

SEPTEMBER 2026

VOLUME 33 NO:1

THE BENSON BULLETIN



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THIS MONTH

- Short Mat Bowls
- Benson At War
- A Benson Diary
- Parish Council Update
- SODC
- Benson WI
- From The Rector
- Bensington Society

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EDITORIAL

I remember being puzzled many years ago at the number of times people kept going back to the cinema to see **"The Sound of Music"** – and we're talking dozens here. Why? I mean it's a good movie but hardly a master piece.

But there was a theory among the keen young musicologists at my university that the reason people were always going back was because there is no musical resolution in Rodgers and Hammerstein's score, so they return in the vain hope of hearing a full musical close. Well I don't agree. I think it's because you think it's all over and then it isn't.

The sight of **Julie Andrews** in a wedding dress with an enormous train that hasn't departed the East door of Vienna's Cathedral by the time she arrives at the altar to marry **Christopher Plummer** is where the film should end. At least that's what I thought when I first watched it. In fact though, it is the moment in the movie when in the good old days you had an interval – sending you off to mooch around the tacky cinema foyer wondering when Part Two might start.

And after you retake your seat you get half a film, sure they get away from the Nazi's and Maria has been on Honeymoon (nudge wink) but then what?

But it's that wedding that gets me. It should be the closure, the ending of the story the final moment when romance meets mutual bills. Not the curtain raiser for popcorn and a can of fizzy drink.

A wedding is one of the hard core climaxes of story telling – even for Lady and the Tramp for goodness sake, though I seriously doubt anyone would be mad enough to take on Buzz Lightyear.

Shakespeare is at it a lot – **Hymen** strides in at the end of "As You Like It" singing – *"Wedding is great Juno's crown; O blessed bond of board and bed! 'Tis Hymen peoples every town; High wedlock then be honoured. Honour, high honour, and renown, To Hymen, god of every town!"*

And then there's Mozart – the **Marriage of Figaro** was written to celebrate a wedding complete with fireworks at the end, which was the reason we went to see it on our own wedding day. To be fair no one knew we were married for months so we could do pretty much what we wanted.

But now, for once in my life I find myself actually in a story that ends in a wedding. My own daughter's, which she, her mother and the mother of the groom have been planning for... oh so many months – I used to think I was the star of my life but now it is clear I am merely a bystander.

I have married off a son but that seems the easy bit. Daughters though – tell that to King Lear... but it's not a matter of how much they love you it's about how much you love them and then letting go, so another bloke can love them even more.

So with a sigh of resignation and the hope of delight, I set off to join the throng with a script in my pocket – *"it's not a script Chris it's a speech"* – oh, OK then.... And a sense of joy that, for one day at least, all might be right with the world.

Thank you to all those who got their copy to me early so there could actually be a September Bulletin and to those who unfortunately have been cast into outer darkness I promise normal service will resume for October.

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Martin Spence, Churchwarden

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We meet at the Parish Hall on Mondays (except Bank Holidays) 1pm - 4pm and most Thursdays 6.45-9pm. More information, email bensonsmbc@gmail.com or phone **07960225805**, or just turn up .

BENSON SHORT MAT BOWLS CLUB

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OLIVIA KIERNAN

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Olivia's work has been longlisted for the Bath and Fish Short Story Awards, shortlisted for the BBC Writersroom, An Post Short Story Award and the Bryan MacMahon Short Story Award.

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A BENSON DIARY

**"Sleep after Toil, Port after stormy Seas,
Ease after War, Death after Life, does greatly please."
(Edmund Spencer Faerie Queen, Book I)**

This long hot summer readily recalls many memories of that other famous long hot summer of my lifetime – the summer of 1976. It was the year of my graduation. It was the year of Abba's anthem to disco Dancing Queen. It was a summer of Dayville's thirty-two flavour of ice-cream shops that swept aside the tubs of raspberry ripple and blocks of Neapolitan from a post-war ice-cream world dominated by Lyons Maid and Wall's. It was the year of Björn Borg's first Wimbledon title – the Nordic cool overwhelming the fiery temperament of the immensely talented Ilie Năstase in three sets. I was something of a Wimbledon addict in those days. My finals year was also my first year at the Devonshire Ball in Leeds. Not quite those glittering summer balls of Oxford and Cambridge, but it was a black-tie affair in a world that was very much floral shirts and tight trousers in exotic fabrics like velvet and satin. And suddenly men wore shorts everywhere. Holiday madness became everyday. There was to be no going back.

There was the inevitable hose pipe ban but water supplies dwindled to a point where, as I left Leeds that hot summer, standpipes had appeared in streets. Then, as now, farmers struggled with failing crops and thirsty livestock, while in heath land and woodland fires broke out in the tinder-dry conditions. Roads softened in the heat, reservoirs fell to alarming levels, and even the smallest signs of cloud were greeted with hope of benevolent rain gods. For all that, the summer of 1976 was remembered with a kind of golden nostalgia: long school holidays, outdoor games, endless picnics, crowded beaches, and evenings spent outside in the warmth.

Relief finally came in late August and September, when rain returned and the parched land began slowly to recover. By then, however, the summer of 1976 had secured its place as one of the defining weather events of modern Britain: a season of beauty and hardship, remembered both for its dazzling sunshine and for the serious strain it placed on communities, agriculture and water supplies.

And in that mêlée, somehow, I sat my multiple examination papers, knowing then far, far more than I can now easily recall and so I graduated with honours as they said in those distant times. The late Duchess of Kent bestowed my degree and the History Prize I'd somehow won without realising there was a glittering prize to be gained! My mum was very proud. And so, the golden summer was for me gilded with other golden memories.

1976 was also the year of the death of Agatha Christie. The quote above from Spencer was a favourite of hers and it is on her monument in Cholsey churchyard, where pilgrims still lay flowers. That walk through Cholsey churchyard is a favourite of both Milo and Finn. And every time we pass by, I fondly remember the queen of mystery who began her reign in my heart in that same year of 1976.

I discovered Agatha Christie rather by accident. My sister and mum had read her of course and I was equally aware of Margaret Rutherford's portrayal of Miss Marple.



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A U C T I O N E E R S A N D V A L U E R S S I N C E 1 7 8 8

That June, I had travelled down to Cornwall – Port Isaac – in the middle of my finals to spend five nights between papers with mum and my sister. I was re-reading Jane Austen, but I finished *Sense and Sensibility* during the holiday. I needed something other than revision, and I picked up a Marple mystery in WH Smith's in Exeter station, before setting off to Leeds. I was quickly hooked. In a year or so I had read all her books. I satisfyingly found I could finish a novel on a long train journey from home in Maidenhead to Leeds. I read all the Marple novels first and it took a couple of other mysteries before I managed my first Poirot. Thinking back to those many train journeys I can still feel the thrill of trying to work out who'd done it. The queen of mystery often defeated me.

