seen as just another person in the village that’s how I want it to be.

Alison Leigh with Alexandra de Jong

The Village Stores & Post Office

Christmas & New Year was a busy time, with customers coming from near and far to enjoy the services and goods we supply. As usual, the team stepped up to the challenge in the Post Office and the shop. It was lovely to have lots of compliments, this really helps to make the time we give worthwhile ... thank you.

Going into the new year our focus is on healthy eating and ethically sourced food. Along with the range we already stock, we have some new foods to tempt you. Please do come in and have a look at what we have to offer. We look forward to seeing you soon.

The Shop and Post Office Team

St Agatha's and St James'

We hope you had a joyful Christmas and New Year and that the weather is a little warmer by the time you get this copy of *The Villager*. On the first Sunday of February (1st) at our family service we will celebrate the Presentation of Christ at the Temple, also known as Candlemas. We will hold our Christingle service at 4.30pm in St Agatha's and hope you will join us; please note the time. This is the last in our special services for Christmas and Epiphany, and after this day we will finally remove the advent candles that have added extra light to our services over the last two months.

Lent will begin on Ash Wednesday 18 February with a service of Ashing with Communion at 9am in St Agatha's and a similar service in St Leonard's, Wallingford at 7.30pm. Lent is a time of penitential reflection and often associated with 'giving up' something that we enjoy, such as our favourite tipple or chocolate. This can be a positive thing to do, think of it as 'giving' not 'giving up', by putting aside the money you might have spent on the things you are going to do without, and donating this to your favourite charity at the end of Lent. There will be an extra Team Communion Service at St Mary Magdalene's (Crowmarsh) on 8 February at 11am as we gather to reopen the church after the reordering to provide a toilet and servery.

Friday 6 March is the World Day of Prayer with a service organised by Christian women in Nigeria. The service will be hosted by St Agatha's and will start at 3pm followed by refreshments. On Sunday 15 March there will be a Family Communion service for Mothering Sunday and on 29 March we will walk from St James' to St Agatha's for our Palm Sunday service. During Holy week there will be many special services; please check the local notice boards or the village Facebook page for information. We celebrate Easter on the 5 April with Easter Communion service followed by the Easter Egg hunt.

Team Vicar Vacancy - people from across the three parishes in the Benefice have been working on the team profile, role description and person specification, and these are now complete. We have two important meetings booked, and the dates for the advertising of the post and interview of the candidate(s) have also been scheduled. It is hoped that the interviews will take place mid-April. In the meantime we will endeavour to provide regular

services as usual, but please check the notice boards for up to date information. Our Wednesday Community Coffee Morning continues every week from 10am to 12 noon. Do join us for this and our regular services, all are welcome.

Rev Janice

St Agatha's Day Bells

St Agatha was born c. 231 AD in Sicily and died there c. 251 AD (according to legend). She is widely celebrated in Sicily itself, with her feast day being 5 February. She is the patron saint not only of our church, but also bellringers (and bellfounders) and bakers, among many others. This year, we will celebrate her Day with our church bells. There will be ringing sessions of around 1 hour each, 3 or 4 times that Thursday (precise timings are still being finalised).

As ever, if you're interested and want to find out more about our craft - maybe pop in on the day(?) - just let me know. Everyone (ages 8 to 80) welcome!

John Dowling

St Agatha's Churchyard

Spring is in the air! Well, hopefully it will be by the time this edition is published! And we'll be looking forward to the growing season. For St Agatha's churchyard, that also means the mowing season.

I'm looking to put together a band of willing volunteers to help maintain the churchyard. Could you do a little mowing (ride-on mower supplied), some weeding, clearing up, strimming, or anything green-fingered? Think green gym! Or maybe give us some advice on grounds maintenance? Time commitment to suit you. Please contact me at any time:

Johnedowling@hotmail.com 07979 863649.

John Dowling

Brightwell Toddlers

We were busy with lots of wintry activities in the run up to Christmas, creating colourful mittens and sparkly snowflakes. We were even lucky enough to welcome Santa to much excitement from the little ones. This New Year we began with a busy group back for more crafts, play, music and singing. We have lots of fun and seasonal activities planned for the weeks ahead.

Thank you to all those helping to keep it all running every week. It's a very friendly group and if you'd like to join us, we're in the Village Hall every Thursday during term time from 9.15–11.15am. All babies, toddlers, and preschoolers (with their parents or carers) are warmly welcome. The cost is £3.50 (cash) or £4 (online) per session. We can be contacted at brightwelltoddlers@gmail.com or via our Facebook page @brightwelltoddlers.

