
The Ascott Grapevine



Grapevine Appeal

The Ascott Grapevine is provided FREE to every household in Ascott and we wish this to continue for a long time to come.

Although 'The Grapevine' does receive support from the Parish Council and the PCC, it only raises a limited amount of revenue from advertising. 'The Ascott Grapevine' survives mainly on donations. If you would like to help The Grapevine continue, any donation large or small would be appreciated. You can give a donation to any member of the editorial team.

If there is an aspect of village life not already covered in the Grapevine please contact a member of the production team to discuss your ideas. Articles for the Spring issue of The Grapevine should be submitted by April 3rd.

Call 01993 832163 or email:

ascottgrapevine@dial.pipex.com

Stuart Fox, Kingsley,

Wendy Pearse,

Karen Purvis

Church Services

1st Sunday
10.00am HC
(Common Worship)

2nd Sunday
8.00am HC P

3rd Sunday
10.00am HC
(Common Worship)

4th Sunday
10.00am MP P
4.00pm
Family Service

The service will be held at one of the churches in the Benefice by rotation. Please check Notice Board for full details.

What's what

EP= Evening Prayer/
Service

FC = Family Communion

HC = Holy Communion

MP = Morning Prayer/
Service

QP = Time of Quiet
Prayer

BS = Benefice Service

Bapt = Holy Baptism

C = Contemporary Language

P = Book of Common
Prayer

Chase News

You will find further information about church services and news about what is happening across the Chase Benefice in the *Chase News*, included in the centre of this issue of the Grapevine.

Content & Editorial Policy

If you have an article, story or poem you would like to submit for publication the Grapevine editorial team would love to hear from you. Material for publication is gratefully accepted. Due to space considerations material may not be used immediately but may be held over to be included in a later issue.

The Grapevine editorial team reserve the right to shorten, amend or reject any material submitted for publication.

Doing your weekly shop in Ascott

Like most people in Ascott I'm very fond of our shop. Sure, I do my big weekly shop online, or drag the kids around Sainsbury's if I have to, but I'm in the village shop most days for a newspaper, milk or a little something I might have forgotten.

Then recently, I spotted a feature in the Daily Mail where writers were challenged to forego their big supermarkets and spend a week shopping locally.

It made me think.

I'm increasingly conscious of the environment (in terms of petrol consumption particularly), and absolutely loathe the hassle of food shopping (it takes a good 10 minutes to drive to Chippy, and prizes are awarded to anyone who can find somewhere to park in Witney these days). I wondered, with the ever-increasing selection of stuff in the village shop, could I find everything I need here, right on my doorstep?

After all, it's not just any shop. It's been awarded "runner up" in the Oxford Rural Community Council shop of the year competition, and was good enough to justify a huge glowing spread in the Independent a few months ago.

So I challenged myself to spend a week without a superstore, and to stock up at Ascott shop instead.

I was nervous. Would this cost a fortune? Would I have to resort to buying Pot Noodles while I presoaked mung beans? Would there be any chicken breasts left when I wanted them, or would my fish-hating husband have to endure smoked mackerel?

First shock: there's certainly no problem with the choice. Within five minutes I'd managed to fill three baskets, paid by credit card and left with a little buzz of excitement that the kids would be eating proper sausages that night, and



not the pasty pink processed fingers I normally buy.

I was back in a few days later snaffling up the fresh fruit and vegetables and musing a slightly different selection of meat (Foxbury Farm delivers mince, chicken breasts, chops and sausages on Wednesdays, Callows Farm delivers whole chickens and large joints on Fridays).

I've found shopping locally requires a slightly different mindset. There was no way I could do it all at once - not the £100 shop I'm used to. There's no trolley for a start. So I reverted to swinging by the shop two or three times a week, spending around £30 a time.

It's changed me too. I'm doing a little more planning ahead, rather than letting supermarket special offers dictate

our meals. If I think “stew would be nice!” I put in an order for cubed meat on Wednesday, or if I fancy gammon for the weekend, I tell them so, and there, on Friday morning, is my beautiful joint, just as expected, with a fresh bunch of parsley for the sauce (also ordered a few days earlier).

I don't think I'd realised quite how lucky we are in this village. Ok the shop can't provide the vast quantities of organic milk I need (although they've tried), and the largest box of washing powder they stock wouldn't make a dent on my laundry pile. But if I can think

of anything they haven't got, they'll try to get it. And everything else is right there – and more.

Have you *tried* those Dr Karg's crispbreads? You'd have to go to Daylesford or Waitrose for a taste sensation like that, and pay 50p more per packet for the privilege.

The shop prices really aren't as expensive as you'd expect for somewhere that doesn't buy in bulk. I'm always seduced by a special offer so I indulge my love of a bargain by raiding the half price bin (of goods just past their sell by date). But the penny or two extra you might pay on items still doesn't compare to the money you'd pour into petrol getting you somewhere cheaper, not to mention the £5 deliver to your door fee if you shop online. Oh yes, internet shopping might be convenient, but how useful is it to receive one mushroom when you were expecting a punnet (happened to me), wrinkly peppers (ditto) and

fresh foods with a sell-by date of tomorrow?

I know the village shop can't compete with the “three for twos” or the “buy one, get one free” (deliciously termed “bogofs” in the trade) offers the supermarkets use to tempt you in, but have you noticed? Those offers are always on bad-for-you processed food. If you're committed to healthy eating, as I am, and keeping an eye on the environment, as I try to, you can't really go wrong.

We're unbelievably lucky to have this shop on our doorstep. If you're only using it a bit (as I was) try using it more. You'll be surprised. See how long you can go before you need a big supermarket shop and think of the money you're saving in petrol as each day goes by.

And if you're not using the shop at all, why on earth not?

Go on in! It's lovely.

Louise Woods

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Marriages

At Holy Trinity Church on 3rd December 2005, Patrick Swann to Vivienne Taylor.

Deaths

On 15th November 2005, Fred Acton aged 89years.

