

Caversham Bridge

No 731

www.cavershambridge.org

January 2026

Prime Minister visits St Anne's



Prime Minister and Bridget Phillipson visiting St Anne's Catholic Primary School *photo Headteacher Bridget Tobin*

by Hilary Smart

ST ANNE'S PRIMARY SCHOOL in Caversham, which is taking part in the free breakfast club initiative, was visited by Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer, Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson, and local MP Matt Rodda at the end of November.

Headteacher, Bridget Tobin, applied for the school to be part of the pilot scheme, recognising the benefits it would bring to the children and parents in the school community. She was delighted to welcome the Prime Minister to the school to see the breakfast club in action.

Prime Minister Starmer spoke to local and national press about the importance of the breakfast club scheme in making sure that all children can start the school day well fed and settled and ready to learn. He also recognised the benefit that access to additional free childcare hours can bring to families struggling with the cost-of-living crisis.

He took the time to speak to staff and pupils at the school. Mrs Tobin said, "It was a wonderful opportunity for our children to engage directly with the Prime Minister. The sense of excitement and disbelief on their faces when he walked into

What stood out most was the time he gave them, genuinely listening to their questions, responding thoughtfully, and encouraging them to think about their hopes and ambitions...

the room was incredible. What stood out most was the time he gave them, genuinely listening to their questions, responding thoughtfully, and encouraging them to think about their hopes and ambitions.

"For many of our pupils, this will be a once-in-a-lifetime experience, and I am certain they will remember it for years to come. Moments like these broaden children's understanding of the world, and show them that their voices matter. We are delighted that our pupils were able to take part in something so memorable and meaningful".

St Anne's, situated in Lower Caversham, is a State School guided by a Catholic ethos and open to families of all faiths or none.

January – Veganuary

by Phil Chatfield

We wish all our readers a Happy New Year

OUR FIRST EDITION for 2026 leads with an unexpected school visit in November (see left). Two of our articles this month feature Pride of Reading winners we reported on last month. As January is promoted as Veganuary, a campaign to inspire people to try vegan living for January, we interviewed Kevin Farrell, owner of Vegivores, as our *Community Connection* (p13). Liz Bradbury, of Walk Works, another Award winner, is the subject of our *Creative Caversham* article (p12).

Learning to disagree agreeably is the subject of Nigel Jones' *Talking Point* this month (p2). A recent local disagreement involves the ending of public membership of Highdown Sports and Leisure facilities, and we have both a reader's letter and an interview with the head teacher (p4). We also report on the Caversham and District Residents' Association meeting in November, at which Amanda Stephens spoke about setting up the charity Oilly's Work following the murder of her son five years ago. Amanda is also the subject of our *Kind Community* article (both p8).

Regular contributors include Les Cooper, reflecting on continual learning as a gardener (p10), Ami Roy on our Lymph System (p15), and Roslyn Weaver looking forward to the National Birdwatch later in the month (p2). Happy Wanderer is inspired by the Holm Oak in St Martin's Precinct (p7), and Angel Bar is the subject of Janina Maher's painting (p9). The work of volunteers contributes much to our community and is the subject of two articles this month – one looking outward and supporting refugees (p4), and the other offering help in reducing heat loss from our homes (p11).

We are always pleased to receive contributions – letters, articles, photos - for publication in future editions. Contact details are shown below.

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



Caversham shops have gone all-out with their Christmas decorations. Above Roland's the hairdressers – all his own work! *photo R Waddington*

INSIDE



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Church and Politics?



Talking Point

by Revd
Nigel Jones

IT'S OFTEN SAID that the Church should keep out of politics. But what about the other way round? Perhaps the way we do politics could teach the Church some lessons.

In a well-functioning democracy (remember that?), we have a way of disagreeing without it leading to civil war. At its best, democracy has a culture of not hating one's opponents and even respecting them. Apologies to readers in the US, I may have a different political opinion from you, but you are still my fellow countryman. Because we cherish peace, we agree to follow the opinion of the majority.

This disagreement can be quite public and open. Of course we can all think of examples of less harmonious politics, but there are issues where reasonable people can reasonably disagree.

So often this contrasts with disagreements in church where we find harsh words, sometimes even the demonising of opponents, especially where there is online anonymity. But first we just pretend, brushing disagreement under the carpet, and maybe that's part of the problem. Maybe we feel that we shouldn't disagree because we're all Christian!

In the Church of England, there is a great emphasis on unity. 'Walking together' even in disagreement. But it's not working very well. I wonder whether it would have been easier if we were more ready to acknowledge our disagreements, rather than division growing under the

surface and then bursting out over some issue (currently arguments over same sex relationships) without the habit and culture that we find in a mature democracy.

You could argue that the Church is not a democracy, but where does that leave us? That we should just obey the Bishops? Or some other less formal leadership? It's no good just saying we follow the Bible, or the tradition, because the arguments are all about how we interpret these.

So perhaps we should have been more open all along about where we disagree, and perhaps agree to disagree, in peace. For example, I think the traditional way we treat the Bible is entirely unjustified. Why should we think it is uniquely reliable? That leads to a conversation. Readers of my last Talking Point may recall that I think we misunderstand Jesus by understanding the cross as something he did only for us; we should see it as an example we are to follow.

Perhaps if we could be honest about these disagreements, we could nurture a culture and a habit of disagreeing agreeably. I have colleagues whom I disagree with profoundly about some aspects of faith, but I know that they are good people. If we can be friends with people of other faiths and work together, why not different sorts of Christian? Some of my best friends are Evangelical Christians. We disagree but we still love each other.

Revd Nigel Jones – Vicar, St. Andrew's, Caversham

Off with the bird(watcher)s

text and photo Roslyn Weaver

If you had to name a favourite bird, what would it be? **The RSPB's annual Big Garden Birdwatch is on January 23-25** and could be a chance to see that favourite bird, or to find a new one. Those of us in Caversham without big gardens to watch can still observe from a local park, or maybe from a window instead – preferably dry and warm, with a hot drink to hand.



The RSPB's annual Big Garden Birdwatch

THE BIRDWATCH ISN'T just to find favourites but to help conservation and track bird numbers across the country. Half a million people took part in 2025, with common birds including the blue tit, woodpigeon, starling, and blackbird—all fairly easy to spot in Caversham.

Of course, not everyone needs a specific event to make them watch birds. As a hobby, birdwatching dates back well over a century, and the keenest birdwatchers have travelled the world to log thousands of species. If time and budget allow, you can succumb to birdwatching madness and take guided birding holidays, buy multi-pocketed clothing to carry field guides, and collect expensive binoculars and camera lens kits.

...middle of nowhere...

The most dedicated are called 'twitchers', and if you've ever seen news reports showing crowds of people with zoom lenses in the middle of nowhere, the chances are they are twitchers, the paparazzi of the natural world, out to spot a rare bird. But nobody needs expensive kit or holidays for birdwatching—just look outside and be patient. Birdwatching famously grew in popularity during Covid-19 lockdowns, societies even started in Prisoner of War camps, and birds have inspired poets, artists, and Biblical imagery.

As for favourite birds? Predictably, the robin is usually England's favourite bird, and mine too (although I also pick the black-capped chickadee and superb fairy wren from previous homes around

the world). And I have a soft spot for the humble sparrow or 'LBJ' (Little Brown Job, a helpful if not highly technical name amateurs use for birds they have no idea about). Since the house sparrow topped Birdwatch the last two decades, let's see if it holds true again for 2026.

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Expectation and Excitement by Phil Chatfield



Sorted for Christmas

photo P Chatfield

crowds came out to enjoy singing by The Abbey Primary Choir, a DJ set at Pop Classics, refreshments and food. Vegivores, BRKY, Costa and Spill were full, and the market stalls set up around St Martin's Precinct were busy. This year's big attraction was a pair of reindeer who flew in for the evening with Santa's Sleigh – all the way from Ashford!

