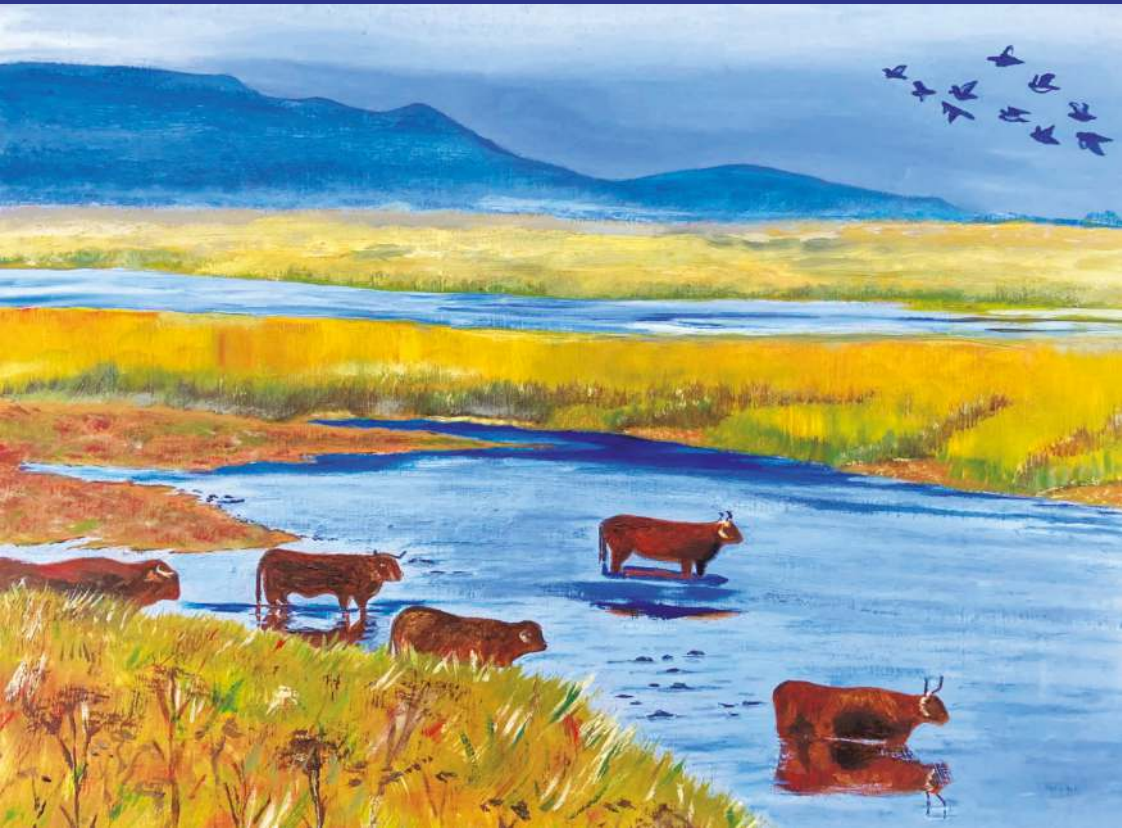


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THIS MONTH

- On The Plot
- A Benson Diary
- Benson Lock Menaced
- Benson Nature Group
- The Ringing Isle
- An Artist I Love
- Church & Village
- Cheers Mary!

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ALL IN JUNE

A week ago I had a fire

**To warm my feet, my hands and face;
Cold winds, that never make a friend,
Crept in and out of every place.**

**Today the fields are rich in grass,
And buttercups in thousands grow;
I'll show the world where I have been—
With gold-dust seen on either shoe.**

**Till to my garden back I come,
Where bumble-bees for hours and hours
Sit on their soft, fat, velvet bums,
To wriggle out of hollow flowers.**

William H Davies

As I sit still huddled in clothing more suited to February than June and stare out at our green drenched Benson garden I reflect on where else I might be.

The government recently offered up a fig-leaf to 'stay-at-home' England with their rather short 'green' list. I have never been that excited by Portugal, immediately discounted the Falklands and South Georgia but became intrigued by the possibilities of St Helena. Where better to go than the island in the middle of the Atlantic where we sent the Emperor to die?

Except Napoleon had apparently been seeing himself off for years with his use of cologne – though on St Helena he couldn't get any and was very cross

about it. A lady in waiting to Empress Josephine remarked that he would get through 60 bottles in a month. He used "almost to drown himself" in the stuff by pouring whole bottles over his head. The problem was that, given this excessive exposure, the ethanol, combined with high levels of essential oils, such as citrus fruits and lavender, probably gained entry to his inner workings and poisoned him from within. The essential oils are "endocrine disrupters" that affect hormones. and that might explain descriptions of Napoleon's enlarged breasts and hairless body, as well as his weight gain.

But why did Napoleon do this? Well he thought that cologne had health benefits (he even drank it in solution) but it also meant that he was the fragrant one in the midst of the terrible smell that pervaded his court and the everyday life of the time.

On the subject of smell I have been reading about the Black Death – well it's a pandemic so why not? – and Napoleon's olfactory woes were as nothing to the smells abounding in the fourteenth century. I mean there was poo everywhere - the world literally stank. On waking, people in town or city were too lazy to bring their chamber pots downstairs so they threw their windows open and after shouting three times 'look out below!' tossed the contents down to the gutter or onto incautious passers by. The streets were open sewers, soldiers tended to relieve themselves outside their tents rather than in military privies, butchers left their carcasses and offal in the streets which they used as abattoirs. The smell must have been indescribable and of course at night the rats had a field day, feeding off the detritus, bringing their plague fleas into every nook and cranny and killing off half the population.

Perhaps there is something vestigial that makes some of us still leave poo in the street. Only we no longer defecate ourselves, we let our dogs do it for us and because (I presume) our DNA still has remnants from those ancestors of chamber pot chucking inclination, there are a tiresome few who still leave their dog's doings where they lie so the rest of us can tread in them. Please those of you who think this is a good idea, shake off your nostalgia for your fourteenth century forebears and pick the stuff up.



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BRITAIN: THE RINGING ISLE



The composer Handel referred to Britain as "the ringing isle" because he said everywhere he went he heard bells ringing. Following on from my recent article "What's up in the Church Tower" it might be of interest to readers if I explain what we actually do when we ring the church bells.

Bells have of course been around for many years and in most parts of the world the bells which are hung in a church tower are swung randomly. However several hundred years ago ringers in Britain started experimenting with new ways of hanging a bell. This eventually led to a wheel being attached to the side of the bell so that the bell could be rung through almost 360 degrees.

This gave better control over the bell and resulted in the introduction of change

ringing in the early part of the 17th century. To start with the bells are rung in descending order from the highest note (the treble bell) to the lowest note (the tenor bell). We call this 'rounds'. Changes are variations in this order. We often ring 'call changes' where one of the ringers calls for two adjacent bells to swap place in their order remembering that bells can only be moved one place at a time. So for example a very quick change on six bells could change 1 2 3 4 5 6 to 1 2 3 5 4 6 .

This leads on to what we call 'change ringing'. For any given number of bells it is possible to calculate the maximum number of unique changes without any one row being repeated. Methods were developed to achieve this with names such as Plain Bob, Grandsire and Stedman. Certain rules are applied to ringing methods so that for instance no bell can move its position in relation to the other bells by more than one place at a time and no change is repeated. Also music is not used and the conductor who is one of the ringers has to memorize where to make various set calls during the ringing to achieve the method.