Fred Acton 1916-2005

Fred Acton was born on the 6th November 1916 in Wigan, Lancashire. He came to Oxfordshire during World War II to work in the Marconi Radio Station and lodged in the Churchill Arms, Ascott until he married Emily Cook. They lived with her parents in Corner House Farm until their house was built at 8 London Lane. Fred continued working at the Marconi Radio Station until he retired. Emily died in 1998 and Fred, a quiet and reserved man eventually moved to Shipton Road where he died suddenly on the 15th November 2005 aged 89 years.

Community Safety Meetings

A series of meetings to take place across the district that will offer better access to not only Neighbourhood Watch advice but also the Police Crime Reduction Officer, Trading Standards & Fire & Rescue.

Mar 22nd

1. Bampton, Town Hall
2. Carterton, Town Hall

April 26th

1. & 2. Witney, High Street Methodist Church

May 24th

1. Woodstock, Town Hall
2. Eynsham, Village Hall

June 21st

1. New Beaconsfield Hall, Shipton-u-Wychwood
2. Burford, Methodist Hall

All meetings will take place on a WEDNESDAY

Meeting times:

- (1) 3.00pm to 5.00pm &
- (2) 6.00pm to 7.30pm.

Apology

We must apologise to **Dick Crampton** for omitting his name from his excellent Trafalgar article in the last issue.

We would also like to apologise to everyone for the late delivery of this issue of the Grapevine. This was due to an unexpected computer hardware failure.

The Swan

Welcome Amanda! If you don't know who Amanda is then I guess you haven't visited The Swan for a couple of months or maybe even a couple of years. So a spot of history might help. After a succession of managers, Rob came to The Swan at the beginning of 2005 and did a great job of really getting the place clean and tidy. He and his team scrubbed and polished, changed all the glasses, sorted out the cellar and the London Pride started to hit the glass tasting just as it should.

Rob moved on last November and Amanda

arrived as an interim manager to look after the place for a month or so. The good news is that she likes it here so much that she has decided to stay. Amanda has continued the good work and The Swan is now warm and welcoming.

Her first priority was to grow the business in order to convince the owners of the potential of The Swan and then to persuade them to invest money in the property and the facilities. Well, she has made a great start, the owners are delighted and they are now looking seri-

ously at the renovation work that needs to be done and the opportunities for improvement.

Amanda has been in the licensed trade all her life and she knows what makes a good pub. She has got lots of ideas about the things that she would like to do but why not help her out? Call into The Swan, buy a drink, have a chat and let her know what you would like from your 'local'.

Ascott is a great community and after a period of uncertainty about its future, with our support, this valuable community resource will continue to be a meeting place right in the heart of the village. By the time the next Grape Vine is published great things could have happened at The Swan.

Cheers.

Tim Lyon



Memories of Coldstone Farm, Part Two

Monday was wash day. The whole lot was done at one go and was a major operation. The built in copper was filled and the fire lit early to provide hot water. We had an elaborate washing machine which was basically a large tub on legs with a circular agitator moving clockwise and anticlockwise and also up and down. This was powered by a wheel with a handle which turned the cog wheel assembly. A wringer was attached at the back which squeezed the water out of the clothes and back into the inside. Things like sheets and pillowcases were then boiled in the copper and the clothes were rinsed in a large bowl of clear water with a squeeze of the bluebag to whiten the whites before going through another wringer and being hung out to dry. I was always fascinated by revolving shafts and cog wheels so I was happy to turn the handle for a while when I was there on Monday mornings. But I remem-

ber one day when Bill Benfield was there with his lorry carrying loads of manure out of the yard and round the road to our land up on the hill. When I went out to help he said "Hello Jim. Grampy tells me you were indoors helping the ladies". This was a bit disturbing as I had not viewed the situation from that angle and I wondered what else had been said! It was quite an experience riding on Bill's lorry chugging up Chippy Hill in first gear,

with a heavy load of muck!

By Tuesday or Wednesday the clothes were dry enough to iron with the heavy solid flat irons. With an old folded sheet on the dining table the irons were usually heated on a paraffin boiling stove, two heating up and one in use. The temperature was critical, hot enough to do the job without scorching. When picked up carefully with a thick cloth holder a spot of water was dropped

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Floods in 1930's. Grandfather riding carthorse Dumpling to bring loaves of bread across the water.

onto the base and the ferocity of the frizzle into steam was the only guide. Grandmother had a type of slide shoe which fitted under the irons when hot so she could heat them by the coal fire without getting soot onto the clothes.

In the first half of the twentieth century the river was more aggressive than today bringing floods of various levels

into the entrance orchard in wintertime. A large piece of a treetop blew down one year and when the flood was deep enough it floated about so I was able to get on it and punt it along. The ducks enjoyed swimming on the flood but they looked quite surprised and disappointed when they came out in the morning to find it had all

gone down and disappeared. It rarely lasted more than two or three days. We always had cattle in the yard up the fields in the winter and they had to be fed and watered twice every day so when the flood was too deep for dad to get along the lane he had to go farther up the village then cross over the railway where it crossed the river. One big flood came with the thaw at the end of the severe winter in 1947. The river had been frozen in places and we could hear the big lumps of ice crashing into the bridge. On one occasion the water was rising when we went on the bus in the morning to Burford School and when we got off in the village in the dark at night it was too deep for me to get through our gateway. So I had to go through by the Tiddy Hall and across what was then a grass field to the bend in the road towards Shipton, then through our orchard to the cowshed and across

the yard to the back door. On rare occasions the surface of the river rose above floor level in the house which was quite exciting for a young boy. "Isn't it good Grandma?" "No it isn't good Jimmy!" I remember it about eight inches deep over the lower floors which in those days were surfaced with stone flags so that when the water went down a good slosh over with a mop and buckets of clean water soon restored things to normal.

The full length of the river was thoroughly dredged out wide and clear in the early 1950's and this prevented the big floods from occurring but now there are more obstructions than ever there were in the 1940's with mud banks, reeds and fallen branches. However, recent decades have brought less rain than previously which has been fortunate for some!

