

FEB/MAR 2026

WELCOMING A NEW YEAR IN OUR VILLAGE

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2026



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Thank you to all of our customers in 2025 and for helping us achieve yet another record-breaking year. We are proud to be the longest serving estate agency in the village. According to Rightmove, Beville Estate Agency sold almost 50% of properties that were sold in the RG4 9 postcode in 2025.



I have worked in estate agency and this firm is fantastic. The entire team is quietly tenacious whilst always utterly charming. They have encyclopaedic knowledge of the local market, coupled with first rate project management.
Mr Giles, Sonning Common

The best estate agent in the area. There is genuine honesty and integrity to Richard, his team within this family run business. Hardworking with great communication from start to finish. Highly recommend.
Mr & Mrs Mullin, Sonning Common

The entire team were absolutely brilliant. We were so happy we even increased their fee which in itself speaks volumes of their service. We can't recommend them highly enough. If you are considering selling you really must speak with them...
Mr & Mrs O'Reilly, Kidmore End

Marcus and the whole team have been fantastic throughout the process of buying a bungalow for my mum. I am now dealing with the lettings team, who are equally helpful and efficient...
Mrs Cheyney, Caversham

Scan to see the rest of our reviews:



Beville provide a very professional service. Of particular value is the honest and expert opinions on how to market a property and the dynamics of the local market. Additionally, good advice on ensuring a smooth property transaction.
Mr Berkeley, Woodcote

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FROM THE EDITORIAL TEAM

A BIG THANK YOU

On behalf of the Magazine team, I wish to thank the many residents and businesses who were incredibly generous with donations for gift vouchers to families less fortunate than ourselves. The residents' donations to the 'Just Giving' site, and several cash donations, added to donations from local businesses and charities - The Harmony Choir, Inspired Villages, Poores' Land Charity, Chiltern Edge Community Association, Women's Institute, Bridges, Wood Lane Dentistry, Heath and Watkins, Beville and Peppard Building Supplies - to fund the retail vouchers for over 150 adults and children.

Feedback was summarised by one man and repeated by many... "Thank you so much for the lovely surprise and gift. I hope you all had a lovely Christmas".

Gift cards of £20 for adults and £10 per child were bought from the local Co-op and One4All. The personal choice for what is bought and where, gives the benefit to the recipient of what to use them for. These vouchers are a lovely Christmas treat, but items for the Food Bank are needed all year round. Packaged food can be left in the containers outside the church or in the box in the Co-op.

Administration of the purchasing was by the Parish Council office, and any excess funds will be held until the school holidays to help cover the costs of lunchtime food for the children normally provided for when at school.

We hope you enjoy the very varied and unusual features in this issue of the magazine, and we wish all our readers and your families a happy and healthy 2026. ●

Diana and Christine

FUTURE DEADLINE DATES FOR MAGAZINE COPY

1 March, 1 May, 1 July – we would love to receive your articles! 😊

MEET THE EDITORIAL TEAM



Diana Pearman



Christine Atkinson



Joan Grummant



Alison Smith

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New beginnings await ...

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SC SONNING COMMON MAGAZINE

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MECE NEWS



As the autumn term draws to a close, it has been a real pleasure to reflect on the “Ber” months and to celebrate the many achievements and experiences our MECE students have enjoyed. With such a rich and varied programme on offer, selecting highlights is never easy; however, I must mention the fabulous Belgium trip I was fortunate

to accompany during October half term, the highly successful Year 11 Mock Interview programme, and the superb community outreach work with Sonning Common, Kidmore End and Caversham Park Primary Schools involving many of our Year 10 and Year 11 students.

Equally impressive has been the enthusiasm shown during the Year 8 team-building day and the launch of the “Year of Opportunity”, alongside the heart-warming festive community initiatives at the Weller Centre and Abbeycrest Nursing Home. Each of these opportunities has seen our students step forward with confidence, demonstrate maturity, and represent MECE with pride within our wider community.

In early November the school was extremely proud to be invited to be part of Remembrance services in both Kidmore End and Sonning Common. Staff and students represented the school at the services on Remembrance Sunday and the full school marked the

2 minute silence on November 11 along with the rest of the country. Whilst in Belgium two students and I were very lucky to be invited to lay a wreath at the nightly service at the Menin Gate – a truly poignant and humbling experience.

I would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank all staff for their dedication and commitment—whether in the classroom, as part of our support teams, or through the organisation of our extensive enrichment programme. These opportunities simply would not be possible without their energy, care and professionalism.

As we look ahead to the Spring term, there is much to be excited about. A full calendar of learning, enrichment and leadership opportunities awaits, and I look forward to seeing our students continue to challenge themselves, seize new opportunities and build on the strong foundations of this term. ●

EMMA BLISS,
Headteacher



SCPS NEWS

SCPS Explained



Happy New Year to you all. We are, as always, happy to see everyone back and refreshed from their extended winter break. This time of year, at school as everywhere, tends to be one of recovery, consolidation and looking forward. Longer days are coming!

Most weeks in our school newsletter we have a feature called ‘SCPS Explained’. The intention of this is to debunk some of the mysteries of primary school life and perhaps to justify some of our actions and procedures. We hope that parents appreciate the information and that it helps them help their children.

Although there is nothing terribly radical in what we explain each week, there are some themes. We often explain time-sensitive things, like the need for hats and sun cream on sunny days (obviously), or current priorities such as reminding parents and children about the contents of packed lunches (healthy), the appropriate uniform for PE days (PE hoodie, shorts and trainers), the rules for phones in school (no thank you) or

sweets and cakes for birthdays (sorry – too many dietary and financial issues).

Here are three more substantive examples:

Manners

We continue to prioritise our focus on good manners. This week we have asked that they tidy up after themselves and offer to help others. We are starting to see a real improvement in the children’s manners and can only thank you if you are also working on them at home. We have asked that children practise the following:

- Hold doors open for others, especially adults, accompanied by the phrase ‘After you’;
- Look at people when you meet them or speak to them, and use their name;
- When meeting people, ask about others before you talk about yourself.

Manners are something that EVERY child can achieve and they make a real difference in life beyond school. We are keen to work together to make sure our pupils have these skills to succeed.

Headteacher’s Awards

In addition to our weekly awards (Star of the Week) and ongoing rewards (team points), at the end of every big term, children can be presented with a special Headteacher’s Award. There are just three awards per class: one chosen by the teacher, one by other adults and one by the children. These are highly prized and well-deserved.

Those getting the award received a laminated certificate and a badge.

The Nest

The Nest is staffed by our pastoral team and used as a really nice place for children needing a re-set. Some children need this during lesson time, but mostly it is used at playtimes and lunchtimes, to get away from the hubbub of a busy classroom or playground. To keep it calm, there are a limited number of children allowed in at any one time. The pastoral team often take this opportunity to check in informally with children who might be struggling, although many of the Nest visitors do not need this at all and simply enjoy doing puzzles, playing board games, colouring, or doing a craft activity.

Many thanks for your continuing support to our school. For those of you who came to the seasonal shows or our Carol Concert, you will have seen our school at its best. Full of light, hope and enthusiasm. I must mention the Harmony Choir who really stole the show – thank you gentlemen for such an inspiring performance. ●

Best wishes,
RACHEL SALMONS
Headteacher



BISHOPSWOOD



As we welcome the New Year, I would like to wish everyone in our local community a happy, healthy, and successful year ahead. Our school continues to be a place of learning, growth, and connection, and we are proud of the strong relationships we share with the community around us.

