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Caversham Bridge

No 732

www.cavershambridge.org

February 2026



Ms Mathews

photo Highdown School

Bringing back joy

In our January edition, we provided a brief introduction to the Head Teacher at Highdown School and Sixth Form Centre, Laura Mathews, and reported on the reasons for the closure of Highdown Sports and Leisure. This month we learn a little more about the school and Laura's vision for its future.

by Phil Chatfield

LAURA STUDIED AT Durham University and is, by training, an English teacher. She was familiar with Highdown before she became Head last January, having previously had a spell as Assistant Head at the school. One difference between Highdown and her previous school in Thatcham is the selective nature of secondary education in Reading. However, she emphasised the talent of the school's students and the importance of helping them to find their passion and

to aspire to do well. The size of the school means it can offer a wide variety of options in addition to the usual subjects, such as Hair and Beauty (it is one of the top 5% for this in England), and Music Technology, for which results are in the top 1%.

...tackling the issue...

Covid-19 has cast a long shadow over schools and children, with school attendance down by 4% both nationally and at Highdown. Laura's vision is to bring joy back into school, whilst resetting expectations with respect to the wearing of uniforms, behaviour in the school, and

punctuality. For example, late arrivals have fallen from 200 a day to around 20 as a result of measures taken to tackle the issue.

After our discussion about the school, Laura showed me around the site and talked about plans for the future. The original building predates the development of the school – it served as a maternity hospital during World War II – and is surrounded with more modern buildings added over the last 50 years. There is a need for improved facilities for Sixth Form students, and Laura hopes these can be addressed in the near future. She believes the school has the potential to be one of the best in the country and wants students to be proud to be part of it.

We report some of the school's recent successes (p10-11) and look forward to following progress in the coming years.

'But February made me shiver With every paper I deliver...'

Don McLean – American Pie

by George Grubb

WE HOPE it's not 'Bad news on the doorstep' with the Caversham Bridge! We have had a cold spell early in the new year, with the now unusual sight of snow on the streets, if only briefly.

Our February edition leads with an article about our largest school, Highdown School and Sixth Form Centre (above). We have more news from the school inside the paper (p10-11), and we also look back at previous articles about it (p11).

Local people are in the spotlight this month. From those involved in creative activities, such as Adrienne Black of Concerts in Caversham (p16) and milliner Liz Felix (p8) to the new Chair of Caversham and District Residents Association, Nick Haskins (p14) and Ken Potter, who recently celebrated his 100th birthday at Chiltern Court (p9).

Our regular contributors have also been busy, with Happy Wanderer 'going public' about Hill's Meadows (p7),



Our sunny Christmas Day beside the Thames.

photo O Badziak

Les Cooper preparing for the new gardening year (p12), and Roslyn Weaver suggesting a break from 'multi-tasking' (p2). Perry Walker writes about teenage acne (p12) and is also the recipient of a recent award in a national skincare competition (p5). Ami Roy references Cindy Lauper, suggesting we have more fun in her Wellbeing article (p19) but, if this is too tiring, Alex Forbes can suggest a good book to read (p5). Alex has been busy putting together another Fourbears Fest programme, which runs from

the end of February into March (p4) with workshops for children, author events, poetry and a Crime Panel.

We are always pleased to hear from our readers, so do send us your news, photos or thoughts for future articles.

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

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Working together



Talking Point

by
David Jenkins

ONE OF MY favourite stories (parables) is the following: One day, in the carpenter's shop at Nazareth, the carpenter laid the tools down and went out to have his lunch.

No sooner had he gone than all the tools started to argue with each other. "Mr Hammer, you'll have to go. You make much too much noise." The hammer replied, "Well, I'll go if Mr Nail goes. I spend all day trying to knock some sense into him." Mr Nail said "Well, what about Mr. Wood. He wouldn't do anything I asked." Mr Wood complained about Mr Sandpaper: "He rubs me up the wrong way." Mr Sandpaper criticised Mr Knife: "The things he says are so cutting and hurtful." Mr Knife says "Mr Ruler ought to go; he thinks he rules everything." Mr Ruler has a go at Mr Rope saying, "He gets himself tied up in knots". Mr Rope said of Mr Glue, "I've never met anyone so stuck up." Mr Glue said, "What about Mr Screw? You have to go round and round in circles with him." Mr Screw complained about Mr Screwdriver, "He always gets onto me."

So they had nothing to do with one another.

The carpenter came back from his lunch break. He realised what had been going on, but didn't say anything. He just picked up each of the tools in turn and used them to construct a wooden plough which would be used by one of the poorer farmers in Nazareth. The farmer would use the plough to help to feed his family and other families in Nazareth. The carpenter placed the plough ready for the farmer to collect and then went out to have his tea.

No sooner had he gone than the tools started to say to each other, "Weren't we daft to fall out with each other? We did so because we're all different, but it's because we're different that we all have something distinctive to offer. And look what we've done between us under the carpenter's direction - we've made something beautiful and worthwhile and life-giving".

Like many of Jesus' stories (parables) about the 'Kingdom of God' it's a story that reflects a truth about life.

The most worthwhile, beautiful and life-giving constructive activities in which I engage are all to do with working together with others - in family life, among friends, with the Methodist people in Caversham and beyond, with Caversham Churches Together leaders and people, with Reading Inter Faith Group, and with other organisations and groups.

The ethos of Caversham Bridge is to highlight the different groups and activities which contribute to the life of the community.

Simply living alongside one another does not establish a community. A community comes into being when we work together for the common good.

Working together towards constructive ends, sometimes with people who are very different from us, is a hugely vital aspect of what life is intended to be.

Revd David Jenkins is a member of the Methodist Team Ministry.

The rewards for us of single tasking

text and photo Roslyn Weaver

If the garden bird watch of late January sparked an interest in birds, February gives another excuse to focus on birds again – single tasking.

Sunday 22 February has been called **Single Tasking Day**, an awareness day aimed at reminding us to stop doing multiple things at once.

MULTI-TASKING IS often used as a boast about superior efficiency and productivity. Yet research suggests it's a myth. When we talk about multi-tasking, what actually happens is that we are just switching between tasks – and doing it badly. Each time we change tasks, our brain has a 'switching cost' which slows it down and causes mistakes, thanks to mental tiredness.

This problem happens because our brains work best by paying attention to one thing at a time. Some negative consequences might be social – staring at a phone and ignoring someone talking with us – or study/work-related, like checking messages while in a lecture or work call and missing information. And other consequences are safety-related, like trying to drive while chatting or listening to a podcast, all of which require attention to process information from traffic situations, conversations, even music. Research also shows the most confident multi taskers are the worst at it.

So we can safely leave the multi-tasking to the birds, put the phone away, and do a single task like watching the birds at sunset instead...

It turns out single tasking also has benefits beyond relationships, study or work and safety: doing just one thing at a time helps to reduce stress and anxiety and improves mental wellbeing. In fact, it seems even the birds do multi-tasking better than we do; their switching cost can be quicker than ours, according to research on pigeons. The theory is they do this better because of different brain structures (giving a whole new meaning to the phrase *bird brain*).

So we can safely leave the multi-tasking to the birds, put the phone away, and do a single task like watching the birds at sunset instead – a little more calmly than we might otherwise.



Calmly watching birds on the River Thames

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Generating an educational return

by Lawrence Jones and Topaz Maitland

READING HYDRO hosted its 20th school visit in 2025. Some readers may have noticed a colourfully painted building while crossing the footpath on the weir at the Caversham Lock. This is Reading Hydro (RH), a hydroelectric scheme which has produced up to 46 kW of electricity since being commissioned in 2021.

It was set up as a Community Benefit Scheme, and 750 people, mainly local, invested in it. As well as generating low-carbon electricity, it will re-invest any profits back into the local community.

Another key mission for Reading Hydro is supporting education. Since 2021, RH volunteers have hosted visits for local schools to bring classes along and learn more about renewable power generation and climate change. Additionally, the volunteers can teach children about the environmental aspects of living near the River Thames, and how the hydro scheme enables fish and eels to swim upstream.

One of the local teachers, Mrs Lazor, who visited commented, "The volunteers were extremely knowledgeable and friendly. I would highly recommend the visit to anyone wanting to delve a little deeper in the local area and its sustainable and eco-friendly projects."