Santa himself was in Fourbears Books to receive gifts for distribution at Christmas – he was given quite a few books by the children visiting him in his 'Reverse Santa' role. Artist Janina Maher was also in the bookshop working on her latest painting. Local craft producers and Caversham Fairtrade set up stalls in the Baptist church, which provided a welcome stopping-off point to escape from the rain!

The Econet team arrived at Caversham Court Gardens bright and early the next morning for the annual Green



Patiently waiting for the big night

photo M Aparcar



Janina painting live

photo P Chatfield

Christmas Tree sale with their Scots Pines, harvested as part of the management of local lowland heathland. In addition, greenery for wreaths, dried flowers, fair trade gifts, and wood crafts were on sale, and the local Royal Society for the Protection of Birds team were selling bird tables and feed. Despite the closure of the main gate and a few late showers, the sale was well attended, and all but three of the smallest trees were sent on their way to new homes for Christmas.

As an aside, the main gates had been demolished by a car driving through them, and the sad remains were still on site. It is likely to be many months before replacement gates can be made and rehung. In the meantime, the gardens can be accessed from the side gate next to the stables' courtyard and the gate from St Peter's churchyard.

THERE WERE many events in our area in the run-up to Christmas, including the traditional Christmas Fairs at St Peter's and St Barnabas' Churches, and the Gala at St Andrew's Hall over the weekend of 6 and 7 December.

The centre of Caversham was busy for the late night opening event of Friday 5 December. Despite the rain, the



From the Caversham Bridge team

AS WE START the new year, we thought it would be worth reminding our readers of the objective for the Caversham Bridge paper, summarised in our Mission Statement:

To enrich community life in Caversham and the surrounding area through the provision of reliable and trusted local news, as well as information about local churches and other religious organisations, people, events and businesses.

The paper aims to reflect our local community and to build a sense of belonging. We welcome your contributions and suggestions for articles. Has someone gone above and beyond the everyday to help you or a neighbour? Do you have suggestions for people who could be included in our Community Connections or Kind Community features? Contact us at editors@cavershambridge.org

Subscriptions reminder

Our subscriptions now run from 1 April and will remain unchanged at £7 a year for 2026/7. More than 60% of subscriptions were paid by standing order or bank transfer last year, which saves significant bank charges imposed on cash and cheque payments. A standing order is a simple way to ensure your subscription is paid on time. It is helpful if these are set up for payment around the middle of March to allow us to notify your volunteer deliverer you have paid.

Our account details are: **The Caversham Bridge News, Sort Code 30-67-99, Account Number 72808960.**

And don't forget your postcode and house number, for example, RG48AX 32, so we can link payment to delivery.

We have received a few standing order payments for £5 in recent weeks. If you do have a standing order, could you please check to see if it is for the correct amount (£7).

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“ You Wrote

Looking for support

Dear Caversham Bridge

I WRITE AS a longtime subscriber to Caversham Bridge, to ask if you could lend some support to our campaign to keep the public sports facilities at Highdown School open.

All members today received an email stating that the gym was closing to public access on 31 December 2025. For context, there have been public access sports facilities at Highdown, available to the local community, for 40 years.

The facility serves the local community and is the only public school sports facility in North Reading.

Adding to this sad situation is the fact that the facilities will remain unchanged, as they are part of the school, the school head teacher has simply stated they will not be available any longer for public access.

I have asked the head teacher for comment, as I am quite sure she cannot make this decision on her own, or without wider consultation. I have also contacted local MP Matt Rodda and will continue to encourage members to support the objection to closing the facilities.

All support/advice welcome.

Jacob Macbeth. Emmer Green

Changes at Highdown

text and photo Phil Chatfield

FOLLOWING A CHANCE meeting at the CADRA open meeting in November, the head teacher at Highdown School and Sixth Form Centre invited me to visit the school and meet her to talk about her vision for the future. Given recent correspondence about access to the sports facilities at the school (left) and the important role the school plays in our community, I was pleased to accept the offer.

Laura Mathews became head teacher in January 2025, after a spell at Kennet School in Thatcham. However, she had worked at Highdown as Assistant Head before moving to Kennet, so was familiar with the school. She felt it had great potential and was excited by the prospect of taking it forward.

...reasons for closure...

Given the immediacy of the closure of Highdown Sports and Leisure (HSL) to public membership, this article considers the reasons for closure. Next month we will look at what is happening within the school, aspirations for the future, and for greater community engagement.

HSL was set up as a company in 2014, with the intention of profits contributing towards the school's educational objectives. There is a small swimming pool and a gym, the latter having taken the place of two squash courts. There were around 145 active members who could use these outside of school hours. The facilities are also let out to clubs and organisations – for example for swimming lessons. The facilities will continue to be used for the school and lettings. HSL has made a small profit in recent years but, given the need for health and safety improvements for continued public (member) use, it will become a drain on the



Highdown School, Emmer Green

school's resources. Growing the membership or increasing fees were considered but, given the small size of both the gym and pool, capacity is limited. Alternative options have been explored, such as management by the group operating Rivermead, but without success.

Highdown is an academy and part of a large educational trust managing 43 schools in the southeast of England. As such it is not a local authority responsibility, and decisions such as the closure of membership to HSL are taken based on the school's educational priorities.

Laura recognises existing members' distress at the loss of the facilities. But, having explored options for maintaining a membership scheme, she and the trust directors have decided it is no longer viable.

At the time of writing, information on the closure is available on the school website at www.highdown.reading.sch.uk/page/?title=Highdown+Sport+and+Leisure&pid=458

Next month we look forward and consider what the future holds for the school, its students and the staff.

More Than A Kind Face by Len Middleton

Care 4 Calais is a charity supporting people seeking asylum in the UK and refugees making a new life here

I STARTED VOLUNTEERING with them recently, and found that what these people want is a friendly face and a bit of help to navigate their way through the asylum system, so it's not too hard and so rewarding. I thought it would be tea, biscuits and a bit of sympathy, which it is, but also the Care 4 Calais lanyard draws people towards you.

The recruitment process is long and rigorous, but essential, as these people are so vulnerable. It involves an ID and criminal records checks, and safeguarding training.

Then the big reveal – it's not in Calais – in fact it's still Caversham! I started helping with the English lessons at the drop-in as a teaching assistant, so I don't have to plan the lesson or prepare materials. I listen to the lesson and then help the students with their exercises. In one lesson I played a landlord to whom they had to pose questions such as, 'Is the room near the railway station?'. Their level of English varies enormously, but all the students are keen to learn and lessons are fun.

When I arrived at the drop-in, volunteer asylum-seekers, eager to help, were putting out the tables. My conversations started when so many phones were brought out, because the Home Office has made everything electronic, including eVisa problems, emails from gov.uk and translation Apps. Despite my lack of expertise, I helped somebody go through the web pages on gov.uk to report a problem with their eVisa.

Among the things I tackled were:

- Finding someone to talk to about belief in God, discussing various branches of Christianity and Islam
- Finding an immigration lawyer; we have a list
- Finding a local gay group

- Introducing a couple of people with similar backgrounds
- I promised to bring some deodorant the next week (not for me!)

It was a busy morning, but mainly involved looking things up; Care 4 Calais has lists to help find things, and other experienced volunteers are always keen to help.

Now I make a point of trying to greet and shake hands with everybody I've met before and, after a few weeks, it is gratifying to see a couple of them coming out of their shells.

If you would like to volunteer or find out more, please email me at len.middleton@ntlworld.com To find out more, visit the Care4Calais website at <https://care4calais.org>



Drop-in helpers

photo Care4Calais

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by Alex Forbes



For your bookshelf...

Welcome to our monthly article where we chat about books we've enjoyed in the last month

Happy New year to everyone from Fourbears Books

OUR FIRST BOOK is *List of Suspicious Things* by Jennie Godfrey. It is set in 1970s Yorkshire when the Yorkshire Ripper is still at large. 12-year-old Miv decides that she and her best friend are going to catch the Yorkshire Ripper by keeping a list of anything that is suspicious in their village. It includes the vandalism at the local newsagents, the way Miv's dad is acting, the behaviour of her teachers, and many more goings on. It's written well, as it reads like a 12-year-old is talking. There is a lovely innocence in her point of view. I really liked the different characters but, as you can imagine in

those times, the goings on are not always pretty. This was recently a 'thumbs up' from the book club.