An example of a frequently rung method is Grandsire Triples whereby seven bells ring the method with the tenor bell ringing at the end of each row rather like a drum beating the time. In mathematics this is described as factorial 7 ($7 \times 6 \times 5 \times 4 \times 3 \times 2 \times 1$) which gives 5040. This means that it is possible to get 5040 different changes on seven bells. Ringing these 5040 changes with everyone keeping in place and the conductor putting the calls in the right place constitutes a full Peal. This would normally take about 3 hours. In Benson we often ring 'quarter peals', usually to celebrate a special occasion and these take about 45 minutes.

Full circle ringing is largely peculiar to the British Isles where there about 6000 church towers with bells. Our style of ringing has also been introduced to about 140 towers in other countries such as North America, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa.



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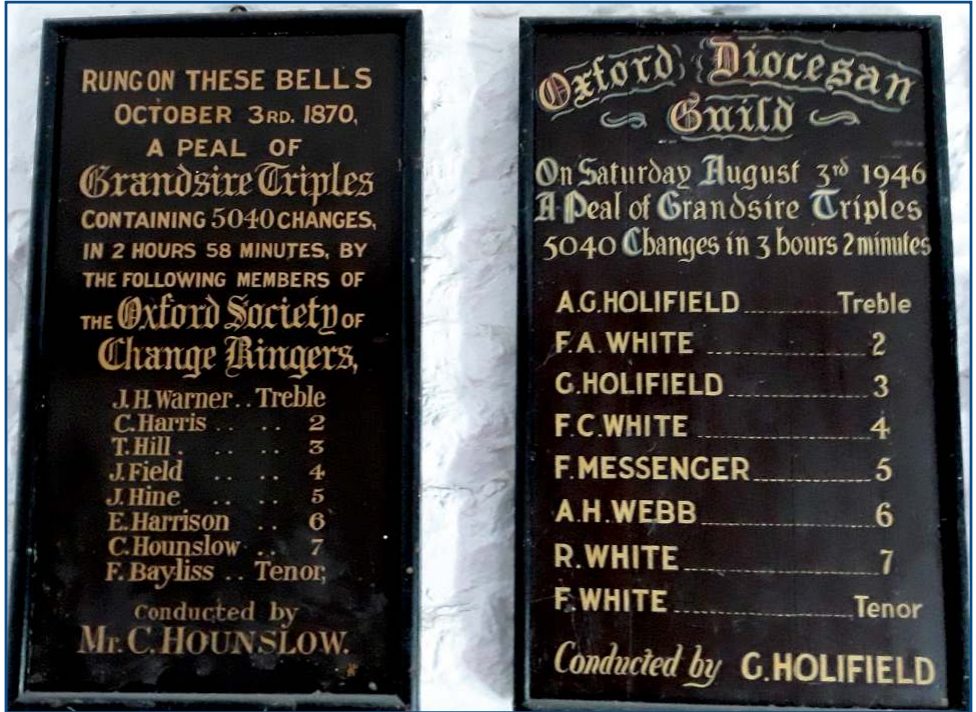
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At the time of writing there is none or very limited ringing due to the pandemic. However we are looking forward to when we can return to ringing our church bells. The ringing room walls have many mementoes of ringing and accompanying this article are photographs of two historic peal boards and a more recent one (*at the beginning of John's article -Ed*) which celebrated the re-hanging of the bells in 2009.

John Tchighianoff
Tower Captain



CHEERS MARY!



The last fourteen months has changed the World and here's a little Benson item worth recording. Thanks to the efforts of Steve and wife Karen, **Benson Butchers** carries on producing excellent meat, delivered to us during the pandemic each Saturday by Karen. But the pandemic meant that Mary Cook had to retire, perhaps prematurely. Mary had worked in that shop from the age of 19 as different butchers came and went for over sixty years! Surely a record for Benson High Street and indeed many other High Streets. Mary, I haven't seen you for some fifteen months. Have a great and healthy retirement.

Peter Clarke



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ON THE PLOT

It was standing room only in the greenhouse well into May, with vigorous young plants outgrowing their pots and eager to savour the freedom of the plot. In their youthful naivety, tucked up every night under a double layer of fleece, and toasty warm by day with the sun shining through the glass, they were of course unaware of the dangers lurking there, innocent of frosts and damaging winds. But the time inevitably comes when it does them no good to hold them back any longer – and this is when protective cloches come into their own. Whether ready-made versions purchased online, fashioned into shape using sheets of corrugated pvc from the local hardware store, or simply made by draping the thick polythene your new sofa or mattress came wrapped in over hoops of blue water pipe, slotted onto short bamboo sticks to secure them in the ground, they all do the trick. For individual plants, courgettes for example, a bottomless plastic bottle or an upturned fat-ball tub come in handy to ease the transition from pot to plot. The essential thing to remember, though, is that these all keep the rain out too and forgetting to water can have tragic consequences – so no severing of those apron strings just yet!

There's similar impatience out on the allotment, with the first shoots of the early potatoes nudging their way through the soil piled above their maternal tubers, in a bid to get a glimpse of the outside world and start the important business of photosynthesising. No environmentally unfriendly plastic-based products needed here - just more soil, to keep them in the dark and safe from Jack Frost a bit longer.

Plants of the brassica family, however, are hardy souls and largely unfazed by what the weather flings at them. Their main enemies have beaks and wings. Did you know that the call of the ubiquitous wood pigeon is in fact a warning? 'Cover those cabbages, cover those cabbages, cover those cabbages – now!'. So, as I was advised in my early allotmenting days, net it or forget it. And if the ever hungry pigeons weren't enough of a nuisance, those dainty white butterflies are also a force to contend with, and have an uncanny knack of getting through the tiniest gap to start their procreation process. I sometimes think they must fold their wings back and torpedo their way in, and have learned to my cost that a coarse-meshed netting just doesn't cut the mustard. The finer the better.

Forewarned is forearmed, but even if you have done everything you can to give your plants a good start, by raising them with care and preparing them well for life in the great beyond, it's only natural that you may feel a little apprehensive the first time you walk away from the allotment, leaving them to start fending for themselves. But they will relish their independence as they go on to mature and grow, and you, in turn, will be richly rewarded.

Linda Parkin

BENSON HEALTH WALKS: HELP WANTED!

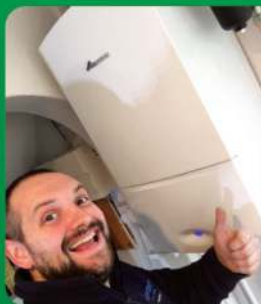
I am sorry to say that I am not about to announce a date for these walks to resume just yet. The benefits of health walks include walking as a group. This involves leaders being on a rota so that there are always leaders available for the walks on offer. To meet the requirements of Walking for Health, our umbrella organisation, being a leader involves training, which is a pre-requisite. Many existing leaders have been involved in the rota for over 10 years, some for up to 20.

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So there are various reasons such as age, health, change in circumstances or needing a rest that mean we currently do not have enough leaders to run a regular weekly walk. I hope this might change over the summer: any walker – existing health walker or not – could help it change by being willing to come forward as a new leader.