The railway was much more active before the bite of the

Beeching Axe. There was a double track all the way with proper buildings at all the stations. These were manned by a station master, ticket clerk and an adequate number of porters. Every station had a siding track or two for loading goods and there were cattle holding pens at Charlbury, Shipton and Kingham. Many more passenger trains went each way and the expresses were often twelve coaches in length. There were a va-



Taken in the 1930's from what was the gateway into the second orchard looking towards the river

riety of goods trains, cattle trucks, parcel vans, milk tanks, oil tanks, sugar beet and ironstone trucks and flat beds for farm machines as well as general goods vans and many coal trains. These were often sixty trucks in length. There was also a short "Pick Up" train in each direction every day to collect or leave trucks at the sidings as necessary for each station. Apart from a one coach diesel which made a return trip every day, all the trains were pulled by steam engines.

When a goods train stopped it was with a crescendo of noise like a mixture of falling dominoes and breaking glass as each truck in turn slammed into the buffers of the one in front. Then each truck would jump and bounce in turn when it's tow chain snatched tight as the engine began to move again going a good walking pace by the time the last truck began to move.

There was a brick built 'crossing cottage' close to the rail track

where Gypsy Lane crosses the line at the curve towards Shipton. This crossing was wide enough to be used by horses and wagons. The last man at the cottage was Mr Peter Carter who lived there with his wife and son. I remember one dusky evening in winter when a knock came at the door and it was Dr Scott Senior. Mrs Carter was ill and he had his car stuck along the grass track of Gypsy Lane so dad had to harness a horse and take some chains to pull

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it out, The cottage later became empty and vandalised and was demolished in the 1950's.

I've always enjoyed the view from the land of Coldstone Farm. From the fields by the A361 the panoramic scene across the Evenlode Valley stretches from Churchill in the north round through Kingham, Stow, Idbury, all the Wychwoods and Chilson to Chadlington in the east north east. In the 1940's the semi circle of land from Lyneham round through the Wychwood villages to Chilson carried forty five active farms and twenty one of these had a herd of milking cows, So we could see other farmers ploughing, hay-making, harvesting and their cows going in to be milked. Sadly now there are no dairy cows at all in this area and the present number of working farms is thirteen. The other thirty two farms have all ceased

to operate as a farming business and their land has been taken over by other farms. Modern progress is a mixed blessing and the flail trimmer is not everyone's idea of an asset to the environment but without this machine most fields would by now be out of sight behind overgrown and unkempt hedges. So few people now work in agriculture.

For now, the colours still change with the

flow of the seasons, from green to gold then to brown and on to green once again with the promise of yet another season.

Jim Pearse.

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'The River Evenlode Runs Through It'

For the past 30 years I have lived in Ascott-under-Wychwood and when I've gone over the railway and past the signal box to the river bridge, I have noticed how some people stop and look over the bridge to see the River Evenlode, and then look down to see any fish and watch the swans. Even I do; but I never knew where it started or finished until February last year when I bought a book on walking called 'The Evenlode - an Exploration of a Cotswold River' by Gordon Ottewell. So during the spring and summer step-by-step I took on a little hobby for Sunday afternoons and decided to do this walk.

On Walk One, I started to walk from a Longborough pub called the Coach and Horses. Near Stow-on-the-Wold a police car with his blue light flashing pulled up and said there had been a crash up the road. He told me that a cement mixing



St Edward's Church, Evenlode

lorry had hit a prison van so I should be on the lookout for ten hardened criminals. I carried on walking to Bourton-on-the-Hill past Sezincote House and to a spring near Bourton-on-the-Hill where the River Evenlode starts.

On Walk Two, called the Evenlode Village Circular walk which starts from the village, soon after starting the walk I came across a fight between a rat and a hedgehog. I watched for two minutes before the hedgehog won on points. I carried on walking almost to Moreton-in-Marsh

where I came to one of the smallest sections of the river Evenlode I came across on my walk.

On Walk Three, you walk through another three villages and these are called Adlestrop, Oddington and Daylesford. As I almost finished this walk I met a bloke who asked me what the weather would be like tomorrow. I said that it would be cool in Goole, dry in Rye and if he was going to Lissing Down, he should take an umbrella.

The next walk was Kingham and Bledington Heath. When I started to walk from Kingham to

Daylesford, the River Evenlode started to get bigger. At the end of the walk, walking back along the River Evenlode I came across a bloke who was into sport who told me that in the transatlantic single-handed yacht race, Mr Tommy Smith had been disqualified for using both hands. I walked to the old railway bridge that was part of the line which used to run from Kingham to Banbury until the 1960s and popped down and the path turns into a woodland area where you walk up to the new railway line and back into the wood to the end you

started from. It was a nice little walk.

The best walk I did was the next walk, from Shipton to Lyneham and Bruern. A good walk with lovely views. When you walk into Bruern you find a track to Bruern weir where we all used to go to swim and dive into the Evenlode when we were young. When I was a lad of fourteen I came across a bloke and I asked who lived in that big house and the man told me that it was some bloke who had invented the zip fastener and that not long ago he had been honoured with a life peerage, and that he was

now know as the Lord of the Flies.

The next walk I started from Ascott and went to Shipton; I believe this could be considered the middle stretch of the river Evenlode. The next walk I again started in Ascott, and went to Shorthampton and Chilson. Just outside of Shorthampton, I met a lady who played with the Chipping Norton Silver Band. She said there had been a strange happening during a performance at the theatre in Chipping Norton the night before; during the performance of Bermuda Music the man playing the triangle simply disappeared!

The next walk took me from Charlbury through Dean Grove, Coldrun Mill, Cornbury and Fawler. This was a very long walk but lovely to do. After that the next walk started from Stonesfield, past the Roman Villa in North Leigh and on to Combe, where I had a



The Railway Bridge, Kingham

big cheer from some people on the village green when they saw me with the walking book.

The next section of the walk I did was another good walk which is called the Long Hanborough circular walk. Towards the end of this walk I started to

sneeze and flap my arms about, a couple who saw me asked what was the matter, and I said I must have caught bird flu on the way.

The next walk is the last one, which takes you from Eynsham by the Talbot Inn. Turn left when you get to

Eynsham lock and the weir and follow the Thames path for about 20 - 25 minutes and you will see where the river Evenlode flows into the river Thames.