The education team at RH is already planning visits for 2026, and any schools interested are invited to contact reading.hydro.education@gmail.com



Reading Hydro at Caversham Lock

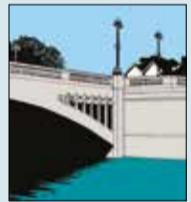
photo Topaz Maitland. Used by Permission

Scout Post Update by Elaine Rae



A BIG THANK YOU to everyone in Caversham and Emmer Green who used the Scout Christmas Post delivery service in December. The 89th (Milestone Wood) Scout Group sorted over 1,750 cards, and Beavers, Cubs, Scouts and Explorers delivered

them across the area over the weekend of 19/20 December. With your support, we raised over £950 for the 89th Reading (Milestone Wood) Scout Group, and this will help towards their participation in the WINGS jamboree in Windsor in July 2026.



From the Caversham Bridge team

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

If you already have a standing order, could you please check to see if it is for the correct amount, £7.

Scanning of past editions

Our project to make all past editions available online continues with 1972, 1992, 1993 and 1995 which have now been added.

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WE ARE SO excited about 2026 events, especially Fourbears Fest 2026. We have some cracking authors, although it is a little bit different from previous years. We found May a difficult time competing with other events, the weather, and the general business of May. Cramming all the events into one weekend potentially meant people who were away missed out. In 2026 we have spread the events over a month and moved it to February and March. **Check out our website www.fourbearsbooks.co.uk/fourbears-fest for all the details.** What better way of spending a late winter day or evening? The main events are:

Tuesday 17th February

19:30 at Fourbears Books

Will Dean – Discussing all things from his many books including his latest novel, *Adrift*. Will Dean is one of our favourite authors producing thrilling atmospheric crime novels with characters that will stay with you.

Tuesday 24th February

19:30 at Caversham Baptist Church

Gill Hornby – Perfect for all Jane Austen fans. Gill Hornby is celebrating the publication of the paperback *The Elopement*, which is the third book in her trilogy based on Jane Austen's world. *Miss Austen* is the first book and is fantastic television on iPlayer if you want to get a flavour of Gill's work.

Friday 27th February

19:30 at Progress Theatre

Crime Panel - Three fantastic authors interviewed by local legend Kate Wells. The authors are Kristen Perrin, C L Miller and Lauren North. We'll delve into what it takes to be a successful crime author. One of the authors has links to *The Antique Roadshow*, but you'll have to come along to find out who.



FOURBEARS FEST 26

by Alex Forbes

Saturday 28th February

14:00 at Progress Theatre

Robin Ince – Robin has appeared many times before at Fourbears Fest, each time it's a special event. This time he is discussing his latest poetry book *Ice Cream for a Broken Tooth*.

Saturday 28th February

16:00 at Progress Theatre

Create a Novel on stage
M J Arlidge and some special famous author friends join us to create a novel with the help of the audience. This will be a unique and fascinating event.

Saturday 14th March

17:30 at Fourbears Books**

Steve Anthony – Children's author and illustrator. *The Rainbowsaurus* is one of our favourite picture books in the shop. Steve is such a fascinating chap and a fabulous illustrator, too. He's sure to create something fun for the session. Suitable for ages 4+. ***time still to be confirmed.*

Saturday 14th March

13:00 at Queen Anne's School Caversham

Harriet Muncaster – The best-selling author of *Isadora Moon*. Harriet has a huge legion of fans, with 100 tickets already sold. Dressing up is encouraged. Suitable for ages 7+.

Sunday 15th March

10:00 at Fourbears Books

Reading Rep's Teddy Time – An interactive storytelling session with song, dance and sensory play! Suitable for ages 18 months - 4 years old, older siblings welcome.

Sunday 15th March

11:30 at Fourbears Books

Creative Craft Session with **Yuval Zommer** – who returns to Fourbears introducing children to *The Big Book of Nature Art*, using everyday items of nature like leaves and twigs to make beautiful creations. Suitable for ages 6+.

Sunday 15th March

14:00 at Fourbears Books

Creative Writing session with **Eve Wersocki Morris** – How to write a robbery. Bestselling author, Eve Wersocki Morris, is coming to Fourbears Fest for a creative writing workshop. Perfect for ages 9+ who have always wanted to write the perfect adventure. Eve is here to inspire, guide and entertain you.



Nativity Live

Once again the churches of lower Caversham combined to bring the Christmas story to life on the local streets

THE EVENT was blessed with dry weather and there was a large gathering at the Fox and Hounds Pub at the start of the walk, despite the extreme cold. The crowd followed the star from the pub to St John's Church, accompanied by shepherds with their sheep and goats. On the way they found the Wise Men at Gosbrook Road Methodist Church. More than 300 people were met at St John's by the Bishop of Reading for a short service with some favourite carols, followed by mince pies and mulled wine.

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Above left: Meeting the shepherds and their flock in Westfield Park
Above: The Three Wise Men at Gosbrook Road Methodist Church



All together at St John's Church **all photos M Apar**

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For your bookshelf...

by Alex Forbes

Welcome to Fourbears Books' monthly review, where we pick two of our favourite recent reads. We are busy getting ready for Fourbears Fest 26, where we host a variety of authors and illustrators, putting on events for all ages.

NEILL CAMERON HAS always been a hit whenever he has visited Fourbears Fest, and he has a brand-new book out *Donut Squad Make a Mess*. The bagels are lying low, and now the Donut Squad are enjoying making their own malarkey. They're off camping! And hiding from bears!

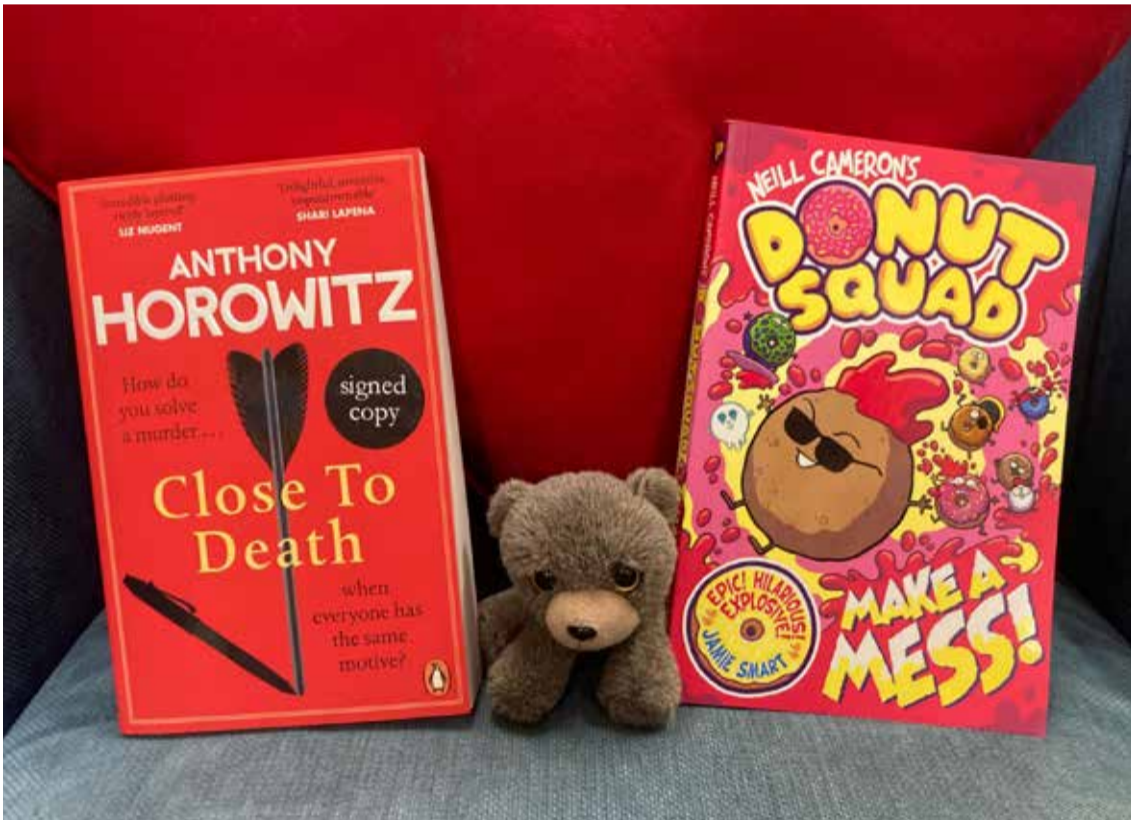
A sequel to *Donut Squad*, which was one of our 2025 bestsellers, this book is even funnier, and the perfect read for fans of the comic book style and are aged 7+. The beauty of this style of book is kids will re-read them time and time again. In addition, the comic book style is great for the young minds' visual comprehension. And they get children reading.

For the adult pick, I have chosen the most recent (fifth) book in the Anthony Horowitz

Hawthorne series. The title is *Close to Death*. For those who haven't read any of the series it's a slightly different concept, as one of the detective duo is the author Anthony Horowitz himself, providing insight and commentary on typical murder mysteries. It's a bit tricky to explain, but it's an enjoyable read and works really well. I have blitzed through the entire series.