The children's pick is a series I have written about often, Skandar. This title is *The First Unicorn Rider*, and it is set around a thousand years before the adventures of Skandar. George is shipwrecked on a mysterious island and, while exploring, he discovers a unicorn. But not the fluffy cuddly unicorns we know and love, these are wild, bloodthirsty beasts.

Interestingly, the publisher has pitched this book as 9+ and I'd agree in terms of content, but the size of text in the book lends itself to those who may struggle with reading at that age group or slightly older. Theme wise, if your 8-year-old doesn't get scared easily, it's a great read. Full of adventure and magic, with a dose of mystery.

Fourbears Fest is fast approaching in February and March, so look out for those events; we have some cracking authors coming to see us.



Nothing suspicious about this bear!

photo A Forbes

The Property Market



by **Kate Fox**

Owner and Director of Fox-Beckett Independent Estate Agents



Getting ready to sell your home? Top Tips to prepare

WHEN YOU feel it's time to move, it's the perfect time to get your property ready. It may be a long-term planned move, or a more spur of the moment decision. If you don't have long to prepare your property for sale, here are some great tips for getting you and your home market-ready, whatever the circumstances.

- 1. De-clutter.** Store anything you don't use regularly or need in the loft or garage, clear work surfaces in the kitchen and bathroom, keep kids' toys in one space, and make sure viewers can walk around the rooms without tripping over anything.
- 2. Clean your home** from top to bottom, with shining taps, clean windows, spotless kitchen work surfaces, and plumped and inviting sofas and cushions.
- 3. Don't forget** the outside of your home, as first impressions are vital. Clean the front door, add a couple of pretty pots outside, sweep paths and wipe down the windowsills. Mow the lawn and sweep patios.
- 4. Make sure your home smells nice:** pet smells are not for everyone! Keep some windows ajar to allow in fresh air, add some fresh flowers and scented candles.
- 5. Check your finances** with a mortgage broker to ensure you are able to afford the move.
- 6. Instruct a good, local solicitor** early, as the forms they will send you to fill in may take some time to complete.
- 7. Make a box file** for all the guarantees or paperwork you have for your property, which will be useful for your solicitor once you start the conveyancing process. These might include records of boiler services, any electrical certificates and receipts for any works you have had done to your property.
- 8. You will need** a valid energy performance certificate (EPC). To find out if you already have one in place search your postcode on the government website, Find an energy certificate - GOV.UK. Your estate agent can help you find a local provider too.
- 9. Get three valuations** from local estate agents and understand how they are going to market your property and who will be looking after you during the process. Remember that pricing your home correctly is very important.
- 10. Always have** professional photographs of your home and be there on the day to help with presenting it in its best light.
- 11. Get door mats!** When you have lots of people like agents, viewers and surveyors coming in and out, good-sized door mats where people can take their shoes off at the front and back doors are vital.

Once you have managed to work through the list you will have done all you can to start your moving plans on a positive note!

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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.

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 – *Rivarate Choir* – Caversham Heights Methodist Church, Highmoor Road. 19:30 in term time. Enjoy singing together. For details see rivarate.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

Wednesdays – *The Waltham St Lawrence Silver Band* – Neville Hall in Waltham St Lawrence RG10 0JJ. 20:00-22:00. Free and friendly club for brass instrumentalists. Email: waltham.band@gmail.com

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

Thursdays – *Weller Voices Community Choir* – 19:30-20:30. Weller Centre, 110 Amersham Road, RG4 5NA. Term time only. Singing is fun, free and for all. Join any of our sessions. For details, contact wellervoices@gmail.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/KeepCavershamTidy)

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

Friday 2 January – *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

Wednesday 7 January – *Reading Urban Walk 3.00 Miles* – 10:30 Reading Urban Level Pavement Walk. Ideal for Winter. Meet just inside Reading Museum. Blgrave Street RG1 1QH. Walk to Rural Life Museum, Redlands Road. Coffee and Museum visit for one hour and return to Reading Museum. Pang Valley Ramblers. One of a programme of regular walks in the area – see pvramblers.org.uk/walks-programme

Tuesday 6 January – *Caversham Women's Institute* – 19:30 at Church House, Caversham. www.thewi.org.uk or Tel: 0118 947 5176

Wednesday 7 January – *Rosehill Ladies* – 14:00 at St Barnabas Hall, Emmer Green. Tel: Sue 0118 947 7570 or email suegreen@hotmail.com

Friday 9 January – *Chazey Women's Institute* – 14:30 at St Andrew's Church Hall. Tel: 0118 947 0964, or e-mail rowena@primology.com

Wednesday 21 January – *Today's ability to predict extreme weather in a changing climate, a talk by Professor Sir Brian Hoskins CBE FRS, Japan Prize Laureate 2024* – 20:00 The Caversham Heights Society at Caversham Heights Methodist Church Hall, Highmoor Road. To learn more visit cavershamheights.org or email: contact@cavershamheights.org

Monday 26 January – *David Hockney, a presentation by local artist and art teacher Keith Appleby* – 14:00 Reading u3a, Abbey Baptist Church, Abbey Square, Reading. Non-members welcome, free entry. See www.readingu3a.org.uk

Friday 23 January – *Accents et dialectes en France et dans les pays francophones. Sabine Martinez investigates the accents and dialects found in the French regions and abroad* – 19:30-21:30 Le Cercle Français at Church House, 59 Church Street, RG4 8AX. 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 readingcirclefrancais@gmail.com

Coming up:

Monday 2 February – *Building and sailing the Proteus, a talk by local sailors Robin Popham and Paul Waterman* – 19:30 doors open, 20:00 talk. Reading Offshore Sailing Club. Upper Thames Motor Yacht Clubhouse, Sonning Mill Island, Reading RG4 6TW. For further details see www.readingoffshore.org.uk or contact sailrosc25@gmail.com

Gardeners Prepare!

Caversham Horticultural Society Spring show will be on Saturday 28 March 2026.

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

THIS MONTH, the controversial proposal for 70 homes in South Oxfordshire (SODC) at **Land West of Kidmore End Road**, Emmer Green (P25/S1431/O) was narrowly refused by SODC Planning Committee, however the developers are expected to appeal.

In Caversham around the centre and river there are two new applications: at **3 Prospect Street** (PL/25/1211), a change of use to a tanning and beauty salon; and in **St Martins Precinct** (PL/25/1608), non-material amendments concerning materials, architectural details and tree relocation, which relate to the approved plan for a new apartment block (PL/14/0997), on the land near the telephone exchange.

There are also updates on applications in the same area. In **Church Street**, both of the proposed **BT Street Hubs** and their illuminated advertising were refused (PL/25/1352 & PL/25/1388), citing visual clutter, obstruction of pedestrians and wheelchair users, and the noise and light pollution impacts. Similar BT Hubs across the town have also been refused. At the listed **2-4 Church Street** (PL/24/1531 & PL/24/1537), where permission was granted in May, work has started before the required materials condition was discharged.

The appeal against the refused extension for **1 Gravel Hill Cottages** (PL/25/0574) was dismissed citing the impact on the property's character and its Chilterns National Landscape setting.

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

CADRA is a non-political voice for Caversham, Emmer Green and the community around North Reading. It is run by a small team of volunteers.

Membership costs just £9 for three years – see membermojo.co.uk/cadra for details.

A Fair Trade Christmas

THE ANNUAL Fairtrade sale in our house in November raised more than £350 for charity, shared between Launchpad Reading, the Red Cross and WaterAid. We would like to thank everyone who supported the sale,

especially those who kindly baked cakes and biscuits!

