



Caversham Bridge

No 727

www.cavershambridge.org

September 2025

Post Office seeks new home

text and photo Phil Chatfield

AFTER MONTHS of rumour and speculation, the closure of the Post Office counter at the Henley Road Co-op was announced on 10 July. The counter shut on 2 August. The Post Office normally expect to give at least four weeks' notice of changes, but this is described as 'unexpected' and so does not need to comply. The closure is stated as being due to 'the resignation of the postmaster and the withdrawal of the premises for Post Office use'.

Local people were dismayed, as the post office counter in the shop was well used and regarded as an essential facility for the community. One visitor described how her 97 year-old mother made a weekly expedition to the post office and met up with friends at the same time. Local business owner, Akua Woods of Shea Butter Cottage, had been part of a petition to save the post office counter and had also contacted Matt Rodda, MP, but to no avail.

...limited opening hours...

Shea Butter Cottage and other local businesses, such as AW Cycles, used the counter for posting orders, for providing change for their tills and for banking. However, the limited opening hours had made it difficult for some – it is a challenge if your business runs from 9:00 to 17:00 to visit a post office which has the same opening times. Add to this the frequent unplanned closures of the counter and some with parcels to send have been seeking alternative services.



Henley Road Co-op

The nearest remaining Post Offices are in Hemdean Road in Caversham, where parking is difficult, and in Emmer Green, a 2 miles drive away. For bus users, the branch in Broad Street Mall in Reading is an option.

Although a notice of closure was displayed at the counter, it is likely few read the three-page document, and there was nothing to indicate the closure in the

window of the shop. The document is available online at www.postofficeviews.co.uk and emphasises the importance to the Post Office of providing a service in the local community. They are actively seeking a new retail partner who would be interested in running the service.

If your business is interested, see www.runapostoffice.co.uk

Never too young!



photo M Teng

Reader Michelle Teng sent us this photo of her twins on the way back from school before the summer break, saying "To the lovely people at the Caversham Bridge, I thought you might enjoy this photo of young readers enjoying your paper whilst out on a bike ride!"

Bells Rang Out for Joyce

by Elestr Lee

NOT ALL NEWS is bad news...and September's Caversham Bridge has dug deep to find stories and events well worth celebrating this month!

We mark the special service which was held at St Giles in July to honour Joyce Vernon, who has been ringing the bells there for 70 years. Joyce herself took part in the peal which followed, with members of the team she has trained and inspired (p4). Meanwhile, kind community reporter, Caroline Gratix, meets another source of inspiration, Julie Williams, who has brought together personal coaches throughout Reading through her *Lighting Fires* organisation (p2). Within Caversham, local group Engage Befriending is on the look-out for new befrienders to get involved with older residents (p13), and we share the fascinating war-time memories of local resident Margaret.

At a time of harvest, we celebrate the benefits of Organic September with an article by Tayma Cannon (p8); a great source of organic and ethically-sourced food is

our very own True Food Co-op in Emmer Green, which has been drawn by Janina Maher, with an account of the store's history by Martin Andrews (p9). And, if you are keen to support local artists and crafters, it's good to know that the now regular *Artists & Makers Fair* will be returning on September 13 – a great place to meet local makers, buy gifts, and enjoy a cuppa and a cake (p5). For gardeners, September can be a great time to take cuttings and increase stock in the garden for free – Les Cooper advises us (p10).

Let's remember, Autumn brings a time of change... but plenty for us all to enjoy!

Contact us at

editors@cavershambridge.org

or by post at Church House, Church Street, Caversham, RG4 8AX.

Please note, it is currently not possible to contact us by phone.

INSIDE



For the love of ivy – Happy Wanderer

p7



Deep Sea Divers in Caversham – Holiday Club

p11



Creative Caversham Sweet Dreams – BKRY

p14

Finding Peace and Rest



Talking Point

by
Rev Jeongsouk Kim

IN GENESIS Chapter 2 verse 8, 'Now the Lord God planted a garden in the east, in Eden', I note the verb 'planted', not 'made'. I think there is a difference. 'Made' suggests a finished product, complete and final in its moment of creation. 'Planted' tells us that God's garden was alive. Gardens are living organisms which develop, change and grow. The lawns and trees in my garden tell me so.

On just one occasion I have visited two gardens in Cornwall – the Eden Project and the Lost Gardens of Heligan. The Eden Project is clearly made by human beings; it is extremely popular, but I found it very commercialised and far too crowded. In contrast, the Lost Gardens of Heligan are more natural. The plants and trees in different parts of the garden seem almost to have planted themselves, and I found it easy to find quiet places where I could feel in touch with God's creation.

Verse 9 goes on, 'And the Lord God made all kinds of trees to grow out of the ground – trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food'.

God is an artist. He made, and still makes, trees pleasing to the eye. I can't think of any tree in its natural state that isn't pleasing to the eye; each has a grace and a presence that speaks of God's creation.

God was creating beauty right from the start. The next

Gardens are living organisms which develop, change and grow. The lawns and trees in my garden tell me so...

verse, verse 10, follows with 'a river watering the garden'. Trees and water – what more could a painter want? God's will was to fill our lives with beauty and delight. Eden means a place of delight, a paradise we say; and 'paradise' is a Persian word meaning a pleasure garden. Some commentators point out that even in pleasure gardens, the gardeners have to work. But most gardeners say they enjoy working in their gardens.

God's purpose for humankind was to be planted in the garden, to grow in the beauty and delight that flows from the presence of God. It was God's garden – we read of him taking his evening walk in it, a lovely image. In the garden where God is, where His presence is real and tangible, there is paradise.

So why not take time out to visit the countryside or favourite garden where you can find a time of peace and rest in this busy and noisy world?

Rev Jeongsouk Kim

Retiring Methodist Minister for Caversham and Woodley



Julie Williams

Our **Kind** Community

text and photo Caroline Gratrix

Lighting Fires: How Julie Williams is igniting change in Reading



THIS MONTH, we shine a light on Julie Williams, founder of Lighting Fires and an extraordinary coach who's turning sparks of inspiration into real impact across Reading.

Thirteen years ago, after a successful corporate career with Accenture and Microsoft, and following the birth of her children, Julie took a pause to reflect. During this time and after reading *Time to Think* by Nancy Kline, she discovered her true calling in coaching. She launched Lighting Fires with the goal of helping individuals find clarity, confidence and purpose in both life and leadership.

But working solo can be isolating, and Julie, not one to keep the light to herself, created Coaching Reading, a collective of professional coaches who offer pro bono support to local charities and nonprofit organisations. What started as a small idea quickly grew into a vibrant community of 30 coaches (with a waiting list), united by a shared purpose: to give back to Reading.

The impact has been powerful:

- 230 one-to-one coaching sessions delivered
- Group coaching offered to 10–15 charity leaders at a time
- Planned support for Black History Month and Black business leaders this October
- Regular monthly Continuing Professional Development meetings fostering growth and connection

The feedback from charities and coaches alike has been phenomenal. But perhaps the most heartfelt response is the sense of community, connection and collective purpose that Coaching Reading has sparked.

The movement continues to grow, including

through *The Lighting Fires Podcast*, where conversations about leadership, change and purpose are shared. You can find and listen to *The Lighting Fires Podcast* on all major platforms.