I'm writing still in the high summer days of this long hot summer. It has felt hotter than that of 1976. Maybe time plays her tricks and maybe youthful me was more adaptable yesterday than I am today. Those early blasts of heat in late May were profoundly unpleasant. I must admit it hasn't felt quite as bad since. I've found a routine in getting the dogs out shortly after 6 in the morning. Warborough is quiet then, save for our barking mad spaniels. But they love it. There's been plenty to see these early mornings, blessed by blue serenity and golden sun. The harvest of what often has seemed to be dwarf varieties of common cereals, came and went in July. Nor did bales of hay, quickly made up in the fields as soon as wheat and barley were cut down, linger very long. There's been a generous scattering of blousey sunflowers seeded from last year's crop between Benson and Warborough. They look as heliotropes must towards the sun that's been king of the sky these long summer days.

Outside the village our countryside, its rolling hills and open fields are in morning light white gold. And by afternoon their golden glory comes. And as dusk settles this reflected glory lightens the landscape even as the days length has begun their decline into autumn. Hedgerow fruits have also come early but many have not survived the drought. Blackberries look like currants. Apples are like red and green ping-pong balls rolling on the straw grass. We did get a magnificent crop of loganberries in late May and early June. We've got a handful of large peaches too this year and grapes upon the vine – ready for jelly making not for wine – and above all in their greatest, sweetest glut - fragrant figs.

The summer of 1976 has passed into folk memory as the year when the sun seemed never to set and the rain forgot to fall. I was young then. I hope others will fondly remember this summer of 2026 as fondly. I fear that may be but the fond and foolish musings of old age.

John Murphy

**The faithfull knight now grew in little space,
By hearing her, and by her sisters lore,
To such perfection of all heavenly grace,
That wretched world he gan for to abhore...**

LIBRARY OPENING TIMES:

MONDAY: 2pm - 6pm TUESDAY: 9am - 12.30pm & 2pm - 5pm

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FRIDAY: 9am - 12.30pm & 2pm - 5pm SATURDAY: 9.30am - 12.30pm

THE BENSON COMMUNITY SHED



Make, Share, Belong. This is the ethos of Benson's Community Shed, which, having opened in May has had its first summer, and what a summer it has been. The Shed has the potential to be many things, although I would be lying if I said that it had the ability to provide a cool and shady space for those of us who have wanted respite from the intense heat. Those members who have been

enthusiastic about throwing themselves into projects, no matter what the heat, have found themselves making their first project, the Shed itself.

We have grand plans for our Shed, and the past months have been a hive of activity as members have tackled the very fabric of the building, patching up the floor and roof, and embarking on the building of a partition wall to separate the workshop from the social area. You may have seen the skip outside, filling up with our waste. Thank-you to Grundons for donating this.

The Shed is all about community and it is with great excitement that we have watched our community start to grow and develop. Some of you may have come to our launch on 9th May, our first opportunity to share the fantastic facilities the Shed provides, allowing those of you who are curious about joining the Shed to see what we are about. No launch is complete without a spread, huge thanks to Benson Care Home for the beautifully crafted cupcakes they made for us. Missing out on the cupcakes, our local MP, Freddie van Mierlo dropped in to meet members on the 19th June, recognising both the value of BenShed and the Shed movement through tabling an "Early day motion" welcoming it's establishment. What recognition!

We have been overwhelmed by those who have supported the shed, financially, with their time, or through donations; Benson Garden Club, the Maker Space, David Wilson Homes and so many individuals who have given an amazing range of specialist tools and equipment, to name but a few.

The Shed is a space for all and we recognise that some will want to come with their own projects, others may want direction, and some may want to sit on our (donated) sofa, drink tea and talk.

We welcome all new members and if you are not sure what we are about visit us during one of our sessions, Monday and Wednesday afternoons 2-5 and Fridays 10-1. You don't have to let us know you are coming, just stop by and see what is happening.

Saturday 19th September 3.00 - 5.00 p.m. is the BenShed open afternoon. Members and non-members can join in making together, ending with a sausage supper. Please drop by.



WALKING FOR HEALTH

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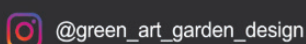
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BENSON AT WAR – PART 2 – AUTUMN 1940

As we have seen in a previous article, the summer/autumn of 1940 was a time when people held their breath in the face of an expected German invasion. The Army was being re-built, re-trained & re-equipped – but this would take time. To buy time, the call went out in May 1940 for men to join a new armed force – The Local Defence Volunteers – who would fight locally.

An appeal by the Government for the LDV rapidly led to Colonel Bremner raising the first squad in Benson in late May 1940, and when this force was quickly renamed the Home Guard in July 1940, a full Benson platoon was formed.

However, it was not just about Dad's Army, a remarkable document has survived and is in our archives – reprinted in “Benson, a Century of Change” – which is “The War Book” put together by the Benson Invasion Committee. This Committee – chaired by Gerald Aldridge – represented the Home Guard, the ARP Wardens, the Women Volunteers, the Police, the Fire Service and Medical Services.

The War Book listed:

- The Committee's thinking on actions from a simple air raid to a full-scale invasion. Every possible scenario seems to have been considered & planned for.
- For security, a series of patrols were established around dawn & dusk, whilst firewatchers stood on the alert
- Equipment – from stirrup pumps for extinguishing fires through to cycles for communications. Locations of stretchers through to digging tools were all listed with their locations.
- Provision of essential services such as food, water, medical, lighting, heating & sanitation. First aid posts, food kitchens, & billeting were all planned for.
- It laid out a chain of responsibility, so everyone knew who was doing what, where and when.

The War Book paints a picture of a village totally committed to a task and highly organised. They planned for all contingencies, allocating fields for sanitation and burial of the expected dead, they planned for the homeless and for emergency rescue squads. Everyone seemed to play a part, be it ever so humble. A remarkable book, recording remarkable work by very ordinary people. Thankfully their work was never really needed.

Dave Rushton, Benson History Group, Bensington Society, bensingtonhistory.org



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FROM THE RECTOR

Round about this time of year the apples in the Vicarage garden are ripening. The old “English apple” season is traditionally late – with the latest apples not falling from the trees until November – but across much of Europe the season comes earlier. We tend to think of apples as a particularly “English” fruit – but in fact they’re Europe’s favourite fruit, and even in Italy, land of lemon and orange groves, apricot and peach trees, the apple is still the most beloved of all.

There are a few mentions of apples in the Bible (always to do with being beloved), but the “apple” most often depicted in Christian iconography is in fact not there in Scripture at all: the fruit of the forbidden tree from which Eve and Adam foolishly eat in the Garden of Eden is not named in the Bible. It was on account of the desirability of apples to later readers that the fruit the serpent tricked Eve into consuming was supposed to have been an apple!

That apple, then, comes to signify something that is so desirable, something the pull of which is so strong, that it overrides what we know to be right and good. That’s often the way, isn’t it, with things that we desire: a thing seems attractive when we look at it, but then we want it more and more until the desired thing gnaws away at us to such an extent that it almost takes over our thinking altogether. One of the many remarkable things about the Book of Genesis is that it identifies this capacity of desire to snowball and seize control of us, and that it (correctly) reckons that such unchecked desire opens up the pathway to sin – and alienation from God and his good ways.