Existing leaders will always give help and support and the training has now moved on line. Walks are local and soon become familiar so map reading skills are not required. Leaders need to turn up, choose a route (we have 6 main routes, although there are minor variations available for all of them), plan for possible risks – particularly the weather, and make sure that all those who start out are still there at the end. It is really just common sense and there are no tests involved. If you are interested in knowing more, please contact the co-ordinator: Kate Hart, kate.h@ntlworld.com or 01491 838689.

Health walkers have not only had the benefit of regular walking but have generally got to know many other like-minded local residents, especially as we finish in a local café for coffee. It's a great way to make new friends. I hope to hear from you!

Kate Hart

CHURCH AND VILLAGE

He's telling a story, Miss! In the Primary School of my distant youth 'story' was synonymous with fib – in other words, a lie. Fiction is the opposite of fact: but are facts always the truth?

My stern grandfather, who by a few years actually qualified as a Victorian, tried to stop his children reading novels on the grounds that they weren't true – how therefore could they possibly inculcate moral virtue? To call something a Fairy Story is to condemn it as the very incarnation of constructed mendacity – yet, although I'm fairly certain that there never was a put-upon daughter abused by her vile step-sisters, who nevertheless managed by means of well-fitting footwear to win the hand of the Prince of the Realm, surely Cinderella is a deeply ethical tale, commending honesty and goodness over spite and jealousy?

I am convinced that truth is very often better served by fiction than mere reportage, and we are all post-modern enough to realise that what seems unalloyed verity from one standpoint might look very different from another. Humankind is a story-telling species; we convey our experience by sharing narratives. It's how families and communities define themselves, refining, shaping, managing the memory so it best encapsulates the kernel of the matter. The Christian religion places story-telling at its very heart. Each year from December to May we recount, act out, live through the dramatic narrative of the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. This inexhaustible, profound sequence enables those of us who share it to find shape and purpose in our own story, our hopes, tragedies, challenges. By June the cycle is complete; we now reflect on the entirety. What new things have we learned since this time last year? How different does the world look, and what are we inspired to do about it?

Wherever you place Jesus on the spectrum extending from utter fiction to absolute truth, it's not a bad exercise, and I commend it to you.

Prebendary Gilleen Craig

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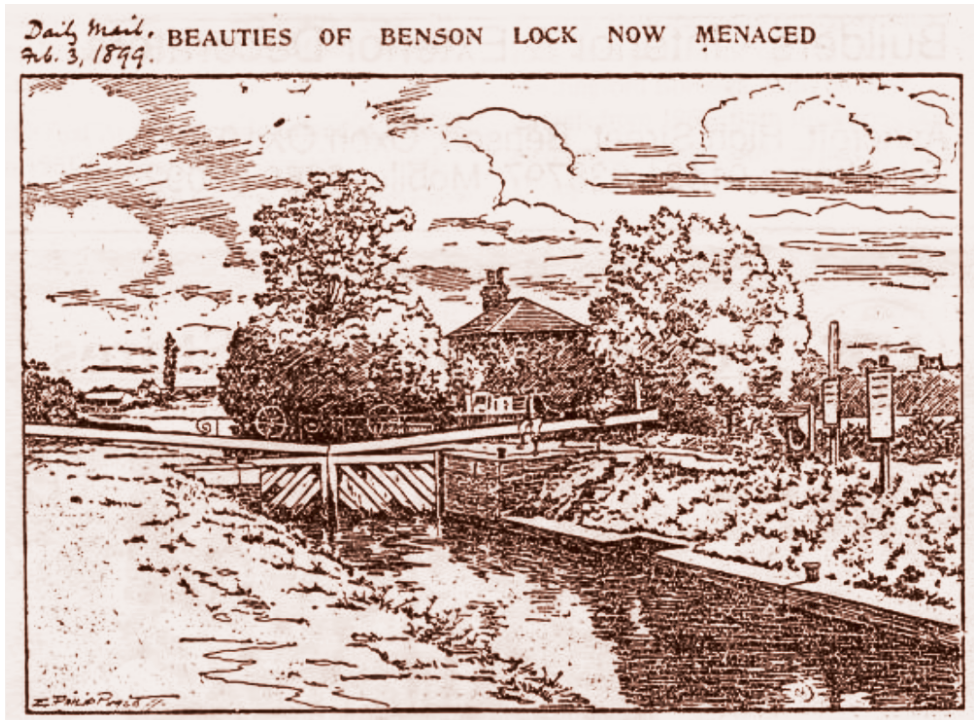
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BENSON LOCK MENACED

Following on from John Dalton's article on the 150th anniversary of Benson Lock in our April issue the piece below was to be found in the Daily Mail of 1899:



MORE BEAUTY SPOILING Scene of the Proposed Bridge at Benson Lock

The accompanying picture gives a view at Benson Lock, near which it is proposed to construct a railway bridge across the Thames. The erection of this bridge has called forth a large number of protesting letters from readers of the Daily Mail, and the decision of the Light Railway Commission, in whose hands the question now rests, is being awaited with interest by all lovers of Thames scenery.

It is proposed by certain corporate interests to construct a light railway from Wallingford to Benson, crossing the Thames just above Benson Lock. This bridge is to be an iron structure, which, with its approaches, will not only mar the beauty of the river thereabouts, but cause great annoyance to hundreds of sail boat owners who frequent the reach. The river at this point is one of the few excellent sailing spots remaining, and the bridge, it is said, cannot be made high enough to obviate the lowering of sails each time it is reached.

The population of Wallingford is only about 3,000 and of Benson 1,000. The proposed railway will be only a mile and three-quarters in length, and many persons maintain that the benefits proposed can in no way compensate for the disadvantages.

(If I have space there will be more on this proposed railway in our next issue - Ed)



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If you are one of those affected, you should know that PIP (personal independence payments) may be available. PIP is financial support for those who have an illness, disability or mental health condition, making it hard for them to do everyday tasks or get around. Income, savings and employment status don't affect your PIP eligibility, and PIP can supplement any other benefits you might be receiving.

To apply, you need to be aged between 16 and your state pension age, and you need to have had these health problems for at least three months and expect them to continue. For help with applying for PIP, contact Citizens Advice Adviceline on 0808 278 7907 (for Oxfordshire South and Vale).

There is more information about PIP at: citizensadvice.org.uk/benefits/sick-or-disabled-people-and-carers/PIP/

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A BENSON DIARY

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?

Thou art more lovely and more temperate:

Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,

And summer's lease hath all too short a date:

Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,

And often is his gold complexion dimmed,

And every fair from fair sometime declines,

By chance, or nature's changing course untrimmed:

Rough winds have played their part shaking May's darling buds this year. Seldom do I recall a colder start to May. The apple blossom came late. It still gloriously crowns our crab apple. Whether there will be fruit I cannot say.

It is by Bob's Corner that I catch the succulent scent of lilac year

to year and suddenly summer smiles. The lilac blossom topples over the fine old garden wall and – often with our dogs pulling me their own ways – I always stop to draw the soft sweet lilac to catch the scent that promises the sweetness of an English summer.

If white snowdrops and yellow daffodils are Spring's sentinels and if tulips her colourfully uniformed infantry, then Spring's Triumph comes garlanded with victory's purple in its many etiolated hues and paler shades - from blue-violet of wildflowers in woods; to the coyer paler purples of violets and violas along the shaded glades; to the amaranthine shades of ceanothus and purple sprouting broccoli and the dizzying arrays of mauve wisteria and lilac blossom, spiky lavender, and peppery pinks. Late spring owns a violaceous palette.