Julie's vision and the generosity of other Coaching Reading co-founders and coaches remind us of the power of kindness in action. By creating spaces where people are truly heard and supported, they're not only lighting individual fires, they are igniting a movement of care, collaboration, and change across our community.

STOP PRESS

CONGRATULATIONS

to Alex Forbes and wife Claire on the safe arrival of bookshop baby Willoughby, a brother for Jacob and Eliza, on Saturday 3 August.

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Off to explore the world text and photos Fred Smith



VOLUNTEERS FROM the Caversham Oxfam Shop in Prospect Street gathered on Tuesday 29 July to wish their manager, Toby Ralphs, 'Bon Voyage'. Regular volunteer, Mary Tindall, hosted the event, attended by around 25 members of the team, in her garden in Emmer Green.

Having just graduated with a degree in Geography, Toby took on the manager's post at the shop in March 2024. Working with the established team of volunteers there, he has given the shop a makeover, resulting in a more than 30% increase in sales. However, he has decided now is the right time to explore the wider world and has plans to travel overland (mostly) to visit family in Singapore.

When asked what he had enjoyed most about his time at the shop, he did not hesitate. "People. It has been a privilege to work with the wonderful volunteers and to meet our customers and donors. And finding cool things hidden amongst the donations is always rewarding!"

Until a replacement manager is appointed, the shop is likely to be operating on reduced hours, as the team of volunteers step up to keep the show on the road.

Do check if you are planning to visit.
Phone 0118 947 9232
or email oxfamshop3802@oxfam.org.uk



Toby at the shop (left) and Caversham Oxfam Shop volunteers gathered to say farewell to Toby

Not about the winning – but...

Text and photo George Grubb

CONGRATULATIONS TO Weller Centre based RG4 FC on their award as Club of the Year in Bucks and Berks at the Grassroots Football Awards on 31 July. There are 600 clubs in the area! More on the Club next month.



RG4 FC award

Don't miss an issue

THE PAPER is delivered by our team of nearly 100 volunteers throughout Mapledurham, Caversham, Emmer Green and Caversham Park Village, as well as the Caversham Road area. The annual subscription is £7 and runs from April. For new subscribers, the charge is £5 for the period until April 2026.

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REinspired Caversham

by Hannah Ross

MY NAME'S Hannah and, at the beginning of the school summer term, I started working as a project manager for REinspired, a local Christian ecumenical project which delivers interactive RE sessions to local primary schools, supported by Churches Together in Caversham. Our sessions are designed to meet the needs of the RE syllabus, helping teachers to cover the Christian content, and are supported by volunteers from local churches, enabling the children to hear lived Christian experiences and practices.

As you might expect, the summer term for Reinspired Caversham is generally the quietest and, with the delivery of only five sessions to around 300 primary school pupils across years 2, 4, 5 and 6, it was a relatively gentle start to the role. Other than a session in a hot classroom during the early July heatwave, it was an enjoyable experience, and children engaged enthusiastically and interacted well with volunteers. Next term is thankfully bound to be cooler but also a lot busier. Last year, Reinspired delivered 24 sessions in the autumn term! With the birth of Jesus being central to delivery, as it is to the Christian faith, it's an important term and a privilege to co-lead the sessions.

If you are interested in learning more about REinspired Caversham, please contact me at hannah.ross@reinspired.org.uk.



Anna Clark (left) with Hannah

photo B Caborn

Joyce marks 70 years of Church Bellringing at St Giles

by Helen Bennett



The bell ringers at St Giles

photo M Thornton



Joyce

photo H Bennett

ON SUNDAY 20 JULY, Caversham resident and cherished member of the bellringing community in Reading, Joyce Vernon, celebrated an awe-inspiring 70 years of service at St Giles. To mark the occasion, Joyce and ringers from around Reading rang for the service at St Giles, followed by two quarter peals (45-minute pieces of special ringing) with her grand-daughter, Lucy, and son-in-law, Steve, taking part in one of them.

A member of St Giles church for 80 years, Joyce first climbed the steps of St Giles' bell tower as a teenager. The vicar was on a recruitment drive and had sought new talent from the youth club! Through the church and ringing, Joyce met her late husband, Keith, and together they became the bedrock of the church.

Over the years, Joyce has shown remarkable dedication and commitment to St Giles. As well as taking on the role of tower captain, she has served on bell ringing committees, organised events, and carried out a huge amount of fundraising to enable the bells to be re-hung.

Thanks to Joyce, the bells have rung out for

A member of St Giles church for 80 years, Joyce first climbed the steps of St Giles' bell tower as a teenager...

Sunday services and Church festivals, with peals and quarter peals organised to celebrate births, weddings, royal occasions and to mark final farewells. As the vicar says, "The bells and the bell ringers are our noisiest advocate!"

Joyce has taught many members of the community to ring, and they speak fondly of her kindness and supportive approach, particularly her role in making St Giles' tower a welcoming, friendly place to learn. Today, Joyce continues to inspire those around her by her determination to keep learning new methods (music for bells), and her willingness to support others.

On Sunday it was great to have all Joyce's family at St Giles to mark the occasion, and she especially appreciated her family members taking part in the ringing. There aren't many activities which multiple generations can enjoy together, but bellringing is one of them.

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Hello! My name's Ben
I'm 15 and currently attending Maiden Erlegh School. I'm taking a week's work experience at Fourbears Bookshop. I love books, writing and creative arts, so a bookshop's quite a good place for work experience!

THE FIRST BOOK I'm going to share with you is *A Sliver of Darkness*, a collection of short horror stories by author C J Tudor. This is one of the best books I've ever read, blending various facets of horror into one book. I genuinely believe it to be one of the greatest short story collections ever written, due to its excellent use of pacing, tension and emotion. The stories have a wide variety of settings. For example, one takes place on a cruise liner in the apocalypse, one is a romantic 50s horror set in a bar, and another has a hotel you can never escape — and that's just three of them. Overall, there are 11 stories told within just 350 pages, making for an edge-of-the-seat experience the whole way through. I'd recommend it for anyone above the age of

14, especially if you've read horror in the past. There's something for everyone here, so don't miss this one.

A book I'd highly recommend if your child has ever asked questions to which you don't know the answers about biology, chemistry or how the body works, is *Kay's Anatomy*. The book is gross, goofy and genuinely funny. If you like *Horrible Histories*, you'll love this. There are hilarious cartoons throughout, helping even the most reluctant reader to delve into the book; and don't fear, below all the jokes and gags, there is genuine science and education, making this perfect for an inquisitive child — it's made for one of the funniest reads of my life! I'd recommend mainly for 8-12-year-olds.

Overall, these books are perfect for different audiences, but both make for thrilling and exciting reads on their own merits.

I hope you've enjoyed my article just as much as I've enjoyed my work experience at Fourbears bookshop. Happy reading!

www.fourbearsbooks.co.uk



The Bear's bones?

photo A Forbes



ARTISTS & MAKERS

Fair Returns

by Joyce Richardson

THE ARTISTS & MAKERS Fair returns on Saturday 13 September to its regular venue, Caversham Methodist Church, but with a new image for the Autumn season of fairs and, as always, lots of wonderful gift ideas. Now into its fourth year, the Fair has established a firm reputation for showcasing a diverse range of high quality, unique arts and crafts at affordable prices.