Once upon a time, an apple was the best symbol for that kind of desire. We moderns might well choose something else to represent for us our capacity to be knocked sideways by our desires. I wonder what it might be for you, that you desire so much that it compromises your ability to see clearly, and to serve God faithfully? Whatever it is: beware! If our desires are left unchecked, they can very quickly bend us out of shape, damaging our relationship with our own very selves – and with God.

Sunday services at St Helen’s, Benson, take place every Sunday at 9.30. In addition, there are further Sunday services as follows: 6th September – 4 O’Clock Church at 4pm; 20th September – Said Holy Communion at 8.15am; 28th September – Sanctuary (informal worship) at 6pm.

Sunday services at St Mary’s, Ewelme, take place every Sunday in September at 11 o’clock.

All are welcome!



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THE BENSONINGTON SOCIETY

This month's piece is written even earlier than usual. Why? It's to help our ever industrious editor whose daughter, Emma, is being married on the 14th August to Daniel, right at his busiest time in the cycle of the Bulletin preparation for September. Regardless of the constraints, I'm sure we all hope the event went off superbly and wish the bride and groom all the best on the next stage in their journey together.

So Autumn begins. There being no Benson Bulletin in August, the transition from this unusual summer is felt all the more and, thinking back to Yvonne Parks's talk in May, not just by us. As flowers are smaller and less numerous bees have to be more industrious to meet their daily quotas to see the hives/nests through the winter. So there is still time to get the drill out and drill a few helpful holes in a log pile or even the garden wall.

Our next meeting is on 25th September, when the talk will be "The Greatest Story Ever Told" – The history of you me and everything – given by Professor Tim Coulson of the Zoology Department at Oxford University

As an advance notice, the October talk on the 30th will be 'Three Wayward Women and Wallingford Castle', given by Edwina Johnson. Following that there is no meeting in November and the December meeting is on the 4th NOT the 25th – for obvious reasons. At the meeting we will be entertained by the Benson Military Wives Choir.

I hope all our members and other readers of this piece had an enjoyable summer, although I suspect the gardeners amongst us are desperate for rain and are already grieving at the loss of some of their beloved plants. As I write this on August 7th the forecast is for another heatwave next week!

David McGill

BENSON LIBRARY - FRESH START

There is something lovely about September: new routines, fresh starts, and the chance to try something different. At Benson Library, we'd like to invite you to join us for Fresh Start September — a warm welcome to everyone, whether you already know us well or have not visited for a while. Throughout the month, it's a chance to explore what the library offers, from books, digital services and international newspapers to jigsaws, family history, rhymetimes, Knit and Natter, and our teen craft session, Chill and Create. During Get to Know Your Library Week (Monday 7th to Saturday 12th September), please pop in during opening hours for cake, a cup of tea, and a friendly chat with the team. You can also find out about the **Friends of Benson Library** who support the library through fundraising, events, volunteer help, and practical support. They are also organising an author talk with crime writer Olivia Kiernan at the library on Wednesday 23rd September at 7.30pm. Tickets are £5 and include a glass of wine.

Teenagers are invited to complete a short questionnaire during September to tell us how the library could better meet their needs. We'd love to hear their ideas and help shape the library into a space that works for them.

So whether you're a regular visitor, returning after a break, new to the village, or simply curious about what happens here, we'd be delighted to see you. Come in, say hello, and make a fresh start with us this September. Benson Library Team - Phone: **01865 815114** Email: benson.library@oxfordshire.gov.uk

FOBL: friendsofbensonlibrary.co.uk and facebook.com/SaveBensonLibrary/

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BOB THE POSTIE

It's with great sadness that we share the news of Bob North's (The Postie) passing. He delivered mail to the residents of Benson for over 20 years. His funeral will be held on Thursday 13th August at 2pm, St Mary's Church, Wallingford Market Place. You wrote a lovely piece about him when he retired and used some beautiful pictures of him in his Royal Mail uniform. We're forever grateful for this. Thank you.



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MANY AS HE WAS
ALWAYS WILLING TO
HELP PEOPLE OUT
AND ENJOYED A GOOD
CHAT.
AND HERE ARE THOSE
PHOTOS:**



HERITAGE OPEN DAY

HERITAGE OPEN DAY, SATURDAY 12 SEPTEMBER, 11 AM – 3 PM.

Come and join us at St Helen's Church for Benson's contribution to the country's largest free Heritage Festival. This year's theme is **'The working lives of everyday people,'** and the Bensington Society's History Group has been working hard on displays about the effects of agricultural change and the job opportunities presented by the coaching trade from the late 19th – mid 20th centuries. Other attractions include the village models and a Benson Time line – and there will be another opportunity to see the stunning scale model of HMS Nottingham, lost at sea in August 1916, if you missed the commemoration of Vice Admiral Miller on the centenary of his death in July. We also hope to be joined by members of Benson Community Shed who will be demonstrating heritage crafts such as green wood carving.

Benson Veteran Cycle Club will bring along some of their very special cycles. We will also be welcoming those taking part in **'Ride and Stride'**, the Historic Churches' Trust annual sponsored event. For more information and suggested routes between local churches in the area – including a South Oxfordshire route with a description of St Helen's warm welcome and excellent cakes! - see: ohct.org.uk/ride-and-stride/

The event is free, and runs from 11 am to 3 pm. Tours of the bell tower and ringing demonstrations will be led by the church's tower captain and team from 11 am to 12 pm. In the afternoon, Sue (CWGC volunteer) will lead a tour of the Commonwealth War Graves which brings to life the stories of some of those who died in the 20th century wars. Numbers are limited, so it would be helpful if you could pre-book on: sthelensevents@bensonandewlemechirches.co.uk

BENSON LIBRARY

REGULAR EVENTS

Rhymetime: 1st and 2nd Tuesday plus last 2 Fridays of the month

10am - 10.30am followed by coffee morning

Knit and Natter: 2pm - 4pm 1st Tuesday of the month

Carers Coffee Morning: 10.30am - 12 noon 1st Thursday of the month

Family History Group: 6pm - 7pm 2nd Thursday of the month

Gadget and IT Support: 2pm - 4pm Last Tuesday of the month

For more information please call 01491 838474

oxfordshire.gov.uk/libraries

X @oxonlibraries - Facebook: Oxfordshire Libraries

CHOLSEY REPAIR CAFÉ

Cholsey Repair Café will be back on Saturday 19th September at the Cholsey Pavilion, between 10.00 and 12.45. This follows the regular formula of third Saturday of odd-numbered months. Volunteers will be there to help you attempt repairs to a wide range of household items, bikes, gardening equipment and electrical goods (white goods excepted). No charge is made but if you care to make a donation, it helps to cover operating expenses. You can see more at cholseyrepaircafe.com or email: repaircafe@cholsey.com. Also look out for other repair cafés in our district.