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It is not the only floral note this year - am I alone in noticing primroses flowering far longer than in recent times? In our garden, the rhododendron and azalea are normally already in flower by May time, but time runs cold this year and so everything runs later. I've not even put in the bedding plants yet - too cold for them and far too cold for us to be out in it.

The birds are made of tougher stuff than us mere mortals. Red breasted robins open the dawn chorus most mornings – followed quickly by the blackbirds and then the full symphony of cacophonous bird song. We have four nests about the church – which means later in the year we will need to clear our gutters. They leave their white splatters as their calling cards about the nest sites. They bespatter the cars as well – hitting the mark if not aiming to please.

For me, May brings nostalgia - as heady as any perfumed lilac. My school days in Maidenhead and later in Reading are relit in memory's magic moonlight. Back then although we all knew about May dances and May poles and going a-Maying, those English customs were ghosts at the banquet of summer term. Sometimes a maypole was put-up for some summer fete, but it never really amounted to anything more than a curiosity.

Instead in May on damp mornings or languid afternoons, serried ranks of classes came together to prepare for sports day in June. Mr Hartigan who perhaps was already in his late sixties appeared sporting vest, and high-waisted pale trousers with a military tie for a belt. An old gramophone was put on the trimmed lawn and speakers were fixed to it by the Physics and Maths masters working in tandem with long coils of wire. Other teachers, all smoking cigarettes, were dotted along the pale cream veranda - silhouettes of the lost idyll of some summer long ago - whilst music hissed and crackled over the lawns where serried ranks of boys gleamed in white t-shirts and white shorts and freshly whitened plimsoles.

In the mid-sixties, it all belonged to another age - as did the various exercises which were meant to harmonise with various compositions of Johann Strauss II. As boys would, we played-up on the beat of the waltz, often led astray by the bolder boys of fourth and fifth forms.

By the time I reached sixteen those sports days were like blossom blown into gullies of the past. The other prize of summer terms were extra holidays. We got a half-day off school on the Holy Days like Ascension and other the great feasts that peppered the months of May, June, and early July. Our many extra holidays were the envy of other schools about in Reading. Whilst we rushed home, they were left to construe Livy's Wars endlessly waged that long eternity to 4 o'clock.

When I see about the village the blossom and the lilac and the horse chestnut pyramids pink and cream piling high into the sky, all I believed forgotten somehow seems alive and although those summer days were only lived for a youthful moment, their memory has endured a lifetime's wear and tear. Perhaps like the smile of the Cheshire cat they will not fade until the very end.

**But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st,
Nor shall death brag thou wander'st in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st
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(WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, SONNET XVIII)

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BENSON NATURE GROUP

The Brook – Past, Present and Future



**Benson's Well
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Despite being the shortest chalk stream in the Chilterns, Ewelme or Benson (depending on where you live) the Brook has a fascinating social and natural history. This was illustrated by David Solomon in a brilliant, fact-filled talk in April. With its catchment of 16 square km and annual rainfall of 696mm, the underlying geology of chalk and gravel keep water flow and temperature more or less constant throughout the year.

With a mill mentioned in the Domesday Book, to sheep washing and watercress growing, the Brook has played a central role for well over 1,000 years. Watercress grew naturally in Kings Pool in Ewelme and there are records of leaf clearing, moorhens and even an otter being shot to protect the crop. Commercial watercress growing ceased in 1988 and milling came to an end in the 1880's following fires at Benson and at Ewelme's mills.

Naturally, chalk streams have an untidy appearance with overgrown banks and water buttercup providing habitat for wildlife. There are good examples of semi-natural stretches (eg: Millbrook Mead) but much of the brook is now

brick-lined or culverted and so of reduced wildlife value. Trout, once common, are much less in evidence. Invasive non-native Pacific Signal crayfish have wiped out native crayfish and despite the removal of mink, water voles have disappeared.

BNG members monitor river fly populations every month to check on water quality as these creatures are very sensitive to pollution. This month the sample at the Watercress Beds was healthy whereas below the road bridge, at the location of the mill, there were many dead or dying insects. It is not possible to pinpoint the reason for this unusual event; there are several possibilities including a spillage on the road or agricultural or garden chemical run-off.

We also measure chemical pollutants (Phosphates and Nitrates) in the water. The latest readings show high levels of nitrates but low phosphate levels. The high nitrate levels are even present at the source of the brook so it must be concluded that the cause is agricultural fertiliser which is not filtered out as the water passes through the chalk. It is difficult to do anything about the road or agriculture sources but as individuals we should do everything we can to prevent pollution as even the tiniest amount can cause big problems - eg: from garden chemicals or flea treatments on pets. Heavy rain can wash it into the brook.

But there is hope. Such information could inform a strategy to reverse the declines and with community support and different management, invertebrate numbers could increase and herald the return of trout and other species. For future events see our Facebook page or website: bensonnaturegroup.com

Val Siddiqui

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NEWS FROM DADS

The five cast members of DADS outdoor production of “The Wind In The Willows” have taken advantage of recent good weather to rehearse under a gazebo in my back garden in Benson. It has been a welcome change to rehearsing via zoom! One of the joys of working in the theatre are the different challenges which each new production brings and this show is no exception. Not least due to all the restrictions! Strangely enough, there have been some benefits. For instance, rehearsing via Zoom has meant that we are probably much more advanced than we would normally be with developing the characters and learning the lines.

We are performing “The Wind In The Willows” in the Cloister Garden at Dorchester Abbey from July 22nd - 24th. It’s been a tough year for everyone so prices are lower than normal at £7 and £4 for children aged 4 to 12 - tickets available via: dads.org.uk.

July 29th – 31st we have been asked to perform for three nights in a riverside location in Henley to help to raise funds for The Kenton Theatre. Tickets will be available shortly via the Kenton Theatre Box Office. The venue is absolutely stunning, with several willow trees to picnic under!

Mark Wilkin

BENSON MILLSTREAM CENTRE



By the time you read this the Centre should have been open for lunches only for a couple of weeks but if pandemic restrictions are lifted fully this June, we will be back to business as usual.

The Trustees are very proud of what the Centre has achieved during the pandemic and how we have been able to adapt and expand our service so quickly. With the support of the Centre and the Hub Managers (Donna and Christine), plus dozens of willing volunteers, over 3,500 hot meals have been delivered to customers’ homes; activity packs have gone out, regular phone calls have been made to counter loneliness and almost 1,000 food parcels have gone to needy people in the area, regardless of age. With the Help Hub now part of the Centre we are ready at very short notice to adapt to any changing circumstances.

Fundraising Help Needed

The last 18 months, have been difficult for the Centre financially due to the pandemic. Local fund raising, which contributes to our finances and also keeps our profile high, has had to be cancelled and we’ve relied heavily on our Treasurer to apply for grants in order to keep any deficit to a minimum. With ‘normal’ life on the horizon we are now keen to fill that gap and get some fund raising underway, particularly to fund our extension plans. We are looking for volunteers who could do any of the following:

- **Share any previous fund raising experience and bring new ideas.**
- **Monitor key websites for grant opportunities and apply with support from our Treasurer.**
- **Use their project management skills to help organise events.**
- **Help on the day of events - in whatever capacity.**

If you would like to support this valuable village resource and help us get back to regular fund raising, please get in touch by emailing: bensonmillstreamcentre@btinternet.com, putting ‘Fund raising’ in the subject line.