I did enjoy the complete walk. It was well worth it!

Timothy Ryan

Flix in the Stix

February

Shipton

Thurs 23rd

'Pride and Prejudice' -
8pm

March

Ascott

Thurs 9th

'Casablanca' - 8pm

March

Milton

(date to be confirmed)

'Kinky Boots' - 8pm
'Howl's Moving Castle'
- matinee

Shipton

Thurs 30th

'Mrs. Henderson
Presents' - 8pm

April

Ascott

Sat 8th

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Around the Village



A jolly time was had by all on a tour of Wychwood Brewery





Jane Barker from Oxfordshire Rural Community Council presenting Sandy Markwell with the Runners-Up Certificate in the Village Shop of the Year Competition (Community Section)



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Nature Notes

One of the joys of living in the Evenlode Valley is the wide variety of habitats contained within a relatively small area. We have woodlands, hedgerows, grassland, dry hillsides and of course the river, together with the associated flood plain and marshy ground.

These wetland habitats attract some interesting birds.

One particular favourite of mine is the Grey Heron, one of our



Grey Heron

largest native birds with a wingspan of nearly two metres. Usually a solitary bird it will feed from the edge of the river or a pond, carefully

stalking its prey and striking with surprising speed and power, often stabbing more than once. They usually catch fish, but will also eat frogs, water beetles, water voles or the young of other nesting birds. Occasionally they will move into deeper water to raid nests of water birds such as Grebes.

Although solitary in their feeding habits, their nest site is communal with several nests built in an area of woodland close to water. The nests consist of large platforms made from twigs and are built high in the trees. There is no soft lining material used. The eggs are laid in late February or March.

Another visitor is the Snipe, which might be either the Common Snipe, a native that breeds in Britain, or more likely the Jack Snipe, a smaller bird that is a winter visitor, travelling from the birch forests of the north and arriving from Septem-



Snipe

ber. Identifying one from the other is not easy. The Common Snipe is larger with a longer bill. When disturbed it flies in a pronounced zigzag pattern making very quick and sharp turns flying to a great height, uttering a “scarp, scarp” cry, often travelling a great distance. The Jack Snipe rises more quietly when disturbed, its twists and turns are more moderate and it will often land within a few yards.

Both Snipe spend their days concealed in cover near water but at dusk will move to marshy areas, bogs and pond edges to feed, probing into the mud with their long, sensitive

bills looking for earth-worms, their staple food.

Snipe belong to the same family as the Woodcock and are also considered to be game birds.

A less welcome visitor that has been reported is the Cormorant. Fortunately, from

Great Cormorant



the local fishermen's point of view, this is a rare visitor to the Evenlode Valley. The cormorant is one of our largest fish eating birds and the natural habitat of the British species is the coast and salt water estuaries. However there is a European sub-species that has moved inland to feed and breed on a wide variety of

fresh water sites. It is these birds that concern anglers who have seen their numbers increase rapidly. This has put fish stocks, in some our rivers and lakes, under pressure, possibly causing problems for other wild life such as Kingfishers and Otters. It has been estimated that a Cormorant will eat between twenty and thirty 7cm long fish each day!

The Cormorant is equally at home in the air or in the water; it is a strong flyer, can swim like a duck and when disturbed sink until the whole body except the



Cormorant neck and head is under water. It dives well, when in pursuit of fish, swimming underwater using its feet alone; remaining submerged for up to half a minute and is able to out-run most fish.

Thanks to Pete Moss from Coldstone Angling Club for details of some of the birds he has seen.

Stuart Fox

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Ascott-under-Wychwood Parish Council

Thames Valley Police have now successfully established the scheme named NAG, this being the Neighbourhood Action Group. This contains representatives from Chipping Norton, Charlbury and The Wychwoods. The NAG also contains members of our Neighbourhood Police Team and local councils. They will be meeting regularly to discuss how to problem solve issues raised and

will be working as a team to tackle the top three priorities - Traffic and speeding, Youths hanging around and Anti-social behaviour.

Your Ascott-under-Wychwood NAG contacts are Mr John Cull on 831261 and Mr Roger Shepherd on 830227

Can we request again that should you witness any acts of vandalism or you are affected by vandalism please report

them immediately on 08458 505 505. Should an immediate response be required please report immediately on 999.

Angela Barnes
Parish Clerk:
01608 641045

Parish Council:

Nigel Braithwaite,	Chairman	831282
Elaine Byles		831427
Stuart Fox		832004
Mike Pearce		830058
Wendy Pearse		831023

Parish Conservation

The Wychwood Project has now launched its new initiative “The Parish Conservation Challenge” and it hopes to work with local communities to identify their priorities for the conservation of local wildlife habitats and landscape features.

Ascott has been chosen as one of the first Parishes to be asked to put forward ideas for local action. Projects that have been discussed by the Parish Council

include, restoration of the dry stone walls surrounding The Pound, hedgerow trees to replace the elms lost on the approach to the village off the A361 and possibly some hedge laying.

What do you think?

This is a community based project and we want to hear about your ideas to improve enhance and restore local wildlife habitats and landscape features. This

may include tree planting, replacing hedges, pond restoration, erecting owl boxes etc.

Please contact Stuart Fox 01993 832004 (stuart@wychwood.me.uk) or any member of the Parish Council with your suggestions.

Stuart Fox

From the desk of Hilary Biles – District Councillor

Well done David, our man won!

What a year for David Cameron, our Member of Parliament. After a succession of promotions he is now the Leader of the Conservative Party – Leader of the Opposition, the Rt. Hon David Cameron M.P. This can only be good for our area. David lives locally in Dean and understands the rural areas and the problems facing market towns and villages. We wish him every success

The pilot Green Waste scheme proved very effective and will now be rolled out to 4,000 houses in the area. There will be a consultation to look at the view of residents. While I am sure we all support the collection of green waste, this could result in two weekly collections of residual waste. If you have strong feelings on this matter please write to me. I have already received

emails about the Christmas and New Year holiday collections.