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**Office open Mon-Fri 9-11am
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Out of hours contact:

Albert Bevan:

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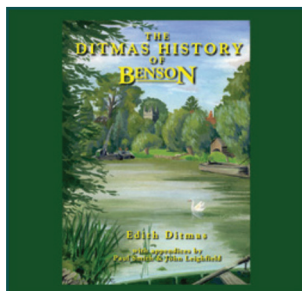
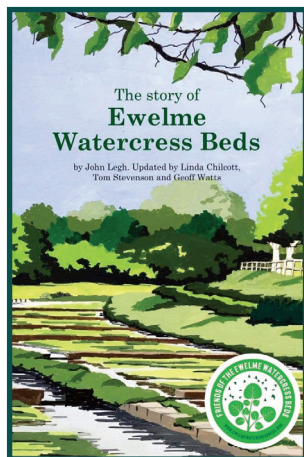
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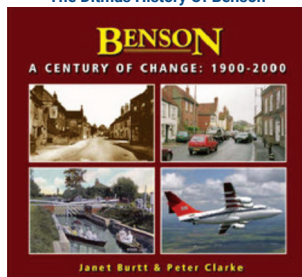
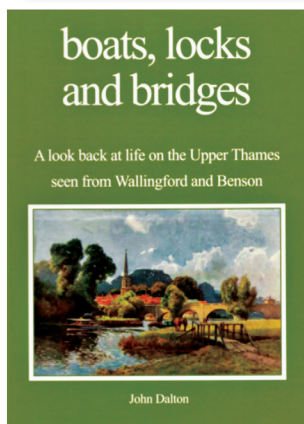
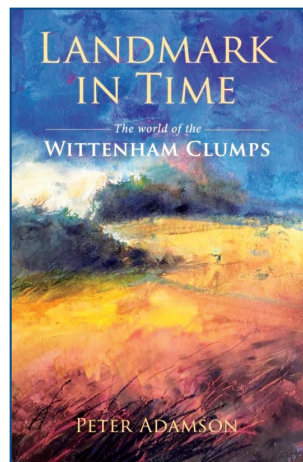
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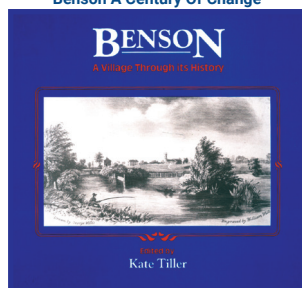
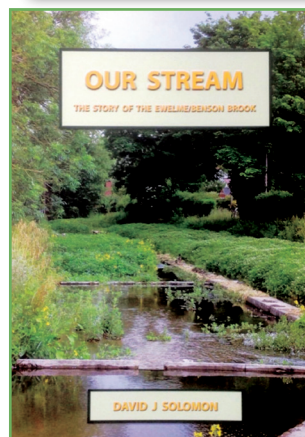
At: Village Information/Events



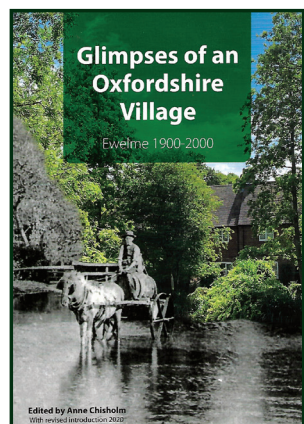
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 Others directly from John Dalton, Peter Clarke or Tom Stevenson, or at Derry's Den where some can be bought but not all. And some can be found on Amazon.



"Landmark in Time" is available at Wallingford Bookshop on Amazon and from peteradamsonwriting.com

VILLAGE INFORMATION

BENSON POST OFFICE: BENSON PARISH HALL PAVILION

Opening Hours: Tuesday 9.30 - 12.30 & 13.00 - 16.00 / Wednesday & Thursday 9.30 - 12.30

BENSON LIBRARY: Opening Times: Mon 2pm - 6pm / Tues 9 - 12.30pm & 2pm - 5pm / Thurs 2pm - 7pm / Fri 9 - 12.30pm & 2pm - 5pm / Sat 9.30 - 12.30.

BENSON MILLSTREAM CENTRE: open Mon, Wed, Fri 11.30-1.30pm for lunch, drop in coffee morning 'Millstream Mugs' Tuesdays 11-12pm. Hire of the centre for events contact bensonmillstreamcentre@gmail.com or phone 01491 834889.

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CHURCH INFORMATION

ST HELEN'S : Rev Dr Patrick Gilday: rector@bensonandewelmechurches.co.uk - 01491 838535 / Rev Marion Harrison: marion.harrison@bensonandewelmechurches.co.uk; 07555 352796 bensonandewelmechurches.co.uk / sthelensevents@bensonandewelmechurches.co.uk

ST BIRINUS (CATHOLIC): DORCHESTER Fr. John Osman: 01865 340417.

ST HELEN'S BERRICK SALOME Fr Michael Lakey / Churchwarden: 01865 890915.

ST LAWRENCE WARBOROUGH: Revd. Lisa Morgan 07424689574 revlisamorgan@gmail.com **WALLINGFORD BAPTIST:** pastorsimonwbc@ymail.com wallingfordbaptist.co.uk --- 01491 839904. **WALLINGFORD METHODIST:** revbrucet@yahoo.co.uk 01235 813242 wallingfordmethodistchurch.org.uk **WALLINGFORD QUAKERS** midthamesquakers.org.uk/wallingford-meeting/

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BADMINTON: MON 8-10PM / BINGO TUES 7 - 9PM / FLOODLIT TENNIS THURS: 7.00PM.

COMMUNITY HALL: TABLE TENNIS FRI: 8-10 PM - OVER 60'S WEDS: 2-4.15 PM

TO HIRE THE PARISH OR COMMUNITY HALL TEL: 01491 825038

MILLSTREAM PILATES TUESDAY 09.30- 10.30 & 10.45.11.45. WEDNESDAY 18.15 - 19.15 & 19.30 - 20.30. THURSDAY 09.30 & 10.45 & 18.30 - 19.30.

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SEPTEMBER EVENTS

EVERY TUESDAY - 10.30-12pm COMMUNITY COFFEE MORNING Millstream Centre

EVERY WEDNESDAY - COMMUNITY WALK 10am Parish Hall

EVERY 1st THURSDAY OF MONTH Carers Coffee Morning: 10.30am - 12 - Library

SEPTEMBER

3/ Benson House 1030 – 12 - Understanding Dementia Workshop

3/ Wallingford Photographic Club 7.30 Crowmarsh Pavilion

4/ Benson House 9 -1030 Parkinson Disease Café

9/ Henley Stamp Club Bix Parish Hall 7.30

10/ Wallingford Photographic Club Online.