The Fair is committed to supporting the many talented artists and craftspeople from Caversham and the surrounding area. Their original arts and crafts provide interesting and unique alternatives to the mass-produced items found on-line and in national chain stores.

The Fair is also known for its popular Lobby Café. Situated between the two main halls, it provides much needed refreshment in the form of cakes, tea and coffee, for stallholders and visitors alike. Every month the Fair donates the proceeds from drinks sales to a different local charity; in September it will be Dementia UK.

...welcoming environment...

Organizer Jean Harper comments, "When we started back in 2021, with just nine stalls, we had no idea the Fair would prove to be so popular and successful. Nowadays the Fair regularly attracts three to four times that number of stallholders and its reputation has spread beyond Caversham and Reading. Hundreds of visitors now come to enjoy the warm, welcoming environment, and to chat with the artists and craftspeople about their work. Many return every month, as there is always something different to see."

So, whether your taste tends towards traditional or quirky art, amazing textiles, beautiful ceramics and woodwork, or some truly stunning jewellery and gifts, come along to the Artists & Makers Fair between 10:00 and 16:00. You are promised a warm welcome and, as it is a dog-friendly event, there are always treats at the entrance for any four-legged friends who accompany you!

The Artists and Makers Fair is on the second Saturday of the month.

This Autumn's dates are:

13 September, 11 October, 8 November and 13 December.

More information: www.artistsandmakersfairs.co.uk

Fb [Artists & Makers Fair Caversham](https://www.facebook.com/artistsandmakersfaircaversham),

Instagram [artistsandmakersfaircaversham](https://www.instagram.com/artistsandmakersfaircaversham)

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What's On

IF YOU have an event planned, please send details to whatson@cavershambridge.org. We need to receive these no later than the 10th of the month before the event for inclusion in the printed paper. Later submissions can be included in our online What's On, which is updated regularly. To see what has been added check: cavershambridge.org/archives/category/around-caversham

Please note, a listing of baby and toddler groups can be found on page 14.

Caversham Library – 09:00-17:00 Tuesday and Friday, 13:00-19:00 Thursday and 10:00-15:00 Saturday. Regular events include:
Rhymetimes for the little ones – popular, so please book first! Every Tuesday at 10:15 and 11:15.

Games Club, Friday mornings 10:30-12:00. All adults welcome – refreshments!

Sit and Stitch 17:30-19:45, on 2nd and 4th Thursdays every month. Refreshments – come and be inspired. Tel: 0118 937 5103

or see reading.gov.uk/leisure/all-libraries/caversham-library

Geo Café – Artists Against Homelessness, an ongoing and changing exhibition of art by local artists at Geo Café, Prospect Street. For each sale the artist makes a donation to Launchpad Reading. Open every day.

Liz Real Studio Sale – Sale of artwork and art related materials – August/September. Liz is preparing to move so there will be pictures (both framed and unframed), art materials, works on paper, collage pots, greetings cards etc. Everything reduced by 50% - with prices starting at £5, and a donation to Launchpad Reading based on a percentage of the sales. To visit the studio, contact Liz for an appointment on 0790 976 6733 or email lizreal1@icloud.com

Mondays – Caversham Park Bridge Club – at the Milestone Centre, 19:15 for 19:30 start. Phone Lin 0118 334 8195 for further information. bridgewebs.com/cavershampark

Tuesdays – Rivariate Choir – Caversham Heights Methodist Church, Highmoor Road. 19:30 in term time. Enjoy singing together. For details see rivariate.com

Wednesdays – Caversham Writers – Welcoming enthusiastic hobbyists and aspiring authors alike. Meeting weekly in person or via Zoom. Free to all. For details: meetup.com/CavershamWriters or [@CavershamWriter](https://twitter.com/CavershamWriter) on Twitter (X)

Wednesdays – Light on the Hill Café – 19:30-21:30 at Grace Church, 119 Peppard Road, RG4 8TR. A wellbeing café for adults 18+. Come as you are for tea and a chat. Please see: www.gracechurchcaversham.org.uk

Thursdays – Friendly Over-60s Social Club – 10:00-13:00 at Milestone Centre, Caversham Park Village. Hot lunch, quizzes and the chance to chat. Contact Cheryl at 07964 750182 or Trina at 07477 570541

Thursdays – Weller Centre Craft Group – 13:00-15:00. Be creative with friends. For details contact Pam Chatfield at pamch32@gmail.com Mobile 07986 905784 or Weller Centre 0118 947 5828

Thursdays – New Caversham Heights Bridge Club – 14:00 at the Caversham Heights Methodist Church, Highmoor Road. For details contact Duncan Knight on 0118 947 5544 or email duncan.knight@googlemail.com

Fridays – Warm Welcome Space – 10:00-13:30 at Caversham Baptist Church, South Street, RG4 8HY. All welcome, just drop in for free refreshments, including hot soup from 12:00. Tel: 0118 954 5353 www.cavershambaptistchurch.org.uk

Saturdays – Keep Caversham Tidy – A local charity dedicated to eliminating litter and improving public spaces in Caversham. Free to join and no ongoing commitment. Families welcome! Email Keepcavershamtidy@gmail.com, FB [Keep Caversham Tidy](https://www.facebook.com/CAFMarket)

Sundays – Caversham Artisan & Farmers Market – Caversham Precinct, 10:00-15:00. See www.facebook.com/CAFMarket

Sundays – Nordic Walk (or just walking). Free to all. Tel: 07931 754096 or email Pat at Wirralbird@hotmail.com

Sundays – Redifolk Song and Music Club – 20:00-22:30 in the Community Hall, Watlington House, RG1 4RA. £8 admission for performances, £3 on singing nights. See www.redifolk.co.uk

Until 6 September – Don't Rock the Boat, a comedy by Robin Hawdon – The Mill at Sonning Theatre. For times and bookings, see millatsonning.com/shows/dont-rock-the-boat

Until Saturday 27 September – Exhibition of works by Sally Castle: **To Plant a Garden is to Believe in Tomorrow** – Caversham Picture Framers, Church Road – see cavershampictureframer.co.uk/events

Tuesday 2 September – Caversham Women's Institute – 19:30 at Church House, Caversham. www.thewi.org.uk or Tel: 0118 947 5176

Wednesday 3 September – Rosehill Ladies – 14:00 at St Barnabas Hall, Emmer Green. For details contact Sue Green tel: 0118 947 7570 or email suegreen@hotmail.com

Friday 5 September – Chazey Women's Institute – 14:30 at St Andrew's Church Hall. Tel: 0118 947 0964, or e-mail rowena@primology.com

Friday 5 September – Bereavement Café – 14:00-15:30 at St. Barnabas, Emmer Green. A safe place to find others who have had their own loss and can appreciate something of your experience. For further info Tel. Gill at 0118 947 8772

Saturday 6 September – Reading Abbey Gateway Rooftop Tour – 11:00 A 45 minute tour of the restored Abbey Gateway. Details at whatsonreading.com/venues/abbey-gateway/whats-on/reading-abbey-gateway-rooftop-tour

Sunday 7 September – Thatcham Reedbeds and Greenham Common Walk – 6.0 Miles – 10:30 Meet at The Nature Discovery Centre, Thatcham Post Code RG19 3FU Pang Valley Ramblers. One of a programme of regular walks in the area – pvrblers.org.uk/walks-programme