Close to Death takes us to a residential close in the desirable Richmond Upon Thames. The residents seem to have the perfect life, until a rowdy family move in. Soon the father of the family is found murdered. Everyone in the close wanted him dead so how do you find the killer when all the neighbours have the same motive? Horowitz's books are incredibly inventive, and the book is a lot of fun. I think if you like Richard Osman books, you'd really enjoy *Close to Death*, plus we have signed copies in the shop.

We hope you manage to find time to pick up a book, whatever you like reading, and do pop into the shop soon to say hello and find out about all the events we have on.



No need to hide from this bear

photo A Forbes



PERRY WALKER, who writes regular skin care articles for the Caversham Bridge, has been making news in the skin care world. She has been chosen as the winner of the SkinBase *Transformation of the Year* award. SkinBase is a UK-based company specialising in equipment, training and support for skin care professionals.

The Award celebrates the very best in skin transformations, where there is not only visible skin improvement, but the life-changing results which transform a person's confidence. With over 200 entries, 72 finalists and five category winners, the judges faced an exceptionally difficult decision. However, they decided the overall winner for 2025 was Perry Walker of Perry's Beauty in Caversham; her work with her client Sadie stood out for the judges.

Sadie had lived with severe rosacea for many years, a condition that affected her confidence and daily life. Perry's transformation with Sadie impressed the judges not only for the clear visual improvements in severe rosacea, but for the trusted client-therapist relationship underpinning the results. Perry said, "Working with Sadie has been my biggest achievement yet. Her rosacea had been a real problem for years". She went on to say, "Sadie's redness is hugely reduced, her skin is calm and even, and she can now go out without concealer. This is why I do what I do."

Sadie said, "I've suffered with rosacea most of my life. It was affecting my mental health and self-worth. I can honestly say it's been worth every penny and the slight discomfort of having this treatment, for how I feel today about 'me' has been life changing."

As the *Transformation of the Year* winners, Perry and Sadie will each be heading off to Barbados, courtesy of SkinBase.

See page 12 for her latest contribution on Teenage Acne.

Based on information from:

skinbase.co.uk/blog/skinbase-transformation-of-the-year-2025-winner

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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 18.

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](https://www.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 9475544 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 – *Readifolk 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

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

Tuesday 3 February – *Caversham Women's Institute* – 19:30 at Church House, Caversham. www.thewi.org.uk or Tel: 0118 947 5176

Wednesday 4 February – *Crowmarsh Gifford Walk 4.00 Miles* – 10:30 SU617892 Meet at The Bell, Crowmarsh Gifford. The Street. OX10 8EF. Park in car park behind the Pub. Walk along the Thames Path and around Wallingford Town Centre. May be muddy in places. Pub lunch available. Pang Valley Ramblers. One of a programme of regular walks in the area – see pvrwalkers.org.uk/walks-programme

Wednesday 4 February – *Rosehill Ladies* – 14:00 at St Barnabas Hall, Emmer Green. Tel: Sue 0118 947 7570 or email suegreen@hotmail.com

Wednesday 4 February – *Water; how we use it and abuse it*, a talk by Dr Jane Sellwood – 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

Friday 6 February – *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

Friday 6 February – *Chazey Women's Institute* – 14:30 at St Andrew's Church Hall. Tel: 0118 947 0964, or e-mail rowena@primology.com

Saturday 14 February – *Valentine's Day Concert* – 14:30 Reading Symphony Orchestra, Great Hall, University of Reading. For details, see page 4.

Wednesday 18 February – *Humanoid Robotics*, a talk by Nigel Balchin – 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

Wednesday 18 February – *Showing Delphiniums at Chelsea*, talk by Mark Lyman – 19:30 Caversham Horticultural Society online talk (using Zoom), ticket only via Eventbrite. Access granted from 19:30 and the talk will start shortly afterwards.

Details www.caversham-horticultural.org.uk

Saturday 21 February – *Concerts in Caversham Spring Concert* – 19:30 St Andrew's Church, Albert Road, Caversham RG4 7PL See page 16 for details.

Monday 23 February – *Sutton Hoo*, an illustrated talk by Dr Jennifer Foster (University of Reading) – 14:00 Reading u3a, Abbey Baptist Church, Abbey Square, Reading. Non-members welcome, free entry. See www.readingu3a.org.uk

Friday 27 February – *La chanson française*. Join Arnaud on a musical trip down memory lane – 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 readingfrenchcircle@gmail.com

Coming Soon:

Monday 2 March – *Sailing the sun*, a talk by Barrie Neilson, founder of *Sailing Holidays* – 19:30 doors open, 20:00 talk. Reading Offshore Sailing Club. Upper Thames Motor Yacht Clubhouse, Sonning Mill Island, Reading RG4 6TW. For details see entry above for 2 February.

Saturday 7 March – *Mozart's Così fan tutte* by Merry Opera – 19:00 St Andrew's Church, Caversham. See page 16 for details. Tickets, £22, available from www.merryopera.co.uk/cosifantutte

Gardeners Prepare!

Caversham Horticultural Society Spring show will be on Saturday 28 March 2026. Details www.caversham-horticultural.org.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

Hemdean House School buildings proposal

EMMER GREEN, the application (PL/25/0691) for access into Reading from the proposed development of 70 homes on **Land West of Kidmore End Road** in South Oxfordshire is expected to be considered by Reading Borough Council's Planning Committee. The Committee has been advised that, despite South Oxfordshire District Council's refusal of the development, Reading should still record the decision it would have taken, as an appeal is very likely.

Churchill Living has published proposals to convert the former **Hemdean House School** buildings and grounds into retirement accommodation, although the buildings are locally listed.

There are three planning updates within the St Peter's Conservation Area. At **2-4 Church Street** (PL/25/1828), the renovation of what was formerly the Spice Oven (a listed building) has been granted, subject to conditions. This application sets out the proposed external materials, and the Church Street frontage must remain in keeping with the building's historic character and that of its neighbours. At **10B Bridge Street** (PL/25/1693), there is a proposal for partial demolition and a new rear extension to provide a groundfloor flat and shop, with a fivebedroom HMO above. At **18 Church Road** (PL/25/1597), permission is sought for a substantial extension, which has prompted questions about flood risk.

In Caversham Centre, there are two applications. At **3 Prospect Street** (PL/25/1211), there is a proposal for a change of use to a tanning and beauty salon. Outside **29 Church Street**, an appeal has been lodged against the refusal of applications (PL/25/1352) and (PL/25/1357) seeking to replace the phone box with a BT Street Hub and LED display. The Council has refused all recent BT Hub applications across the town.

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.

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IN AUGUST 1927, two Caversham men were arrested for playing a game of chance for money in a public place. The game was called Crown and Anchor, and the place was Hill's Meadow. It was only six weeks since the public had been given access to the field, but there had been no official opening. In the magistrates' court, the defence lawyer claimed that no offence had been committed, since this was not a public area. The case was reported in the local paper under the headline 'Public or Private?' The defence won the day, and the case was dismissed.

Most people living in Caversham will know the Christchurch and Hill's Meadows, on either side of George Street. It seems strange now that the executors of the late Arthur Hill had given the meadow to Reading Corporation in 1909, but it wasn't officially opened to the public until 1928. Presumably this was in no small measure due to the First World War. And, in 1923 when Reading Bridge was opened, even though there was a path under the road between the two meadows, Hill's Meadow was not officially open to the public.

Even after 1928, the Corporation still wasn't sure what to do with the land. A new swimming bath was proposed, and a new Civic Centre to replace the municipal buildings in Blagrove Street. In 1936, river levels rose and much of the land was flooded but, nevertheless, in 1938 there were plans to bring in earth to raise the level

of the meadow, and to build a new technical college on it. This time, the Second World War intervened, and the college was built on Kings Road in the 1950s.