We are already planning our regular plant sale, which will be in May, with the first seeds (chillies and aubergines) due for planting early in January!

by Pam Chatfield

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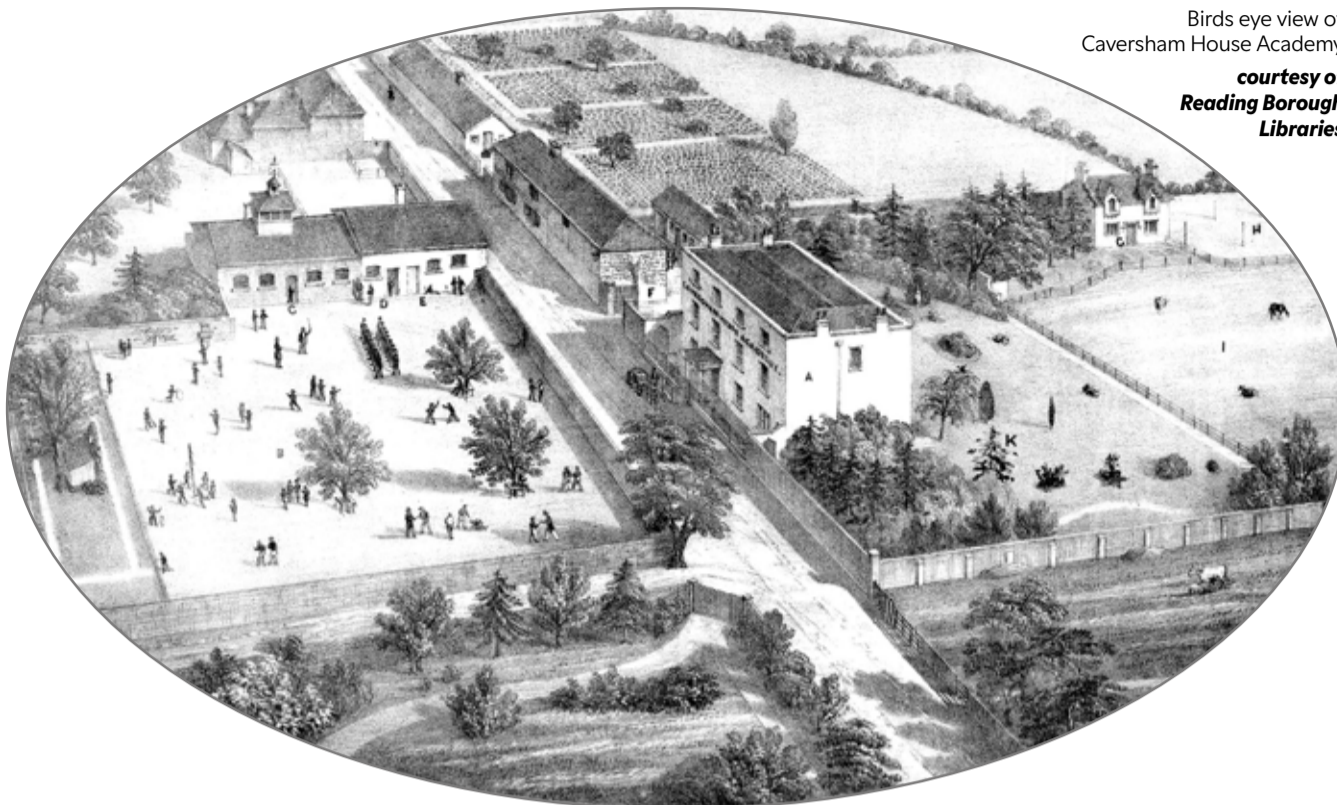
O NA SUNNY morning last October, I was standing at the bus stop by the Library in Hemdean Road when the wonderful autumn colours of the trees in the shopping precinct on the opposite side of Church Street caught my eye. It didn't seem all that long since they were planted, and I seemed to remember some old trees there before. And then my attention turned to the more sombre colour of the very large holm oak, growing right up against the Costa Coffee shop. Why on earth had the shop been built so close to the tree? It must have been a large tree before the shops were built. And why had the tree been planted there in the first place, a century and more before?

And so, while the other people at the stop seemed to be fiddling around with mobile phones, I was quite happy with my private thoughts. I thought the holm oak might make a suitable subject for an article in the *Caversham Bridge*, and then I started thinking about other notable trees in Caversham. Then the bus arrived.

...like a holly...

The holm oak, or evergreen oak, *quercus ilex*, is not native to Britain. Like other oaks, it has small greenish flowers in the spring, and acorns in the autumn. Its leaves are dark green with paler and slightly downy undersides and, sometimes, spines on the edges like holly. The Oxford English Dictionary says that the name for the holly was originally holm or hollin, and the botanical name of the tree signifies an oak tree which is like a holly.

I was curious as to whether the Caversham specimen was protected by a Tree Preservation Order, and was surprised to find this had happened only in 2013, when it was described as 'a tree of significant amenity value'. I doubt whether the owners of the shopping precinct saw it in that light in 2015, when they proposed building more flats above the shops, which would have risen above what is there now.



Birds eye view of Caversham House Academy
courtesy of Reading Borough Libraries

The tree would have touched the windows, and there was mention of 'topping and lopping' in the local paper. In the end, this did not happen, because the partners owning the Waitrose supermarket decided not to extend their building, which opened in 1984 on what had been the site of the old Regal Cinema.

The tree, and several other old trees, had been part of the garden of Caversham House. From around 1850, this had been a boys' boarding school run by the Knighton family.

Our illustration of the school, which dates from around 1885, shows the house and the junction of Church Street and Hemdean Road, and comes by courtesy of Reading Borough Libraries. Sadly, the holm oak is not identifiable on the print. Across the road, the school playing field can be seen – now the site of the Library, the New Testament Church of God and the Working Men's Club. It has been said that a tunnel was built under Church Street, between the house and the playing field. I wonder...

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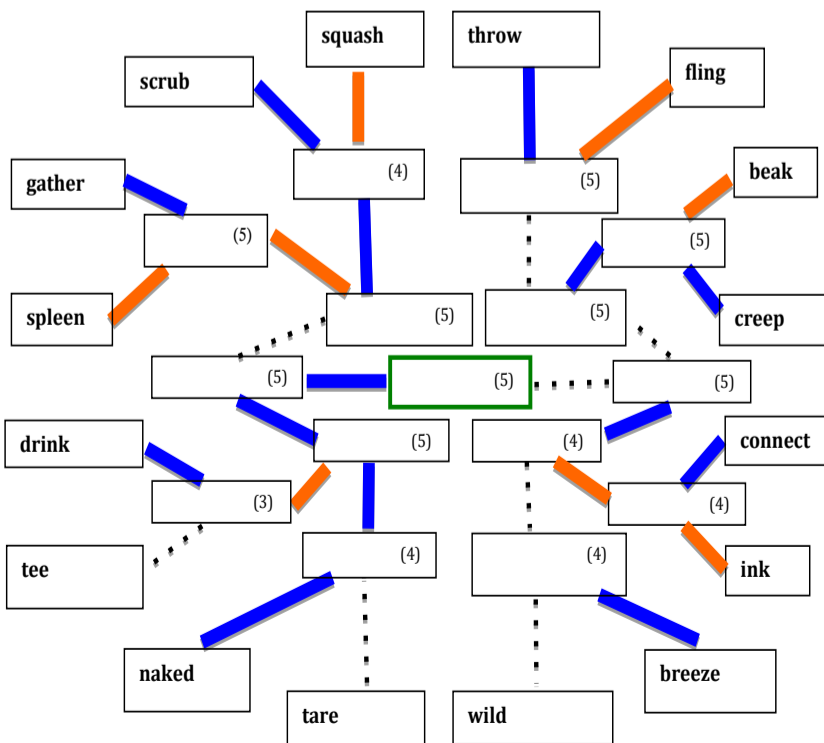
Puzzle Corner

The Challenge by Rachel

WORD PUZZLE

Find the word that has the same meaning as the clue; or rhymes with; or has one letter that is different. For example: *tingle* has 6 letters, rhymes with *shingle* and means *thrill*.

Rhyme ———
Letter change
Meaning ———



Answers on page 14

KNITTING

Can you find 25 knitting related words in the grid?