At the heart of our curriculum is a clear and consistent focus: preparing our children to understand the world around them and to engage confidently, safely, and meaningfully within their community. This golden thread runs through all aspects of school life, from our youngest learners through to our oldest pupils as they prepare for adulthood.

This term, pupils have been learning about "People who make a difference", exploring the contributions of individuals both locally and globally. They have learned about

community roles such as firefighters, police officers, doctors, and nurses, as well as artists and historical figures who have shaped the world we live in. Pupils studied famous artworks, from the Mona Lisa to the works of Van Gogh, and learned about notable individuals including Rosa Parks and Queen Elizabeth.

Our learning has also focused on Power and Progress, helping pupils to understand how inventions and technology have changed over time. They explored old and new toys and games, examined historical objects such as typewriters and early mobile phones, and considered how innovation continues to shape everyday life. Alongside this, pupils have been learning about forces, online safety, and enjoyed celebrating Christmas while learning about the story of the birth of Jesus.

As part of our commitment to preparing pupils for adulthood, our older pupils have also taken part in rich and meaningful learning beyond the classroom. In English, they studied My Neighbour Totoro as a text, exploring its themes and storytelling before visiting London to see the West End stage production. During the visit, pupils shared thoughtful discussions about whether they preferred the written text, the film, or the theatre version. The trip also provided valuable real-world learning opportunities as pupils walked through Covent Garden, admired the Christmas decorations, and practised independence, communication, and community

engagement in a busy city environment.

Developing independence and life skills remains central to our work. Pupils are supported to learn how to cross roads safely, queue in shops, interact confidently with others, and take an active role within their local community. As part of this, pupils also learn about kindness, responsibility, and giving back. This term, we were proud to collect harvest donations for our local food bank, which pupils helped to deliver to Juliet at Sonning Common Library, reinforcing the importance of supporting others within our community.

Looking ahead, some of our older pupils will be designing and hosting events for members of the community, including regular tea parties, so please do keep an eye out for invitations. We also have a number of pupils who are ready and eager to take part in work experience as they take important steps towards adulthood.

If you are a local business and feel you could support our pupils through work experience or community opportunities, we would be delighted to hear from you. Strong community partnerships play a vital role in helping our pupils thrive.

Thank you for your continued support, and we look forward to another year of learning, collaboration, and community connection. ●

Priya Bhagrath
Headteacher



CYCLEWAY

Do you sometimes wish your MP would 'get on his bike'?
We asked our MP Freddie van Mierlo to get on his, and he did!



Why? Most people agree that to get cyclists off the B481 would be beneficial for all. Less inconvenience for drivers, safer for bike riders, reassuring for parents.

Many would agree the roads are not the best place for bikes.

In The Netherlands, motor vehicles, bikes and pedestrians often enjoy total separation from each other!

The need for a non-athletic safe route to Emmer Green, for bike riders, walkers and mobility scooter users is unquestionable, proven by a community survey. Maybe one should even accommodate horse riding.

Increasing evidence shows our NHS is stressed, exacerbated by consequences of escalating obesity. Human-induced climate crisis is looming. (How many sceptics have now turned the page?)

Who is not yet convinced that encouraging active travel (walking,

riding, etc) is the more intelligent way forward?

Our MP Freddie van Mierlo recently rode the B481 from Sonning Common to Emmer Green and back. He was accompanied by other influential people and a group of local riders, about 15 in all.

If you were there, thank you for supporting the Sonning Common Cycleway project.

To know more, see www.sonningcommoncycleway.uk then click the green banner near the top. Enjoy the video. ●

Paul W



SANTA ON A TRACTOR



Thank you all for celebrating Christmas with us on our annual ride around the village. This is the TENTH year!

Yes, ten years since I jokingly agreed on Facebook to arrange Santa because so many people were saying it was a shame that the Rotary Club no longer did Santa in Sonning Common. My children were still so young I had to hide my identity from them and get changed in garages and roadside, and now they too are helping by collecting money and giving out the chocolates!

It's such a lovely event and each year it gets harder to organise with people's children growing up, busy lives and the crazy licensing demands (both music licence and collection licence). The cost of a music licence is expensive so we have to battle to get discounts, and this can take a lot of phone calls and emails.

We will be back next year, and plans are already being discussed. If you'd like to volunteer then please let me know as soon as possible as we need help through the year, not just on the night, to make this more spectacular and come up with something the village can be proud of.

As Ant and Dec would say, in no particular order I wish to thank the following:

- Mathew White, Matthew Hopson and Craig Henderson for their help bringing this together and hanging signs, arranging last minute rescue missions and steering us round safely round the village.
- Guy Champion who came to the rescue, supplied us with the

tractor& trailer, kindly drove us around and also gave us two of the most excellent little elves (Jessica and Oliver) for the evening.

- Jim Holland from Jims Roofing and Building for loaning us a generator to power lights and music
- Alan Wilson from Alan Wilsons Property Services for help decorating the trailer and being there on the evening
- Richard and Sarah McKenzie-Black for helping decorate, supplying extra chocolates and being there to help
- Alison Baillie and Steve Goodchild for being dancing and singing elves



- CESA for donating towards some of the consumable items and decorations
- Jamie from the Bell Street Barber for donating the signs for the Santa on a Tractor
- Richard Burroughs for providing and delivering our seat for the evening in the form of hay bales
- PRS PPL for the music licence
- SODC for the street collection licence
- My own family for putting up with me planning this for the last four months, being there when we

had any hiccups, generally coping with all the stuff in our house for the last few weeks (now a house covered in hay), helping on the evening to decorate the trailer/ counting the money into bags (which takes a long time to do)

- And finally, all the wonderful and amazing volunteers who helped on the night, most who help every year and a few new people too. I must say I most enjoyed setting off the snow machine and watching the children's faces, but even better seeing Merlin covered in snow as if he'd forgotten each time it turned on, when the song says snow Merlin!

We raised a whopping £831.50 for the Ways and Means Trust in Peppard and Oxfordshire Foster Carers Association, both charities that impact our village and have been a huge support to many families. Both charities were voted by the village and very deserving. I think it was one of our most successful fundraisers.

THANK YOU EVERYONE for your smiles, dancing and happy cheer on our way round, your donations will really help those charities.

See you next year! •

Helen Coyne

CEHS WINTER SPRING 2026

Chiltern Edge Horticultural Society has a great programme for 2026. Starting with a talk on Tuesday 13th January at 2:30pm "A Short History of the English Garden" by Kevin Toohar. Tuesday 10th February at 2:30 pm, "Trees for a small garden with a taste of pruning and shaping" by Amelia Williams. On 10th March an evening talk at 7:30pm "Serre de la Madone & Hidcote" by Anna Steven, all talks are at Peppard War Memorial Hall RG9 5JA. Please check times as the first two are afternoon, the third is an evening talk.

Please come along and support your local gardening club.

Our first show of the year is our Spring Show on Saturday 28th March 2026 2-4pm at the Sonning Common Village Hall, everyone is welcome, free entry, great raffle, plant stall and refreshments. Call in to see flowers, vegetables, arts & crafts, photography and domestic classes.

We have seven talks a year and also our autumn show, and two coach trips (at additional cost) please see our website www.cehs.co.uk or : Facebook and on Nextdoor for more information.

We always welcome new members as it's only £10 a year, yes only £10 a year. All talks are free to members,

£5 on the door for non-members. You can join at the talks or shows.

Looking forward to a great year, looking forward to seeing you. •

Many thanks,
Colin Mather





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Oxfordshire ageUK

The Hive

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We'll also be supported by your local Social Prescribers and support staff from Sonning Common Health Centre, our Digital Support volunteer, Soha Housing and other different local services in your community.