Thursday 11 September – Reading Haydn Choir Open Rehearsal – 19:45 – St Joseph's College, Upper Redlands Road, Reading RG1 5JT – no obligation to join, music supplied. If interested, email Eileen at rdghaydnchoir@gmail.com

Saturday 13 September – Artists & Makers Fair – 10:00-16:00 at Caversham Methodist Hall, Gosbrook Road. Local artists and craftspeople display their work for sale. Free entry. For further information phone Jean at 07808 966928 or visit www.cavershamcrafts.co.uk

Saturday 13 September – Heritage Open Days – Caversham Court Gardens and talks at Caversham Baptist Church. See www.heritageopendays.org.uk/whats-on for all Open Days events and for the Reading programme see whatsonreading.com, or links from the CADRA website www.cadra.org.uk/en/Events

Sunday 14 September – Reading Cycle Festival – 11:00-16:00 Christchurch Meadows. See www.readingcyclefestival.co.uk for details

Wednesday 17 September – 150 Years of Jackson's Corner, a talk by Thomas Macey – 19:00 The Reading History Society at the Abbey Baptist Church: £2 for non-members of the Society. It is likely to be popular so pre-booking is advised, through historyofreadingsociety@yahoo.com

Monday 22 September – So you think we don't make anything any more? British manufacturing in the 21st Century – 14:00 at Abbey Baptist Church, Abbey Square, Reading. Talk to Reading u3a by Berkshire historian Richard Marks. Non-members welcome, free entry. See www.readingu3a.org.uk

Friday 26 September – I did it my way – comme d'habitude, talk by Peter Prowse – 19:30-21:30 at Church House, 59 Church Street, RG4 8AX. Le Cercle Français, for those who are learning French, love France and for French nationals. Admission £5 welcome drink included. See www.readingfrenchcircle.co.uk for programme. Email readingfrenchcircle@gmail.com

Coming Soon

Friday 24 October-Saturday 1 November – Concerts in Caversham Autumn Festival – St Andrew's Church, Albert Road, Caversham. Tickets and details www.concertsincaversham.co.uk

CADRA Planning Bulletin

A summary of planning and transport matters affecting the RG4 area, provided by Caversham and District Residents Association www.cadra.org.uk

AROUND CAVERSHAM Centre: New applications recently include **43 Church Road (PL/25/1017)**, a welcomed roof restoration of a Grade II listed house in the conservation area. Its position opposite Caversham Court Stables raises concerns about managing the work on this busy and narrow road. At **18 Bridge Street (PL/25/1004)**, a conversion of offices (Class E) into two flats (Class C3) is proposed. A previous application was refused due to noise impact, flood risk, and waste management issues. **35 Prospect Street (PL/25/1036)**, next to La Bella Café, is a retrospective application for a Certificate of Lawfulness for five small studio flats that have been in long-term use.

Elsewhere in our Area: Off Knights Way, **Emmer Green (PL/25/0883)**, an expansion of the Emmer Green Kindergarten is proposed, providing up to thirty places for under-three-year-olds on spare land behind their existing Grove Road building. The application at **25 Tredegar Road, Emmer Green (PL/23/0549)**, submitted two years ago for a two-storey five-bedroom house next to No. 25, may be nearing a decision, as a draft Section 106 agreement is now available. A new house on the busy Lowfield Road in **Caversham Park Village (PL/23/1043)** which uses spare land at the back of 26 Woods Road is causing some local concerns.

In South Oxfordshire, the controversial application for up to 70 homes on the old golf club land west of **Kidmore End Road, Emmer Green (PL/25/0691)** has been updated to include an air quality assessment provided by the developers.

See www.cadra.org.uk for links to these planning applications.

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Healthy soil, healthy you

by Tayma Cannon



This month is 'Organic September' so we asked Tayma at the True Food Co-op in Emmer Green if she could explain the benefits of organic food.

“The health of soil, plants, animals and man is one and indivisible,” said Sir Albert Howard, botanist and co-founder of the Soil Association. In other words, healthy soil means healthy food. By choosing organic food you are choosing to support the cultivation of healthy soil systems that can benefit your own 'gut garden'.

Organic farming focuses on maintaining and improving soil health, promoting biodiversity, and minimising environmental impact. Organic farming systems can foster greater microbial richness, higher microbial activity, and greater microbial biomass compared to conventional systems. Research findings suggest the enhanced microbial environment in organic farming could translate to healthier, more nutrient-dense crops. When you consume these foods, these beneficial microorganisms may contribute to a more diverse gut microbiome, which is good for overall health.

Higher levels of certain nutrients, particularly antioxidants, are beneficial for digestion. Organically produced crops (cereals, fruit and vegetables) have been found with up to 68% more antioxidants than non-organic crops. These antioxidants, particularly polyphenols, can have prebiotic-like effects, by supporting the growth of beneficial bacteria in your gut, thereby contributing to improved gut health and digestion.

...significant benefits...

Certain pesticides could affect the composition and functions of the gut microbiota. One of the most significant benefits of organic food for gut health is the reduced exposure to synthetic pesticides. These chemicals could alter the composition of gut microbiota in both animals and humans.

It's not just organic crops that have been shown to have additional benefits to those conventionally grown; organic milk and meat can contain around 50% more beneficial omega-3 fatty acids than nonorganic. These nutritional differences also apply to organic dairy products like butter, cream, cheese and yoghurt. The difference in Omega 3 is due to organic animals eating a more natural, grass-based diet containing high levels of clover.

If you want to explore how eating organically could improve your wellbeing, True Food Co-op is a good place to start. True Food is your local, community owned and run organic shop. It has a huge range of organic and zero waste products to try.

Recipe

Easy miso noodles with crispy tofu

FERMENTED FOODS like kimchi are rich in probiotics—beneficial live microbes that can reach your gut and support the healthy bacteria already living there. During the fermentation process microbes break down carbohydrates in food in the absence of oxygen, using sugars and starches to produce acids and alcohols which help preserve the food and enhance its flavour. An added benefit of fermentation is a change in the bioavailability of nutrients, meaning it may increase how much of certain nutrients your body can absorb and use from those foods. This recipe is doubly beneficial for your gut as it contains two fermented elements: kimchi and miso.

Ingredients

- 1 packet plain tofu
- 1 tbsp sesame seeds
- 1 packet of noodles
- 2 sachets of tofu ginger miso soup 60g
- 2 carrots
- 2 courgettes
- 1 handful of tinned or frozen sweetcorn
- 1 tbsp vegetable oil

For the marinade:

- 1 clove garlic, crushed
- 1 thumb sized piece of ginger, grated
- 1 tbsp soy sauce
- 2 tbsp toasted sesame oil
- 1 tsp chilli flakes

To serve:

- Organic Kimchi to taste

Method

Start by mixing the marinade ingredients together in a medium sized bowl. Crumble the tofu into



photo True Food Co-op

small pieces like large breadcrumbs to maximise the surface area which soaks up the marinade. Mix into the marinade bowl so the tofu is completely coated. Leave to stand whilst you do the remaining prep. Next, prepare the carrot and courgette by using a peeler to slice them into thin ribbons. In a large saucepan heat the vegetable oil on a high heat and then add the carrot and courgette ribbons and cook for 1-2 minutes, using tongs to mix them around as they cook – just giving them a quick stir fry but retaining all the crunch. Remove from the pan and divide between two warm bowls. Put the saucepan back on the heat and add 200ml of water, along with the miso sachets stirred through. Once boiling, turn down to a simmer and add the noodles to cook according to the packet instructions (usually 6-8 minutes for egg noodles). Top up with a little extra water, depending on how much broth you want.