17/ Wallingford Photographic Club 7.30 Crowmarsh Pavilion

19/ BenShed Open Afternoon 3pm - 5pm

20/ Benson Antique Fair Parish Hall 9am - 3pm

23/ Benson WI 23rd 2pm Benson House Care Home

23/ Henley Stamp Club Bix Parish Hall 7.30

23/ FOBL Author Talk 7.30 Benson Library

24/ Wallingford Photographic Club 7.30 Crowmarsh Pavilion

25/ Bensington Society Parish Hall 7.30



Please send all Diary information to: diary@bensonbulletin.co.uk

FULL DETAILS Of Upcoming Events

Please Go To: bensonbulletin.co.uk - "Village Information/Events"

About The Benson Bulletin

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

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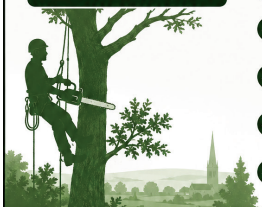
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WALLINGFORD LITERARY FESTIVAL

BEST OF INDIE PUBLISHING COMES TO WALLINGFORD

Wallingford is holding its inaugural literary festival on Saturday 3rd October, hosted by Oxford Independent Authors (OxIA), simultaneously at St. Mary's Church and the Methodist Church from 10am to 4pm. Wallingford has a long literary history, not least its connection with Agatha Christie, and the organisers are delighted to celebrate the passion for reading and writing that exists within the local community.

This exciting event will provide a selection of stall holders in both locations that are local independent authors (self or small press traditionally published) or businesses supporting the independent author sector. This will be supplemented by a series of children's workshops at St. Mary's Church and adult focused talks at the Methodist Church. Basic refreshments will be available at both venues.

We are also planning a talk at Wallingford Library for primary age school children and another adult orientated talk at the Corn Exchange.

The event is being supported by Wallingford Bookshop, Deputy Mayor Mark Hoskins, Councillor Marcus Harris, Wallingford School and Wallingford Library.

The talks programme is likely to include adult focused sessions on wellbeing, historical fiction, how to get published, and a number of book launches from local authors. The children's workshops will cover all ages from primary to sixth form aged children. Ticketing information will be out in September via the OxIA website

– oxia.org.uk

Oxford Independent Authors is a mutually supportive group of local Oxfordshire based independent authors, who come together to support each other with all aspects of writing, publishing, marketing and selling their books. This is the fourth literary festival that OxIA is hosting, following previous events at Headington (2025) and Wolvercote (2025 and 2026).

Any enquiries about the event should be sent to Colin Wade, Event Lead at colinwade40@btinternet.com

Wallingford Literary Festival

SAVE THE DATE

Saturday October 3, 2026

10:00 ~ 16:00

St Mary's Church & Methodist Church, Wallingford

Entry to all workshops and talks are free.

Visit our website for more information

<http://www.oxia.org.uk/>

Independent Authors (OxIA) are delighted to be running the inaugural Wallingford Literary Festival with the support of Wallingford Bookshop and Wallingford Councillors.

Stalls at both locations. Children's workshops in St Mary's Church. Adult orientated talks in the Methodist Church.



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BENSON PARISH COUNCIL UPDATE



DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

COUNCILLORS' MEET AND CHAT in the village centre at Bob's Corner from 10.00am to 11.30am on Saturday 26 September. Representatives from the County, District and Parish Councils will be there, so do come along if you have any questions or concerns, you'd like to discuss.

VILLAGE LITTER PICK - Sunday 11 October once again led by our litter champion, Abi Turner. In the meantime, anyone out walking regularly who would like to do their bit to help keep Benson looking its best is welcome to borrow a litter grabber and collect official SODC sacks from the Parish Office.

REMEMBRANCE PARADE will take place on Sunday 8 November. As always, we are looking for volunteers to help with marshalling. If you can spare some time, we would be very grateful for your support.

CHRISTMAS IN BENSON - The elves are back from their summer holidays and busy planning this year's village event. It will take place on Friday 27 November from 6.00pm to 9.00pm, following the Church Christmas lights switch on and carol service.

ELIVIA OUTLINE PLANNING APPLICATION

At the end of July, we received an outline planning application from Elivia Homes for a development of 170 homes on the site identified in our Neighbourhood Plan as BEN5. This is the field on the right-hand side as you leave the village on the Watlington Road, shortly after passing the entrance to Blacklands Road.

We are aware that many residents feel Benson has taken more than its fair share of new housing development in recent years. However, changes to planning policy introduced in March 2026 mean that if South Oxfordshire District Council intends to refuse the application, it must first consult the Ministry of Housing. The Ministry may then decide to intervene and grant permission despite the District Council's recommendation. Benson Parish Council strongly opposes the proposal and has submitted a comprehensive response, which can be viewed on our website:

bensonpc.org.uk/2026/07/30/benson-parish-council-response-to-elivia-homes-outline-application/

ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

Residents will be aware that Benson has unfortunately experienced an increase in anti-social behaviour during August. Incidents have included damage to play equipment and the skate park and behaviour that has caused distress to younger children and their families.

We are grateful to those residents who have reported incidents, all of which have been (and will be) reported to the police. CCTV operates in a number of locations around the village and appropriate footage will be shared with Thames Valley Police to support their investigations. Criminal damage to Council property and facilities is taken seriously and incidents will be followed up wherever possible.



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Benson has a strong community spirit which people of all ages can enjoy and be proud of. It is disappointing that a small number of individuals are disrespecting our shared community spaces and having a negative impact on others.

As a result of vandalism, misuse and, in some cases, normal wear and tear, a number of items of play equipment are currently awaiting repair. These include the zip wire, cosy cocoons, pirouette, St Helen's roundabout, kicking wall and the slide platform. We appreciate residents' patience while repairs are arranged.

We now have a projects page on the website where you can find out the latest on current council projects - **Council Projects - Benson Parish Council**.

PATIENT PARTICIPATION GROUP

HEALTHWATCH OXFORDSHIRE – VOICES MATTER

Readers will remember that in March we wrote about Healthwatch Oxfordshire, part of a national network of local Healthwatch organisations across England. It operates as the independent champion for residents across the county, and its mission – through listening, advising and influencing - is to ensure that people who use health and social care services are at the heart of how they are designed and delivered. Healthwatch Oxfordshire recently published their Annual Impact Report for 2025-2026.

Using patient feedback, in the course of the year, they published 33 reports on what people reported, and the improvements patients - and staff - would like to see. For example, the Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust took forward several actions, including creating a new web page and resources for those on a waiting list for the Chronic Pelvic Pain clinic. Their report also directly informed the local area's Integrated Care Board's (ICB's) women's health strategy.

A key feature underpinning the current NHS changes is **technology**, the NHS App - and in due course, developing AI - improving internet access, while ensuring GP practices continue to offer non-digital services for those unable to access the online resources. By listening to people's difficulties in navigating the online urgent and emergency care system, Healthwatch gave advice which was taken up by decision-makers who undertook to develop a new overarching Oxfordshire Urgent and Emergency online service with clear information and consistency across providers.

Supporting Patient Participation Groups (PPGs) was another priority, with visits to 23 group meetings; these were included in their report on the App. HealthWatch support the MillStream Surgery PPG group too and attended our "Future of the NHS" workshop last year. With a statutory power to "Enter and View", they visited various hospitals, hospices and other care settings over the year. For example, they visited a mental health inpatient ward in Warneford Hospital in Oxford and identified changes which have been approved by Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust.