When: Thursday 5th February and Thursday 5th March 2026
10am-12pm

Where: Sonning Common Village Hall, Wood Lane, Sonning Common, RG4 9SL

Cost: FREE - with support from Farrans Construction

Rachel 07827 235420 | Abbie 07827 235431
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*Amnesty International is the world's largest grassroots human rights organisation, working to protect people wherever justice, freedom, truth and dignity are denied.
*Wyfold RDA is an independent charity that provides horse riding facilities for people with physical or mental disabilities, located within the south Oxfordshire and Reading areas.



Village Quiz

The annual Village Quiz will be held on Friday
13th March. Find out some of the things you
didn't know you knew! It's not so much about
knowing the answers, more about spending
time with friends. Was it really that long ago
that Bryan Adams was number one for **HOW**
MANY WEEKS!!? Or, I'm sure I passed a sign
the other day saying which towns Henley is
twinned with... Gather a few friends together
and take the plunge - enter a team. Treat
yourself to an evening of fun and revelations!
For further details and to book a table email
rmdunstan@hotmail.com

Sonning Common Health Walks: February - March 2026

The Health Walks continue into the Spring. It's a lovely time of
year to enjoy a walk in our beautiful local countryside, and if you
need company then come and join us!

The Health Walkers will be celebrating 30 years of Health Walking
in April! (look out for more details nearer the time). We walk for
fitness - and it's friendly, fun and free! The walks are for everyone,
whatever their age and ability, and are graded accordingly. Not all
of them are fast walks: contact us (see website address below)
for advice about which one is best for you. If you want to speak to
someone about any aspect of the Health Walks, phone
Chris Brook on 0118 972 2609

There are no walk timetables in paper form at the moment, so you
will have to check the website for days/starting places/distances:
www.sonningcommonhealthwalks.co.uk

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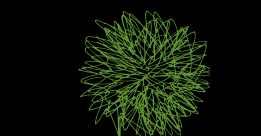
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PARISH NEWS

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VILLAGE DAY 2026



Village Day 2026 takes place on Sunday 28 June in Memorial Park - and we need your help to make it happen.

The event relies entirely on volunteers. Without enough people on the day, Village Day simply cannot run as planned.

Our priority need is car parking volunteers. This is a vital role, helping to keep parking safe and organised and collecting donations that support the event.

- Car parking operates from 10am to 6pm
- We need at least three volunteers at all times
- You can volunteer for just one hour – longer if you wish, but one hour really does help

If enough people step forward for short time slots, the workload is shared and manageable for everyone.

We also need a small number of volunteers to:

- Help with setting up from 9am
- Help with clearing away from 6pm

If you have other skills or experience you are happy to offer on the day, or are simply willing to be an extra pair of hands, we would be delighted to hear from you.

Please consider giving just one hour of your time. It will make a genuine difference and help ensure this much-loved village event can go ahead.

To volunteer, please contact the council office – clerk@sonningcommon-pc.gov.uk or 0118 972 3616 letting us know:

- Your name
- Your availability (time and duration)



Thank you to everyone who can help support Village Day 2026 and our wider village community.

Andy Donachie
Parish Clerk

Sonning Common Parish Council
Mobile: 07508 203831
Tel: 0118 972 3616

Email: clerk@sonningcommon-pc.gov.uk
Parish Office, Village Hall, Wood Lane, Sonning Common RG4 9SL
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THE REALITY OF REFUGE AND RESETTLEMENT IN OUR MIDST

Did you know that Britain granted sanctuary after the Second World War to over 250,000 Poles? Most were survivors of Soviet gulags which were part of Russia's drive for expansionism.

Stalin's push to destroy Eastern Poland and absorb it into the Soviet Union, involved land, business and property confiscation and the deportation of over 1.5 million Polish people.

At the conferences of Tehran (1943) and Yalta (1945) the Allied leaders Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin redrew the map of Europe; thus south east Poland became part of Soviet-controlled Ukraine. Displaced Poles like my parents, lucky enough to survive the slave-labour camps, had no homes to return to.

Their Poland had now become Ukraine. What had been their new marital home in a forest, was now inaccessible behind the iron curtain. As refugees they gained a shared Nissen hut in a forest in another land ... England.

Hundreds of such people lived in resettlement camps local to us - Checkendon, Nettlebed, Kingwood Common. These Displacement Camps became a microcosm of Polish society.

Czeslaw Adamczyk wrote:

"As with all the camps/hostels accommodation was very basic: corrugated Nissen huts and strategically placed ablution blocks- but after nearly 8 years in exile and crossing 3 continents, Polish people soon adapted to their new conditions. Checkendon became one of many bustling Polish enclaves with its own church and priest, school and entertainments, a hall where culture and traditions were strictly observed. Many of the residents were actively involved in the camp's social life: there was a lively amateur dramatics group putting on plays, a choir that sang both Polish and English songs and a traditional Polish dance group. A 6 person dance band played regularly at dances held in the camp's entertainment hall and weekly film shows were held there too. There was a well stocked library with both Polish and English books, a youth club, and a table tennis and chess group. Life in Checkendon was similar to all the other Camps/Hostels throughout the UK. The camp finally closed in the early 60s."



My parents, brother Jurek and me outside our hut at Checkendon Polish Camp c. 1953.



At a dance: My beloved Godfather and wife; my beloved parents Maria and Wojciech.

Banners, Statue and national costume in a Feast Day Procession Honouring Mary.



In July 1955, at the age of almost five I found myself fortunate to move to a real, new bricks-and-mortar house in Sonning Common with my parents and older brother. It was wondrously exciting, but scary to an infant with no English, whose only outside experience at the camp had been visits to the doctor beyond. I had to learn the language, go to school, negotiate new paths. Life was puzzling and the world had expanded. So did our family.

Did you know that many people like us and their descendants, still live in our communities and outlying areas? A number were homed hereabouts, attended local schools, raised families.

However, they often still feel a strong and poignant connection with their lives at the camps ...

Graham Drucker, conservationist and genealogist, has created a private Facebook page: Friends of Checkendon camp, Nettlebed camp and Kingwood Common camp, specifically for the hundreds of Polish refugees who once populated displacement camps in Checkendon and surrounds.

Ultimately, the aim is to unite past residents, to commemorate their shared history and to establish a permanent memorial. This year marks the 80th anniversary of Polish soldiers' arrival at the Nissen hut camps, offering them and later their families sanctuary as victims of war and of forced labour in Siberian gulags.

Several elements combine to create a strong, enduring connection and tribute to Poles who'd been savagely uprooted from their homeland. Reflections, research and the involvement of one-time inhabitants and local community help to establish honour and remembrance where it is due.

Articles in the Henley Standard and a local BBC interview have featured these resettlements in order to foster links. Many of us were very young when we moved on. (I was almost five and have lived in my only bricks and mortar home for over seventy years.)

Our memories are limited. However, new connections are being forged with faces from the past; faded memories are being re-ignited; mutual reminiscences and emotions are surfacing. ●

Might you be able to help with this project? Perhaps you can provide names of people associated with the camps or direct them to this venture. Thank you, Irenka Motyka.



In Wojciech's arms, my sister Ludmila, born in Sonning Common.

MEET THE ... 'TOPPING' LADIES OF SONNING COMMON'S WI

By JOAN GRUMMANT



The post box toppers of Sonning Common always raise a smile and warm cheerful feeling when they appear, as the local community eagerly anticipates them. They are the work of Sonning Common's WI craft group that meets once a month and are a celebration of its expertise, creative ideas, and collaborative work. One of the first toppers that appeared was celebrating the platinum jubilee of Queen Elizabeth the second, when Sue Hedges managed the Craft Group. Over the last year the craft group has been managed by Marilyn Mowatt, and it usually plans the themes a year in advance, according to events that are topical.