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If there is an older person you feel would benefit from nourishing meals, companionship, and interesting activities, please get in touch with Donna on 01491 834889.

The Centre is open Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays and there is an answerphone for out-of-hours calls. If you would like to know more about the Centre's work please go to: bensonmillstreamcentre.org

We're looking forward to seeing familiar faces at the Centre again soon – customers and volunteers - and to welcoming quite a few new faces too.

Geraldine Gault

BENSON COMMUNITY GARDENS



Last week our much loved new/old greenhouse got blown in by the wind and gales. The frame is bent and we think we might have to salvage it by recycling the roof into a cold frame. It is sad but it shows how small we are in the face of weather systems.

On that note – we will remember May this year as chilly, very chilly. It seems like a different country and climate to this time last year when we were basking in the sun during lockdown. Last year however the challenge was late frost which crumpled the runner beans and blackened the tips of the potatoes.

I saw such an inventive idea on Allotments online – a runner bean arch, strung between two raised beds. It used old metal rods and

old hose pipes over the top. The universe is full of creativity and I for one am forever recycling other peoples' ideas. Have a walk down and watch the progress of this archway; we used willow branches and old tubing. A few of our allotment stars (the ones who come to help), have been wonderful in supporting the project and its challenges. We had just bought thermal openers for the windows of the greenhouse. These are now going spare if anyone would like them.

Lots of container/patio bush tomatoes are growing slowly and the courgettes are good and strong. We will bring them to the Gardening Clubs plant sale day. We have also divided clumps of daisies - a symbol of growing for sharing and growing in an attitude of plenty. Do come and chill out at the picnic table and look around. We try to have a presence there on a Saturday morning and a Sunday afternoon. There are rocks to paint and other activities as the summer progresses. I am pleased to say that there is healthy looking swiss chard nearly ready for you to pick and lots of eternal spinach beside the sad greenhouse. The scarecrows look in need of new clothing too, its head got blown off in the high winds. I look rather enviously at some of the amazing scarecrows on the allotments.

We are always looking for new members. It is £10 per year for a family and you can contact us by an email to: bensoncommunitygardens@gmail.com.

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AN ARTIST I LOVE



Self Portrait - ©Tate Britain

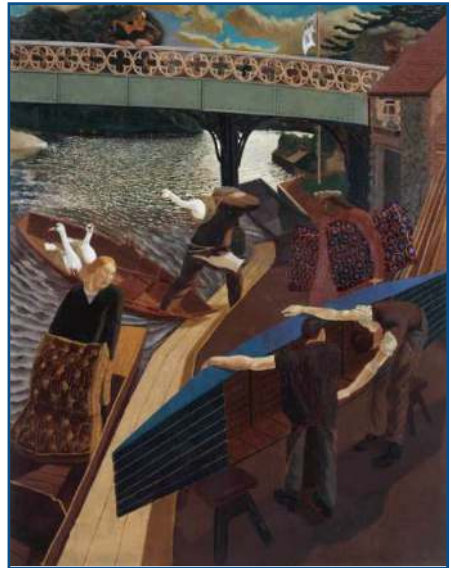
Having spent several years living in Maidenhead, the artist, Sir Stanley Spencer, was a local celebrity and I was, for a while, a member of the Friends of Stanley Spencer. However, I didn't begin to appreciate his art until I began to paint 10 years ago and invited our local art historian, Robert Kidner, to give a talk to Watercress Painters which included several very beautiful Spencer landscapes - landscape being where my interest lies but were only done to bring in the bread and butter! When I began to read about him ... well, I was hooked - intrigued - and wanted to learn more about the personality behind these lovely scenes which so contrast with his rather strange religious compositions!

Trisha Scott

SIR STANLEY SPENCER – ARTIST EXTRAORDINAIRE

Many people will be aware of Spencer but will they be as familiar with his rather complicated and Bohemian lifestyle?

Stanley was born in 1891 into a large family and spent most of his life in the nearby Berkshire village of Cookham which he called 'heaven on earth' and where his father was church organist. His upbringing and therefore his art had a fairly strong religious bent, the family being regular churchgoers. He was well known for his biblical scenes placed around the village of Cookham having been sponsored to study under Henry Tonks at the Slade School of Art. He served over two years on the front line in Macedonia in World War 1 and the horrors of what he witnessed influenced his artworks, one in particular being the mural 'The Resurrection



"Swan Upping at Cookham" - ©Tate Britain

of the Soldiers' in which he depicted dead soldiers emerging from their tombs into a landscape of crosses. Undoubtedly his greatest work was the painting of a memorial chapel (Sandham) in Burghclere, Hampshire to a life lost during the First World War depicting shell shocked troops and scenes from Macedonia in 16 enormous paintings.

He married Hilda Carline, a fellow artist, and their two daughters were born in Cookham but, eventually, Hilda, dissatisfied with village life, began to spend more and more time with her family in Hampstead leaving Stanley the opportunity to meet up with and befriend fellow Cookham artist Patricia Preece who was the live-in lover and lifelong companion of Dorothy Hepworth. Stanley and Patricia became obsessed with each other – he showered her with gifts and she travelled with him to



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Switzerland. He painted many nude portraits of Patricia much to the chagrin of both Hilda and Dorothy. Now here is the extraordinary thing - Patricia lost confidence in her own ability to paint but used to travel up to London to sell paintings that bore her signature. So all the paintings being sold and revered bearing the name of Patricia Preece were, in fact, painted by her very talented artist lover, Dorothy Hepworth!

Hilda moved back to Hampstead and sent their daughter, Shirin, to live with a relative having become increasingly exasperated at the developing relationship between Stanley and Patricia Preece so she started divorce proceedings. What is quite odd was that a week after Hilda divorced Stanley and the Maidenhead register office hosted the wedding of Stanley to Patricia, Hilda spent the night with Stanley at their Cookham home while Patricia and Dorothy went down to Cornwall for the honeymoon! The marriage was never consummated but Stanley allowed Patricia to manage his finances and even signed over the deeds of the Cookham house to her. Hilda was still very much the love of Stanley's life – it seems he had rather hoped that she would agree to a threesome! This second marriage fell apart but Preece refused to grant Stanley a divorce. It had always been the plan of the penniless Preece and Hepworth to own Lindworth, the Spencer Cookham home, to solve their financial problems. Having achieved this they rented it out thus evicting Spencer. He moved to Swiss Cottage and painted a series of four canvasses entitled 'Christ in the Wilderness'.

In his final years, after the Royal Academy sued him for obscenity based on his scrapbook drawings, he was granted a CBE and was persuaded to rejoin the RA.

In 1955 the Tate held a large retrospective of his work and he began a series of paintings 'Christ Preaching at Cookham Regatta' intended for the church. He was knighted in 1958 and could be seen wandering the lanes of Cookham pushing an old pram containing his painting equipment. This and many of his paintings including the unfinished "Christ Preaching at Cookham" can be seen at the Stanley Spencer Gallery in Cookham. It is an amazing sight being a huge part finished canvas on which there is a very detailed grid with many illustrated squares but many blank ones too. An exhibition opened there from Monday 17 May under the title of 'Love, Art, Loss – the Wives of Stanley Spencer'.