Whilst the noodles are cooking, tip the tofu and any excess marinade, along with the sesame seeds, into another saucepan and fry on a medium heat until the pieces are golden brown and starting to crisp. Mix periodically to ensure even browning. When the noodles are almost cooked, add the sweetcorn to the pan. Divide the noodles and broth between the two bowls of vegetables and sprinkle the crispy tofu on top. Serve with organic Kimchi.



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True Food Community Co-operative

Their vision and mission is to enable 'our communities to enjoy, sustainable, ethical food and household products ... to accelerate change towards more sustainable lifestyles'...

I found it a bit of a struggle cycling up the Peppard Road from lower Caversham (I confess to getting off my bike and pushing up the steepest part of the hill) – my destination in Emmer Green was the True Food Co-op in Grove Road, which is the subject of Janina Maher's drawing in this month's Organic September edition. It's an appropriate choice as the True Food Co-op aims to provide 'local, organic, zero waste sustainable shopping'.

Their vision and mission is to enable 'our communities to enjoy, sustainable, ethical food and household products ... to accelerate change towards more sustainable lifestyles'. These are noble aims but the atmosphere of the shop is relaxed and welcoming, with staff very happy to discuss products and offer advice. The shelves are stacked with fresh produce and ethically sourced products.

There is a fascinating and detailed historical account of the beginning and development of the co-operative on their website. In brief, the business began in 1999 when a group of like-minded residents wanted to buy affordable organic food and came together to form the 'True Food Club' to buy produce in bulk. The idea grew and The Club moved to the Rising Sun Arts Centre in Southampton Street and became more of a market than a buying club.

...attracted support...

In 2004 they set up stalls in community venues around Reading and attracted support from local charities and organisations and at the end of that year formally registered as 'The True Food Community Cooperative Limited'. They sold through mobile markets but also took over warehouse, office and shop space in Emmer Green and with money from successful lottery grants refurbished the shop, bought a van and established a thriving business. However, to be financially independent, without relying on grants, it was decided to concentrate on developing the shop and building its customer base.



Drawing by Janina Maher

www.janinamaher.artweb.com

As a true co-operative, the business is owned and run by its members. There is a core of five paid staff but the business relies on a large group of volunteers which creates a real community atmosphere – the volunteers I spoke to really enjoy their time in the shop and contributing to the ideals and aims of the business.

Since Janina made her drawing the shop name on the façade is undergoing re-painting. Simon Warner (their Buyer and Shop Manager who was volunteering on the till that day) told me that while stripping off the old paint ghostly signs for previous occupants of the premises were uncovered – suggesting that it had been a Pet Shop and earlier a Chemist.

Let's hope that the True Food Co-op continues to thrive.



janinamaher.artweb.com

This drawing is one of a number which appear in Janina's 2026 Caversham Calendar, available from Fourbears Books in Prospect Street and NOODstores in Church Street

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Les Cooper

Something to do

NOW DEAR reader, what sort of gardener are you? Are you one who does gardening just to keep your place looking neat and tidy, or are you an enthusiast who rushes out at dawn to water the radishes? My bet is you are somewhere in between, keen one day and possibly not so eager when the weather is unkind.

I ask because September is a good month for taking cuttings, particularly of plants which might not survive through the winter or ones you would simply like to have a few more of. The enthusiast will jump at the chance to propagate their stock. Many of us will think, why bother with a lot of fiddling when, come next Spring, there will be a host of plants in garden centres and in catalogues?

My own thoughts are a mixture, because I do admit to feeling smug when I

succeed in taking a few successful cuttings. But sometimes rather a mug when I fail!

As I often do, I look online to obtain tips and advice. This time, one source suggested ten plants to propagate in September. They are: Fuchsia, Hebe, Lavender, Penstemon, Pelargonium, Felicia, Salvia, Lemon Verbena, Verbena and Helichrysum.

Sadly, I have neither the time nor the energy to go this far, but I will assuredly take a few cuttings.

...worth doing...

Fuchsia I think are easy and worth doing. Particularly if there is one you are fond of and cannot buy a new one, because you have lost the label and forgotten its name!

Lavender because, annoyingly, every winter you lose one or two and, anyway, the more you have the merrier your garden looks.

Penstemon can winter safely outside



Fuschia Sion Kop

photo E Cooper

except when the frosts are very severe. Also, the older plants tend to become woody and past their best, so a few cuttings are always worthwhile.

Salvia are in favour with me at the moment. They are not winter hardy, therefore cuttings are a must.

The rest of the list I will leave for the really keen gardeners to do. As a

footnote, I must tell the truth, as my accomplishment with cuttings last winter was pathetic. Rightly or wrongly, I blame the compost I used, because it failed to retain the moisture. In days gone by, when we used peat-based compost, it retained moisture better. Maybe I am making excuses, but I would be interested in other growers' opinions.

Swan upping returns to Caversham text and photo Roslyn Weaver



Swan uppers leaving Caversham Lock

July saw the return of swan upping to Caversham, a five-day procession that takes place each year along the River Thames and aims to monitor the population of young swans. This year it reached Caversham on Thursday 17th July, drawing a sizeable crowd to watch the striking group of wooden boats (and some more modern ones) making their way upriver in search of swans. Many of the crowd walked alongside the boats to watch their progress.

Now more conservation than ceremony, the focus of the traditional procession is more about caring for the birds than determining ownership. The swan uppers look for young swans and stop every time they see a cygnet, calling "All up!", before circling the young swan to then lift it out of the water, checking its health, and taking care of any injuries,

before returning it safely to the river. Like all young birds, cygnets are in danger from a range of predators, including dogs and other animals, and at risk from humans trying to injure or kill them, as well as other problems.

This year, there were no stops for cygnet checks in the stretch of river immediately past the lock. This might seem to confirm the decline found in last year's census that reported swan numbers had dropped by almost half. But it is not all bad news. Media reports about the environment often seem to suggest that things are bad and only getting worse, but this time it appears to be a different story. Shortly after this year's event, reports noted that this swan upping has seen an increase in the annual cygnet numbers since last year, suggesting a possible return to improvements seen before then – a tradition many might hope continues.

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EcoTip

by Tricia Marcouse

THE READING CLIMATE Action Strategy and Plan for 2025-2030 are out for public consultation until mid-September. You can access both from readingcan.org.uk/public-consultation and either complete the online survey, or make a detailed response to the whole document or specific parts.

This is the fourth 5-year action plan created by the Reading Climate Change Partnership; a voluntary association between organisations in Reading which have pledged to introduce changes to reduce climate emissions and mitigate the impacts of climate change in our town. The partnership includes the university, the

Have your say (and offer to help?)

council, business groups, energy suppliers, voluntary groups and youth representatives.

The plan is divided into six themes, covering low-carbon energy, transport, water, nature, food and waste, with cross-theme requirements for communication, education, policy and planning.