The toppers are to be found in three places in Sonning Common - on the post boxes of Wood Lane, Westleigh Drive and at Widmore Pond. Some significant national events such as the Coronation, D Day Remembrance Day and Christmas Day are always kept, but local events such as notable anniversaries are covered too. This year the Sonning Common WI will be celebrating a 70-year anniversary in February, so this is going to be a great focus of attention. Not everyone in the group contributes to the making of the toppers but Marilyn Mowatt is always responsible for the bases. The patterns and ideas for the tops come from a wide variety of

sources including old patterns and the internet. The group has a huge range of skills and interests, so the sharing of ideas and expertise is a strong contributor to its success. The group uses craft materials that are donated by members or interested parties. A lot of the items are recycled and adapted, and some such as their collection of hand knitted poppies are kept to be reused.

This is a very friendly and lively group of between 20 and 25 members. Someone usually speaks at their meetings/workshops, and they are always keen to try new crafts. They are currently learning about the art of felting, and all are



encouraged to learn and try new skills. The group is self-sufficient and receives no funding from the WI, but it also plays a huge part supporting the work of many local charities.

Marilyn used to make scrubs for the NHS during Covid, and this evolved into the group knitting scarves and hats for troops in Ukraine, and now for the stalls at Frimley Hospital. The stalls are situated outside the paediatric ward and raise money for special chairs that morph into beds enabling parents to sleep and stay overnight with their children.

Some members of the group also knit blankets or baby items for Cowshed - a charity that supports people in crisis who are referred to it as needing support. The Royal Berks premature baby unit also benefits from the knitted beanie hats for the very small babies.

Spending time with this group of ladies was a great pleasure. The open and welcoming atmosphere of the meeting encourages all members to put forward ideas and try out new crafts. The fact that they create such beautiful, often moving, or joyful toppers is not a coincidence

– it is the result of careful planning, hard work, and great collaboration. Long may it continue and our thanks must go to all of them. They certainly brighten up our days! •



COULD YOU BE A HOME VISITOR?

When we, the Co-Ordinators of the FISH Home Visiting service, have a new client we try very hard to match them with a volunteer with similar interests and sometimes our success in pairing people goes beyond our wildest dreams.

Pauline has been a Home Visitor for a number of years and has been befriending Paz (pronounced Path) for two years now.

Paz hasn't had an easy life. She was born in Madrid during the Spanish Civil War but had to leave at a very young age to live in safety with her grandparents. Eventually she met and married an English man with whom she had three children, but they parted ways some years later. She is a rather shy woman, very private and intensely independent. Whilst these characteristics stood her in good stead as a younger woman, at 90 years old she found herself lonely and friendless.

At the beginning Pauline just visited her at home but now Paz goes to tea at Pauline's house, she has met Pauline's family, they celebrate each other's birthdays, Pauline has taken Paz shopping for clothes and they have the occasional pub lunch. Recently they went to lunch and Paz was over the moon to find a Spanish waiter that she could chat to. Paz says she feels as if she has known Pauline all her life and describes her as sweet, sincere and lovely in every respect – sentiments that are most certainly reciprocated. And for a few weeks the tables have been turned: Pauline had a fall which resulted in a fractured arm and Paz has been phoning every few days to ask after her.



Bert joined us as a new volunteer a year ago. Originally from Singapore, he served in the Royal Air Force. Now retired, he loves his golf and has a particular interest in military history.

Ian, a Scot, was a senior executive in a large IT company and has travelled extensively as well as living and working overseas. When he developed heart failure, he was unable to continue doing all the things that he loved – mountain walking, gardening and maintaining an allotment. He has a deep love of history and even lectured on cruise ships. He says that he had given up on things.

Bert and Ian clicked straight away. They have so much in common and discovered so many shared interests. Bert thoroughly enjoys the company of both Ian and his wife, Catherine, and Ian says he finds Bert such an interesting character and finds him

so easy to talk to. He jokes 'Being Scottish is equivalent to coming from Singapore'. Bert was a member of the British Modern Military History Society based in Woodcote. Now, Ian joins Bert in attending talks there. To quote Catherine 'When the two of them get together, they never stop talking'.

Could you be like Pauline or Bert and bring so much joy to someone who is lonely and isolated? You are not expected to take them out and about unless you want to – all we ask is that you go along for a regular chat and provide some much-needed social contact.

If you are interested, please contact FISH on 0118 972 3986 or go to www.fishvolunteercentre.org.uk and select Contact Us. ●

RITA HADGKISS

TOM FORT FAMILIES

A few days before Christmas one of my elder brothers rang up to check if I was on schedule to carry out my allotted task for the festive feast.

'Am I likely to have forgotten that I am doing roast potatoes for thirty-five people?' I inquired as politely as I could. Any more than he might have forgotten that he was cooking a giant turkey for thirty-five people, or that Helen (my wife) was responsible for providing puddings for thirty-five people.

In fairness to this brother, I should explain that he was in overall charge of the occasion. Its success or failure depended in good measure on how well he performed. But – as I pointed out to him – were he Pep Guardiola, would he be going up to his goalkeeper just before kick-off and

suggesting that he dive left to try and save a penalty instead of right? You have to have faith.

This was a family Christmas dinner. Yes, you have read that correctly (all right, five of the guests were not family). How did this happen? It was a question all of us asked ourselves more than once in the days before.

The thing is, we are all getting on. My eldest (of three) brother is 81, and the youngest of us – my sister – is in her late 60s, and the feeling was that if we didn't do it this year, we wouldn't ever do it because we'd be too ancient. As she and her family live in the United States, their participation was key.

So they came. As did all my five children, plus three partners, plus all

my four grandchildren. We gathered in the village hall near where my turkey-cooking brother lives in Gloucestershire. The noise was prodigious. The consumption of food was epic. The number of wine bottles to be disposed of afterwards was appalling.

Was it worth it? Well, put it like this. I wouldn't do it again in a hurry. ●



ALISON SMITH GOING LOOPY

We generally think of going round in circles as being a bad thing, I guess because it implies we're getting nowhere. However, it occurred to me as I trudged through the rain on my way back from our friendly village supermarket (other supermarkets are available but do involve some travel), that being able to take a different route home is oddly satisfying. I get more of a sense of achievement if I've walked a loop rather than just gone up and down the same stretch of road. The German for commuter is "der Pendler", as in pendulum. And they say they have no sense of humour! The image that word conjures up in my mind makes me chuckle every time. Perhaps it's because I grew up in the 1970s that I can't help imagining a cartoon image of a

smartly dressed man in a bowler hat endlessly swinging to and fro!

Even when I go for a more leisurely stroll around our village it's possible to walk a loop not a line. Whether I go up to the Millennium Field for a more natural environment, or to Memorial Park where you can guarantee the path will be firm under foot, I can head out one way, and back another. Getting out for some fresh air, and vitamin D from the sun is invigorating and something I try to make myself do no matter what the weather. I say "try" because, to be honest, you're less likely to spot me out and about in February than May, but I will definitely have thought about it! We're spoilt for choice here, not just with our two parks (I'm not counting playgrounds as, as much as I'd like to, going on swings does

make me quite nauseous these days – what's that all about?), but also with the open countryside around us.