Healthwatch also ran 6 webinars on a range of health and care topics, for example Health Inequalities across the county, the new Neighbourhood plans, Menopause, and Supporting Mental Health and Wellbeing in teenagers. These were attended by around 300 people. These are only a few of the activities of Healthwatch Oxfordshire and the remarkable achievements of a very small, dedicated team of employees and volunteers working to make the health and care services better for all of us.

See more at Healthwatch Oxfordshire website: healthwatchoxfordshire.co.uk/

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SODC UPDATE



**Andrea Powell
&
Sue Cooper**



NEW COUNCILS FOR OXFORDSHIRE!

You will no doubt have already heard by now that the Government has announced its plans for local government reorganisation in Oxfordshire and West Berkshire. To some surprise, they have opted for the three Unitary Authorities (UA) model which was proposed by Oxford City Council rather than the two UA model put forward by SODC and Vale of White Horse or the “One Oxfordshire” approach favoured by the County Council.

What does this mean? It means that residents of Benson will move into a new Unitary Authority called Ridgeway on 1st April 2028 (no joke!) along with those living in towns and villages across southern Oxfordshire and west Berkshire. However, the new Greater Oxford UA will stretch down as far as Warborough and Shillingford, so our neighbours across the fields will be administered by a different council. Greater Oxford essentially absorbs what is currently Oxford’s Green Belt and has been chosen to focus on economic growth and housebuilding to support the homes which Oxford wants to build but which it cannot fit into the city’s current boundaries.

In May 2027 all registered voters will be asked to elect their representative(s) to the new authorities, but until 1st April 2028 the existing elected councillors (i.e. Sue Cooper, Andrea Powell and Gavin McLauchlan) will continue to oversee day-to-day services while the new Council sets itself up for business with a new strategic plan and a budget. We still don’t know (at the time of writing) how many councillors will represent Benson and Crowmarsh, but it will be either one or two, as opposed to the three we have today. Apparently this will be a more efficient arrangement, but we are all concerned about the workload expected of local councillors and the reduction in representation and the impact on local democracy. There are still many unanswered questions which will endeavour to resolve over the coming weeks, and we will keep you all posted through the pages of the Benson Bulletin and Facebook.

BENSON RELIEF ROAD UPDATE

We are regularly asked when the new relief road will be opening. If only we knew! Progress with the road has been slow and made more complicated by the change in ownership of the “Regency Gardens” development (now being built by Bewley Homes), the unexpected drainage problems experienced on this site which necessitated the acquisition of land and the construction of additional mitigation facilities and the fact that the Local Planning Authority cannot set an “end date” for the delivery of the road. The final piece in the jigsaw between the Cala estate and Chiltern Grange, which runs through Regency Gardens, is still being used by construction vehicles and cannot be opened up and adopted as a highway until this

site is completed. However, rest assured that the road will open one day – it is ready on either side of the “middle bit” – and the village should see significant traffic easing once that is done.

ELIVIA HOMES OUTLINE PLANNING APPLICATION

Villagers will be well aware that another speculative planning application has been submitted by Elivia Homes to build up to 170 new homes on the site behind Blacklands Road and between Watlington Road and Brook Street. This site is unallocated in the Benson Neighbourhood Plan and would add traffic to the road which will only just have been made quieter by the opening of the Benson Relief Road! Your County, District and Parish councillors are all resisting this application and are grateful to all those who submitted their comments to the SODC planning website.

LAND CHARGES SYSTEM ONLINE AGAIN

We know that some people have been inconvenienced (some quite significantly) by the delay to the upgrade of the Land Charges system at SODC. This was due to the project being substantially more complex than originally anticipated. It is now back online and the Council has brought in extra resources to clear the backlog, and we can only apologise to anyone who experienced delays with house moves as a result. This project is one part of a huge programme to upgrade the technology platforms used by the Council following the cancellation of the outsourcing contract with Capita which was set up many years ago by a previous administration.

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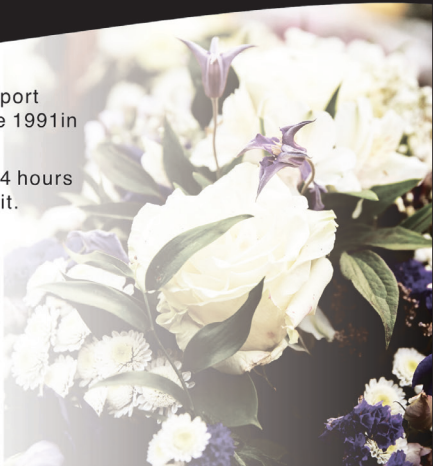
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THE BENSON WI



For the first time in a long time, Benson WI members had to cancel a meeting. June should have seen us at the Root One Garden Centre for a presentation by the staff who are celebrating their 25th anniversary. Sadly the very hot weather became too much.

For our July meeting 12 of our members enjoyed a private tour of the Howbery Park Flood Resilience Garden led by Steve Packman the environment and innovation manager at Nurture Landscapes. Before our tour, Donna Bowles (Howbery Estate Manager) and Steve gave our members a talk on the background of the garden built on the silver-medal winning Flood Resilient Garden debuted

at the Chelsea Flower Show in 2024. They discussed how planting and landscaping can offer a lovely outdoor space that offers defences against flooding. It is hoped that the garden will demonstrate how an ordinary terrace house garden can incorporate a resilient design. Alongside the tour Steve Packman also talked about other aspects of Howbery Park which is quite a large estate. There are many trees, some large bee hives now producing Howbery Honey and fields for cattle grazing. Members had a chance to ask questions and received small packets of wild flower seeds. It was a very hot afternoon but tea and cake on the patio after was very pleasant and we thank the staff at Howbery for looking after us so well.

We were pleased to see that a photo and details of our 100th anniversary celebrations appeared in the July/August edition of our Oxfordshire Inspires magazine and we were very grateful to make use of our 2025 Federation Bursary funding award to cover costs of our refreshments at Howbery.

For our September meeting, we shall be returning to Benson House for a cake-making demonstration by the in-house chef, and hopefully a bit of tasting. There are a lot of other WI events available for booking in September. Some of our members will be attending a 'Taste of Persia' day in our Parish Hall and, again in the Parish Hall, members will be attending another Speaker Selection Day where they will hear auditions from potential speakers wishing to be included in the WI Directory. Other trips and workshops on offer can be seen at oxfordshirewi.co.uk

We have had a number of membership enquiries of late so please contact us again at bensonwi@oxfordshirewi.co.uk if you wish to join us. Membership fees reduce a little in September. Visitors also welcome (£5 please) – contact the Secretary for further details.

BENSON TREFOIL GUILD

Our meeting in June coincided with the first day of the Ascot horse racing season, which we marked the occasion with a fun horse racing game and a show of Ascot worthy hats. We divided off into small teams and got ready to race, we chose our colours from the dice available and took up our positions at the starting post. The first race was a straightforward sprint which saw us just throwing the dice and moving our horse along the racetrack based on our score, that was just the warm up! Subsequent races involved more brain work because unlike at the real Ascot, which is a flat racing meeting, our races involved hurdles or fences in the form of trivia questions, we only got to throw the dice if we got the answer to the question right.