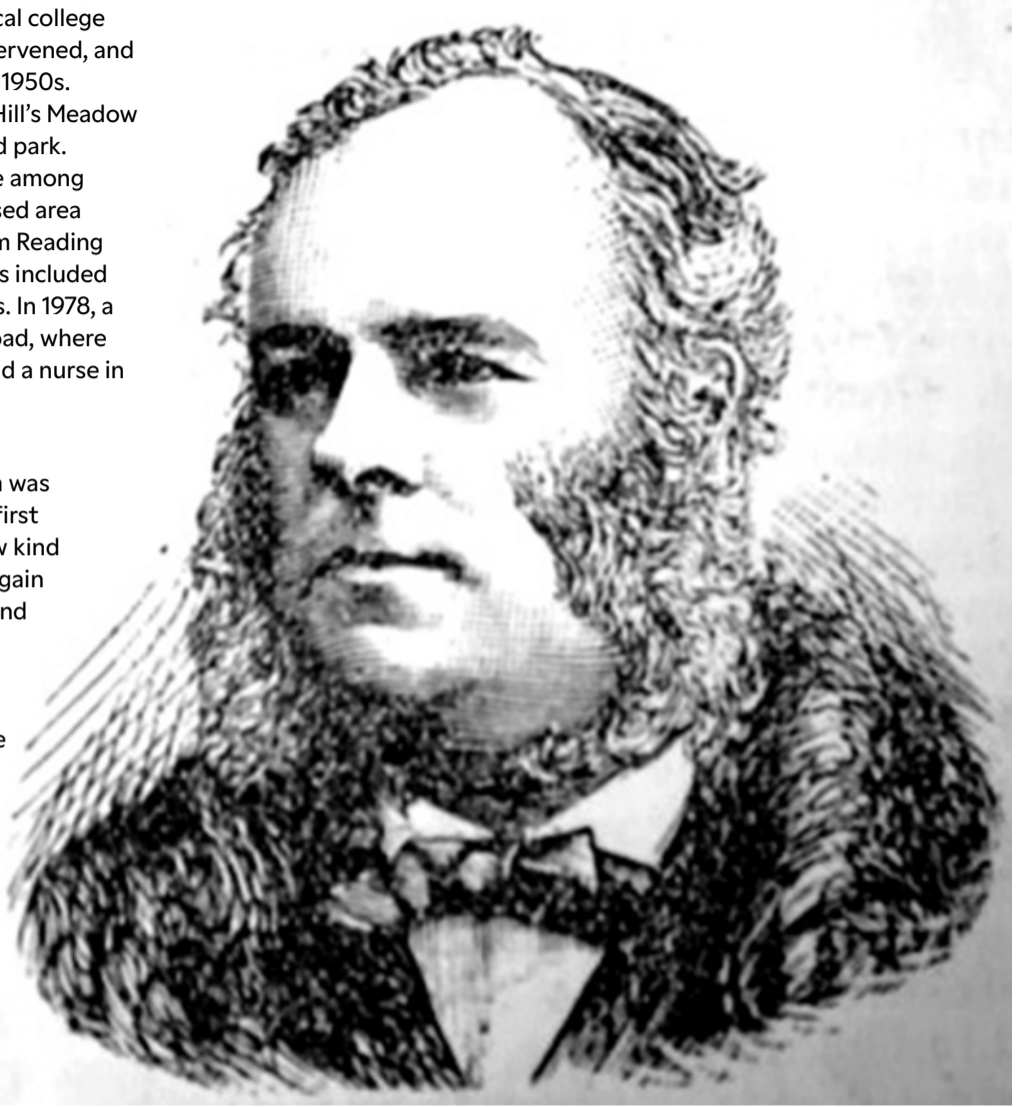
In the end, nothing much was built on Hill's Meadow except for the car park and the skateboard park. In 1977, skateboarding was the latest craze among young people, and the creation of this raised area with its undulations brought protests from Reading Civic Society and others. The original plans included a club house, a cafeteria, and public toilets. In 1978, a skateboard arena was planned on Elgar Road, where marshals would be on duty all day long, and a nurse in case people hurt themselves.

...first of its kind...

Only the skateboard park in Caversham was built, and it is still partly there. It was the first of its kind in the country to be given a new kind of surface, which would enable skaters to gain high speeds, and to suffer fewer scrapes and injuries if they fell over.

I have been told that the raised area where the skateboarding took place had started off as a corporation refuse tip. The dustcarts used to turn off George Street near the petrol station, and you can still see the turning, paved with cobblestones, in the footpath.

The old skateboard area is now abandoned, replaced by a new Caversham Skate Park behind the car wash in 2012. Where there was once the new surface to enable high speeds, there is grass, with brambles, and several broom bushes – a strange relic of around 50 years ago.



Our picture is of Arthur Hill

courtesy of Reading Borough Libraries

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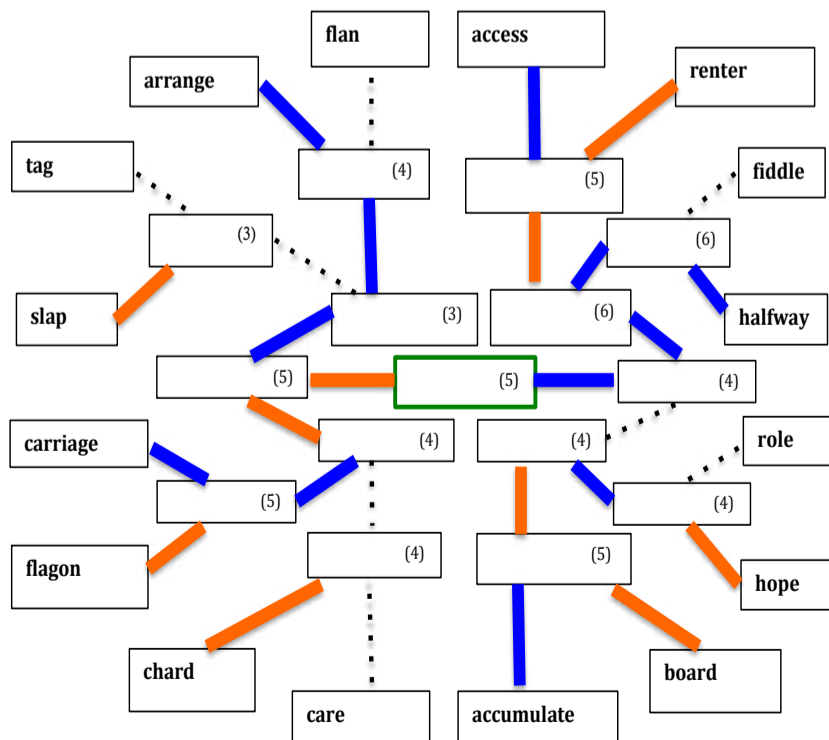
Puzzle Corner

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 18

IN THE OFFICE

Can you find 22 stationery related words in the grid?

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

Ballpoint
Box File
Elastic Band
Folder
Fountain Pen
Glue Stick
Hole Punch
Ink
Jotter
Notebook
Paper

Paper Clip
Pen
Pencil
Postit Note
Rubber
Ruler
Scissors
Sellotape
Sharpener
Staple
Treasury Tag

Creative CAVERSHAM

Turning heads at stunning new hat shop



February is the month when weddings are in the air, and Spring around the corner... for anyone needing a special outfit, the only way to top this is with an eye-catching hat. Who better to turn to than milliner **Liz Felix**? **Elestr Lee** visited her new Church Road shop

It's just six months since Liz Felix opened her doors in Caversham, where she also makes an extraordinary array of the hats and headpieces which have made her name as a foremost UK milliner – Liz's hats have been spotted at royal weddings and been worn by at least one head of state. "Customers have followed me from my previous shop in Henley," Liz told me. "They come from a wide area, and they are loving Caversham. They call it the new Islington – there is a real buzz here!" Liz offers a friendly welcome to returning customers

and newcomers alike, and loves to assist anyone who is looking for the 'right' hat

However, becoming a milliner wasn't something Liz contemplated when growing up in Twyford (she has lived in and around Reading all her life). "My father wanted me to be an accountant, but I definitely did not!" Liz revealed – "so at the age of 16 I ran away, got on a boat, and made it to Jersey. Though eventually I realised I had to come back home."

Sewing and fashion were passions when at school but this was not encouraged, and



Liz loves to help customers find the right hat to match their outfit and to suit the occasion
Photos top left and right and above: Kathryn Fell/Brand Photography



Stylish hats from Liz's range complete the look

while her first part-time weekend job was working in Heelas (now John Lewis) where she was allowed to dress the mannequins, her jobs were mainly accountancy, recruitment or sales. When her daughter was a toddler in the early 90s, she made her a hat based on a pattern she found at a craft fair at Knowle Hill. "People started asking me to make hats for their children, word got around, and I ended up selling hats and clothes at a shop in the Harris Arcade.

"I then went to the London College of Fashion, where I learnt millinery – and in fact, I have never stopped learning. I like to attend courses at every opportunity, as I believe there is always something to learn and improve on. Initially, I had a workshop in my garden, and then in 2014 I opened my shop in Henley, and my confidence grew. The shop went very well, and my reputation spread. However along came Covid – I had a premonition this wouldn't go away quickly. My lease was coming up in the August of 2020, so I decided to terminate it. With hindsight it was absolutely the right thing to do, but I was devastated.

...it was perfect...