C	H	A	H	M	Y	L	J	P	L	A	N	R	K
N	A	R	H	D	T	I	N	K	U	F	D	E	N
I	R	R	Y	E	R	I	B	W	Y	R	G	V	I
E	O	A	D	X	K	S	V	O	Y	N	L	O	T
K	W	N	N	I	Q	O	K	O	L	M	T	L	T
S	U	Y	G	O	G	N	Y	L	P	R	I	L	I
F	A	C	A	P	L	A	Z	F	R	C	Y	U	N
A	G	S	O	C	K	S	N	Z	U	A	E	P	G
I	E	R	E	M	H	S	A	C	O	S	S	G	N
R	P	V	E	E	N	E	C	K	F	T	R	L	E
I	B	A	L	L	V	V	A	E	X	O	E	N	E
S	R	E	P	M	U	J	B	C	E	N	J	R	D
L	B	M	B	E	C	V	L	A	E	S	Q	A	L
E	H	S	L	E	E	V	E	L	J	X	P	Y	E

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Cable
Cardigan
Cashmere
Cast on
Fair Isle
Four Ply
Knit
Knitting Needle
Jersey
Jumper

Lace
Pullover
Purl
Rib
Row
Skein
Sleeve
Socks
Vee Neck
Wool
Yarn
Yoke

Our *Kind* Community

text and photo Caroline Gratrix



Amanda Stephens: Five Years On: How Kindness Carries Olly's Legacy

January marks five years since the murder of 13-year-old **Olly Stephens**, a date that still reverberates through our community. Yet when you speak to his mum, **Amanda**, what shines through isn't bitterness. It's kindness. Quiet, determined, roll-your-sleeves-up kindness that has carried her, **Stuart**, their family and friends through unthinkable grief.



Stuart, Matt Rodda and Amanda

photo Office of M Rodda MP

OLLY'S LEGACY began close to home. Emmer Green Primary School created their annual Kindness Awards in his name, inspired by the way he looked after a younger pupil, his buddy, when he was in Year 6. That small act, a boy simply caring for another child, has become the inspiration for everything his parents now do.

Amanda describes their work in three streams: campaigning, fundraising, and raising awareness. She and Stuart were part of the Bereaved Families for Online Safety, brought together by Baroness Beeban Kidron. By sharing their stories directly with MPs, they helped push the Online Safety Bill into law in October 2023. They now work with Ofcom to ensure social media platforms are properly regulated; a daunting task, but one they approach with the same compassion which has become their trademark.

Fundraising with a lot of support has grown too, from Memorial birthday walks, fishing and rugby events, to an 18th celebration party that was filled with love and fun, just as Olly would have liked! In August 2025, their 'Olly's Work' became a registered charity, The Olly Stephens Trust. To date they have raised funds for Olly's chosen charities, No.5 Young People, Parenting Special Children, The Ben Kinsella Trust, Starting Point, Grassrootz Youth Club and Give Back FC.

Alongside busy jobs, they help make documentaries, podcasts, visit schools, speak to parents and professionals, and champion three core areas: anti-knife crime, online safety and SEND support. "Olly's Work has been our focus in grief," Amanda says, "We never want anyone else to live with the pain that we do."



Amanda Stephens

Their goal is to raise £60,000 for a permanent Ben Kinsella Trust Exhibition in the Thames Valley for all the young people to visit on school trips. Anyone can help, from bake sales to sponsored challenges, seeing if your business would choose them as their charity of the year, or matching funding, maybe offer your time as a volunteer.

Amanda said, "Please help us to make sure that Olly's Work reaches the world, one Reading Kindness Rock at a time, please take a beautiful painted stone from under Olly's Tree in Bugs Bottom and treasure it or leave it on your travels".

More information, including the documentary, podcast links and to donate, can be found at: <https://readingannesty.art/ollyswork>

Hope and Happiness

by Phil Chatfield

THE THEME OF the Caversham and District Residents' Association (CADRA) open meeting on 19 November was Promoting Hope + Happiness, Preventing Hate + Harm. Olly Stephens was just 13 when an online argument led to his murder in Bugs Bottom nearly 5 years ago. His mother, Amanda, spoke about the circumstances which led up to this and the events which have unfolded since, including the setting up of a charity, The Olly Stephens Trust, which aims to protect young people by raising awareness and educating them away from violence and to stay safe online.

Amanda started with a warning about the disturbing and emotional content of her talk. Olly's tragic story was outlined and included an extract from BBC News following the conviction of his killers. The role of social media and the ready access to violent content which it served to normalise was outlined.

...online harms...

Olly's parents have campaigned in Parliament and joined a group of families who have lost loved ones due to online harms, Bereaved Families for Online Safety, set up by Baroness Beeban Kidron. One consequence has been the Royal Assent of The Online Safety Act 2023, supported by local MP Matt Rodda. This should help to reduce the amount of dangerous content online, which can be directly linked to many deaths, including the 11 young people of the Bereaved Families for Online Safety group.

Amanda was supported by Demi, a teenager herself, who spoke with passion about the impact of online content targeted at young people promoting unrealistic expectations on appearance, and self-harm, violence and suicide.

Nearly five years on, Olly is remembered in The Olly Stephens Trust, a charity, known as Olly's Work, which lobbies to remove harmful content from social media and to restrict the use of

smartphones in schools. Their work also aims to educate parents, carers, and those who work with young people, about the risks and the importance of open discussions with children which aim to understand, reassure and support them through these challenging years.

If you are able, please donate, so the charity can work with The Ben Kinsella Trust to help fund a Choices and Consequences Exhibition in Reading, offering knife crime prevention and online safety workshops to young people in our area.

To find out more visit www.readingannesty.art/ollyswork or contact ollyswork@outlook.com For more information about CADRA, see www.cadra.org.uk

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Angel Bar

THE ANGEL BAR, with its distinctive angel wings motif, is a stylish venue that provides 'Food for the Soul, Cocktails for the Spirit'. Meena Arch opened the business about three years ago, after twenty years in the hospitality and entertainment world working in cafés, hotels and restaurants. She is now passionate about her new enterprise which is a supper club as well as a cocktail bar with a great atmosphere. Hannah, behind the bar, described the interior design as 'vintage chic'. They were about to welcome guests to a quiz night when I visited, as the venue specialises in private bookings for special events, as well as welcoming everyone seeking a relaxing drink and delicious food.

Before Meena took over 18 Prospect Street, it was the Topsy Bean Cocktail and Coffee Bar, and the building has been occupied for many decades by those providing catering and food. In 1895, it was a restaurant run by a J Hunt but, by 1900, it had changed hands to G Goggins, a baker and confectioner. A street directory for 1921 lists the premises now being a confectioner and 'Refreshment Rooms' run by the Talbot Sisters, part of a business with branches in Castle Street and 17 and 18 West Street in Reading. However, by 1925, G G Parslow had taken over the building and opened as a bakery. Parslows was to become a well-known local bakery with a number of branches in the area. They also took over the premises in West Street,

...our new Ultra-Violet Rays, Vitamin 'D' Grade 'A' Bread – builds strong bone, muscle and sound teeth, and is the finest bread for athletes – children fed on it will never suffer from rickets

where they opened a 'luncheon Room'. An advert placed by Parslows in Kelly's Street Directory of 1934 made some impressive claims:

'Our NEW Ultra-Violet Rays, Vitamin 'D' Grade 'A' Bread – Builds strong bone, muscle and sound teeth, and is the finest bread for athletes – Children fed on it will never suffer from Rickets.'

The ovens installed in the Caversham bakery were manufactured by the firm of John Wilder in Wallingford – famous for engineering agricultural machinery. When a branch of Parslows in Woodley was demolished in 1982, a new road on the site was named Bakers Way in their honour. Parslows prospered for many years in Caversham and were still in business when I moved here in 1976 but were taken over by Allied Bakeries in the 1980s.