This is just one of the things about our village that I love. Does that make me middle-aged? Quite possibly. Does it make me loopy? I'll leave that for you to decide. ●

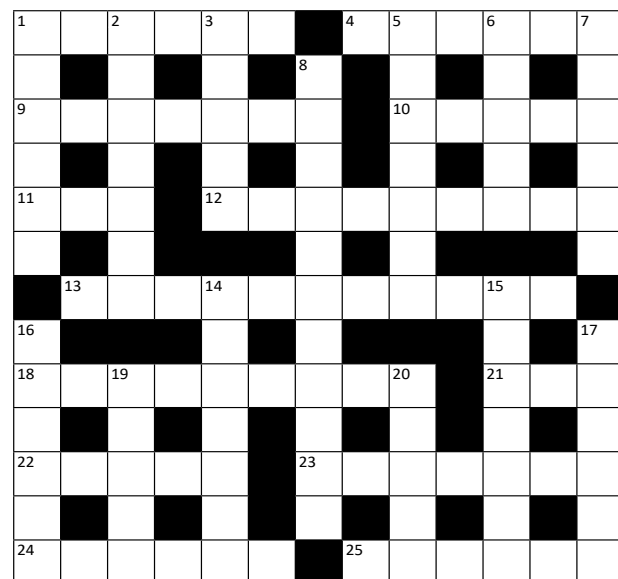
ALISON SMITH
(welcome to the editorial group)



PUZZLE PAGE

By DAVID DUNSTAN

Cryptic crossword



ACROSS

1. Made bed in Oxfordshire town (6)
4. Stabbing in Oxfordshire village (6)
9. Presume, mistakenly, it is paramount (7)
10. Bird is under par (5)
11. A turn previously (3)
12. Hate tunic badly — it is true-to-life (9)
13. Wolf, darling, disturbed in Oxfordshire town (11)
18. Comes down around gospel writer with prominent features (9)
21. Signal to wait in line, we hear (3)
22. Fabric found in frilly cravats (5)
23. Fleet commander is awfully mad liar (7)
24. Ruin inferior Bucks town (6)
25. Stokes and lad seen in Oxfordshire village (6)

DOWN

1. Days I'm struggling with disappointment (6)
2. Ambassador falls short for certificate (7)
3. Carmen, perhaps, has work before time (5)
5. An individual's pixie in person (7)
6. Metal block found in aging ottoman (5)
7. Country with oil, by the sound of it (6)
8. Senior citizen is ancient, near worn out! (11)
14. Painful back disrupted album before leave (7)
15. Documents discs (7)
16. Zigzag course is strangely small, containing nothing (6)
17. Magician's bird of prey (6)
19. It's more pleasant near, consuming frozen dessert (5)
20. Memos scattered in battle (5)

Sudoku

Grading: medium

4		6	3		5			
			6	1				3
			4		9	5		
1						8		
7	4						9	5
		3						6
		4	1		7			
3				2	6			
			5		3	6		7

Cryptogram

The following quotation has been encoded using a simple letter substitution. What does it say?

HYTRIS YU RNI RYWI MES FEWMESR, MES
CEEG MEEG OTG HOSWRN, MES RNI REAFN
EM O MSYITGDB NOTG OTG MES O RODL
KIUYGI RNI MYSI: YR YU RNI RYWI MES
NEWI. — IGYRN UYRHIDD

Quiz: How many?

1. How many miles across the Strait of Dover at its narrowest point?
2. How many episodes were made of Fawlty Towers?
3. How many people in a hockey team (on the field at one time)?
4. How many goals altogether in the World Cup Final 1966?
5. How many miles in a marathon (forgetting the extra 385 yards)?
6. How many dots altogether on a die (or dice)?
7. How many books in the Bible (excluding the Apocrypha)?
8. How many carats in pure gold?
9. How many symphonies written by Beethoven?
10. How many bytes in a kilobyte (KB)?

See answers on page 34

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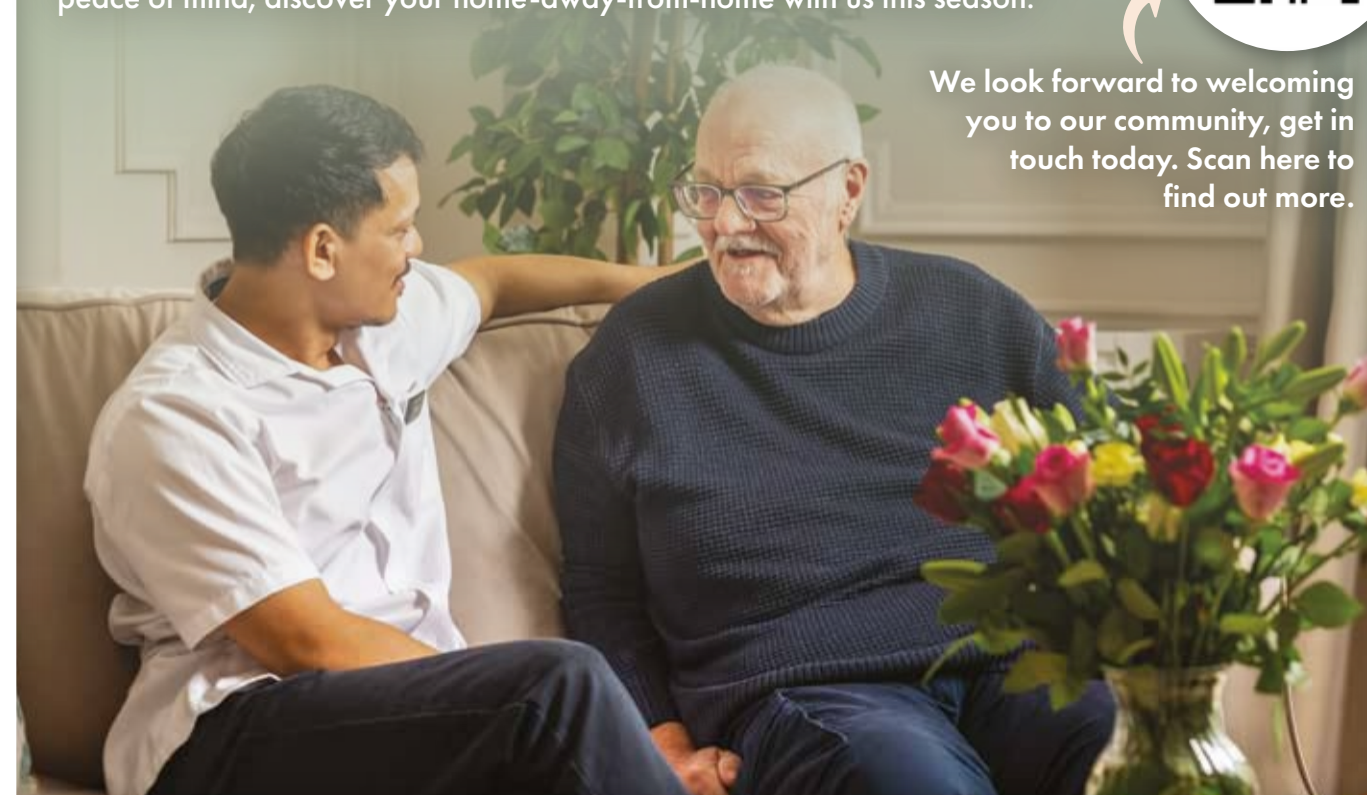
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'Think globally, act locally' – turn it around,' said the late Dr.Jane Goodall.

It's easy to become overwhelmed and stuck in the belief that as individuals and small communities we can't make a difference - the reality is quite the opposite. Making a difference where you are, with what you have is easy when you know how. Easy hacks for your garden...