Individuals and organisations have signed up to deliver the specific actions in the plan, but it won't happen in isolation. The changes will affect you.

The partnership is keen for feedback, both positive and negative, so please take part in the consultation, and consider if you could help deliver some of the goals, or perhaps suggest new ones you could lead or support.

Some suggestions: the action plan offers help to schools and community organisations to redesign their outside space for shade, biodiversity or food production.

Could you discuss this at the school used by your children, or discuss changing school meals to include some meat-free days?

In Emmer Green, local residents have adopted the grass corner on their nearby road junction and managed it for colour and biodiversity. Could you set up a project in your street? The council would undertake initial rotovation, and provide some wildflower starter seed, but development and maintenance would be left to the local group.

There are plans for an eco-hub in Reading, to give unbiased advice on retrofit options for houses to reduce emissions and energy costs. Do you have expertise, or are you willing to be trained to become a volunteer advisor?

Make an offer on your response to the consultation or just email info@readingcan.org.uk

Deep sea divers in Caversham

by Evie Porter

IN THE FIRST week of the summer holidays, 147 primary-aged children attended Deep Sea Divers, Churches Together in Caversham's annual holiday club. The club is a fun-filled week interwoven with messages from the Bible, open to children of all faiths and none.

This year, Deep Sea Divers brought us ocean-themed activities, from 'Watery Workouts', to creating a sea creature mural out of recycled objects. As always, a wide variety of activities were on offer, ensuring there was something for every child—fencing, laser tag, wool making, dancing, archery and basketball, to name a few.

Run by a team of volunteers, the club is a testament to the strength of our community here in Caversham. After attending since its very first year (way back

in 2012!), I have found being a member of the Youth Crew is such a great experience, and it's an opportunity offered to everyone when they reach the end of their time in the club after year 6. Spending time with other young Christians and sharing the message with children is so fulfilling, whether they connect with the faith or simply take away the message to live a kinder life. Joel Wilson, a fellow young leader, said, "Seeing the fun the kids have doing such a variety of activities, and enabling them to learn the gospel in a fun and accessible way" are

As always, a wide variety of activities were on offer, ensuring there was something for every child...



Youth Crew member in action

photo CTC Holiday Club

his favourite things about the role. When accompanied by the inquisitive minds of children, discussing the Bible never fails to bring up interesting questions.

According to the children, some highlights of the week were 'Wet Wednesday' (a club-wide water fight), the singing and dancing in assemblies, and activities on 'Family Fun Friday'. This is a day when family and friends are welcome to join us in wrapping up the

week, with activities including a bouncy castle obstacle course, face painting and a travelling zoo.

As the week drew to a close, it was so rewarding to see the smiles, friendships and memories shared by both children and volunteers alike. We're already looking forward to what next summer will bring for the Churches Together in Caversham Holiday Club!

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SWEET DREAMS



This September marks the first anniversary of BKRY which opened its doors a year ago, offering coffee, delicious cakes – and upstairs, an Academy, where young and old alike can learn the art of cake decorating.

Elestr Lee finds out more

BKRY IS THE brainchild of local resident Jo Deacon, who took the brave step of acquiring the lease on the derelict space wedged between House of Cards and Superdrug in Caversham centre in April 2024. “It needed to be completely renovated and a complete refit, which we largely did ourselves,” Jo recalled. Her determination to create her business is the result of a long-time interest in baking and cake decorating. “I started teaching in schools, firstly in Slough, then doing supply teaching in various primary schools in Caversham. While I was teaching, I became obsessed with baking cakes, so in the end, I

took some professional courses. I now have three sons, and I took the pastry chef course at Reading while I was still breast feeding!”

In 2018 Jo converted a room in her mother’s house in Emmer Green, so she could bake cakes to sell professionally. “I was running my business around my children, so on occasions the oven would be running at 2am!” she said. “But I also met Candy Hall, who is a trained chef, through a mother and baby group, and she has now become my operations manager, and is pivotal in running BKRY.

“I had always wanted to have my own cake shop, and when I found out about the space available in Caversham, I knew I could

combine both my passions – baking as well as teaching.”

Jo is keen to take on new staff who she can train, including Viktoria, a refugee from the conflict in Ukraine, who knocked on the BKRY door and asked if there was any chance of a job. “I also take on teenagers who are looking for work experience,” she added. “I began my Academy, offering cake decorating classes in village halls and at parties during 2022. But now, at BKRY in Caversham, I can offer cakes and cookies for customers to buy, as well as classes, for young and old alike.”

For now, Jo’s classes are all about cake decoration, and those attending are aged from 5 upwards. “Eventually, I would like to teach the whole baking process. One of my ideas would be to create an online teaching class, so people can go ‘from home baking to pro’.

“My ideas for developing the business don’t stop. We were in the news recently due to the burglary a few months ago, with the generous response from the community for the raffle raising money to help us out, which was amazing. But it made me realise what the local community can do to support each other.

...bring a smile...

“I am very passionate about helping others and have an interest in supporting adult mental health issues. In association with the Weller Centre in Caversham, I have launched ‘Bentos For Better Days’, for which we have developed a ‘Pay It Forward’ initiative, allowing people to provide a cake for an adult who would really benefit from a special treat, bring a smile to their face, and helping them to celebrate their birthday. It’s a way of ‘giving back’ and supporting others.”

Jo and her team are endlessly coming up with new ideas for cake decorations – “For example, I’m obsessed with food and flavours, so this might be inspired by places I’ve been to, or the seasons. Nature is another source of inspiration, especially for my floral designs. We look at Pinterest for ideas and to see the latest trends and check out Instagram.

“My best ideas come when I’m taking a walk, or just as I’m falling asleep! All of us here love decorating cakes, but it’s also our customers who come up with their own ideas. For example, I make brownies and for special occasions, we can put edible labels on them. One customer wanted a very cute photo of her baby’s face on the



“I’m obsessed with food and flavours, so this might be inspired by places I’ve been to, or the seasons. Nature is another source of inspiration, especially for my floral designs...”

brownies I made for her! I do cakes for big corporate events as well as for weddings, so these always are personalised. I even had a customer who wanted to celebrate ‘One year being sober!’”

Jo has recently branched out so that customers in Henley can order her products through Pavilion Foods in Market Place, which can then be delivered there. And in August she started creating cakes which will celebrate a new country every month – starting, appropriately enough, with staff member Viktoria’s Ukraine.

Jo loves the creativity which fizzes from the team around her. “While I created the brand, our staff at BKRY are all very creative in their own right – one is an artist, as well as a tattooist. All the designs you see painted on the BKRY walls are her work. As one of my bakers said, it’s nice that they all have something different to contribute, and everyone is allowed to be creative – while in the meantime, the customers keep coming back!”

Find out more:

Check out products and information about the BKRY Academy via bkry.co.uk



Graduates of Jo’s Ultimate Celebration Cake class



Jo personalises cakes to order – for weddings, celebrations, and corporate occasions

all photos BKRY

Time To Engage

by Sheila Cox

ENGAGE BEFRIENDING is a local charity befriending older people in the area. Have you ever thought about the neighbours in your street who might be housebound? Caversham and Emmer Green is a very community-minded area. Currently 16 older people are being visited or telephoned regularly by one of our befrienders. Volunteers visit an older person once a week

or fortnightly for an hour or so and give support in some of the following ways; visits to medical appointments, out for lunch or a cuppa together, visiting National Trust properties and local towns, playing games, going for short walks, providing transport to our coffee mornings or just simply visiting.