Prints of this, and all Janina's other paintings are available from her website

janinamaher.artweb.com/drawings-prints-paintings



Painting by Janina Maher

www.janinamaher.artweb.com



Artisa Market 2025

photo F Smith

Annual Market Drew The Crowds

by Elestr Lee

THE FIFTH Artisa Christmas Market, held in Southview Park off Marsack Street, is now becoming a firm Caversham fixture during the build up to Christmas. Held on November 16, organiser Tamalia Reeves – who runs the Creativ.Spaces studio there – was delighted that the crowds turned out to check out the stalls offering a mix of arts and crafts

locally made, as well as tasty food and hot drinks. For those with young children, there was also the chance to meet Father Christmas.

The sun shone on the event, and it was lovely to see old friends meeting up as they checked out potential Christmas gifts and enjoyed listening to festive music, including both a choir and Liz Bradbury's young violin pupils. Tamalia was delighted with the response and pleased to announce the 2025 market raised £637 for Sue Ryder.

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Les Cooper



Chilien Crocus – *Tecophilaea Cyanocrocus*

Questions answered – and still learning

IN OCTOBER I went to Phyllis Court in Henley, to attend a recording session of the BBC radio programme Gardeners' Question Time. It was an enjoyable and enlightening evening with an enthusiastic audience of mostly ladies. The chairman was Peter Gibbs, with panellists Pippa Greenwood, Christine Walkden and Matthew Pottage. Before the recording began, we were asked to write down any questions we might like to ask, and I dutifully wrote one about plants to grow with the onset of climate change. Thankfully my question wasn't used, because I hadn't realised I would have to move to the front row of seats to ask it. I

suspect I would probably have stumbled over my name and got the question all wrong anyway.

The other questions were very good, and the experts answered them all with ease. But events like this do make you appreciate the gaps in your knowledge. For example, Matthew Pottage recommended *Hibiscus Moscheutos*, a hardy perennial that has large showy flowers in the summer. It sounded rather good and worth growing, but I had never heard of it.

As you may know, Gardeners' Question Time has been broadcast for over 70 years and once, long, long ago, I went to a recording in Caversham, and I think

the experts were Fred Loads and Bill Sowerbutts. I would be lying if I said I remembered anything about the occasion. I suspect the audience would have been all keen, older gardening men, and I wouldn't have had the nerve to ask a question. Gardening was different back then, when we wandered around using DDT, nicotine and all manner of things that have now been banned. In those days, in trying to keep up to date with modern developments, it's a wonder I didn't poison myself to death.

We were introduced to a flower which is new to me. Have you ever heard of *Tecophilaea Cyanocrocus*, the Chilean blue crocus? Me neither, but it has the RHS Award of Garden Merit so it must be a flower to try in our gardens. Apparently it is a cormous perennial 10 cm in height, with narrow greyish-green leaves and slender stems bearing solitary intense blue, white-centred crocus-like flowers. It sounds worth trying, I will give it a go this year and report back.

Winter skin health: How to keep your glow through the cold months

WHEN THE temperature drops, so does our skin's moisture. The cold winter air, combined with indoor heating and harsh winds, can quickly strip the skin of hydration, leaving it feeling dry, tight, and sensitive. But, with a few small changes to your routine, you can protect your skin barrier and keep your glow all season long.

The key to healthy winter skin is hydration and barrier support. Many clients tell me their skin feels rough or flaky at this time of year — that's your skin's way of telling you your barrier is compromised and asking for a little extra care. Switch to a gentler cleanser that won't strip natural oils, and look for products containing ingredients such as hyaluronic acid, ceramides, and squalene to lock in moisture.

Exfoliation is still important during winter, but it should be done carefully. Over-exfoliating can damage the skin's protective barrier and worsen dryness. I recommend gentle enzyme exfoliants or low-strength acids to remove dead skin cells without irritation.

Don't forget SPF — yes, even when it's cloudy! UV rays can still penetrate through winter clouds and windows, contributing to long-term skin ageing and pigmentation. A lightweight daily sunscreen will protect your skin year-round.

Another tip: be mindful of indoor heating. Central heating can dehydrate the air, so consider using a humidifier or keeping a bowl of water near radiators to add moisture back into your environment.

...stimulate circulation...

Professional treatments such as hydrating facials, LED light therapy, or gentle resurfacing treatments can also give the skin a much-needed boost in the colder months. These treatments help stimulate circulation and repair the skin barrier, leaving you with a healthy, radiant complexion.

Winter can be harsh on your skin, but with the right care and protection, you can stay glowing, hydrated, and confident right through to Spring.



by **Perry Walker**
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Reading Hydro Energy Champions

by Austin Jacobs

Reading Hydro Innovation Director

READING HYDRO is the Community Benefit Society which built the hydro-electric plant at Caversham Lock. Following four successful years' operating the plant, our innovation team looked at how we could help individuals achieve warm, comfortable, energy-efficient homes. We also wanted to actively support a fair transition to a low-carbon economy for everyone.

As a result, we are pleased to announce the launch of a new, completely free, service providing home energy advice. Our volunteer 'Energy Champions' group started work on 1 December 2025. The service is designed to help anyone facing an energy challenge. For those struggling with bills, our Champions replace

light bulbs with low-energy LED bulbs free of charge. We also help troubleshoot heating system problems, and offer advice on saving energy at home.

For all homeowners, we offer thermal imaging and home energy advice. This includes looking at billing and tariffs, hints and tips on saving energy, and advice on larger investments such as solar panels.

...reduce the energy...

We are already helping people across the area. Our first caller had a modern, centrally heated, one-bed apartment costing her £30 a week in electricity! We also helped a landlord wanting to reduce the energy consumption of a Victorian terraced house with a 'Heat pump readiness' assessment.

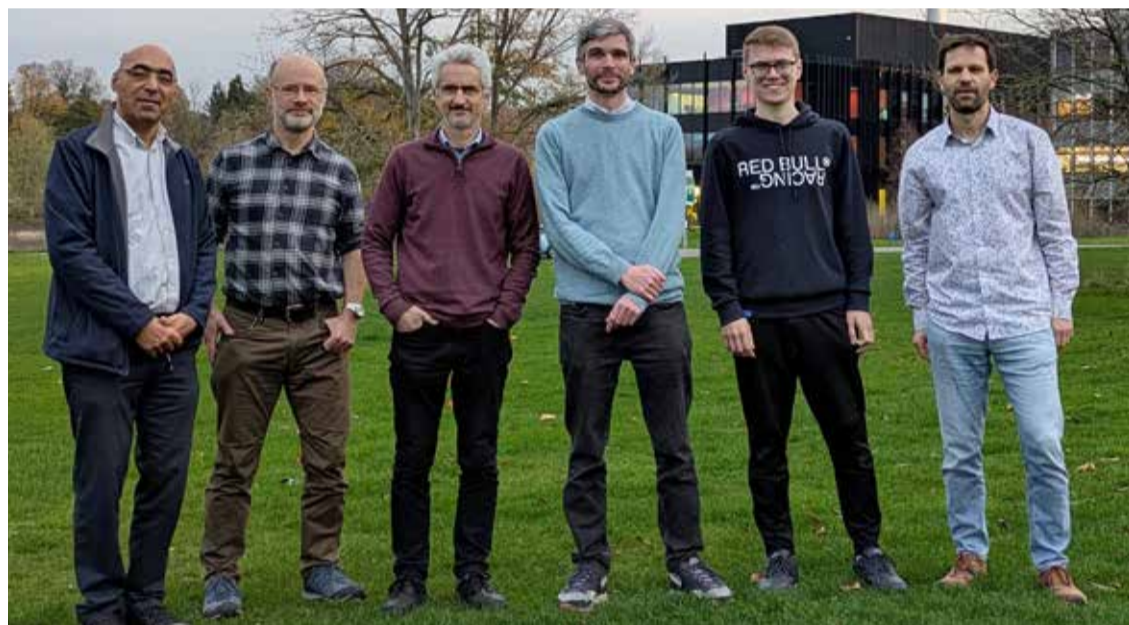
Our volunteer advisers are trained to a City and Guilds standard, and can help people over the phone and in their homes. Reading Hydro also has a great network of people who just want to share their experiences of making home energy improvements.