Sam Bailey-Davies and the Toddlers Team

Brightwell Supporting Refugees

The BSR trustees would like to pay tribute to Dani Brown, one of our most loyal and generous supporters, who sadly died in November. Her vivacious spirit and enthusiasm enabled many memorable events to take place in Small's House Barn, including Mike Bartlett's Barn Dance and Robert Seatter's Cello & the Nightingale, which raised funds for the charity. We send our condolences to Jonathan and their son, James.

Over the next few months, BSR will be staging our usual Friday night talks and film events at the village hall. Among them will be a poetry evening celebrating the Thames with Robert Seatter and some films reflecting on Chernobyl, 40 years after the disaster (Dates and details to be posted soon.)

The next Brightwell Supporting Refugees AGM will be on Wednesday, 15 April at 7.30pm in the St Agatha's church meeting room – everyone welcome.

David Dugan

Flower and Produce Show

I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who entered their flowers, fruit, vegetables, baking, preserves, handicrafts, writing and photos. All your entries are much appreciated and admired by everyone who visits the flower and produce tent at the village fete.

To keep the flower and produce tent running we are looking for a new committee to take over. Helen Satchell and I have been acting as secretary and chair of the committee along with Gina, John, Julia and Terry. But we shall all be stepping down for various reasons.

The new secretary should be computer literate as the previously hand written cards are now on a computer. As chair of the committee the tasks are not

onerous. Assisting with laying out the tables the day before and a lot of running about on the day of the fete with the entries. As a committee, we meet as a group once in March/April to agree the theme and categories for the entries to be published in the May/June edition of *The Villager* magazine. I'm hoping to move to Cornwall so it would be great to hand over to new committee members with fresh ideas to keep the show going.

For further details, please contact myself, Alisonhedges@aol.com or Helen Satchell, Hvsatchell@icloud.com.

Alison Hedges

Stewart Village Hall

The hall was bustling over the festive season with parties and celebrations including the much-loved Christmas Carol Evening. Expertly hosted by Marcus Harris, the highlight once again was the wonderful performances by the children from Brightwell-cum-Sotwell Primary School. The December Clock Tower Lottery draw was carried out during the evening including the bonus draw of £500.

As we return to our regular programme, many of the groups and clubs would be delighted to welcome new members. Activities (listed in the 'What's On' insert) include WI, Badminton, Indoor Bowls, Quilting and more. See StewartVillageHall.org.uk/schedule or give Shena a call on 01491 834543 for more information.

The Future of the Stewart Village Hall

The Trustees have been working hard behind the scenes to keep the hall running while also moving the Restoration Project forward. We would like to share this work with you at an open meeting on **29 January at 7.30pm**. Please come along. The condition of the building continues to deteriorate, and without your input, help and support, the project may falter. The future of this vital community building really is in your hands.

Annette Kilworth

BcS WI

Following a busy Christmas period, the BcS WI ladies are ready to focus once again on the year ahead. As always, our January meeting is a busy one. It is the month for members to cast their vote on the 5 options for the 2026 resolutions plus hosting our speaker. This time we listened to a representative from The Institute of Advance Motorist, who told us all about driving safely.

as we get older. A very timely talk considering the recent changes to the law regarding driving and safety.

Talking about changes to the law, back in December, the NFWI (National Federation of Women's Institute) had to make a difficult decision on their membership following a ruling from the Supreme Court on the definition of Gender. As from April 2026, the WI will no longer be able to offer membership to transgender women. They will, however, provide social and community support groups.

Looking ahead now, our new program reads as follows:

Tuesday 10 February: 'Losing England's Landscape and Climate Change' - a talk by Chris Churchman

Tuesday 10 March: our Annual Meeting plus 'Origami Designer and Artist' by Peter Buchanan-Symons

Tuesday 14 April: 'The work of a TV/Film Extra' by Rob Brewer

All our meetings take place on the 2nd Tuesday in the month at 7.30pm in the Village Hall. We are always happy to welcome guests.

Karin Matthews

"A complete dis-a-ster daaaarling!"

Four words you certainly didn't hear from the cheery crowd of Wassailers who braved the chill for ten minutes of 'Strictly Come Dancing' fun performed by the Brightwell Mummers in the frosty beauty of Sotwell House gardens, so kindly opened by Jenny and David Dobbins.

Dating back to medieval times and created to symbolise the natural cycle of the seasons, Mummers' plays are typically stories of hero combat, featuring a life-and-death battle and resurrection by a doctor figure. This year's production was no exception.

With a Strictly-inspired script, crafted by the creative genius of Andy Lewis to celebrate Alex Kingston's recent competition success, a cast of sixteen, under the imaginative direction of Christopher Baines, treated Wassailers to an amusing tale of rebirth told through music, song and, of course, dance. As always, thanks to John Burdass for his excellent sound and lighting support.