There are currently two older people on our waiting list, hoping the right person will come along to match with them. One person wants to meet a volunteer at a café in Caversham for a chat and a cuppa and perhaps a short walk. Another would like a weekly pub visit. Visits or trips out make such a difference to someone feeling lonely or isolated. We like to think both the volunteer and the older person get something out of visits, especially if they live away from their home country or family.

Some volunteers are introduced after the death of the older person's partner. During such a difficult period, just having someone who will listen is helpful, and practical help can also be identified.

Volunteers must be checked out to keep everyone

safe. Any necessary training will then be provided. We will inform any prospective volunteers of the requirements.

Here are some comments from the older people we're visiting: "It's widened my horizons because he's involved me in what's going on in the world". "It's company for me and we chat a lot. We talk about 'Old' Reading". "It has made a difference – it's good to have someone call in regularly. I only see him and the carers".

Everyone deserves companionship and conversation and Engage's mission to reduce loneliness by helping people connect with their community is part of our communities' response. Could you offer an hour a week to visit an older person in your neighbourhood?

For more information about Engage Befriending, please contact:

Sheila Cox - Regional Co-ordinator on 07516 254916 or at sheila.cox@themustardtree.org

Or see their website, engage-uk.org Office telephone: 0118 995 2102



Margaret's war-time memories

Caversham resident Margaret has a Befriender through Engage Befriending, who visits and takes her out. Margaret shared some of her war-time memories with Tony Newell at a recent monthly Engage drop-in café.

text and photos Tony Newell

HER EARLIEST memory was her father collecting her from Sunday School. At home they heard Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain on the radio announcing Britain was at war. Almost immediately there was an air raid siren, but the family did not have an air raid shelter.

Margaret was at junior school when World War II started and lived with her family near Hounslow Barracks. In the cul-de-sac where they lived, her father and some neighbours together dug the ground and constructed Anderson shelters for their homes. During the Blitz – the sustained aerial bombing from September 1940 to May 1941 – Margaret and her family spent the nights in their shelter.

...flying bombs...

After May 1940, Margaret remembers listening to Prime Minister Winston Churchill's speeches on the radio. Later in the war she recollects the sound of the 'doodlebugs' - the flying bombs which went silent when about to hit their targets. When one landed near her home they had to be evacuated. Most of the men in the area had gone to war. Those left, including Margaret's father,

were on ARP (Air Raid Precautions) duty - checking blackouts, responding to air raids by sounding alarms, providing first aid, and other duties as needed. Once, when Margaret's father was on duty, a lump of burning shrapnel landed in a bucket of water right outside her shelter. Any closer and Margaret would not be here to share her memories! Everyone was issued with an identity card, a ration card and a gas mask.

Margaret's school was next to Hounslow Barracks, so the children would often have to wait for the troops to pass by. They exchanged waves and blew kisses - the troops were probably remembering their own children they had left behind.

Margaret saw many Spitfires and Hurricanes flying from the nearby Heston Aerodrome on their missions. They would return in formation, so it was easy to spot if any were missing. She would say to her mother, "One missing tonight".

On VE Day, her mother and the other ladies managed to provide food for the street party despite rationing. But the war with Japan was ongoing, and Margaret remembers the atom bomb being dropped, finally ending hostilities.



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First Impressions Matter

From Trailer to Feature Film: Telling Your Professional Story

by Laura Harmsworth



YOUR CV LISTS achievements, but can you tell good stories about them? September is a great time to learn how stories can improve your job applications. Every bullet point on your CV represents a story. The trick is telling these stories well across different formats — whether in cover letters, interviews, or networking conversations.

Beyond the STAR Method

Whilst STAR (Situation, Task, Action, Result) provides structure, good professional stories need emotional intelligence. Consider the human bits: What motivated your decisions? How did you navigate uncertainty? What did you learn about yourself?

Different Stories for Different Formats

Professional storytelling works across multiple platforms with varying levels of detail. Your CV bullet point might read: 'Led team of 12 through restructuring, maintaining 15% productivity increase during transition period.' That's short and results focused.

But when an interviewer asks, 'Tell me about managing change', you expand the full story: 'When our department faced redundancies, I inherited a team of 12 people who were understandably anxious about their futures. I started holding weekly one-to-ones, not just about work progress but about their concerns. By creating a supportive environment for honest

conversation, we actually increased productivity by 15% during what could have been a really difficult period.'

Cover letters offer a middle ground, perhaps two sentences hinting at the human elements: 'Leading a team through restructuring taught me that honest communication during uncertainty can boost performance. By creating a supportive environment for difficult conversations, we maintained team morale and exceeded targets.'

Building Your Story Collection

Start collecting your professional stories now, preparing different versions:

- **CV version: Results-focused, with numbers where possible, brief**
- **Cover letter version: Context plus outcome, showing personality**
- **Interview version: Full story with emotional intelligence and lessons learned**

The trick is knowing which version to use when. Your CV gets you noticed with highlights, but your interview stories help employers to imagine working with you.

Think of your CV as the film trailer — it shows the key moments. Your interview stories are the full film where character development happens.



For the youngest members of our community

LISTED BELOW are regular term-time events for toddlers, babies and their carers. All are free of charge, although donations towards costs are welcome.

Mondays – *Little Lambs and You* – Caversham Baptist Church, South Street, Caversham RG4 8HY 10:00-11:30. Baby and toddler group. Numbers are limited, so there is an online booking system. See www.cavershambaptistchurch.org.uk/Groups/382970/Little_Lambs.aspx

Tuesdays – *Babies and Toddlers* – Gosbrook Road Methodist Church, RG4 8EB. 10:00 - 11:30. Refreshments available. All welcome. cavershammethodist.org.uk/baby-toddler-group

Tuesdays – *St. John's Baby and Toddler Group* – Caversham Hall, St. John's Road, RG4 5AN. 09:30 - 11:00. All welcome.

Thursdays – *Toddler Thursday* – St Barnabas Church, Emmer Green, RG4 8RA. 8:45-10:00. Friendly group for preschoolers and parents/carers, refreshments available. www.saintbarnabas.org.uk/whats-on

Thursdays – *Baby Massage with midwife Katie* – 12:15-12:55 at the Weller Centre during term times. Suitable for babies from 6 weeks to crawling. 50p donation towards costs, refreshments available.

Fridays – *Tiddlers for Babies and Toddlers* – St Andrew's Church, Albert Road, Caversham Heights. RG4 7PL. 9:30-11:00. All are welcome, refreshments available. www.facebook.com/groups/209815529592564

Fridays – *Baby and Toddler Group* – Church House, Church Road, Caversham, RG4 8AX. 9:30 – 11:00. Step-free access at the back. See www.ctmparish.org.uk/stpeter for details

THE CHALLENGE SOLUTIONS:

(From left to right from the top)

tape, crass, share, turf, shape, grass, form, **class**, glass, corm, cup, corn, cut, bulb, trophy

The Caversham Bridge is a community newspaper produced by Caversham Bridge News Ltd



Future editions:

Contributions for the October issue

should be submitted by 1 September and for the November edition by 1 October. These should be emailed to:

editors@cavershambridge.org

Dates for advertising copy

are 1 September for the October issue and 1 October for the November issue. These should be emailed to:

advertising@cavershambridge.org



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Wellbeing with Ami Roy

Never Alone

LONELINESS HAS become such a widespread problem that Silicon Valley billionaires are now highlighting it to market AI companions, with Mark Zuckerberg recently stating, "The average American has fewer than three friends".