(Opposite: Dorothy Hepworth (not looking too happy), Patricia Preece and Spencer at their wedding)

He died aged 68 and his ashes are buried in the grounds of Cookham Church with a simple stone: To the memory of Stanley Spencer Kt. CBE RA 1891-1959 and his wife Hilda. Hilda is not buried there however. He left behind an enormous legacy of artwork not to everyone's taste but certainly very varied – portraits, self portraits, landscapes, religious scenes and, of course, the massive illustrations at Sandham Chapel.



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Our Practice Nurse Alison Richmond is retiring and she had some thoughts about her working life at the Mill Stream. “I had worked closely with Dr Anne - not sure about the ‘e’ - Millar and Dr Peter Rose, and then with Dr Tim Wilson once Dr Anne had retired, when I was one of the team leaders at Wallingford community hospital.

Peter told me a Practice Nurse post had become available at MSS and wanted me to apply. I got the job! and joined the team in October 1997. I was proud to join a surgery that had been awarded the Charter award for an innovative forward approach

to general practice. The approach was the then ‘Patient Panel’ involving patients, carers and surgery staff in improving the service. I had the privilege of being part of this group now known as a PPG for over 17 years.

I have seen many changes to the NHS and General Practice and I have seen the surgery expand in size with its two extension projects. At the start the nursing team was just me, then a phlebotomist joined, and now there are three Practice Nurses and a Health Care Assistant.

The best part of being a Practice Nurse was the patients. It has been an honour to have been part of so many of your lives, often getting to know four generations of a family. This is what I will miss most. I am sorry that over the last year I have not been able to see patients face to face due to the pandemic and as a result have not personally said good-bye but I truly wish you all well.”

Thoughts from the practice on Alison’s retirement

As a practice we are fortunate to have had Alison working with us for so many years. We know from all your comments that many patients have very much valued the high quality care Alison has provided over such a long time. We all wish her a very happy and healthy retirement. We held a socially distanced coffee and cake event in our car park with a presentation of gifts and speeches, and together with a representative from the PPG we all celebrated Alison’s long service and marked her retirement.

Update on COVID vaccines

Thank you to all the volunteers who are helping us with our COVID-19 immunisation clinics and those who have given their time to steward the car park, often at short notice and unsociable hours. We are also very grateful to clinical and administrative staff from the Medical Centre at RAF Benson for helping us at the clinics. We really could not have done this without our volunteers and we cannot thank them enough. We would also like to thank all our staff who have been incredible during this time, not only the doctors and nurses but also the support staff who have stepped up and taken and made many more phone calls than normal!

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Applications will be considered shortly after 1 July 2021.

Progress

We have now given over 1901 first dose and 1259 second dose vaccinations which includes our patients, NHS community staff and RAF personnel. We are currently giving second dose vaccinations and continue to give first dose vaccinations to the younger age groups, we are currently booking those in the 30 – 39 year old age group.

PPG (Mill Stream Surgery Patient Participation Group - formerly the Patients Panel)

Morag Raikes works as a Clinical Pharmacist across the three GP practices within our Primary Care Network (PCN). She is based at Mill Stream Surgery on Thursdays and met with Di Duncan to discuss her role. Di began by asking Morag about her background:

“I’ve twenty nine years experience as a community pharmacist and was the PCN lead in community pharmacy. The role of the PCN Pharmacist is relatively new and requires eighteen months of additional training so I’ll be studying hard.

My main role is supporting the doctors, working alongside them, undertaking medication reviews and answering any medication queries from them and the patients. It gives the doctors more time to consult with patients. Other aspects of the role include reviewing patient medications on discharge from hospital and advising on alternatives when drugs are either discontinued or temporarily unavailable. There’s also some involvement in supporting local and national prescribing changes. I have recently been researching the environmental impact of asthma inhalers, and hope to explore this further to help minimise that impact.”

How have you been received by the patients of Mill Stream?

“I have found the patients to be very welcoming and receptive. I’ve enjoyed getting to know them and I think the Doctors appreciate my support and the input I am able to provide from a pharmacy perspective.”

How does your role impact on our local Lloyds pharmacy?

“Having worked in the community pharmacy environment for many years I would hope that I can be supportive and work with Lloyds so that patients are able to receive their medication in as seamless a way as possible.”



Our Swan's still going strong with 8 cygnets
Courtesy Anna Pollock

How would you like to develop your role?

“I want to take on the independent prescribing course. This will further support the GPs and free up more of their time, whilst providing a more holistic approach for patients. I would also like to be involved in some of the audits and reviews that general practice undertakes. Finally I would like to thank the doctors and other staff for their support and for making me feel so welcome.”

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SODC UPDATE



**Andrea Powell
&
Sue Cooper**



Local Election Results

The County Council election results were very interesting, to say the least! The turnout in the Benson & Cholsey Division was 41%. It was a shame it wasn't higher given the importance of local government to the day-to-day lives of local residents. It will come as no surprise to readers that we were rather disappointed by the outcome of in this Division, since we had both campaigned for the Liberal Democrat candidate. However, we live in a democracy and Cllr Bloomfield won the first-past-the-post contest, albeit by the slimmest of margins of just 20 votes! We look forward to seeing Felix at Parish Council and Neighbourhood Plan meetings so that he can focus on delivering his campaign pledges and representing his constituents at County Hall.

Overall, the County remains in “no overall control”, with no one party having a majority of the seats. However, the Lib Dems and Greens collectively make up the largest group, with 24 seats, so there is likely to be a coalition administration of some description; by the time you read this it may well have been sorted out. We were delighted to see 3 Green Councillors elected, including two in neighbouring Divisions of Wallingford and Berinsfield & Garsington (which includes Warborough). The Chalgrove & Watlington seat (which includes Ewelme) was taken from the Conservatives by the Lib Dems.

Importantly for our local communities, this means that we are likely to have the same “flavour” of administration at both District and County level, which should help to ensure that our strategic priorities of addressing climate change, providing affordable and energy-efficient homes, protecting and restoring nature, encouraging community well-being and supporting post-pandemic recovery can be delivered effectively.

Planning Reforms

The Government has decided to push ahead with its reform of the planning system, which it claims has delayed the delivery of new housing across the country. Anyone living in South Oxfordshire might beg to differ, given the number of new developments and the associated disruption caused by infrastructure works. The new system will require local authorities to designate land either for development or protection and any application falling into the former category will receive automatic planning permission. There will be some standards to be met, including the requirement to build “beautiful” houses, but there is no definition yet agreed as to what this might mean. The reforms also mean that empty town centre properties such as shops and offices can be converted without planning permission into homes. This might be good news in terms of revitalising our town centres, but we will have to be careful that any properties meet high environmental standards and provide decent quality accommodation.

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It is another reminder that local planning authorities are actually very constrained by the legal framework within which they have to operate and a reflection of the influence enjoyed by the house-building industry. This is why it is so important for local communities to build strong relationships with the developers in their area to ensure that green spaces, community facilities and other infrastructure are all included within house-building projects. These relationships can often deliver more benefits than is required under the law, Benson being a good case in point.