Cut a CD size hole in your garden fence or make a small tunnel underneath it to allow hedgehogs to roam freely away from traffic – see the Eco SoCo website for info on the SC Hedgehog Highway!

Add a few pebbles to a couple of shallow dishes of water for birds and insects.

Make a messy pile of logs, twigs and leaves creating a wonderful habitat for insects and hedgehogs.

Ease up on the mowing – allow a no mow 1-metre-wide strip running alongside your hedges – this 'wildlife transition strip' is an ecologist favourite for supporting wildlife in your garden.

Plant with pollinators in mind and evening visitors such as moths (nighttime pollinators), bats and owls.

Draw curtains at night and minimise outdoor lighting to protect the dark sky environment our nocturnal wildlife relies on.

Useful Links:

www.bbowt.org.uk/wildlife-gardening-videos

www.wildlifetrusts.org/actions/how-attract-moths-and-bats-your-garden

Exciting Eco Action on Bigger 'Patches'...

We're really excited to be working with several custodians of larger areas of land in SC, focussing on sustainable, low-cost changes to enhance biodiversity. Watch this space - details to follow later in the year!

Will this be the year that you make your mark for nature in SC? Want to feel that you are truly making a difference?... by joining Eco SoCo, there



are many ways you can get involved, big and small, regularly and as a one off. We'd love to hear from you!

- Email us at ecosoco24@gmail.com
- Join our Facebook group / DM us
- Call in for a chat at the Repair Café
- 'Volunteering is an act of heroism on a grand scale. And it matters profoundly. It does more than help people beat the odds. It changes the odds.' Bill Clinton

And lastly, please remember our Free Monthly Repair Café – let's fix your broken stuff! We start again on Saturday February 7th 10-12.30 @ Springwater Church, Blounts Court Road. We fix electricals, bikes, toys, clocks and textiles. Come early to avoid disappointment as the Repair Café can get extremely busy – **we've saved almost 800 items from landfill so far!** Please remember to bring only what one person can comfortably carry! Coffee, tea and delicious homemade cakes are always on offer too, at the onsite Springwater Café. ●

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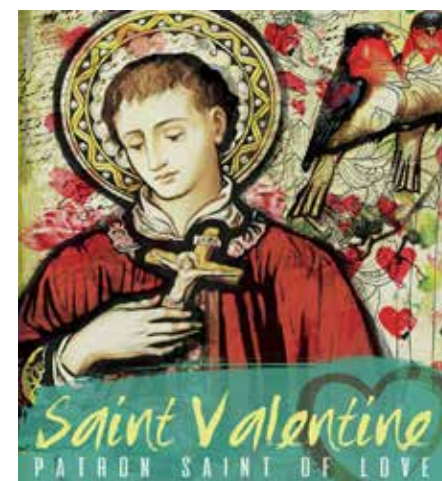
£5 per ticket More details on the EcoSoco facebook page



VALENTINE'S DAY HISTORY

HOW LEGENDS AND TRADITIONS SHAPED THE CELEBRATION OF LOVE

By CHRISTINE ATKINSON



Valentine's Day, which pops up every year on 14th February, has pretty much become the go-to day for showing someone you care. These days it's all about swapping cards, flowers, and presents—though, let's be honest, some people reckon it's just a good excuse for shops to cash in. But if you dig a bit deeper, you'll find the day is rooted in all sorts of old stories, history, and a fair bit of change over the years.

The Legend Behind the Name

The name 'Valentine' comes from Saint Valentine, but who he actually was is a bit of a mystery. One story reckons Valentine was a Roman priest back when Emperor Claudius II was in charge. Claudius thought single lads made better soldiers, so he banned them from getting married. Valentine wasn't having any of it, though, and carried on marrying couples in secret. When he was found out he was executed around 270 AD, which is probably why he's linked to love and standing up for what you believe in.

There's another story too—apparently, while locked up, Valentine fell for the jailer's daughter and sent her a sweet note signed, 'from your Valentine'. That little sign-off has stuck around and is still used today.

Medieval Romance

By the time the Middle Ages rolled around, Valentine's Day had turned into a proper celebration of romance. Geoffrey Chaucer, a famous English poet from the 14th century, played a big part in linking Valentine's Day to romantic love. In his poem "Parlement of Foules" (which means "Parliament of Birds"), he describes how birds come together on 14th February to choose their partners. This idea helped to popularise the notion that Valentine's Day was a special time for romance and matchmaking. Chaucer's reference is one of the earliest known connections between the day and the idea of couples pairing up, which influenced later traditions of celebrating love on Valentine's Day.

Thanks to him, the idea of Valentine's Day as a day for lovebirds spread through the fancy circles of Europe, and soon enough, everyone else joined in too.

Modern Traditions

Over the years, swapping love notes and little gifts became more and more popular. In England during the 1700s, people started sending handmade cards and tokens, and once the printing press was invented, things really took off. By the time Queen Victoria was on the throne, you could buy all sorts of Valentine's cards, and the tradition

hopped over to America as well. These days, it's all about cards, chocolates, flowers, and maybe a nice meal out—blending old symbols of love with a bit of modern flair. ●



REDISCOVERING YOUR LOCAL LIBRARY

As the calendar turns to 2026, many of us feel the familiar pull of the "fresh start." We set ambitious goals to master new skills, cultivate hobbies, or reclaim a little more time for ourselves. However, the New Year isn't just about reinvention - it's about rediscovery. While the world outside rushes to transform, your library remains a steady, welcoming anchor where curiosity is the only requirement for entry.

This year, the Friends of Sonning Common Library are staying true to what we do best: supporting our fabulous local library to be a vibrant hub for connection, learning, and leisure. Our 2026 calendar is already starting to fill with opportunities to engage. For our younger community members, we will be hosting a

half-term animal encounter session with a range of exotic animals from Brambles. This will be followed by the return of the Teddy Bear Sleepover - this time with an Easter twist - at the start of April. For those looking to get creative, we are holding our first adult crafts session in March. Do subscribe to updates from our website or follow us on Facebook or Instagram to be the first to know about these and future events.

Further ahead, we are on the look out for authors who might be willing to come and talk about their books at an author evening. If you have any recommendations please let us know!

We're also continuing our regular Rhymetime and Storytime sessions,

offering a dose of fun for the little ones and a sociable escape for parents and carers. For those seeking good company and a warm brew, our Friday Social Mornings offer the ideal opportunity to connect with a lovely welcoming group.

Whether you are looking to master a new skill, find a peaceful corner to get lost in your favourite books, begin planning your next big adventure, or simply meet some new faces - we invite you to step inside and make the library a part of your journey this year. The library is open to everyone, and is one of the few services available that doesn't require a subscription fee. ●

VERA GALYASZ
Friends of Sonning Common Library



NEWS FROM THE LIBRARY

Greetings from Sonning Common Library! February is the month of romance so love your library and pay us a visit. It's free to join and borrow books. If you haven't been for a few years, your library card will probably be out of date but, don't worry, we can give you a shiny new one and tell you all about the events and activities we have going on. It's a busy but friendly place for you to while away an hour or two. You can play a board game or take home a jigsaw puzzle or even take on one of our regular Scrabble or chess players! Youngsters also have games, toys and colouring to entertain them so

venture out and you'll get a warm welcome. Our Special Valentine's Day story time (with crafts and a cake sale) will take place on the day itself, Saturday, 14th February.

In March we will be embracing Japanese culture with our fiction and non-fiction book displays and we will also be celebrating British Science Week so there is something for everybody. Our Mother's Day Special Storytime will be on Saturday, 14th March so bring along your children (or grandchildren!) and while we entertain them with stories and crafts, you can relax with a cup of tea and cake. Mums might

even have a little gift to take home because of their offsprings' efforts.