The District Council do have to conform to EU regulations on waste and have targets to meet. As usual we do not receive extra funding to go along with the targets.

Chipping Norton Hospital will go ahead with the Intermediate Care beds in the Care home building but in a separate wing and there will be two birthing pools in the new maternity unit. There will also be X-ray and consulting rooms. The staff will remain NHS for three years after the completion of the building. Lets hope this time the NHS will not change their minds.

The supporting people budget for Oxfordshire has been cut by government. This of course affects all services for vulnerable people.

All District Councils in Oxfordshire have had to cut their budgets by 15%. In West Oxfordshire we have done well to hold on to our residential services and we did not need to make a cut for older people as we have fewer services than elsewhere. I wish I could say things will improve but we have been informed there will be ongoing government funding cuts in future years.

West Oxfordshire is on target with their affordable homes, and there will be 53 on the parker Knoll site in Chipping Norton that should be ready by the autumn. If you are interested in these properties you will need a connection with Chipping Norton through family, work or residence.

Hilary Biles

Spring

Now fades the last long streak of snow,
Now burgeons every maze of quick
About the flowering squares, and thick
By ashen roots the violets blow.
Now rings the woodland loud and long,
The distance takes a lovelier hue,
And drown'd in yonder living blue
The lark becomes a sightless song.
Now dance the lights on lawn and lea,
The flocks are whiter down the vale,
And milkier every milky sail,
On winding stream of distant sea;
Where now the seamew pipes, or dives
In yonder greening gleam, and fly
The happy birds, that change their sky
To build and brood, that live their lives.
From land to land; and in my breast
Spring wakens too; and my regret
Becomes an April violet,
And buds and blossoms like the rest.

Alfred Lord Tennyson





The Ascott Connection

It was whilst I was re-searching the stories of the Ascott men who died in the Great War that I first became aware of the number of postcards that have survived from that era. The subjects of the postcards are numerous and cover every aspect of the War and society at that time and the embroidered silk postcards which flourished during the War, the majority sent by the troops in France, are real works of art.

Once confronted by these postcards I became hooked and a couple of years ago whilst at a postcard fair in Cheltenham, a pack with a label stating -First World War - all to one family- caught my eye. I was even more intrigued once I turned the pack over. The family's name was Boffin and anyone brought up in Oxford last century will remember the Bakers and Confectioners, Cooper and Boffin, whilst the addresses on the cards were in Jericho, Oxford. This became even
The Ascott Grapevine - Page 24



more intriguing since my grandmother's family lived in Jericho and her brother was killed in Flanders during the Passchendaele Campaign. Needless to say, I bought the cards.

Practically all the cards were sent by 'Bob' to Miss Betty Boffin at various addresses in Jericho. The family seemed to move around a lot, Canal Street, Great Clarendon Street, Walton Street etc. I soon found the Boffin family on the 1901 Census. Father Thomas, mother Sophia, one son and six daughters, Elizabeth (Betty) being the fourth daughter. The cards were sent from various parts of the Western Front,

France, Flanders and Italy, but not one card gave Bob's surname. All had his army number and one O.B.L.I. (Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry). The various movements on the cards corresponded to the deployments of the 1st/4th Territorial Battalion of the Oxford and Bucks. So I now had his battalion but who was Bob?

I went back to the dealer from whom I bought the cards and asked if there were more Boffin cards. Apparently loads had come on to the market but they had been sorted into numerous categories. Between us we sorted through a

Don't forget about the Ascott website:

number of subjects and came up with a few more cards. Two cards from Ilfracombe sent in 1913, one indicating the 150 bedroomed Runnacleave Hotel where it seemed Bob had begun training as a chef. Then one that seemed vaguely familiar. Could it read Ascott under Wychwood? Sure enough a photograph of the old schoolteacher's house, 9 The Green. Well! How surprising – out of all the villages in Oxfordshire! The card had been written by Betty's eldest sister Ethel in 1912 and the wording on the back read "Dear Mam. We arrived here safe, it's grand, tell you all about it when I get home, just off to tea. Love to all, Ethel." My first Ascott connection.

These postcards were becoming even more intriguing. However still no sign of Bob's surname. I decided to write to the Memory Lane column in the Oxford Mail to see if any of the readers could help. A

reply from an elderly nephew of Betty's but he was born sometime after the War and could give me no information. I decided to send a copy of my letter to the Oxford and Bucks Museum at Headington. They had been very helpful with my previous research. There I struck gold. A new data base had been set up using army numbers and sure enough there he was ROBERT GEORGE GASS 1ST/4TH Oxford and Bucks. Armed with this new information I soon found the family on the 1901 Census. Father Edward (a reader at Oxford University Press), mother, three sons (Bob the eldest) and two daughters.

They lived in Kingston Road next to Jericho and in 1913 Bob and Betty were both eighteen and could well have known each other since schooldays, perhaps attending the local school of St. Barnabas together.

Bob enlisted in 1914 (he could already have

been a member of the Territorials like his father) and was sent to France in June 1915. He served in the trenches near Hebuterne for nearly a year before fighting in the Somme Campaign in 1916. Then the Battalion moved to Flanders in 1917 and took part in the mud, sweat, blood and tears of Passchendaele. In November 1917 they were sent to Italy to help the Italians hold their line following the Austrian advance after the Battle of Caporetto. The Asiago Plateau was the site of much of the Battalion's deployment during 1918 where indeed the 1st/4th Oxford and Bucks fought in a similar stand to Rourke's Drift in South Africa when on 15th June the Austrians practically surrounded them and every man fought backs to the wall eventually coming through victorious. Not until February 1919 did Bob finally leave Italy and return to his 'Dearest Betty.'

I still kept my eyes open for the Boffin cards at subsequent fairs and thus found my second Ascott connection. A card of Ascott Church from Betty's second sister Nance simply stating 'Dear Lizzie, Just a PC no doubt you will see me before the PC. Love from Nance.' Just what could be this connection with Ascott?