To make it easier (oh no it didn't) we only had to choose between More or Less as the answer. Some questions were easier than others but would you know which coastline is longer between Canada and Australia or whether a human body produces more or less flatulence each day than a bicycle tyre would hold? Suffice to say there was plenty of laughter and not a few groans when the actual answers were revealed. When all the races had been run we took a vote on who had the best hat and our winner, Pam Vines, received a small gift. We all agreed that the fairy lights and extra flowers gave her the edge over the other competitors. At this meeting we also finalised the voting for our charity of the year and as a result we will be making a donation this year to Style Acre. Some of us have direct personal experience of the services they provide in the area and we agreed that this was a worthy cause to support.

In July we held our traditional summer party and threw our doors open to welcome visitors from other Oxfordshire Guilds. This year was no exception but sadly visitors were thin on the ground due to prior commitments, holidays and lack of transportation. That being said, Guild members and our visitors enjoyed a relaxed afternoon tea with entertainment provided by relatives of one of our members. Better still there were goodie bags of cake and savoury items for members to take home so that they could extend the summer picnic vibe into the evening and beyond. I'd like to thank everyone who helped by preparing food, laying tables, providing transport for members and then clearing everything up at the end of the afternoon, your hard work was appreciated by everyone who was there.

Our closing quote this month comes from that great novelist Henry James:

"Summer afternoon—summer afternoon; to me those have always been the two most beautiful words in the English language."

Now that's a quote that no one can argue with!

Helen Horton

MOBILITY SCOOTER GRUMBLE

I have recently joined the mobility scooter users and have been quite shocked at not only the state of the pavements but the amount of cars that park half on them. There are not always dropped curbs to enable you to avoid going around them. There is also the issue of overgrown hedges making the pavements difficult to navigate.

Trying to go along the cycle path on the Regency Gardens Estate has proved difficult due to the amount of cars parking on them. I wonder how many more disabled people and even parents with push chairs are finding it difficult to get around our lovely village.

**Kindest regards
Jackie Spencer**



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FROM OUR MP

I hope you have been able to remain comfortable in the recent heat wave - it has certainly underlined the urgent need to better prepare our communities for the many challenges of a changing climate. In June I participated in Greener Henley's Community Resilience Briefing, which brought together leaders and decision-makers from local organisations to watch the 'People's Emergency Briefing' film and discuss how Henley and the surrounding area can prepare for the growing impacts of climate change. I was proud to take a 'Spread the Word' pledge, committing to champion local climate and nature action and encourage wider participation across the constituency.

With my pledge in mind, it was brilliant to be joined by so many local groups and organisations at the Summer Climate Lobby in Sonning Common last month. I was particularly inspired and touched by the eloquence of local school pupils talking about their future, which at present is very much in our hands. Many thanks to all for their time and contributions, I'm looking forward to getting stuck into my action points on my return to Westminster.

In Westminster, July saw a flurry of legislative activity as the Government rushed to finish before the long Summer Recess. I've been working closely on the Health Bill - as it aligns closely with my background prior to entering the house. I've tabled not 1, but 6 amendments to the Bill at committee stage. One of these calls for reforms of early access to medicines, given how boys with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy were denied a new medicine in Oxfordshire while the rest of the country got access.

Still on health, I raised a point of order in the House to request a response to my letter of 2nd June requesting the Secretary of State for Health to step in and reverse the decision to close three Oxfordshire dedicated mental health programmes providing support for vulnerable children, young people and families at critical points of need. I got a holding response the next day. By the time I get a substantive response - the service will be long gone - deeply frustrating.

I also raised Thames Water's dismal record again in the House. This time asking for the privately owned water companies in England and Wales to be included within the scope of the Public Accountability Bill (Hillsborough law) so they too are bound by the code of conduct and duty of candour - just like the publicly owned companies of Scotland and Northern Ireland are.

Locally, it was fantastic to visit Benson Weir earlier this month and see the completed works first hand. This is a really important investment in our local area that will benefit residents, visitors, boaters and everyone who enjoys the River Thames for the anticipated 100 plus year life cycle of the bridge. The Environment Agency has delivered a complex engineering project while ensuring this vital piece of river infrastructure continues to do its job of managing river flows. It's also great to see environmental improvements built into the scheme, including the new fish and eel pass, helping wildlife thrive alongside the engineering works.



FROM OUR MP (CONTINUED)

A visit to BenShed highlighted to me the power of persistence; this space for local residents to come together to learn and ply a craft from woodwork to dressmaking is a testament to the eight years a small team spent realising a vision. That's why I laid down a motion in Parliament in honour of their work.

It was also a pleasure to be invited to the Ewelme Alms house Charity Founders Service last month - it was fascinating to hear about their nearly 600 year history and lovely to feel a tiny part of that history.

THE MILLSTREAM SURGERY

WELCOME TO OUR NEW REGISTRAR

We are delighted to welcome **Dr Usama Sajid** who started with us at the beginning of August. Dr Sajid will spend his Registrar year with us until August 2027. Usama is a fully qualified doctor who is spending a year with us to complete his specialist training for General Practice.

COVID AND FLU CLINICS FOR AUTUMN 2026

**THIS YEAR OUR COVID AND FLU CLINICS WILL BE HELD AT THE SURGERY ON:
SATURDAY 3RD OCTOBER AND SATURDAY 17TH OCTOBER**

Please save the dates and we will be in touch eligible patients, closer to the time

**FOR THE FLU VACCINE ELIGIBILITY HAS NOT CHANGED FROM LAST YEAR
FROM 1 SEPTEMBER 2026:**

- 1)** Pregnant women - **2)** All children aged 2 or 3 years on 31 August 2026 -
- 3)** Primary school and Secondary school-aged children (from reception to year 11)
- 4)** Individuals 17 years and over attending a special education needs (SEN) school and who are in a clinical risk group may also be vaccinated alongside their peers.
- 5)** All children in clinical risk groups aged from 6 months to less than 18 years (please ask at practice for confirmation)

FROM 1 OCTOBER 2026:

- 1)** those aged 65 years and over **2)** those aged 18 years to under 65 years in clinical risk groups (please ask at practice for details) **3)** those in long-stay residential care homes **4)** carers in receipt of carer's allowance, or those who are the main carer of an elderly or disabled person **4)** close contacts of immunocompromised individuals



**FOR THE COVID VACCINE ELIGIBILITY IS AS
FOLLOWS:**

Are aged 75 years or over

**Aged 6 months to 74 years and have a
weakened immune system because of a health
condition or treatment (please ask at the
surgery if you are unsure)**

or

Live in a care home

HENLEY AND DISTRICT STAMP CLUB

Summer is now coming to an end and we are re-commencing our meetings in Bix Village Hall.

Have you thought of resurrecting a hobby from your past, like stamp collecting, Postal history or Postcards? You will find it more than just collecting a little bit of sticky paper. If you look into the history and background of the stamps and postal history, there is a lot to learn.

The Henley Stamp Club is a friendly group and we would be delighted to see new visitors or members. If you are interested in facts concerning stamps or postal history, why not come along and find out about how you can promote your interest?