So, another lively year is shaping up in your local library. Remember to keep an eye on the Friends of Sonning Common Library website as we have lots of events coming up including a half term animal encounter session for youngsters, adult crafts, a teddy bear sleepover and more author visits. www.friendsofsonningcommonlibrary.org.uk

We look forward to welcoming you soon. ●

JULIET LEGG
Librarian



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CHURCH NEWS



CHRIST THE KING AND ST JOHN THE BAPTIST

The Christmas treats may long since have been polished off, but hopefully the joy of the Christmas season still remains! The parish church of St John the Baptist, Kidmore End, together with its daughter church, Christ the King, Sonning Common, welcomed many to various services over the festive period. The annual service of lessons and carols was hosted by Christ the King church – a change from the norm. The service was a joyful occasion and many stayed to enjoy mulled wine and mince pies. Christingle on Christmas Eve was a fun family event, with many children (and adults!) joining in enthusiastically with the activity, as well as the singing of well-known carols by the light of many beautiful Christingles.

The celebrations extended into the New Year, with a festive fundraising concert at St John's – a final opportunity to enjoy listening to the choir and instrumentalists and to join in with some carols, before St John's closed its doors for several months whilst essential works to update and improve heating and lighting are carried out. The intention is to have the church back in use by the beginning of May (watch this space!).

With St John's out of action, parish services will be held at Christ the King with a Sunday morning Eucharist every week at 9.30am – do join us!

On Sunday 25th January (6.30pm) there will be a service at Christ the King for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity – all are warmly invited to attend. This year's interdenominational World Day of

Prayer service will take place at Christ the King on Friday 6th March, 6.30pm and this year is dedicated to women in Nigeria.

Easter falls at the beginning of April this year, so we are already looking ahead to Lent and Holy Week services. Ash Wednesday, which marks the start of Lent, falls on Wednesday 18th February. There will be a Benefice Sung Eucharist service (with ashing) at All Saints' church, Rotherfield Peppard, at 7.00pm. Mothering Sunday will be celebrated at Christ the King on Sunday 15th March (9.30am). A Benefice service for Palm Sunday will be held at All Saints' on Sunday 29th March (10.30am), and Easter Day, the celebration of the Resurrection of Christ, at Christ the King and All Saints' on Sunday 5th April (9.30am and 10.30am).

There is so much more going on at our churches, including Alpha Youth, a course for teenagers who are exploring faith, which began in January; Second Sunday services, every second Sunday of the month, held at Christ the King at 5pm – a relaxed service with singing, activities and refreshments, especially suitable for children, but all warmly welcomed; study groups and Lent activities taking place across the Benefice. For details of these and all other services please do check the Benefice pages (All Saints', St John's and Christ the King) at www.achurchnearyou.com.

Please come along to a church service: you can be sure of a warm welcome! And stay for a cup of tea or coffee with biscuits and friendly conversation afterwards. If you would like to get in touch with the Ministry Team, contact details are on church noticeboards or via the web address above. ●

CEC

I'd like to tell you about something we've been learning at our church services recently.

You may be familiar with the events of the Christmas story; but there are some Bible verses that give us an insight into what it meant for Jesus to enter this world as a baby in the manger.

The verses say that Jesus 'did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant.'

In other words Jesus, without ceasing to be God, gave up his place at God's side to enter this world as a man. He let go of his position to serve us, and to die for us.

We live in a world where powerful leaders seem determined to exercise their power to further their own ends; they appear even willing to accept the deaths of people who get in their way in order to secure their rule.

Jesus humbled himself for us – and God was pleased with Him. The verses conclude with God's verdict on Jesus 'He exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name – that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow'. ●

MARTIN SECCOMBE

COLLECTION FOR CIRDIC

Can you help? The churches of Christ the King, Sonning Common, and St John the Baptist, Kidmore End, are supporting the work of CIRDIC (Churches in Reading Drop-in Centre)..

Established in 1990, CIRDIC is a safe and welcoming drop-in centre for homeless people living in the local community. The Centre offers a range of support services including hot meals, clean clothes and toiletries, shower facilities and access to health care.

The Centre relies on donations to provide its excellent service. This year, local authority funding has been

reduced significantly, so donations are even more vital. CIRDIC welcomes any of the following: men's clothing, socks and underwear (medium); women's clothing, socks and underwear (size 8, 10, 12); deodorant; shower gel; toothbrushes and toothpaste; razors and shaving cream; towels; tinned meats and fish; tinned fruit and vegetables; tinned rice pudding and custard; peanut butter; chocolate spread; Marmite; brown sauce; ketchup; mustard; salad cream; instant coffee; biscuits; sugar; marmalade. No pasta or baked beans please!

Donations can be left in the collection boxes in the porches of both churches.

Thank you. ●

ST MICHAEL'S CATHOLIC CHURCH

As you read this January will already have already slipped away, but at the time of writing the New Year is yet to begin. As a parish we had a joyful celebration of Christmas at our three Christmas Masses. Once again, our early Christmas Eve Mass for families with young children proved very popular with people standing despite extra chairs being brought into the church. It was very moving to see the young children portraying the nativity scene as the Christmas Gospel was proclaimed. Later in the evening the church was full again for our Christmas Night Mass. This was a somewhat more solemn occasion but no less joyful. Christmas morning saw another good attendance. At all three Masses

it was lovely to see so many people, including extended families, gathering to acknowledge the coming of God into the world before celebrating Christmas at home. For Christians, the belief is that the baby born in Bethlehem has shown us how to live a better life in this world by serving others and opened the way to God's kingdom.

As the New Year gets underway, we begin our second year without a resident parish priest and are very grateful for the support we get from our neighbouring parishes in Henley, Goring and Watlington. The life of the parish continues to thrive due to the dedication of the Parish Pastoral Council and the many others who happily give their time to respond to the needs of the parish.

It seems hard to believe that when this edition of the Sonning Common Magazine is distributed Ash Wednesday (18 Feb) will just be a couple of weeks away and our journey towards the great feast of Easter begins. For information concerning our Lent and Easter activities please check our parish website.

If you are new to the area and seeking a Catholic church or have lost touch and want to return, do visit us or make contact. You will be most welcome. Our preparation programme for Holy Communion will have just started and visits to housebound parishioners and care homes continues. To contact the parish or check Mass times etc. see our website: www.saintmichaelsonningcommon.org.uk.

With every blessing for 2026. ●



DR DRURY

After nearly 27 years at Sonning Common Health Centre Ralph Drury is hanging up his stethoscope and retiring from general practice at the end of February 2026. Here is his good-bye message:

It has been a privilege to work with such a wonderful primary healthcare team, such a nice bunch of patients and to live and work in such a beautiful area. When I started work in Sonning Common, Concorde used to thunder overhead every morning. We had inpatient beds at Townlands hospital, and we covered out of hours every evening, did long night shifts, often up all night after a full day of consulting, covering ten local practices with a car and driver based in Wallingford hospital. It seems a long time ago we had pagers not phones, S Club Seven (Pop group) were in the top ten and Tony Blair was prime minister!

I studied medicine at St Thomas hospital and then did my GP training in West London. We moved out of London in 1999 with a 6-week-old baby and fortunately a fantastically well organised wife so somehow managed to work full time plus all the out of hours. My first winter was challenging with the Millenium bug fears and flu epidemic plus on call Christmas weekend. Over the years there have always been challenges - swine flu, strep and of course COVID. The team at Sonning Common have always managed to adapt.