We're now ready to help with your home energy challenge, whatever it may be. If you would like us to help you, or you know someone who needs our help, get in touch:

Call us on **0300 102 4536**

or email us: energy.champions@readinghydro.org

We need to raise funds for homes in fuel poverty and seek donors to support these giveaways, so if you can help, please contact us. We are also seeking volunteers – see readinghydro.org/about-our-hydro/get-involved



The volunteer champions

photo Reading Hydro

For those struggling with bills, our Champions replace light bulbs with low-energy LED bulbs free of charge. We also help troubleshoot heating system problems...



Check your home for draughts

DRAUGHTS ARE bad news. They waste your heat, reduce comfort and bring dirt in from outside. Controlling draughts is the most cost-effective way of reducing your heating bills, with paybacks in a couple of months.

To find draughts, first of all look for them. If you can see daylight through a letter box, keyhole, around or below a window frame or beside a door, then there will be a draught there. Check the top of your airing cupboard for gaps, or holes through the ceiling into the loft. Any crack that is discoloured black could well have a draught coming in through it, depositing dirt from outside. In an older house, don't forget to look for the ventilation systems provided for old boiler systems and fireplaces. Unnecessary airbricks hidden behind furniture and cupboards are common places where draughts can get in. Finally, the fireplace itself. If you do not use it, then plug it for the winter months with a 'chimney sheep' or a pillow in a bin bag. Take it out in the Spring to air the chimney.

The second method for locating draughts is to feel for them. Dampen the back of your hand and hold it close to socket outlets, windowsills, window sashes, skirting boards, where pipes go through walls, or any cracks; if the back of your hand feels cold then there is very likely a draught.

There's a helpful video on draughtbusters.net/finding-draughts and this website contains all the information you need to DIY away your draughts once you've found them.

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Creative CAVERSHAM

Music in the air...



Local musician and violin teacher **Liz Bradbury** has ‘added a new string to her bow’ as they say! – as co-founder, with Caroline Gratrix, of Walk Works. Liz explained to **Elestr Lee** how the inspiration for the new venture came

“Grew up in Hertfordshire, and studied at Durham and then Newcastle,” Liz said. “Having initially studied music, I did my master’s in information and library management and went to work in London, doing business research in the corporate world. My husband got a job in Oxford, so we came to live in this area.

“When the youngest of my three children was five, I got my violin out and joined Reading Symphony Orchestra – I really loved it! When I told friends and school parents that I played the violin, they started asking me if I could teach their children. This grew, and I’ve been teaching for 14 years now. I worked for Berkshire Maestros for three years, teaching in schools all over the county, including running a string orchestra based at Highdown. But now I work privately from my house in Emmer Green.

“I teach both adults as well as children; some want to work through the grades, or I explore a wide range of musical genres with

others. For the past three years my pupils have played at the Artisa Christmas Market in Marsack Street – it’s so rewarding getting the children playing together and they have such a good time!” Liz recalled.

She’s now been a member of Reading Symphony Orchestra, which rehearses weekly at Queen Anne’s School in Caversham, for more than ten years. “When I joined RSO my first thought was ‘Wow, what an amazing orchestra’ – and I still do!” enthused Liz. She is now combining her music teaching and performing with her new project.

The idea for Walk Works came during the upheavals caused by Covid-19, when Liz and longtime friend Caroline Gratrix got together once again. “Caroline and I have been friends since we met at the post-natal group at Balmore Surgery,” Liz explained. “During Covid-19, we wanted to meet up and get some exercise. One day I suggested to Caroline we should go for a long walk in the



Group walking has created a special sense of community – even on cold days!

photo Walk Works



Liz (centre) plays violin regularly with Reading Symphony Orchestra

photo William Harris

countryside – somewhere she’d never been. That walk blew Caroline’s mind – she had no idea there were so many footpaths in this area, even though she’s lived here forever.

“We went home and excitedly looked up other footpaths, putting together a variety of routes, and reading up on the history of places we discovered. We wanted to share these walks with others and develop a business from this. In December 2020 we came up with an event and posted it on Facebook. One person turned up! After that we set up a Facebook page and an Instagram account, and learned how to use social media – eight people came, then 12 – it started growing.

“We now have a large community of ‘regulars’; we have hundreds of routes all over the Chilterns, Berkshire and South Oxfordshire. Walks tend to be from five to 10 kilometers, and last around two hours – we meet at 9:30 and can be back for 11:30, and between 20 and 40 people join us. We try to stop at a pub or café half-way, so this also supports the rural communities and small businesses around our area.”

...like meditating...

Liz sees a definite connection between being a musician and her new business. “Playing a musical instrument is both a physical activity and important for mental health. Music for me gives me a bit of ‘head space’ – it’s almost like meditating. But you also get this from walking.

“With Walk Works, it’s a great way to exercise. Like learning a new piece of music, those taking part are also discovering new places. Just as taking part in an orchestra, group walking also creates a sense of community – a shared experience. Plus the friendships which have developed amongst our regular walkers makes Walk Works even more rewarding.”

As well as discovering new walks, Liz and Caroline are developing ideas which combine walking with fun, unique experiences. In 2025 they ran two very successful Chilterns Walking and Vineyard Tours, featuring an epic 14km walk, including a tour and tasting at four vineyards. “Watch this space for new Walking and Vineyard events in 2026!” Liz promised. Walk Works

“Playing a musical instrument is both a physical activity and important for mental health...”

also offer nature-inspired re-set days, and team walks for businesses. Last year this included walks collaborating with local businesses, providing activities including a ‘sound bath’ and an African drumming workshop, enhancing the experience of being in nature. The pair are inspired by their own creativity – Caroline as a photographer, and Liz’s musical interests.

For 2026, Liz is keen to continue helping others develop musical skills as well as to enjoy the benefits of the outdoors. She is fizzing with ideas for Walk Works, which won Community of the Year award at the Pride of Reading Awards in 2025. “We weren’t expecting it – it was a real surprise!” Liz said.



Liz and Caroline

photo porawards

Find out more:

Reading Symphony Orchestra’s next concert takes place on **Saturday February 14, 19:30** at the Great Hall, Reading
rso.org.uk

Facebook: **Walk Works**
Instagram: **walk.works**
walkworks.co.uk

Community Connections

Interview with Kevin Farrell of Vegivores

text and photo Sarah Stuffs

FOR VEGANUARY we have an interview with Caversham's best-known purveyor of vegan food and winner of the Pride of Reading Hospitality Award in 2025. Vegivores is very much a passion project for Kevin. He had a career in finance, but was tired of being an underappreciated small cog in a large wheel. He had part-time jobs in hospitality as a student, which he enjoyed. At the time he and his wife were trying to eat less meat and were aware there wasn't a great choice of vegetarian food in restaurants. As he looked into it, he learned more about vegan choices and realised this was for him.

Vegivores began in 2017 as a street food van, popping up as part of the regular Blue



Kevin Farrell

Collar markets and other events in Reading. The restaurant opened in 2019 in half of the current premises, next to the butchers, which has amused many locals over the years. It expanded into the adjacent unit at the end of 2020. They were kept going during the Covid-19 lockdowns by take-away deliveries. The restaurant is now their main focus, but they still cater for one-off outside events, including corporate events and weddings.

Life isn't easy for independent businesses. We met shortly after the budget in late November, and Kevin was

looking at increased costs of nearly £2,000 per month. He recently had to close his second restaurant, in Bournemouth, as footfall wasn't high enough. However, following increased costs earlier in the year, Kevin has already introduced changes to encourage more footfall in Caversham, including a revamped, cheaper lunch menu and a monthly curry club. You can also learn how to cook vegan food in classes he runs at Queen Anne's School (the next is 24 January).

Away from work, Kevin runs several times a week and is a member of a local golf club. Though he doesn't have much time to play at the moment, he grew up next to a golf course and was a serious player when younger.

How long have you lived in RG4?