Finally I found my third connection. A postcard of the Ascott Fete in 1913. But the card was not sent until June 1920 and was addressed to Betty's younger sister Vi. It was written by Ethel who had married in 1915 and by 1920 was living in Gravesend. She had written on behalf of her first daughter to wish Vi

many happy returns of her birthday and cryptically one sentence gives food for thought, 'hope-Aunty Betty is better'. Very little information is given on Bob's postcards, mainly due to the censor but one sentiment that frequently crops up is the subject of Betty's health 'I hope you are feeling better.' 'Do you good to have a rest.' When Bob finally returned to Oxford after serving for practically the entire length of the War, perhaps he then faced his greatest ordeal. On 19th November 1920 Elizabeth Lilian Rose Boffin was buried in St. Sepulchre's Cemetery in Jericho. A very poignant end to Bob's postcard story.

I then felt that I could not leave Bob at this crucial point. I decided to write to the seven Gass's listed in the Oxford Telephone Book to see if anyone had any recollection of him. I had a reply from the granddaughter of Bob's uncle and through her memories and those of another family member in South Africa, I was able to search the Marriage and Birth Registrations. Bob married a Ruby Molyneux from Headington in 1923. They had two daughters, Sheila and Ann. It is believed that Bob finally became a chef and I very much hope that subsequently life treated him well.

As for me, I shall always be intrigued by the Ascott connection but realise that there is very little likelihood of that mystery ever being solved.

Many of you must have stories of intrigue or mystery to tell. Please share



them with us. No matter long or short we should be pleased to print them in the Grapevine, so please contact a member of the Editorial Team with your article.

Wendy Pearse.



Expulsion

“The expulsion of Adam and Eve” by Masaccio forms part of the magnificent frescoes in the Brancacci Chapel in the church of Santa Maria del Carmine in Florence. Every time I see this painting I am struck by the shame and despair etched on Eve’s face.

The poem won the monthly poetry competition (March 2005) in the Literary Review - a magazine I cannot recommend too highly to anyone interested in literature. The subject of the competition was “Foul play”.

Expulsion

His hands are clasped over his eyes;
her face is racked by pain,
as they walk out of paradise,
cast out from your domain.
Omnipotence.. it must be hard
to think of things to do,
when everything that is, is marred
by the knowledge that it’s you
who thought this up; this universe,
this garden of delight
designed to introduce a curse
that demonstrates your might.
So, did you smile when they rushed out
crushed by their guilt and shame?
You can’t have entertained much doubt:
The outcome of your game
was pre-determined, cut and dried.
Your need was that they stray;
The tree, the serpent and his lies-
all part of your foul play.

Harry Kappen



Grey Squirrel - Friend or Foe?

Be honest – watching a grey squirrel defeat your best efforts to stop it taking peanuts from a bird feeder - it is hard not to be impressed by this resourceful and successful inhabitant of our woodlands and gardens. The Grey squirrel (Scientific name *Sciurus carolinensis*) is clearly a fast learner as it was only introduced into Britain after the 1870s, from the eastern states of North America where it

is native. There are now estimated to be over 2.5million Grey squirrels, spread through almost all of the UK. Whilst being an entertaining garden companion, not all aspects of the Grey squirrel's behaviour are so appealing. Grey squirrels have been an important factor in the decline of our smaller, native Red squirrel (*Sciurus vulgaris*). Competition for food, the loss of suitable habi-

tat and disease have led to the Grey squirrel ousting the Red from most of the UK's woodlands, including those in Oxfordshire. Grey squirrels also have the unpleasant habit of stripping the bark from young trees in the spring, particularly after a good breeding season when numbers of young are high. Trees between the ages of 10 and 40 years old are most at risk. The tree species most commonly affected are sycamore, beech, oak, pine, larch and Norway spruce; though other broadleaves will be attacked if conditions are right. The consequence of this damage can be severe. At worst trees can be killed or disfigured, often in large numbers. There is a real risk that our grand-children may not have the chance to appreciate the landscapes of mature parkland trees that we currently enjoy, because of damage from Grey squirrels. Grey squirrels have also been reported

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taking the eggs and young of woodland birds, though the impact of this on bird populations is uncertain. Controlling squirrel numbers in commercial woodlands is difficult, time consuming and not helped by the availability of grain pro-

vided for pheasants. If you have a squirrel problem in your garden it is possible to get wire cage squirrel-traps, though this is only likely to be a short-term solution as a 'replacement' squirrel will eventually appear from a nearby area. Friend or Foe? Despite

the pleasing antics I would have to mark them down as a Foe, so keep on with the designs for that ultimate squirrel-proof bird feeder.

Nick Mottram
Wychwood Project
Officer

A Dream Come True

The Grapevine is pleased to welcome a new gardening correspondent who will be contributing ideas and tips as she develops her own garden in the coming year. January is a time for thinking and planning and so the regular column will not start until the April issue.

She is a professional gardener currently working as part of a team for a local estate. By way of a brief introduction she has submitted the following piece about a week she spent as a volunteer at the Lost Gardens of Heligan.

"It was the silence, the unearthly silence that struck you"

These were the first words that Tim Smit wrote in his book, "The Lost Gardens of Heligan," but not anymore! When I arrived at Heligan, the noise was amazing, not cars or people noise, but bird song. Not only had they woken the garden, but they had woken all the birds surrounding the garden.

I counted ten Robins in about as many yards. Thrushes thrived, Blackbirds were in bulk, Tree

Creepers, Woodpeckers and Jays too; whatever you could think of were there, singing away, happy that the gardens were returned to their former glory. I was happy to be there too, working for a week in this wonderful garden I had read so much about; a dream come true. All the people who worked there were happy to be there too, they loved it, their faces familiar from the book and the video I had seen. They seemed like old friends even before I had met them.

My first morning and I was planting troughs of vegetables for their display garden at Hampton Court! The plants were counted and the spaces measured before planting, this really was working from a plan. The afternoon was spent weeding and hoeing the vegetable garden, with many interruptions from the 1000 plus visitors each day. "They love to chat" Richard the head gardener told me, "and we want our staff to chat to them." This is a large part of the staff's

work at Heligan. The first people I spoke to were from Bourton-on-the-Water!