If you missed the event, you can still revel in the cha-cha-cha, ballet, and Morris dancing antics by visiting:

https://bit.ly/Brightwell_Mummers_2026_Wassail.

Lisa de Jong

Brightwell Orchard Group

When Brightwellian Frankie Allen rowed to paralympic Gold in the PR3 mixed coxed four category at the 2024 Summer Paralympics, there was great celebration and pride from the residents of Brightwell, where she grew up and her family still live. You'll remember reading about her success in *The Villager* at the time. This crowned off an amazing series of achievements including European and World Championship successes. Frankie was awarded an MBE for services to Disability Sport in the 2026 New Year's Honours list for her work Improving Access to Sport for Young People. A very well deserved accolade!

Following the 2012 London Paralympics, a new apple variety, *Paradise Gold* (a red dessert apple), was chosen by the London Paralympic Legacy to be planted in the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, recognising the importance of the Paralympic movement to UK sport. Inspired by this connection, the Orchard Group felt it would be a fitting addition to our Village Orchard, planted in honour of Frankie's brilliant achievements and her contribution to disability sport.

Frankie will be joining us in the Village Orchard on **Saturday 28 Feb at 3pm** to help plant her 'Paradise Gold' tree. Please do join us - she has kindly promised to bring her richly deserved medal(s), and this will give us all a wonderful opportunity to make sure she knows just how proud we all are of her!

Ali Quantrell

Fine Perry Tasting

On **Saturday 7 March**, 7.30-10pm at the Village Hall, the Orchard Group invites you to taste eight commercial perries, mostly from the traditional perry counties of Gloucestershire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire, and hear 2 short talks, covering the unique qualities of the perry pear, how perry is made, and what makes it so distinctive. Tickets £20 per person, on sale at Village Stores or by emailing villageorchardgroup@gmail.com. Over 18s only.

Martin Suttle

Save the Children

The 30th Anniversary of Carols around the Christmas Tree on Christmas Eve was a great success; many thanks to everyone who helped, supported and contributed, family, friends, neighbours and villagers, plus of course Father Christmas! Together we raised £986.10p.

£1,000 can make a huge difference: that's what it costs to set up a mobile friendly space for children in conflict zones, refugee camps etc. They provide safe places for children to play, be educated and help these children heal from some of the most traumatic experiences imaginable. Each of these mobile units can serve several hundred children. We are so pleased and grateful that we nearly achieved £1k from the Christmas trees and Christmas Eve.

Save the date – Saturday 25 April: 'Save the Children Fun Dog Show' on the Recreation Ground. A fun afternoon for all, even if you haven't got a dog. Please come and enjoy our refreshment tent (with delicious cakes), stalls, raffle and much more; there will be something for all ages.

Celia & the local Save the Children team

Letter from your MP

As discussions about the government's Great British Railways Bill continue, I have used my role as Liberal Democrat Transport Spokesperson to ensure the passengers are at the centre of these discussions. It is essential they improve the ongoing issues, such as train delays and expensive tickets, which I and many in our constituency experience regularly.

In parliament, a debate regarding Thames Water ensured I was able to raise the concerns raised by residents about the escalating costs and the lack of trust in Thames Water to safely build one of the largest bunded reservoirs in the country.

I have also engaged with local media about problems with postal delivery services, including Evri, and the delayed parcels in Grove and other areas of the constituency. In an interview with the BBC, I spoke about the GP surgery delays specifically affecting Great Western Park.

I have been spending time with some of our wonderful small businesses to better understand the impact of last year's budget and the support they need to keep trading and providing us with products and food. It is always a highlight of my week visiting local businesses and community groups to learn about the work they do for our communities and making sure I am well informed when raising their needs when in parliament. I have also had the pleasure of meeting many residents in Stanford in the Vale and Didcot on their doorsteps recently and in Wantage at one of my regular surgeries. My team and I have now closed over 10,000 constituent cases, supporting individuals, families and businesses to resolve a huge variety of problems.

As always, if there is anything you feel I can help you 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

Book review - Robert Seatter's choice

The Secret Garden by Frances Hodgson Burnett

I was a voracious reader when I was young and never stopped. I lived in the library, read book after book - lots of classics. The two words "Secret" and "Garden" had an immediate momentous appeal - it was like a spell. My parents had a garden and gave me a little part of it. I was obsessed with it. So the idea of a secret garden had a sort of magic. I read the book repetitively throughout my childhood.

It's about India-born Mary, whose parents die. She comes to Yorkshire as an orphan to a gothic mansion. She's friendless, unpleasant, sallow and sulky and has to start again. She meets Dickon, the boy from Yorkshire, and Colin, the sickly boy at the centre of the hundred-roomed house. Then, importantly, she meets the garden. She has no family and has to reinvent her world, be brave and resilient. She grows and transforms as a person and gradually makes friends through becoming a better person.