My wife and I came to the area when my job in finance transferred to Oxford from Belfast. We moved to west Reading in 2012 while my wife did a PGCE at Reading University. I was still working in Oxford and commuting through Caversham. I thought

it looked a nice area and we moved across the river in 2014.

Where are your favourite places to eat, drink and shop in our area?

When off duty I like to be as relaxed as possible and have always enjoyed the atmosphere at both the Fox and Hounds and Quattro.

How do you think we can be eco-friendlier here?

Very simply, we should all eat more plant-based food!

How would you strengthen our sense of community?

There is already a great community spirit in Caversham. There has been talk of a local music festival in 2026, which I think is a great idea.

If you could bring anything here, such as an event, experience or a shop, what would it be?

There is no wine shop in Caversham, I have never understood. If someone doesn't open one soon, I will be tempted to do it myself!

Recipe

ONE OF KEVIN'S new ventures is "Cook Like a Vegivore" cookery classes, which run at Queen Anne's School. He has shared this very tasty sounding recipe from a previous tofu masterclass cookery lesson. It's an easy and delicious snack and starter, where the bites and the dip are both made from different types of tofu, so are crammed full of protein. The next class on 24 January will be an introduction to plant-based food.

Buffalo bites with ranch dip – Meaty, spicy and saucy tofu bites with a creamy and tangy ranch dip. Serves two as a delicious snack or side!

Ingredients

Buffalo bites:

- 80g Frank's hot sauce
- 40g plant-based butter
- 200g firm tofu
- 2 tbsp cornflour
- Chopped chives for topping

Ranch dip:

- 50g silken tofu
- ¼ tsp salt, garlic powder, onion powder, oregano, smoked paprika
- 1 tsp fresh dill
- ¼ tbsp nutritional yeast
- ½ tbsp olive oil
- 1 tsp apple cider vinegar

Instructions:

- Preheat your oven to 200°C and line a baking tray with parchment paper.
- Make the buffalo sauce by melting the butter and mixing it with the Frank's hot sauce, allow to cool. Tear the tofu into bite-sized chunks and coat in the cornflour. Pour over half of the buffalo sauce and stir gently.
- Transfer the tofu on to your lined baking sheet, spread out evenly, and roast in the oven until crispy (around 20-25minutes).
- Whilst the tofu is in the oven, blend all of the ranch dip ingredients together until smooth. When the tofu is cooked, remove from the oven, transfer to a serving bowl and coat in the rest of the sauce. Garnish with chopped chives and enjoy!

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by
Katy Reay
Medical
Mentor

In the latest in our occasional series of articles on health matters, Dr Katy Reay looks at how to advocate for yourself as a patient

Taking back the reins

BEING A PATIENT doesn't mean giving up control. In fact, self-advocacy is one of the most powerful tools you have in your armoury in discussions with health professionals. It's about ensuring you are being heard, asking the right questions, knowing your options — and owning your role in managing your health and wellbeing.

Practical steps to speak up

1. Prepare before appointments

Write down your symptoms, questions, priorities. What worries you most? What do you expect from the outcomes? Having a list helps to focus the conversation and ensures you don't leave the room wishing you'd asked something.

2. Ask open-ended questions

'What are the possible causes of this symptom?' 'What might happen if I decided not to take this treatment?' or 'Are there any alternatives?' These kinds of questions invite explanation rather than a yes/no answer.

3. Clarify what you don't understand

If a term, diagnosis, or risk is unclear, ask them to explain it again — in plain language. If you're unsure about next steps, probe what monitoring or follow-up will look like and how information will be communicated to you.

4. Share your personal context

Your lifestyle, values, fears — these all matter. If something doesn't fit with your daily life, say so. For example, short-term side-effects may be acceptable for some, less so for others. Let your clinician know what you can realistically manage.

5. Request support or second opinions when needed

If you feel uncertain or uncomfortable, it's okay to seek a second opinion, or ask for written information, or even ask for a follow-up conversation. You are entitled to clarity and confidence in your care. For example, it might be helpful to ask for an email address or contact number for the team that you can use if you think of questions after the appointment.

6. Building confidence & self-belief

Advocating for yourself doesn't always feel easy — especially when you're unwell or anxious. It helps to remember that health professionals generally want the best outcome for you. Your input helps them tailor care more accurately. Over time, you'll find your voice stronger, your questions sharper, and your partnership in your own care more rewarding.

Katy is a local medical doctor with 10 years of experience who provides health coaching. Contact details email katy@medicalmentor.uk Website medicalmentor.uk



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

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

Future editions:

Contributions for the February issue

should be submitted by 1 January and for the March edition by 1 February. These should be emailed to:

editors@cavershambridge.org

Dates for advertising copy

are 1 January for the February issue and 1 February for the March issue. These should be emailed to:

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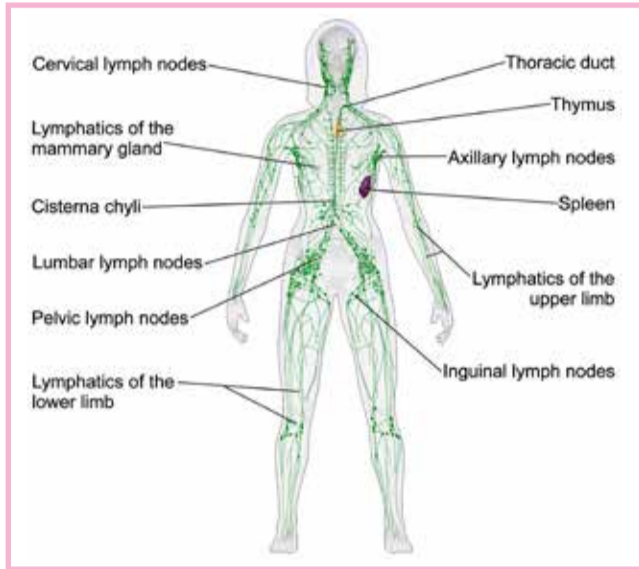
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Wellbeing with Ami Roy

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THE LYMPHATIC system permeates almost every organ of our bodies, even as it remains almost invisible!

It is a sort of waste disposal system. Our blood vessels supply our tissues with a clear, yellowing liquid containing oxygen, nutrients and immune cells. As well as nourishing cells, it sweeps up their metabolic waste products, along with fragments of damaged cells, before draining back into the vascular system.

However, about ten percent of the waste remains in the tissues. Here is where the lymphatic vessels come in; they collect the leftovers!

Inside the lymphatic tubes, this fluid is known as lymph. We have about five to six hundred lymph nodes spread out all over our bodies. At these nodes our immune cells gobble up much of the detritus and, in turn, activate nearby T-cells to look for any cancers/pathogens.

Lymph, along with these activated T-cells, travels back

through the lymphatic system and enters the blood via major ducts situated near the heart. Any unwanted waste is then filtered out by the kidneys and excreted.

Our lymphatic system plays a crucial role in immunity and waste disposal. It is only recently that scientists have noticed the possibility of improving dementia care by improving lymphatic drainage from the brain. In addition to improving our understanding of this hidden network for cancer care, they are harnessing lymph nodes to grow organ transplants!

The thymus gland and spleen are the primary organs of origin and rest for the lymphatic system. Issues such as tonsillitis, swollen lymph nodes, strep throat, lymphoedema (swelling in the body), are all signs of compromised lymphatic system functioning.

Regular exercise, adequate hydration, deep breathing and gentle massage are all known to improve lymphatic system function. Anything we can do to help this wonderful hidden helper will benefit our wellbeing long term!



GREAT PHOTO?



SHARE IT with our readers! We have featured photos from several of our subscribers on the front page. A sunset, rainbow and egret have featured in recent months.

If you have a special shot to share, send it to us as an email attachment at editors@cavershambridge.org

Please note, it needs to be a good resolution for printing. As a guide, a file size of around 1Mb or greater.

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 on YouTube

Gosbrook Road Methodist Church

1st and 3rd Sundays: 10:30

Worship on Wednesday: 10:00-10:30

Third Thursday - Thursday Night Live: 19:30'

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:

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

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)

Deacon Brian Theobald, 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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