Flowers need to be picked for the reception area and then tea-room. Strawberries were needed for Heligan cream teas, herbs needed planting, sweet peas tying up, pineapples needed airing and always the weeds needed weeding. Down in the jungle area I planted bananas and admired the enormous tree ferns which the Tremayne family had planted many

years ago. Under huge gunnera leaves, six feet across, we paddled in the cool water of the jungle ponds, pulling out the invasive water parsnip plants. We could have been the only two people anywhere in the world. When we surfaced from under the huge gunnera, we found that there were more people on earth and yes, they wanted to chat!

“Crib?” shouted Mike, as I hauled another bucket of water up the steep sides of the

work at 4.30, so I could wander around until the gardens closed at 6.00. How smug I was, walking round as though I owned the place. It really was “a dream comes true” working at Heligan.

The gardens were so familiar to me from photos in Tim’s book, but I was now actually digging their soil, pulling their weeds and cutting their flowers. “Can you tell me the way to the lost valley” another visitor, another chat. Some had been to Heligan at the beginning of the garden’s restoration and had returned several times, but for some, like me, this was their first visit, although I know I will be going back.

My last day and as I was hoeing in one of the large flower borders back came the Robin for the hundredth time with a beak full of worms to feed his young, that in time will add to the beautiful and magical noise of this beautiful and magical garden.

AJP

jungle valley for the newly planted bananas. “What” I asked, “crib” it’s what we call our tea break. “Yes please!” The gardeners finish



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District Council Services on the Web

A newly launched website is making it much easier for residents to access local information and interact with the Council at any time of the day.

“My West Oxfordshire is a special feature of our website”, says Cllr Mary Neale, Cabinet Member responsible for e-government at West Oxfordshire District Council. “By entering a postcode, street or house name you can find out about services and issues relating to your property. This includes your bin collection day, your Council Tax, planning information and who your lo-

cal councillor is. You can even see a map and aerial photograph of your house. Why not visit us at: www.westoxon.gov.uk.”

Web pages have been re-written and it is now much easier to find information. There are more efficient ways for reporting things like fly tipping and missed refuse collections and for making requests such as advice and help on pest control. It is also possible to make payments online.

Cllr Barry Norton, Leader of the Council said: “Providing so many services online is a significant step forward for us.



People use the Internet because it is so convenient. Now so much can be done from home - shopping, booking holidays, banking - there is no reason why council services should be any different. I am delighted with what has been achieved.”

Already there have been 70 requests for additional refuse and recycling services and over 200 requests and comments through the nu-

m e r o u s
online forms. Stephen Wilkinson from OX28 Media, Witney was one of the first to send in a comment: “Great site, the ability to pay my council tax online rather than

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have to take time out to trundle into town.”

Mark McArthur-Christie of Bampton also contacted the Council saying, “Really impressed with the new site - easy to navigate, interactive, relevant. I suspect a few other councils could learn a thing or two. Just goes to show that us West Oxon ‘bumpkins’ are ahead of the game...”

Using the website is easier for those with disabilities such as sight impairment. For example

it can be viewed in different text sizes, and with or without images.

Below are some of the services that can now be done online:

- Payments for Council Tax, Business Rates and Parking Fines.
- Reports and requests such as Missed Refuse Collections, Vandalism, Help and Advice on Pests. Over 40 online forms.
- Planning
- Benefits Calculator
- Booking system for leisure centre members

• ‘I am moving’ service which notifies companies and organisations when you move home.

- Links to various County Council forms such as snow clearance or street light problems
- An email alert facility
- Local information through the ‘My West Oxfordshire’ section.

For more information:

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Coldstone Angling Club

By the time the next issue of the Grapevine comes out the season for Coarse fish will be over.

For the club itself we have had quite a reasonable season although it would be nice to have a few more members joining the club especially juniors which for one reason or another do not seem to be coming into the sport.

This season we as a club have been quite active in various projects and fund raising items, earlier in the season we held an evening with the envi-

ronment agency which considering, was very well attended by all parts of the community, the feed back we received from the evening was very encouraging, those attending finding it very interesting. There was a slide show from the agency showing all aspects of the agencies work, this was followed by a question and answer session to the agency, one of the most interesting questions to be asked was on the American Signal Crayfish which has now spread to numerous

waterways through England and are now becoming a real problem causing erosion of river banks by burrowing into the banks causing them to collapse. Also their savaging of fish spawn of which the agency admits these crayfish are causing a lot of problems.

Another project we undertook was the removal of surplus rudd from the lake which seem to have spread very prolifically, the only way we could remove the fish was by rod and line due to the amount of weed in the lake netting would not have been successful. So on one Saturday in November, 10 of us in number held a five hour competition to see how many we could catch, with permission granted for the removal of the fish caught and a new home found for them. We set about to see what we could catch with each competitor recording each fish caught. At the end of the five hours and the

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total caught and tallied up, between us we caught approximately 1,960 rudd with B.Barnes catching over 500 personally.

Fund raising we held out annual Christmas Bingo which this year was quite a disappointment by the numbers attending, nevertheless, the club raised over £160 which would be very appreciated. Thank you for those who attended.

Finally, on February 25th on behalf of the club to raise funds we are holding a dinner dance at the Tiddy Hall.



The white-clawed crayfish (*Austropotamobius pallipes Lereboullet*) is Britain's only native crayfish. It can easily be distinguished from introduced species, such as the North American signal crayfish, by its pinkish-white underside

It is hoped this one will be as successful as the last we held, like most clubs we rely on funds to be able to continue to run.

On behalf of the club we would like to wish you all a happy new year.

P.Moss
Secretary, Coldstone
A.C.