"At first, I worked from home, but then I found a unit at Withy Copse, near Gallowstree Common – such a beautiful place to work. I ended up with both a workroom and a showroom but it didn't give me enough visibility. Driving through Caversham every day I spotted that the former Humos shop in Church Road had become available, and it was perfect. As well as the shop there are two floors upstairs, one where I can block and sew my hats, the other where I can store everything. I feel very lucky!"

Liz uses traditional techniques; her hats are made from felt, or dyed sinamay straw – "This material is brilliant because it takes dyes and can be painted, it picks up colours beautifully, then it is shaped over a block," Liz explained. Liz's hats are bespoke or customised, and all the details are hand sewn – "These details can take a long time," she added.

Weddings are her mainstay, and she also provides hats for Royal Ascot and other race meetings. "Most milliners take time out once Ascot is over, but I take a stand at Phyllis Court as part of Regatta Week in Henley – it's very good for networking. It's such fun!"

As well as her own designs, Liz stocks

...I now have two jobs that I love to do, and although they are different, there are also similarities – I have to understand people's needs, and to do my very best for them

hats by other milliners and hat suppliers. "There should be something for everyone here. And when someone finds the right hat, it really boosts their confidence – they stand taller!"

As well as being a leading milliner, during Covid-19 Liz took on a new role, training to become a celebrant. Having undertaken extensive training, she is now regularly invited to officiate at funerals. "I find it incredibly rewarding," she says. "I now have two jobs that I love to do, and although they are different, there are also similarities – I have to understand people's needs, and to do my very best for them."

What does Liz's father make of her extraordinary creative success? "I also have a brother, Geoff Felix, who is world-famous as a puppet maker and puppeteer – he has worked with great directors such as Jim Henson of *The Muppets* fame. We both have a passion for what we do, but maybe our success was born out of us wanting to prove dad wrong! Dad is surprised, but he is also very proud..."



Audrey Hepburn-inspired photo Oliver Weait

Find out more: lizfelixhats.com

Local artists go to the wall

by Amanda Paradine

SEVERAL CAVERSHAM artists took part in the creation of a new mural at the Royal Berkshire Hospital (RBH), which was officially commissioned on Monday 15 December. The mural depicts a seasonal scene and now brightens the corridor leading to the bereavement and mortuary areas by the Bereavement Viewing Suite.

The 18 artists involved are all part of the Mixed Media Monday Group, which meets weekly at the Biscuit Factory in Reading. We worked over five weekends in October and November to create the artwork. Several of us live in Caversham: Tizzy Cottingham, Nina O Connell, Janet Myall, Gloria Pitt and I. Janina Maher helped by sourcing the materials we needed. The artists were thanked by RBH Chief Executive Steve McManus, RBH Charity Director Jo Warrior, and other members of the RBH team who were involved in the project, at the official celebration in December. Jo Warrior commented, "This artwork has been created with great care and sensitivity, and its location makes it particularly significant".

We were delighted to have a part in such a worthwhile project to create a seasonal countryside scene painted in emulsion and acrylics, and we all enjoyed working on it. We



Grand opening of the mural at the RBH

photo courtesy RBH

received fabulous feedback from staff members passing by as we worked. Thanks to all the RBH staff for supporting us in creating a work of art which will hopefully be a source of comfort to people at a difficult time. It's been wonderful to work on such a collaborative and uplifting project.

You can find out more about the Group on our Facebook and Instagram pages. We have an exhibition coming up at the RBH from 1 March to 26 April in South Block Level 2. All the work is for sale, with some of all sales going to the RBH Charity.

King for the afternoon

by Carol Cozens



Ken is King!

photo Chiltern Court Manager, Jacqui

ON THE AFTERNOON of Thursday 18 December, the residents of Chiltern Court in Emmer Green entertained a very special guest.

Their longest running resident, Mr Ken Potter, who has been living at Chiltern Court ever since it opened in 1986, was made 'King' for the afternoon.

The reason for the special celebration was because Ken was about to turn 100 years old. The residents had a spectacular throne made for him to sit in, on which the design portrayed a reference to his time in the Cold Stream Guards, with a replica of the regimental badge. Also, research found the Guards mascot was a Goose called Jacob, and they had dressed a concrete goose as a Cold Stream Guard soldier.

His neighbours had discovered an old newspaper article in which Ken and his wife featured. As a gift to mark not only his 100th birthday but the fact that he and his wife, Emily, were one of the first couples to take up residence at Chiltern Court, they had the article framed and presented it to Ken as a memento of his years at the development.

Everyone is very fond of Ken, and they all made sure he had a memorable afternoon celebrating his forthcoming 100th birthday. He enjoyed his actual birthday on 29 December with his family. We all wish Ken health and happiness and many more birthdays to come.

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Highdown School Celebrates

As the 2025 Autumn Term came to a close, there was much to celebrate at Highdown School



The National Youth Monologue Competition prizewinners

photo S Hopes

The National Youth Monologue Competition

THE NATIONAL YOUTH Monologue Competition, delivered in partnership with the Ambassador Theatre Group and the Federation of Drama Schools, offers young performers the opportunity to showcase their talent on a West End stage. Highdown students rose to the challenge. Our students entered the competition in June, with several selected as finalists across multiple categories. Representing the school at the live finals held in July at the Ambassadors Theatre were:

- **Emma Kelsall** – KS4 Contemporary Monologue
- **Zoe Krecek** – KS3 Contemporary Monologue
- **Freya Williams** – KS3 Classical Monologue
- **Carli Zinzani** – KS3 Devised Monologue

Each finalist delivered an exceptional performance on the West End stage. Following a highly competitive final, Carli Zinzani was crowned winner of the KS3 Devised

by **Sherrie Lake**

Monologue category, taking home the trophy, while Freya Williams received the runner-up prize for her KS3 Classical Monologue.

The school's success extended beyond the finals, with a significant number of students recognised at regional level. As a result the school was awarded the Southeast Regional Trophy on the basis of its collective achievement.

Mrs Lake, Curriculum Leader for Performing Arts, commented: "When I first heard about the competition I knew it was something our students would excel in – and they proved exactly that. We are incredibly proud of their talent, creativity and dedication. It is a privilege to work with such inspiring young people, and the department is already looking forward to entering again in 2026."

School Presentation Evening

by **Suzanne Hopes**

HIGHDOWN SCHOOL and Sixth Form Centre hosted its annual Presentation Evening on Thursday 18 December, celebrating the achievements, dedication and success of students across GCSE and A-Level courses.

Guest speaker, Bill Buckley, shared insights from his own education and career in the media. He spoke candidly to students and families about his unconventional entry into the industry, recounting how his career began when his mother applied for a role on the television programme *That's Life* on his behalf.

He encouraged students to trust their gut instincts when making decisions about their futures. He also advised them not to rely solely on the advice of a single individual, but instead to arm themselves with knowledge, seek out information and make informed choices.

The evening, hosted by Laura Mathews, headteacher and Chair of School Standards Board, Dr Caroline Foulkes, recognised the hard work of students who completed their examinations this year, with certificates presented to all GCSE and A-Level recipients. In addition, special subject awards were presented to exceptional students who demonstrated outstanding commitment, progress and achievement in individual subjects.

Three stand-out achievements were also recognised with special awards. The award for Excellence at GCSE was presented to Holly Curtayne, who achieved a remarkable full set of grade nines across all her GCSE subjects. The Excellence at A Level award went to Miles Escott, in recognition of his outstanding performance in Mathematics, Further Mathematics, Computer Science and Physics. The Leadership Award was presented to Madeleine Round in recognition of her contribution to school life.

The evening was a celebration not only of academic success, but also of resilience, ambition and the diverse pathways available to young people beyond school. The school would like to congratulate all award recipients and thank Bill Buckley for his generous contribution to the evening.

Bill Buckley and Dr Caroline Foulkes presenting awards for Excellence at GCSE at the School Presentation Evening – all photos S Hopes



Holly Curtayne receives her award



Madeleine Round receives her award



Miles Escott receives his award

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time



The production team

text and photos Sherrie Lake

THE SCHOOL'S Senior School production of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* captivated full-house audiences on 9 and 10 December. It presented a blend of thought-provoking storytelling with fast paced physical theatre, inspired by Frantic Assembly, a theatre company known for its innovative productions which blend physicality and storytelling.

The production received enthusiastic praise for its dynamic staging and powerful ensemble work. A standout performance came from Dylan Fallon, who took on the demanding role of Christopher Boone with exceptional sensitivity and confidence.

Behind the scenes the student-led technical teams – including lighting, sound, props and assistant directors – played an essential role in bringing the production to life, ensuring every moment on stage resonated with energy and precision.