Sonning Common was and still is one of the best practices in the country and remains so having been a Beacon practice, then CQC

Outstanding but it was clear from way before I started how important the links with the community are - Health Walks, Green Gym, On Your Bike and FISH were already flourishing and still are plus lots of other healthy initiatives linked to the practice. I was Diabetic and Obesity lead and we started weight loss clinics for patients with expert dieticians and fitness instructors (no weight loss jabs then!). I have also been fortunate to have mentored medical students and overseen excellent GP Registrars. Over the years general practice has changed a lot but the core processes remain the same and we have an excellent team of new young partners who are doing a great job keeping up the practice's superb reputation and building for a solid future.

I will miss my patients and the excellent people who I've been lucky to have worked with but

feel it is definitely the right time to retire and pursue other things. I am looking forward to trying to stay fit as possible and aim to be seen running (or maybe walking) in many of the local 10k runs for years to come. I'm also planning to enjoy cycling, rowing and walking. My wife is also retiring, and we've got some exciting travels planned.

One thing about being a GP is how humbling it is to see and help people at their very worst times but also at their best. None of us know what is round the corner and I feel very fortunate to be in a position where I am able to hand over to excellent younger doctors and I know my patients will be in good hands. I'm so lucky to have worked in such a great practice with amazing people and thank all those patients who, hopefully I have been able to help during my time as a GP in Sonning Common. •



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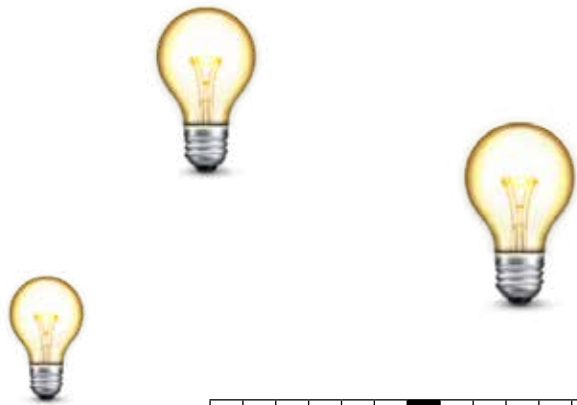
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PUZZLE PAGE ANSWERS FROM PAGE 24



Quiz: How many?

1. 21, 2, 12 (2 series of 6), 3, 11 (out of 16).
4, 6 (England & 2 Germany), 5, 26, 6, 21.
7, 66 (39 OT+27 NT), 8, 24, 9, 9, 10, 1, 024.

Cryptogram

WINTER IS THE TIME FOR COMFORT, FOR
GOOD FOOD AND WARMTH, FOR THE TOUCH
OF A FRIENDLY HAND AND FOR A TALK BESIDE
THE FIRE: IT IS THE TIME FOR HOME. — EDITOR
SITWELL

Sudoku

2	8	9	5	4	3	6	1	7
3	7	1	8	2	6	9	5	4
6	5	4	1	9	7	2	3	8
9	2	3	7	5	8	1	4	6
7	4	8	2	6	1	3	9	5
1	6	5	9	3	4	8	7	2
8	3	2	4	7	9	5	6	1
5	9	7	6	1	2	4	8	3
4	1	6	3	8	5	7	2	9

Cryptic crossword

N	O	S	N	E	B	W	O	L	R	A	M
I	D	M	N	G	E	O					
L	A	R	A	C	R	A	L				
R	O	O	I	B	A	I					
E	C	U	E	S	A	R	M	A	N	D	L
M	E		A	U	A						S
			F	O	R	D					
			L								
E			L	E							Y
C			H	E	N	T	I				A
			O	S	N	R					M
E											
R			N								I
G	O	R	I	N	G	O	T	C	O	D	I

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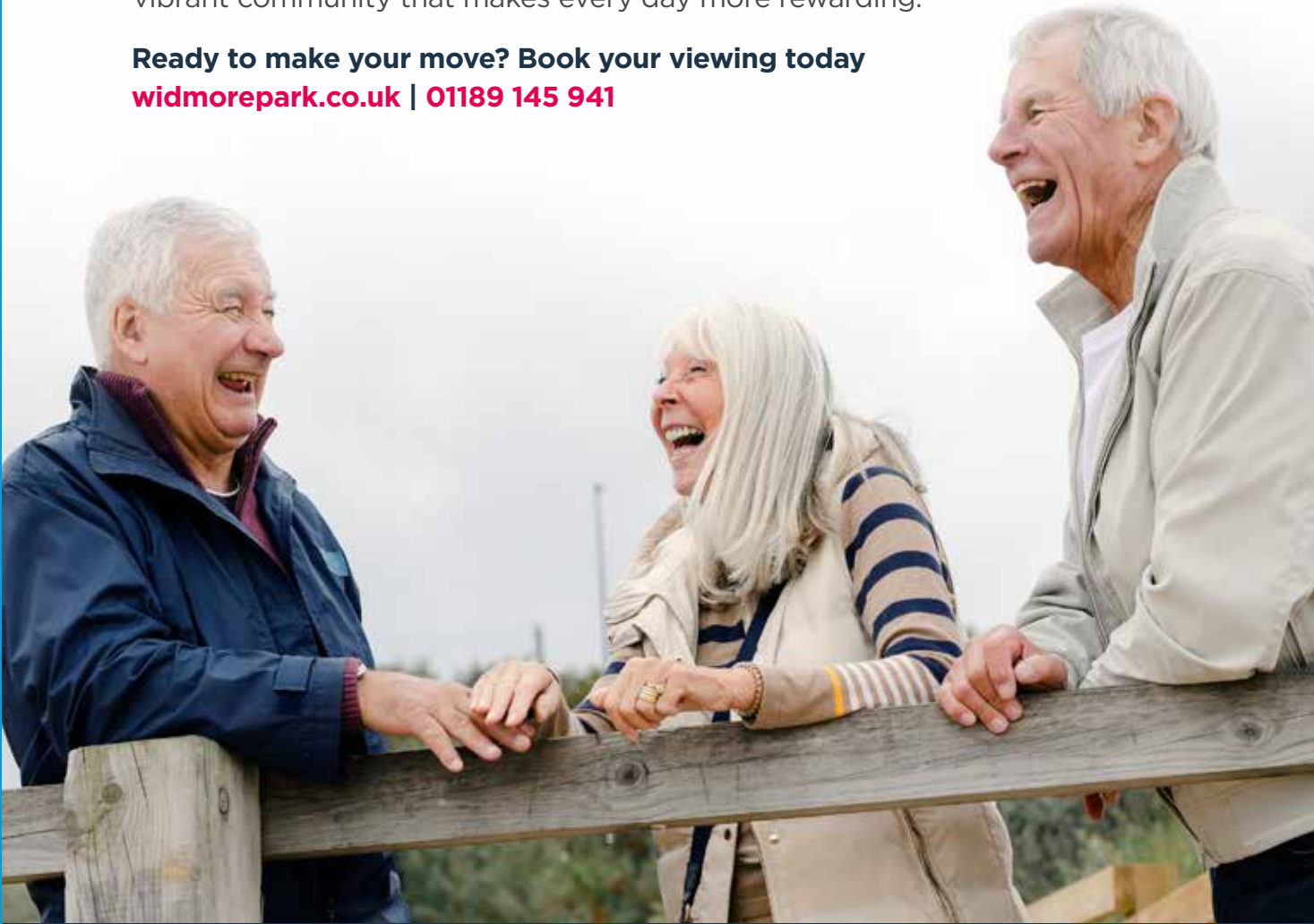
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