To learn more about stamps and postal history why not visit us at Bix one Wednesday evening? You can then meet people who find postal history and the story of stamps fascinating too. Meetings are held on the 2nd and 4th Wednesday of the month in Bix Village Hall at 7.30 p.m.

Wednesday 9th. September – Is a members evening displaying “New Acquisitions”.

Wednesday 23th. September – Sue Burn will display “The MacRobertson Airmail Race of 1934” and Patrick Reid will do “the Tattersall’s Story” How one man through ingenuity and persistence outwitted both Australian state and commonwealth Governments. Visitors and new members are very welcome.

**Further details can be obtained by phoning Steve on 07767 251670
or on our website: - www.henleyphilatelic.org.uk**



WALLINGFORD PHOTOGRAPHIC CLUB

Join us at Wallingford Photographic Club this September and into the autumn as we kick off a fresh season of weekly events for amateur or enthusiast photographers, whether camera or phone users. Our welcoming community offers talks, presentations, competitions, and hands-on sessions. We explore diverse topics, share feedback on members’ photos, and host occasional online events featuring guest speakers from afar. Come meet us Thursdays at 7:30pm at Crowmarsh Pavilion!

We begin on 3rd September with a welcome night for new members, a look at what we’ve been doing over the summer, and an overview of the upcoming programme. On the 10th, we’ll host an online session on sport and action photography (with Roger Hance; ‘Capturing the Decisive Moment’), followed later in the month by practical evenings at the Pavilion, including on the 17th a discussion with London Camera Exchange on the latest photography gear and developments, plus a session on what makes a great photo and how to critique photos. On 24th we will launch our portfolio project scheme then 1st October will bring our first club competition of the new season.

BANG has an exciting announcement. Benson's partnership of local green groups has secured a significant grant from the National Lottery Community Fund, with additional support from Benson Parish Council, to help more people enjoy and care for the natural environment. The funding comes at an important time as Benson continues to grow, bringing new green spaces and opportunities for residents to benefit from nature. The grant will allow the Nature Group to expand its activities, strengthen community involvement and develop new initiatives, including projects focused on young people. It also means volunteer coordinator Tracey Comber will continue her sterling work organising events, supporting volunteers and building partnerships in Benson and across the four parishes. The group will spend the coming months developing projects and hopes even more local people will get involved in protecting and enjoying the area's wildlife and green spaces.

Our second major story highlights the challenges local wildlife is facing during this summer's hot, dry weather. High water temperatures and low river levels have reduced oxygen levels, creating difficult conditions for fish. Following reports from a resident, Environment Agency officers investigated stranded fish in Lady Brook/Elm Brook near the new "Benson Country Park", where sadly many fish had already died before help could arrive. Similar conditions were found nearby alongside Warwick Spinney, with isolated pools trapping young fish. While these losses are disappointing, experts believe the streams will naturally recover once water levels rise again.

If you spot dead fish or fish in distress, please report it by calling the Environment Agency (EA) incident hotline on **0800 80 70 60**, rather than attempting rescues yourself. The EA Fisheries team are very responsive and will attend and help if possible (but only if issue is reported via incident hotline). Reporting quickly helps the right teams respond safely.

More encouragingly, recent riverfly monitoring at Millbrook Mead and Ewelme Watercress Beds found healthy populations of aquatic invertebrates, suggesting these stretches of water remain in reasonable condition. Elsewhere, volunteers continue to water young trees planted at Benson School despite difficult drought conditions, hoping to maximise their survival until cooler weather and rain returns. If you are interested in helping, see our social media for dates of future sessions.

For a few years, BANG has been supporting local Duke of Edinburgh students achieve their volunteering goals. Most recently, Alfie completed an impressive programme of bird monitoring for the British Trust for Ornithology's "Birds in Green Spaces" project, while Jack undertook litter-picking and recycling work and Amber continues a six-month bird survey in Berrick.

Finally, members enjoyed a butterfly identification workshop led by Richard Soulsby and Tom Stevenson, followed by a practical survey at Warwick Spinney with 14 butterfly species recorded in just one hour. The event also introduced beginners to identification techniques and citizen science recording.

Benson Area Nature Group

Restoring our nature

BENSON GARDEN CLUB

The Club's programme of talks begins on 1st October, when we will have Gillian Taylor coming to speak to us on **'More Colour, Less Work – Fact or Fiction?'**. Gillian will examine how we can make our gardens more sustainable in terms of labour, water and nutrition whilst still providing beauty, colour, structure, and insect friendly plants. Gillian is an experienced horticultural writer, speaker and plantswoman. Amongst other things, she is a member of an RHS Trials Forum, an International Rose Trials judge and a Liveryman in the Worshipful Company of Gardeners.

Benson Garden Club was formed in 1995 and is a thriving club with over 100 members. This year's membership subscriptions are due on 1st October 2026, so now is an ideal time to join. Membership is £15 a year which gives access to discounted fees for speaker meetings and a range of garden visits in the summer (separate prices apply for these). For Gillian's talk the price for members is £2 (£5 for visitors). Prices vary according to the speaker, but we will always inform you in advance.

Our speaker meetings cover a diverse range of topics, allowing you to find inspiration and new ideas, chat to like-minded gardeners but also to ask speakers for their professional guidance on how to resolve your own thorny problems (no pun intended!). Here are a few things we have learned from last year's programme, along with some useful tips:

- Prune non-rambling roses during their dormancy, which occurs in January / February, to help avoid disrupting active growth (from Lucie Ponsford on 'Frost in the garden – should you worry about pruning?')
- Be wary of plant gifts when prefaced with the phrase, 'Oh, have one of these, I have loads of them' – a potential indicator that the plant has weed-like tendencies! (from Chris Beardshaw on 'Painting with Plants')
- An unusual but highly effective planting combination for a shady garden is wild garlic with *Tiarella cordifolia*, which will create a mass of frothy flowers (from Katharine Woods on 'Shady Characters – Plants for a Woodland Garden')
- To encourage wildlife, leave winter stalks standing, keep leaf litter under plants and never till garden beds in winter - turning over the soil may inadvertently block the bees' exit holes (from Guy Deakins on 'Sexy Pollinators')
- If you buy plants in coir pots, take them out of the pot and plant them directly into the ground as it can take as long as four years for the coir to break down, restricting root spread in the meantime (from Sam Mallett on 'Small Gardens')

Our talks, from October to April, generally last 60 - 75 minutes and the 2026-27 programme has once again been curated to accommodate a wide range of interests. We meet on the first Thursday in the month, at Benson Parish Hall. There is parking on site, with bays for disabled parking and a ramp for wheelchair access if needed. Doors open at 7.15 pm for refreshments, with most people arriving around 7.30 pm to socialise and have a tea or coffee before the meeting starts at 7.45 pm. Once spring is firmly underway we are out and about visiting gardens (May to September).

More information about the club and how to join as a member can be found on our website bensongardeningclub.weebly.com or please feel free to email bensongardeningclub@gmail.com

Liz Harrison

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