Laura Mathews, headteacher, said, "I am so proud of the maturity and creativity shown by the cast and crew: from the handmade Swiss Army knife, through to the innovative use of physicality on stage. The Performing Arts are the lifeblood of a culture of empathy and curiosity and, at Highdown, we work hard to ensure that performances such



Dynamic staging...

as this are shared and prioritised. I am looking forward to our production of *Grease* in the new year".

One parent audience member perfectly captured the spirit of the event, saying, "You gave young people the chance to tackle brave, challenging material and they rose to it".

The Performing Arts are the lifeblood of a culture of empathy and curiosity and, at Highdown, we work hard to ensure that performances such as this are shared and prioritised...



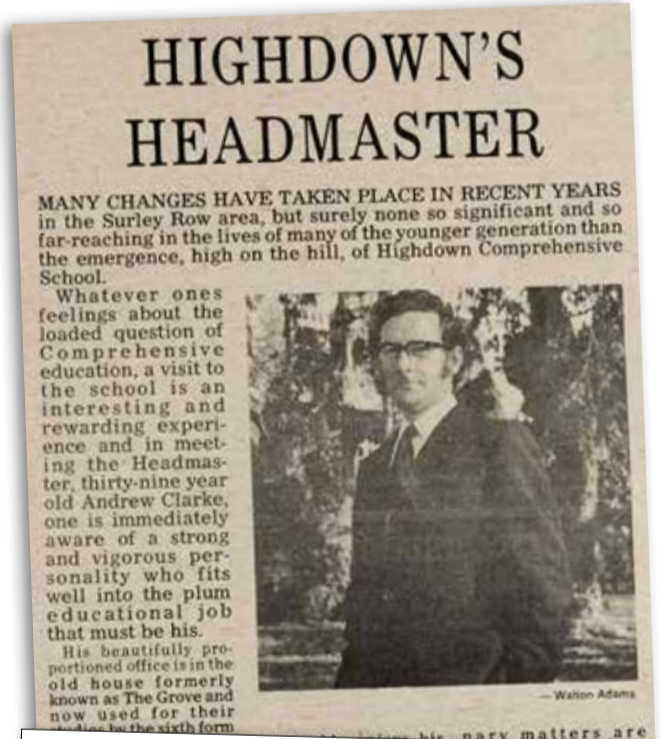
The cast in rehearsal

Looking back at Highdown

by The Editors

THE SCHOOL has featured in the Caversham Bridge paper a few times over the years. Just over 50 years ago, our December 1975 front page introduced the new Headmaster at the school, Andrew Clarke! The article touched on the novelty of comprehensive education and on the inadequate accommodation available. The school had been opened only five years earlier and was designed for 1,000 pupils, but by 1975 it had 1,500.

In 2022, our November edition lead was the celebration of the school's 50th anniversary. It took a brief look at the past use of the original building, Grove House, one of a number of historic, listed buildings on the site.





Les Cooper

Another trying year

IT IS DECEMBER and outside the rain is merrily dripping down the window. But I must write about gardening in February, when the garden starts to come alive. One of my problems is lacking the ability to see into the future. My brain does a whirl; I haven't a crystal ball. Will we have another drought? Will spring be even earlier? Will we have a bad frost in May? Who knows, not even the Met Office!

Garden lovers must be optimistic, and we are, because we know something will always

triumph, even if it is only the buttercups and dandelions.

Optimism comes to the front when we look into the colourful catalogues and order seeds and plug plants. We recall those occasions when things went well and we had neighbours admiring our garden. Let's forget those sad moments when things went astray. This year we will try to get everything right.

...take their time...

What could be more forward-thinking than sowing parsnips now. They are erratic to germinate, and take their time to mature but, after struggling to dig them up, they will be delicious to eat with your Sunday roast— as long as you like them!

And how about chitting some early potatoes by standing them on end in a tray. Make sure they are in a frost-free place because the weather is erratic. If the



Les's dream fuchsia bed

photo F Smith

weather follows last year's pattern, early-sown potatoes could be a good idea; am I correct in thinking by missing the drought, earlier crops did better than those sown later? It might well be worth a try.

Make sure the autumn fruiting raspberry canes have been cut down to the ground to encourage new growth. Amazingly, last season we were picking a few raspberries in November.

All gardeners love to have birds in their gardens. On a cold February day, doesn't it raise your spirits when you are trying to dig

out the weeds and the cheery robin comes to find worms. Keep feeding the birds, food is scarce for them now, so hang out fat balls and make sure the feeders are topped up.

Finally, it is hard to believe but I can get things wrong. Last summer I convinced myself my fuchsias were happy despite the dry weather. Only to realise why later. It was because I watered them. Recently, when by chance I happened to read how fuchsias cannot survive droughts and need ample water, it dawned on me I had been rather dim!

Understanding Teen Skin: Setting Up Good Habits for Life



by Perry Walker

Advanced Skin Specialist

Owner of Perry's Beauty, Caversham
@perrys_beautyroom

The teenage years can be tough on the skin — and on your teens' confidence. Hormones start to fluctuate, oil production increases, and pores can easily become blocked, leading to congestion, blackheads and breakouts. But with the right advice and a consistent routine, teen skin can be managed successfully.

As a skincare specialist who has suffered with acne my whole life, I often see teenagers using harsh products that strip the skin of natural oils, which only encourages more oil production and irritation. The key is to keep things simple: cleanse, protect and hydrate.

...premature ageing...

A gentle, pH-balanced AHA (Alpha Hydroxy Acid) cleanser used morning and evening will help remove excess oil without drying the skin. Follow with a lightweight moisturiser to maintain balance, and never skip SPF — yes, even in winter! UV damage builds up over time and can lead to premature ageing and pigmentation later in life.

It's also important to remember that every teen's skin is

Healthy habits started young often last a lifetime...

different. Some may experience classic oily or acne-prone skin, while others struggle with dryness, sensitivity, or a combination of both. This is often caused by an unhappy barrier due to incorrect product use. Professional skin consultations can help identify what's really happening beneath the surface and guide you to the right products — avoiding trial-and-error frustration.

For teens with persistent acne or scarring, advanced treatments such as LED light therapy, microdermabrasion or IPL (Intense Pulsed Light) can be life-changing when carried out safely and professionally.

Most importantly, remind your teen that breakouts are completely normal and nothing to be ashamed of. With patience, gentle care, and professional guidance, their skin will calm and confidence will return.

Healthy habits started young often last a lifetime — which is the best skincare investment of all.

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Caversham Dry Cleaning Ltd

A long history of business use, from grocery to laundry

THE SUBJECT of Janina's painting this month is Caversham Dry Cleaning Ltd, at number 56 Prospect Street. It occupies an oddly shaped site on the corner with Oxford Street, the last retail property before you reach the Last Crumb pub as you leave the centre of Caversham. The dry cleaning business occupies premises which have housed many different trades and shops over the years. I spoke to Glory Paudel, who owns the business today with her brother-in-law, Santos. Glory was carefully folding some freshly laundered clothes for a customer in the Caversham Launderama in the Gosbrook Road, which they also own. They set up in the Launderama in 2019 and then added to their business by taking over the existing dry-cleaner at number 56 in 2022. They offer a range of services: professional dry cleaning and laundry service for all types of fabric and dress, duvet, curtains and bedding cleaning and ironing.

...come and gone...

In 1892 the site was occupied by William Holloway, bootmaker, together with Mrs Pepper, dressmaker, and John Biddle, boot and shoe repairer. William Holloway eventually became the sole business at the property and traded there until 1911, when it became a grocery shop owned by Agnew, Baker & Co. By 1915, it had become Turner's general store. Further transformations included an antique and curios shop run by a Samuel Lucas and later by John Priggen. By 1929 it had reverted to a grocery shop and, in the 1950s, became a watch and clock maker owned by R V Corp, which was still in business at the end of the 1970s. Since then, many businesses, including a florist, have come and gone.



Drawing by Janina Maher

www.janinamaher.artweb.com

Getting off the bus in George Street at the 'Caversham Laundry' stop recently made me think how much that laundry, operating on a more industrial scale, is a local landmark and has provided employment in Caversham since the end of the nineteenth century. It has had numerous owners, was almost destroyed by a massive fire which I

remember well, was rebuilt, and still thrives today. There was another large laundry in Caversham for many years. It was aptly named the Snowflake Laundry and was in South View Avenue. An advertisement from 1921 declares it was 'the Finest Laundry in the District... Beautiful Colour, Exquisite Finish, Prompt and Correct Return'.