This actually echoes what the World Health Organization has called a crisis of social isolation and loneliness. They report that around 25% of older adults are socially isolated, and 5%-15% of adolescents are lonely. But a variety of research suggests reading may be a much better solution than chatbots.

A recent survey from The Queen's Reading Room, the charity and book club of Queen Camilla, and other surveys, have found that reading fiction and other books significantly reduces feelings of loneliness and improves wellbeing.

Another survey with over 4,000 participants, in

conjunction with the University of Liverpool, found reading offers powerful benefits, serving as a top method for reducing stress. In addition, participants reported reading encouraged personal growth, such as improving health, picking up hobbies and boosting empathy, with 64% of readers having a better understanding of others' feelings.

One way in which reading may help reduce loneliness is by enhancing our social cognition, which is the ability to understand and connect with others.

A neuroimaging study of young adults found that reading fiction, particularly passages with social content, activated areas of the brain involved in social behaviour and emotional understanding, such as the dorsomedial prefrontal cortex. This brain region is also linked to the stronger social cognition seen in frequent fiction readers, suggesting a neural pathway through which reading fosters greater social connectedness.

Importantly, reading may also reduce the risk of dementia. One study of 469 people aged 75 and over, with no dementia at baseline, were followed up for 5 years. Among leisure activities such as playing board games,

playing musical instruments and dancing, reading was associated with a 35% reduced risk of dementia.

A number of studies have similarly shown that engaging in cognitively stimulating activities, such as reading, can slow cognitive decline.

So, while AI and chatbots can enhance our lives in many ways, they are not a solution to everything. We know that, while technology has many benefits, it has also produced many unforeseen problems. Let's solve problems of loneliness and social isolation through reading and book clubs. Reading is also a great way to improve brain structure, cognition and wellbeing.



Local Clergy and Church Services

ANGLICAN

Caversham Thameside and Mapledurham Ministry

St Margaret, St Peter, St John

Rev'd Mike Smith,

The Rectory, 20 Church Rd, Caversham RG4 7AD

Tel: 0118 947 9505 rector@ctmparish.org.uk

Rev'd Penny Cuthbert Tel: 07825 331 810

penny@ctmparish.org.uk

Rev'd Rachel Ross Smith Tel: 07884 371688

rachel@ctmparish.org.uk

Rev'd Dr Catherine Radcliffe Tel: 07740 475697

catherine@ctmparish.org.uk

Contact: admin@ctmparish.org.uk or 0118 996 8836

Correspondence address: Church House,

59 Church Street, Caversham RG4 8AX

Current services

St Margaret's Church

Mapledurham – 11:15. 1st, 2nd, 4th Sunday Holy

Communion, 3rd Sunday Service of the Word.

St Peter's Church

1st Sunday of the month: 9.30 All Age Service of the Word, with music group and choir

18.30 Holy Communion with prayers for healing, with choir

2nd and 4th Sundays: 8.00 said BCP Holy Communion

9.30 Holy Communion with choir and activities for young people, primary and secondary age

3rd Sunday: 9.30 All Age Holy Communion in a shorter format, with choir – 18.30 Choral Evensong

Wednesday: 9.30 said Holy Communion

All services live streamed on Zoom. For Zoom details go to www.ctmparish.org.uk/services/online/

St John's Church

Gosbrook Road Sunday services

9:30 1st and 3rd Sunday Holy Communion,

2nd All Age Worship, 4th Service of the Word

Sunday Club for children on 1st, 3rd and 4th Sundays

Thursday: 10:00 Holy Communion

St Andrew's

Rev'd Nigel Jones, St Andrew's Vicarage, Harrogate Road.

Tel: 0118 947 2788 www.standrewscaversham.org

Current services

St Andrew's weekly services are Sundays at 8:00 and 10:00. The 10:00 is also livestreamed on the St Andrew's YouTube channel. Prayer Book Communion at 11.30 on the first Sunday of each month. More info on the parish website. www.standrewscaversham.org/services
Compline: 8.30 on Mondays during BST (in church)

St Barnabas, Emmer Green and Caversham Park

Rev'd Kevin Lovell, vicar@saintbarnabas.org.uk

Church Office Tel: 0118 947 5214

Current Services

Sundays: 8:00 BCP Holy Communion (1st Sunday only)

9:30 Parish Communion (Service of the Word on 2nd Sunday)

11:15 All Age Worship (Café Church or Family Communion)

Wednesdays: 10:30 Midweek Communion

Morning Prayer: Tuesdays 8:30 in church; Mon/Weds/Thurs 8:00. online at

www.facebook.com/StBarnabasEmmerGreen/live_videos

Full details at www.saintbarnabas.org.uk/whats-on

METHODIST CHURCH

The Methodist Church Caversham

Rev'd David Jenkins Tel: 0118 327 1592

www.cavershammethodist.org.uk

Current services

Caversham Heights Methodist Church

Highmoor Road

Sunday – 10.30 – Also available on YouTube.

Gosbrook Road Methodist Church

Current services: Sunday – 10:30

New Testament Church of God

Rev'd Dr Garrick Wilson

Tel: 0118 946 3009

UNITED REFORMED CHURCH

United Reformed Church, Caversham Park

Contact: **Dr Alison Johnston**

Tel: 0118 947 5152 www.cavershamparkurc.com

Current services

Sunday – 11:00 – Livestreaming on YouTube

Details on their web site at:

<https://cpurc.org.uk/live-stream>

BAPTIST CHURCH

Caversham Baptist Church

Pastor: **Colin Baker**

Church office Tel: 0118 954 5353

Email: secretary@cavershambaptistchurch.org.uk

Current services

Sunday worship 10:30 each week, including groups for children and youth

Sermons are recorded and uploaded to

www.cavershambaptistchurch.org.uk

Hymn Café 15:00-16:00 on the last Sunday of each month

Grace Church (formerly Caversham Hill Chapel)

Elders **Nick King** and **David Steed**

Tel: 0118 947 4529 www.gracechurchcaversham.org.uk

See their web site for details:

www.gracechurchcaversham.org.uk

Riverside Church (Reading)

www.riversidechurchreading.co.uk

ROMAN CATHOLIC

Our Lady and St Anne

Fr Joe McLoughlin, The Presbytery, 2 South View Avenue

Tel: 0118 947 1787 www.ourladyandstanne.org.uk

Current services

See their web site for services at:

www.ourladyandstanne.org.uk

St Michael, Sonning Common

(including Emmer Green and Caversham Park Village)

Fr Colin Blayney, The Presbytery, 18 Peppard Road,

Sonning Common RG4 9SU – Tel: 0118 972 3418

<http://saintmichaelsonningcommon.org.uk>

For details of the services being held at each of our churches, please visit their respective websites (on this page) or the Churches Together in Caversham website www.cavershamchurch.org



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