Cook's Corner: Ascott's Favourite Recipes

Smoked Haddock and Potato Florentine Gratin (Serves 6)

Ingredients

1.14kg (2½lb) filleted smoked haddock
3 tbsp olive oil
700g (1½lb) young leaf spinach
½ tsp salt & a good grinding of black pepper
Grating of nutmeg
6 ripe tomatoes (halved)
900g (2lb) potatoes, peeled and weighed before boiling, then mashed

For the sauce

25g butter
2 tbsp olive oil
2 shallots, skinned & finely diced
1 rounded tbsp flour
570ml (1 pint) milk
2 tsp dijon mustard
1 tsp tabasco sauce
75g (3oz) grated cheddar or lancashire cheese
pinch of salt & lots of ground black pepper
Grating of nutmeg

75g (3oz) parmesan cheese (coarsely grated or shaved)

Put the fish on a board and feel it for any lines of fine bones -cut these out. Cut the fish into large chunks, about one inch in size. Lay a sheet of baking parchment over a baking tray, put the prepared smoked haddock on

this, cover with another sheet of baking parchment and bake in a moderate oven, 350°F/180°C/Gas4. for 15 minutes.

Meanwhile, rub a wide, ovenproof dish, of approximately 2.25 litre (4 pint) capacity. with olive oil or butter.

Heat the olive oil in a large saute pan and add the spinach in relays. removing it to a large bowl as it wilts down. When it is all wilted. cut the spinach as finely as you can with scissors. I think the spinach is nice with texture but if you prefer it

pureed, whizz it in a food processor after wilting. Season with salt, pepper and nutmeg. mixing the seasonings in thoroughly.

Use the same pan to fry the tomatoes. Add some more olive oil and the tomatoes and fry them until they soften. Spread the mashed potatoes over the base of the oiled. ovenproof dish and cover with the spinach and tomatoes. Put the cooked pieces of fish over the spinach.

Make the sauce by heating together the butter and olive oil and frying the shallots for

two to three minutes, or until they are beginning to turn brown at the edges. Stir in the flour, and cook for a minute before gradually adding the milk; stir continuously until the sauce bubbles. Stir in the mustard, tabasco, and then the grated cheese. Take the saucepan off the heat. Season with just a pinch of salt - the spinach is seasoned and the fish will contribute a saltiness - and with the pepper and nutmeg. Pour the sauce over the fish. Cover with the parmesan and, if you are making it to

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eat immediately, put the dish under a red-hot grill until the parmesan melts and turns golden. Keep the dish warm until you are ready to eat.

If you are making this in the morning for

that evening or the next day, let it cool and then cover it with cling film and store it in the fridge. Less than an hour before eating, reheat it in a moderate oven, 350°F/180°C (Gas mark 4), for 25 to 30 min-

utes, and then, if the parmesan has not melted, pop it under a hot grill for a very few minutes, until the surface cheese turns a pale brown.

Kathy Pearce

Have you a favourite or seasonal recipe you would like to share? Then please jot it down and hand a copy to Stuart Fox, Wendy Pearce, Karen Purvis or Kingsley or email it to: ascottgrapevine@dial.pipex.com

Wychwoods Local History Society

The meeting on the Thursday 16th February will be the 25th Anniversary Meeting of the Society. To mark the occasion the guest speaker will be Kate Tiller who will speak in Shipton Village Hall at 7.30.p.m. about Wychwoods History/Local History.

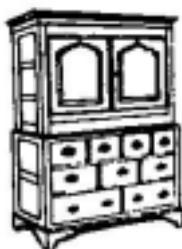
On Thursday 16th March, John Forster (Education Officer, Blenheim Palace) will give a talk in Milton Village Hall at 7.30.p.m. about The Ladies of Blenheim.

Then on Thursday 20th April at 7.30.p.m. in Shipton Village Hall Simon Townley's talk will be Witney and it's

Townships, Recent Work by the Victoria County History.

Old and new members are welcome. Subscriptions are £6 for an individual and £9 for a couple which includes a copy of Wychwoods

History when published. Visitors welcome at any meeting at £2 per head. More information about the Society can be obtained from Wendy Pearce on 831023.



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Leaffield School

School was busy as usual towards the end of last term. The Foundation Stage and KS1 children visited Harcourt Arboretum. It was a very successful trip, scientifically informative at the right level for the children, the weather was kind and everyone had a lovely time. Class 3 visited Hill End Field Study Centre to further the work they were doing in Geography and Improving the Environment. Thanks to the staff and helpers who organised and attended these trips.

The school raised funds for Children in Need by having a Bad Hair and non-uniform day and further school funds were raised by the Friends of Leaffield School who held a great Christmas Gift Night which was enjoyed by

all who attended and an excellent Christmas Shopping opportunity on our doorstep! The CLIC Sargent charity who care for children with cancer and their families benefited from the school taking part in The BIG SING. This was the Young Voices in Concert attempt at a Guinness World Record when thousands of children across the country all sang simultaneously being led by Joss Stone and Lemar. Funds raised through this also went to The Africa Children's Choir who help some of Africa's most vulnerable children.

Starting 2006 year 3 and 4 have begun swimming lessons, Netball Club and Gym Club run on Mondays after school and Girls Football runs on a Tuesday after school. Thanks go

to all the teachers and parent helpers who run these clubs. As with all small schools where funds are limited the input of volunteers with their individual skills or life experiences that can be offered to our children are greatly appreciated and on this note if there is anyone living locally who plays the piano and would be able to come in occasionally to help with singing then we would love to hear from you. We have two pianists already but there are some times when they are unable to play so it would be a shared experience and one that you might really enjoy.

For further information contact the school secretary Mrs Deb Brown on 01993 878273.

*Vicky Greves,
Governor.*

Special thanks to all the children of Windrush Valley School who contributed their drawings for our cover!

Tiddy Hall

Regular Activities

Monday to Thursday Mornings Pre-School-Contact Pauline Plant 07968006451

Wednesday Evenings Badminton. Contact Chris Morgan 01993 831958.

Saturday Mornings Dog Training. Contact Sharon Wilson 01993 831801.

Friday Mornings

Mother and Toddler Group. Contact Pauline Plant 07968006451.

Special Events

Saturday 11th March Sports Club Folk Night - 7.30pm - Beer and Wine Bar

Saturday 29th April Rock 'n' Roll Evening with 'Regeneration' - 7.30pm Beer and Wine Bar

To book the Tiddy Hall contact: Ingrid Ridley 01993 830612

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