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

janinamaher.artweb.com/drawings-prints-paintings

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Keeping Caversham and Emmer Green great places to live

NICK HASKINS succeeded Helen Lambert as Chair of the Caversham and District Residents' Association (CADRA) in May 2025. He is no stranger to many local residents through his involvement in local sporting events, such as Reading Amateur Regatta and helping out at cycling and canoeing events. He really likes sport, and thinks it is great for the community, health and mental wellbeing. He is also Chair of the North Reading Safer Neighbourhood Forum, working with a variety of organisations to make the area a safer place to live.

The Haskins family made the move from Twickenham to Caversham in 2014. Nick had been involved in a serious accident the previous year and for family reasons they needed a change. They wanted to live somewhere between London and Oxford, to stay close to the river and have access to good cycling routes – and found a home here in Caversham. He continued working in finance in London for some time but, more recently, has been working as a consultant with start-ups, creating employment opportunities.

Nick's wife Ania is also well known locally through her association with the Friends of Caversham Court Gardens and other interests. They have two adult children, a son who has just graduated from Reading University, and a daughter who is a trauma physiotherapist in the NHS.

Nick is ambitious for CADRA and set out his vision for its future at the annual general meeting, with the aim of

'Keeping Caversham and Emmer Green great places to live', by backing events that positively promote our community, helping to ensure better outcomes for planning and licensing, and contributing to ending things like antisocial behaviour which are detrimental to our community.

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

We don't tend to eat out much, but are regulars in the local independent coffee shops and bars.

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

I would like people to think more about their everyday choices. Each one might not have a huge impact but, if everyone did something, the cumulative effect would be great. However, I'm against the idea of imposing decisions on others – everyone must do what is right for them.

How would you strengthen our sense of community?

Together with my previous response, I would ask everyone to understand other people's points of view, with better communication leading to better decisions for the local community.

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

I think what we actually need is a little more self-belief, because Reading has everything we need but we don't necessarily realize it.



Nick Haskins

Time for the walker to run!

by Ian Beale

In our October edition, Ian reported on Rotherfield United Walking Football Club and its fundraising event in aid of the FISH Volunteer Centre in Sonning Common and Prostate Cancer UK. Here's what happened to one Auction winner!

THE ICELAND store in Caversham was the venue for an unusually fast appearance of a member of the Rotherfield United Walking Football Club in late November. One very early morning (before the shop opened) found one of our players, Dickie Quelch, racing through the store.

Dickie had won the Iceland Supermarket Trolley Dash in the Club's Charity Auction. He had done some careful reconnaissance and planning before the starter's gun was fired and set off at a blistering pace straight to the meat aisle. Using three trollies strategically positioned around the store, the two-

minute challenge was completed leaving Dickie shattered and gasping for breath. Any discomfort was quickly turned to joy as the Iceland manageress announced Dickie had bagged £544.50 of goodies in the time.

A truly magnificent achievement and brilliant return on investment. Well done Dickie (and Tina his coach and mentor), and thanks to Iceland for their generosity and support.

To learn more about the club visit rotherfieldfc.com/team/walking-football



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Dickie with his Iceland Trolley Dash haul

photo courtesy R Quelch



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Renewable energy investment opportunities

THERE'S A HUGE number of crowd-funded investments available which install community renewable energy systems across the country. Many are launched via Ethex, Triodos or Energy\$All platforms, and others are independently marketed. They aren't covered by the Financial Conduct Authority, and most are difficult to trade. You should anticipate a ten-year bond will be money locked away for the full ten years.

Reading Community Energy Society (RCES) has installed and operates 23 solar photo voltaic systems on roofs of community buildings in and around Reading, with a combined capacity of over 600 kWp. All are crowd funded for the capital works and pay out interest annually to investors from income generated by selling electricity to the building owners (at below market rates).

The electricity generated will charge the new electric bus fleet for the town, reducing emissions to atmosphere from public transport...

A new fund is due to be launched very soon for installation of solar panels on the Reading Transport building in the town centre. The electricity generated will charge the new electric bus fleet for the town, reducing emissions to atmosphere from public transport, as well as providing cheaper electricity for the fleet.

Interested? Then sign up to receive information about this offer once the contracts are finalised on readingenergy.coop and read carefully! You can trawl the site for previous accounts and generation details at the different sites.

I have no idea about the terms of this specific crowdfunding opportunity. I can only say that previous offers have given priority to people living in the Reading postcode areas, that minimum investment has been under £250, and that they've paid interest to me every year on time.

Clayfield Copse – Noctule News

text and photo Andy Cruse

CLAYFIELD COPSE and Blackhouse Woods are ancient woodlands in Emmer Green which, in 1991, were designated as Reading Borough Council's (RBC) first Nature Reserve. The Reserve is a haven for wildlife, including at least nine species of bat.

The Noctule is the UK's largest bat and is almost solely dependent on trees for roosting, favouring woodpecker holes. They can be seen on a summer evening hunting insects high in the sky, sometimes mingling with swifts as the sun goes down.

The Noctule population, along with other bat species, has been closely monitored for 40 years by the Berkshire & South Buckinghamshire Bat Group, who have tagged trees where roosts are present to ensure preservation of these habitats.

Unfortunately, most of the woodpecker holes and suitable cavities were found to be in Ash trees, many of which had started to fall and become unstable due to Ash Dieback. A recently completed project at the Reserve has installed a network of insulated bat boxes to provide suitable habitation for Noctule bats, following extensive tree felling due to Ash Dieback.

...signs of habitation...

The Council worked closely with their appointed Ecologists and Arborists (along with local interest groups) to ensure disturbance was kept to a minimum. Each tree was carefully inspected by the ecology team for signs of habitation before any work commenced. The tree canopies were accessed with a mobile elevating work platform (MEWP), and endoscopes were used to check potential roost sites.

In certain cases, trees had unstable branches which were removed, leaving the bare trunk whilst preserving important maternity roosting sites. To compensate for the loss of natural roosting features, seven large, insulated bat boxes, along with a standard colony box, were installed in a daisy

chain across Clayfield Copse and into Blackhouse Wood, connecting two main roosting areas. These augment two original hibernation boxes.

The boxes have been attached to oak trees and are made from woodcrete, a mixture of wood fibers and cement, which offers good insulation and rot resistance. They were installed using a combination of MEWPs, ladders and lifting tackle, with help from RBC's appointed Arborists, the Bat Group, and volunteers with climbing experience.

Funding for the project was provided by:

- Berkshire and South Buckinghamshire Bat Group berksbats.org.uk
- Reading Borough Council
- Trust for Oxfordshire Environment trustforoxfordshire.org.uk



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Our *Kind* Community

text and photo Caroline Gratrix



Adrienne Black

Adrienne Black: The Woman Behind Caversham's Much-Loved Concerts



IF YOU'VE EVER stepped into St Andrew's Church on an evening when the lights are low and the music is soaring, you've felt the magic that Adrienne Black brought to life in Caversham. A professional pianist with a sharp ear and a soft spot for community, Adrienne, along with her husband, the late Timothy Watts – an oboist with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra – launched Concerts in Caversham back in October 2011. The programmes lean towards classical music, but the breadth of music from many genres is always diverse and interesting and the evenings are delivered with a welcoming and informal local spirit.

...light relief...

The idea was born in the most organic way. Adrienne had joined the Riverate Choir "for a bit of light relief", only to discover that the church was sitting on an excellent performance space. Meanwhile, she had a beautifully refurbished piano she was planning to sell. Enter Nigel, the vicar, who wanted more community-focussed activities at the church and, thanks to a legacy left specifically for artistic endeavours, had the means to support them. The stars aligned, the church bought

Adrienne's spare piano, and Concerts in Caversham found its heartbeat.

But, as Adrienne will tell you, none of this would happen without the small army of volunteers who turn passion into reality. Long-standing church volunteer Regula Adams, a passionate music-lover, handles all the catering and the drinks licences; Stephen, a long-time friend of the family, got the website revamped and now looks after it—his late wife, Vera, was also an enthusiastic supporter. Then there are the many helpers who brave the weather to deliver flyers through letterboxes and staff the Box Office and Bar on concert nights.

The concerts are always performed by professional musicians and remain proudly not-for-profit. Adrienne's motivation has never changed: to give professional musicians—always selected from top London orchestras and the best freelancers on the circuit—a place to express themselves within the more intimate context of chamber music and to bring this inspirational excellence to our local community.

To catch an upcoming concert, visit:
www.concertsincaversham.co.uk/concerts

CONCERTS in CAVERSHAM (CinC)

Early Spring Concert – Saturday 21 February 19:30
at St Andrew's Church, Albert Road, Caversham, RG4 7PL

THE CinC ENSEMBLE, led by the dynamic violinist, Tamas Andras, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra (RPO) co-leader, along with other members of the RPO, will be playing for the CinC early spring concert.