BENSON PARISH COUNCIL UPDATE

Maintaining and Enhancing our Wellbeing

As readers may know, we have had a couple of incidents on Sunnyside in recent weeks involving dogs attacking other dogs. As everyone will be aware, the Sunnyside space is freely available for all to enjoy, including sports groups (in particular football) and children playing. The council is aware that by far the vast majority of dog owners are extremely responsible, and make sure their dogs are both well behaved and well socialised. However, we must take complaints from dog owners seriously: we obviously do not want to make Sunnyside an unwelcome space for any section of our community and would therefore urge all owners to make sure that, should their dogs be uncomfortable with other dogs, they are leashed at all times. Readers should be aware that Sunnyside is covered by CCTV cameras located on the Parish Hall and the Pavilion, and the council will not hesitate to take appropriate action should incidents of this kind continue, and to liaise closely with the relevant authorities, including the police.

Making Benson Brilliant

The preparing and signing of contracts for the Parish Hall extension and refurbishment is underway and appropriate processes and actions are being worked on. Subject to this, we are hoping for a start in early June, please check the website for details.

Benson has a rich history and we are blessed with the sheer volume of artefacts and documents not least the Benson Bulletin, which tell our story – we clearly know where we have come from. Question is do we know what Benson is going in the future? The Parish Council will look at the plans for CIL money spend (see last month's BB); this is a once in a generation opportunity – don't let it pass you and Benson by. Please be active in this subject and engage with the Parish Council so that your voice is heard. We have a brilliant Neighbourhood Plan which sets out much of the vision for the future. Don't leave it to 12 people in a meeting room in the Parish Hall to decide how its spent. Let's forge a Benson Fit for the Future supported by community voice and underpinned by improvements and projects funded through CIL and the ongoing precept.

Keeping Benson Beautiful

If you provide food for the Red Kites, you could be unwittingly causing their death. In order to thrive they need a balanced diet which feeding them will not provide. If the birds associate humans with their food there will be increasing conflict and pressure to reduce their numbers. Large groups of kites endanger aircraft safety and the RAF may use their existing licence to shoot the birds.

I'm sure most of us take pleasure in watching these magnificent birds – help keep them safe by **NOT FEEDING THEM.**

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BENSON GARDEN CLUB



Our May talk, ‘Everything Fuchsia’, was given by Kristopher Harper. Beginning with the geographical origins of fuchsias (many species are native to South America) and their “discovery”, in 1703 by Charles Plumier, we were guided through the history of their hybridisation. It wasn’t until the Victorian era that they became globally popular, and between the 1830s and early 1900s there was a significant growth in the number of commercially available hybrids.

One of the early fuchsia hybridisers was James Lye who introduced more than 100 fuchsia cultivars, of which 33 have survived to the present day. The average time to bring a fuchsia hybrid to market was around five years and we were shown beautiful illustrations from commercial catalogues from the Victorian period, demonstrating the vast array of different characteristics of both flowers and foliage that were becoming available. Kristopher has established the James Lye Fuchsia Collection, to preserve, research and archive Lye’s legacy; in 2012 this was recognised as a National Plant Collection.

He then shared with us flowers picked from his greenhouse that day – exquisite blooms, which led to questions on how best to grow the flowers. For Oxfordshire, we were advised to grow hardy fuchsias close to a house wall, where they will benefit from a warmer microclimate, and to avoid waterlogging at all costs. For these fuchsias, grown outside but not in containers, we were advised to prune them back in spring “quite hard” once growth had started and to give them a light mulch in the autumn.

We have finished our series of speakers for the year and will re-start our talks in October. From June to September, it’s the Club’s season for being out and about visiting gardens, and details are available on our website: bensongardeningclub.weebly.com Further information about the club and how to join as a member can also be found there, or please feel free to email: bensongardeningclub@gmail.com

BENSON EVERGREENS

Liz Harrison

We still hope to resume our monthly meetings once the regulations permit, and the Parish Hall is back to normal use.

I expect, like me, you have all now had your two jabs and I hope that has given you confidence about the future. I shall still be careful to wear a mask where I think it safest and I’m sure social distancing may still be wise, but I am really looking forward to having my family to stay and hugs from my grandchildren. The Committee hopes that we may be able to have a meeting in September - we will let you know nearer the time -- we still haven’t had our AGM yet!

Janet Burt (President)

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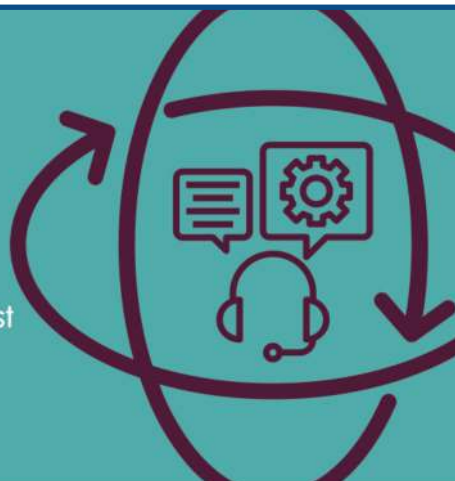
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THE BENSON WI



Our April meeting was not able to take place, but our new committee did manage to hold a meeting, the first since March 2020, and made one or two plans.

During May, members were asked to join the 'Bee Cause' (20th May being World Bee Day) by attracting and feeding bees in our gardens. We were asked to provide shelter for some of the 25 types of bees by not being too tidy and to lobby councils to cut verges only once or twice a year. Saving Bees has been a constant within the WI over the years. Our local federation Climate Change Ambassador has asked us to join the East Kent Federation in making a display of climate change scarves illustrating temperatures over the last 100 years with different colours. These will be displayed at our National Annual Meeting in 2022.

Also, during May, the results of NFWI's recent survey on cervical screening have been launched and NFWI is advocating to our members that they make their MP and Clinical Commissioning Group aware of the findings.

It has not been possible to hold the usual spring Oxfordshire WI Craft Exhibition this year but members from all over our region submitted items for an online exhibition which included jewellery, mosaics, flower arrangements and items of knitwear, some of which can be viewed in our monthly "Oxford Inspires" magazine.

Our Benson members were looking forward to resuming our indoor meetings in June but, with work on the Parish Hall scheduled, our normal venue will be unavailable. A programme for the year remains so far unplanned so it is a case of see how we go. Talks and workshops continue to be provided by Denman at Home and the OFWI Media Team but getting back together and catching up is what we are most looking forward to. Enquiries can be made to the Secretary at: bensonwi@oxfordshirewi.co.uk or on 01491 837885.

Sue Brown (Benson WI President)

BENSON TREFOIL GUILD

We are looking forward to hiring a meeting room and holding "proper" meetings which everyone can attend. We will be holding a Committee Meeting outdoors to plan our summer programme.

We have at last been able to play croquet as it is an outdoor game and easy to social distance. We brought our own chairs and enjoyed our usual tea and cake. Croquet has the reputation of being a game for the elderly but people of any age find it enjoyable, even those with disabilities. Many young people are taking it up and clubs have found their membership double. Croquet is one of the few sports where physical strength is less important than touch, accuracy and tactics.

The death of Prince Philip made me think of other, not so famous, people who have given so much to make this village what it is but are now 'yesterday's' people. Do you remember the fun we had because of them? They organised the fetes, bingo, auctions, horticultural and horse shows, pram races and BAPS, set up the Day Centre and talked the most unlikely of people into helping. So let us remember and give due respect ... to those 'yesterday's' people.