The stand out moment is when the secret garden is revealed: Mary unlocks the door, opens it, and finds a world she hadn't discovered, and then at the end where she opens the door and the garden is born again. Spring has come and everything is flourishing. Mary walks into Spring and it's a metaphor for what she has become. It's an epiphany moment.

As told to Alexandra de Jong

Try something new?

Virginia who runs the Silver Swans ballet class on Mondays is now offering a beginners tap class on Wednesdays starting in the Stewart Hall on 4 February at 10.40-11.40am. Come along for a free trial - you don't need tap shoes to give it a try - just an ordinary pair of shoes will do for a start. To book your free trial, contact v.chell1501@gmail.com or 07776 150903.

Nila Matthews is starting a new accessible yoga class for different abilities, focussing on core and stability. Also at the village hall, on Thursdays from 26 February, 7.30-8.30pm - contact info@awakeningflow.com.

Brightwell Art Club

The Spring semester has started. Classes take place every Saturday at the village hall until 28 March, except half term 14 February. We meet from 10 to 12 noon. Feel free to join us for a taster session. Term fees are £65. For more information see our village website under the directories/local services.

Sunita Sarkar

Gateway to Nature

Debbie Gair, a Sires Hill resident, wrote to *The Villager* about the major works that the Earth Trust is undertaking on Sires Hill, close to the residential area. She says, “*despite the disruption of having the new road installed the changes should ease the traffic on the road up to Wittenham Clumps and ease the parking in the Clumps car park. Plus having a cafe, new walking routes and an adventure play area should make it more appealing to people in the village*”. We asked the Earth Trust for an update:

The Earth Trust is preparing to begin the next phase of its Gateway to Nature project at Wittenham Clumps. Starting in February, a new vehicle entrance from Sires Hill will be installed, designed to reduce traffic on the narrow lane through Little Wittenham village and to provide a safer, more efficient route to the site. Alongside this, expanded parking facilities and bike shelters will be created, helping to manage existing visitor numbers more effectively and reduce pressure on the surrounding landscape.

Construction will also progress on an expanded visitor hub, including a seven-day-a-week café and toilets providing access to new walking routes, including paths that showcase recent tree planting and nature-friendly farming.

Later on work will begin on a new outdoor adventure play-scape, offering families a nature-led space to play, explore and develop a lifelong connection with the outdoors.

Construction is expected to last up to six months. The site will remain open throughout, with no permanent path closures. Earth Trust will carefully manage noise, traffic and environmental impacts, with works timed to protect wildlife and minimise disruption to visitors and local residents.

For specific questions on the project, please contact our Project Lead, Dave Lewis, Director of Operations: dave.lewis@earthtrust.org.uk.

Emily Thomas, Marketing and Communications Officer

VILLAGE DIARY

February

1	Candlemas (9.30am) & Christingle (4pm)	St Ag	
3	Red Lion Quiz Night	RL	7pm
5	Bell ringing for St Agatha's Day	St Ag	TBC
6	World Prayer Day	St Ag	3pm -
10	WI talk 'Losing England's Landscape and Climate Change' by Chris Churchman	VH	7.30pm
11	Jonathan Stamp talk on 'Summer of 43 AD' (BcS Roman Road) at St Mary's Wallingford		8pm
15	Jazz Jam at Red Lion	RL	6pm
18	Ashing service	St Ag	9am
28	Village Orchard Tree Planting – Frankie Allen		3pm

March

3	Red Lion Quiz Night	RL	7pm
7	Fine Perry Tasting	VH	7.30pm
10	Village Lunch Club	VH	12.30pm
10	WI Annual Meeting plus 'Origami Designer and Artist' talk by Peter Buchanan-Symons	VH	7.30pm
14	Community Association Village Quiz	VH	7.30pm
15	Mothering Sunday service	St Ag	9.30am
15	Jazz Jam at Red Lion	RL	6pm
29	Palm Sunday walk from St James to St Agatha's	St Jam	9.30am

Advance Notice

5 April	Easter service and Easter Egg Hunt St Agatha's
15 April	BSR AGM, 7.30pm St Agatha's meeting room
18-19 April	Pre-loved fashion pop-up, Village Hall
25 April	Save the Children Fun Dog Show at the Rec
4 July	Village Fete, Sotwell House
17 July	Open Gardens

Refuse Collection (Food waste each week)

Grey bins	Thursdays 12 & 26 February, 12 & 26 March
Green + brown bins	Thursdays 5 & 19 February, 5 & 19 March