They will perform Strauss's Capriccio (from the opera), Dvorak's Double Bass Quintet and Tchaikovsky's Souvenir de Florence. It promises to be a glorious evening of richly romantic string repertoire for this unusual combination of instruments.

The CinC Christmas event was sold out, so book your tickets early! It promises to be an evening to remember for a long time afterwards.

Visit www.concertsincaversham.co.uk for more information and tickets through the online Box Office. You can also follow CinC on Facebook and Instagram.

And coming soon to St Andrew's...

THE MERRY OPERA returns to St Andrew's on 7 March 2026, with its production of Mozart's *Così fan tutte*, described as a 'Comedy of Love, Lies and Lessons of Life'.

This will be the fourth time the company has visited Caversham and follows on from their performance of Johann Strauss II's *Die Fledermaus* last February. Set up in 2007, the company is a bursary scheme for rising opera stars, offering the chance to learn a role, then perform it on a tour around the country – giving invaluable experience to the young singers.

In *Così fan tutte*, playful deception meets its match in Mozart's sparkling comic opera, reminding us that love is rarely as simple – or

The opera blends razor-sharp wit with moments of truth and reflection in vibrant production...

as certain – as we'd like to believe. Set to some of Mozart's most radiant and intricate music, this production is sung in English (translation by Amanda Holden). The opera blends razor-sharp wit with moments of truth and reflection in this vibrant production that proves Mozart knew the human heart all too well.

Tickets, at £22, available from
www.merryopera.co.uk/cosifantutte

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English translation by Amanda Holden,
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Crossing Grilling



Budding journalists with Councillor John Ennis

by Evie Porter

Our November edition led with an article about the dangers crossing the road at the Last Crumb Pub in Caversham. This article reports on a meeting organised by a student Journalism Club to follow up on the issue.

IN DECEMBER, our student Journalism Club arranged a press conference with Reading Borough Council's (RBC) Lead Councillor for Transport and Security to investigate the Last Crumb Junction crossing campaign.

The campaign, which requested a pedestrian crossing be put in at the Last Crumb Junction, was the subject of RBC's traffic management sub-committee meeting in September, which concluded funding is not currently available.

Interested in the council's perspective, I organised the conference with local councillor, Mr John Ennis. He began by explaining Reading's traffic puzzle. While our award-winning public transport system means only one third of residents travel to work by car, Reading's status as a regional centre means main traffic arteries face pressure from commuters. Furthermore, as a Victorian town, (we have more terraces than Bolton!), it was not built for 21st-century traffic.

Reading was recently shortlisted for its environmental improvements, but the heavy vehicle flow at the Last Crumb junction does not fit the picture of a sustainable and pedestrian-friendly town.

We raised this with Mr Ennis, who emphasised the importance of safe roads. He explained the council's inaction thus far as being due to a lack of funding and complex traffic flows. Legislative requirements mean pavement-widening would be needed. This would put pressure on the £500k budget estimate and eat away at road space in an already congested area. Increased emissions from vehicles idling whilst waiting might reduce air quality, offsetting the council's sustainability goals.

We put forward the idea of larger scale road reconfiguration, such as the A33 bus lanes, new cycle bridge, and the Park & Rides. However, the A33 scheme cost £12 million, and we were told such larger budgets are difficult to secure. The Community Infrastructure Levy, an alternative and more accessible funding route, would not help, as it favours larger projects.

With the council's budget-setting taking place in February, it is all the more important to continue pushing back against the pressure of political tradeoffs, and to make sure that local needs take priority against more visible projects.

Thank you to Mr Ennis for agreeing to speak to us.

LIVE AND LOCAL



Tapas and Tunes

text and photo Richard Wells

VEGIVORES OPENED in St Martin's Precinct in Caversham six years ago, bringing a unique offering to the local restaurant scene. They have since proved popular with vegans and non-vegans alike, and we have enjoyed many visits there. For us summer is a particular favourite time to go, whiling away a few hours sat outside with a glass of wine and some nibbles, but Vegivores provides a warm welcome all year round.

When we saw them advertising their Tapas & Tunes night, promising an evening of live music and authentic, plant-based tapas, we knew we had to go and check it out.

On the evening we attended, we were lucky that Marisa Rodriguez of iconic local rockers, Marisa and The Moths, was appearing. Ably supported by Jack Craig on guitar, the pair performed two sets of chilled, jazz infused, acoustic versions of numerous instantly recognisable pop and rock songs, spanning the decades from the 60s to the present day. Their sets included classic covers from Britney Spears through to Fleetwood Mac, which clearly pleased the audience.

Of course, our performers were not the only stars of the show, as the food played a major role. Switching up their normal tapas menu for the evening kept things interesting. The menu featured some excellent olives, bread and oil and patatas bravas, alongside some really imaginative vegan tapas dishes; we struggled not to order the whole menu! We always appreciate having local beer options - but can never resist Vegivores' excellent cocktails!

We had such a good time and can really recommend keeping an eye on Vegivores' social media accounts for updates on the next Tapas & Tunes night, or any other events they have planned. Or you can simply pop in and try some delicious vegan food. Vegan or not, you will not be disappointed.

For information on events at Vegivores, see www.wearevegivores.com



Marisa Rodriguez, with Jack Craig on guitar

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LAUREN DENNEY:

Much loved and greatly missed



FAMILY AND FRIENDS of local ceramics artist, Lauren Denney, gathered at the Caversham Golf Club on 25 November to celebrate the life of Lauren, who died in the Sue Ryder Duchess of Kent Hospice on 24 October, after a brave and stoic seven-year battle with cancer.

Born in 1978, Lauren grew up in Caversham. She attended Highdown School and Henley College, going on to study at Staffordshire University. Her fascination with clay started when she was four years old, making coil pots from raw clay dug from the garden.

After graduating with a BA Honours Design Degree specialising in slipcast ceramics, she set about building and fitting out her ceramic studio in Caversham. Here she designed, produced and sold a range of slip cast decorative and functional ceramic items. Each piece was made by hand. She subsequently organised shows and taught ceramics part-time at South Hill Park Arts Centre in Bracknell.

Lauren was part of the varied network of fine local artists. In 2010, she co-founded the continually successful annual Caversham Arts Trail with fellow artists Julie Simmonds and Louise Spiers. Lauren was talented, creative, fun-loving, thoughtful, gentle, sometimes shy, but always proud to be ginger. She was a wonderful mother who cherished her family, friends and work colleagues. More than £4,500 has been contributed to three chosen charities in Lauren's memory – Bowel Cancer UK, Sue Ryder and Daisy's Dream. See: Laurendenney.muchloved.com for more details.

Lauren's family are extremely grateful to all the donors for their generosity and kind words.

Caversham Arts Trail will run again in May this year – see cavershamartstrail.co.uk for details.



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 March issue

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

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Dates for advertising copy

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

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Wellbeing with Ami Roy

- walking backwards for a few steps
- Jumping over a puddle with a hop, skip and a jump
- taking a new route just to see what challenges appear

When movement feels enjoyable, interesting or playful, we keep showing up for it. We stop viewing our bodies through the lens of limitation and start seeing possibility again.

Fun builds confidence and helps us become consistent – the real secret to lifelong mobility.

What Cindy Lauper said! Fun!

WHEN WAS THE last time you did something physically playful; not for fitness, not for steps, not for heart rate, but just because it felt enjoyable, interesting or a bit daring? For many adults, the answer is... "I can't quite remember".

Somewhere between childhood and midlife, play gets labelled as childish, silly or indulgent. A thing we 'grow out of'. But our bodies don't grow out of it. They simply stop receiving the kind of movement that play naturally provides: unpredictability, spontaneity, variation, curiosity, a little courage, and a lot more laughter.

Adults tend to approach movement through the lens of 'Is this exercise?' or 'Will this be useful?' Children simply think: How can I get there? What can I climb? What shape can I make?

When we remove imagination from movement, we reduce possibility. We move in the same straight lines,

we choose predictable surfaces, and move in predictable ranges, and our bodies adapt to a narrower world.

But the moment we add curiosity: 'What if I climb this? What if I step on that? What if I scramble under this branch?' we reconnect not only with more movement, but with more self-trust.

Fun becomes a catalyst for ability.

For some people, play looks spectacular: climbing, scrambling, jumping. For others, it's quieter: moving in a new, varied way they hadn't thought of before, actively choosing to take a slightly unusual route whilst out and about, or just trying something without worrying what anyone might think. 'Fun' doesn't have to be loud, extroverted or performative.

Try something today – it might be:

- balancing along a kerb or low wall
- stepping from stone to stone on a woodland path



Image by freepik.com

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

Revd 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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