Pandora Huntingford

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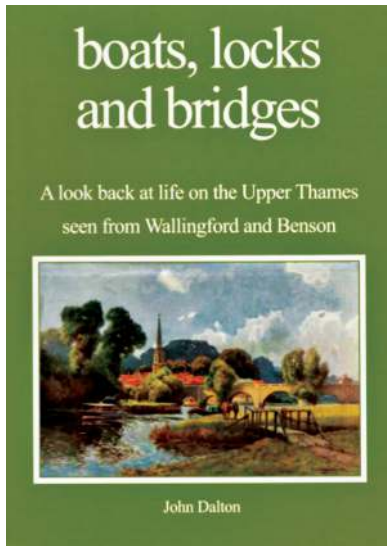


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THE BENSINGTON SOCIETY

I wonder for how many of us, new and old residents, the river played a significant part in choosing to live here. I'm sure there are other more significant reasons like size of affordable house, communication links, the proximity of shops and schools. However, surveys have shown that rivers are high up on the list of local attractions and not just for boat owners. Around Benson 'the river' is the Thames (or maybe in Dorchester, the Thame) and it has played its part in village life for centuries. Just how much was highlighted in the May Zoom talk to the Society by Dr. Simon Wenham. Simon took us along a fascinating journey of 'Pleasure Boating on the Thames' – how it developed and how it traded off and interacted with the river's commercial use, copiously illustrated with pictures of all sorts of river craft from punts to 3 decker pleasure steamers. The Victorian era seemed to be the apex of river travel and his photographs showing the extraordinary number of people and boats at Boulter's Lock at holiday times were almost unbelievable – they certainly weren't socially distanced! A really well put together and interesting talk.



While on the subject of the river, John Dalton (a member of the Society for decades), has just authored and published a wonderfully illustrated book called "boats, locks and bridges", which is a look back at life on the upper Thames as seen from Wallingford and Benson. It should be available from Derry's Den and Wallingford Bookshop by the time you read this.

On Friday the 28th May our Zoom talk was given by Mark Lewis - "Sentinels of the Sea, the Amazing History of Lighthouses" – enlightening us on 'Pharology', the study of lighthouses and other navigational aids. The talk will illuminate the evolving history of lighthouse construction, from the Pharos of Alexandria to the present day, along with the lives of the keepers, including some extraordinary heroic stories associated with them. As is our usual practice there will not be any talks in June, July or August.

According to the PM's "Road Map" it will probably be September before we can get together on a Friday for our usual social and supper evening and so let's hope the PC will have sorted out what the new hiring rules will be by then and that they're not too restrictive. If they have and they're not, Friday 24th September will be 'Party Night' - what form it will take will have to wait until nearer the time.

So, if you know anyone who is thinking of joining our happy band make sure they contact John Tchighianoff and take advantage of the reduced membership fee for the autumn session, so they can join us at the party.

Finally, thankfully, the incidence of Covid-19 in our area seems to be minimal but that does not mean it's non-existent – so stay safe!

David McGill

FROM THE RECTOR

Good news! We are now back in our new regular service pattern, both at St Helen's Church in Benson and St Mary's Church in Ewelme. At Benson we meet each Sunday at 9.30 am and at Ewelme we meet each Sunday at 11.00 am. Everyone is very welcome – for the time being we are still required to follow social distancing rules, but (like everyone else) we are praying these will be lifted soon!

Even more good news: **4 O'Clock Church** is back! On Sunday 6th June we will meet in the churchyard behind the Canons' Room. There will be gazebos so we will be protected whatever the weather! Do bring a picnic blanket to sit on, and something to drink. Because we will be gathering outside we will be allowed to sing (hurrah) – so once again we will be having our usual time of songs, bible story, and prayers at 4pm on the first Sunday in the month. We will also be having doughnuts! All are very welcome – do bring a friend, too.

We are currently looking for new members to join the 4 O'Clock Church planning team. If you would be interested in seeing the good news of Jesus shared with a new generation, please email rector@sthelensbenson.org.uk. We're also back taking bookings for baptisms/christenings at both St Helen's and St Mary's for later in the year – please do talk to the Rector if you are exploring this possibility.

Finally, please do make sure you have Sunday 18th July in your diary: after church that day we will be gathering in the churchyard – safely free of any restrictions, we hope! – for a celebratory picnic with celebrations and fund raising activities.

If you would like to be added to the Benefice email list, please email me at rector@sthelensbenson.org.uk or give me a call on 838535.

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UNDER 9S

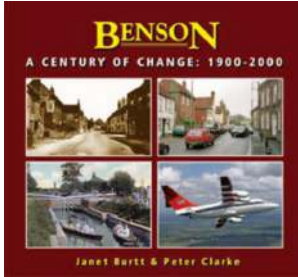
Benson's Under 9s new away kit has been kindly sponsored by No.25 - the Cafe in Benson High Street. The team would like to thank them for their generosity.



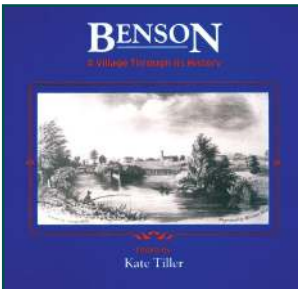
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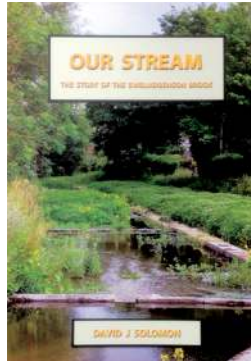
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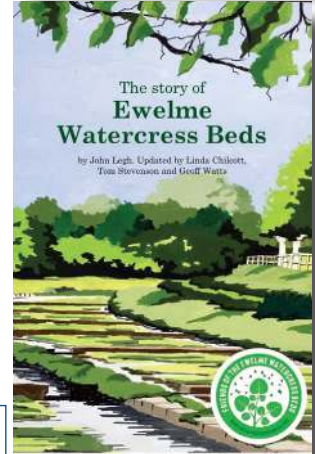
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rector@sthelensbenson.org.uk
01491 838 535

sthelensbenson.org.uk
events@sthelensbenson.org.uk
bensonandewelmechurches.co.uk

St Mary's, Ewelme

Fr Stephen Cousins
01491 839489

The Catholic Parish of St Birinus

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Fr. John Osman,
01865 340417

Church of England Parish of Berrick Salome

Fr Michael Lakey
Churchwarden: Dr. Marian Shaw 01865 890915

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01865 858 525

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wallingfordbaptist.co.uk

Wallingford Methodist Church

Rev Jocelyn Bennet
joss@bennet.org
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Wallingford Quakers

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About The Benson Bulletin

bb.editor@hotmail.co.uk Est. 1994

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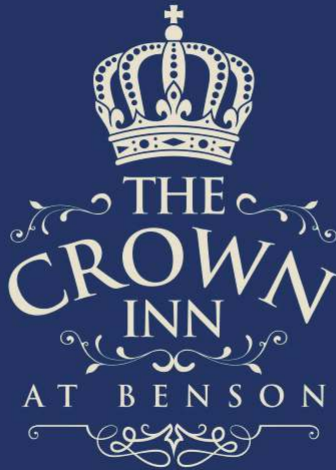
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