

Osney Island Residents' Association Newsletter

End of an era

Jane Buekett, South Street

After more than 20 years as editor of the newsletter, Elizabeth Newbery has stepped down. We owe her huge thanks.

I have taken over as editor, but it is your newsletter, so please let me know what you would like included, and send me contributions (janebuekett@yahoo.co.uk). Deadline for the August newsletter is 24 July. I'd particularly like:

- contributions from all and any islanders, including those in West Court
- recipes (using seasonal ingredients if possible)
- children's activities you have created
- interesting insights from people's jobs (100–200 words — see some of the content in this newsletter)

Elizabeth Newbery, North Street

Many of you are under the impression that I put the newsletter together for the good of the community. I'm afraid that's not the case. When I came here over 20 years ago, I knew no one and realised that if I took it on I would make loads of friends — which I did. What's more, I set up the Directory because I needed word of mouth recommendations to avoid being ripped off. So you see, I've done it entirely for my own benefit.

When I first took it on, it was very much notice of births, deaths and marriages, items for sale plus a healthy dose of parking and flooding issues. All that has been superseded by the excellent email group — but no one seems to want to give up a hard copy. But I'm afraid I've simply run out of steam. Many thanks to my son Oliver who laid it out on his way into Melbourne by train, and to Jane for ensuring its survival.

Living in lockdown

I asked a range of islanders to briefly describe their experience of lockdown. There are more than 300 homes squeezed on to the island. Living close together means we respect each others' privacy, and don't necessarily know our neighbours. For many people living in Oxford, 'home' and family may be far away, and seemingly unreachable right now. But one insight for me has been how many islanders are quietly contributing to the response to COVID-19. Some of them write below.

My experience of lockdown has been mixed: I'm grieving for the astonishing number of people who have died, as well as for my personal little losses such as not



being able to travel to see my parents. But being at home with the children and deciding what we want to do and learn about each day is wonderful. (*Veronika Lukács, South Street*)

We are being extra careful, but are lucky to have priority slots for home delivery from Waitrose. I have made some face masks out of pillow cases so I allow myself to go for walks around the island. We are really very fortunate in having each other, family nearby and plenty of space in the house and garden. (*Bob Summers, Bridge Street*)

Standing in an empty pub on a Friday evening is a haunting experience. During the week we stay busy by cleaning the pub and sorting out veg boxes and pizza kits. In the evening the pub becomes a large living room for us, sitting down to watch TV wondering when we can open the doors again. The upside is discovering all the open space behind Osney Mead. (*Nick West, The Hollybush*)

As one of the few nonagenarians on our island I soon discovered the coronavirus lockdown, or lock-in from my past pub going experiences, has given me time to hope and reflect. I hope my ever attentive daughter has remembered to bring me another bottle of Scotch and I reflect on the late John Betjeman who said 'Old age is like being in the out patients department of purgatory'. (*David Walker, South Street*)

When I really think about it, the lockdown isn't that bad. I get to see my friends through the internet which is better than not seeing them at all. I'm actually learning more at home than I would at school. Not a second of this lockdown is wasted: school work, flute lessons, singing lessons, dance practices, scenic walks, long bike rides

with appa, cooking and baking with mummy, and reading! (*Sahana Vaidyanathan, Bridge Street*)

Is anyone else brushing their teeth more? It's a ridiculous thing, but I've noticed that now I'm at home, working in a shed office, I feel like brushing my teeth after lunch; the toothbrush is right there and I feel slightly more aware of my body in these strange times. It's so absurd. People are suffering. We are isolated. I haven't seen friends or family for about two months. But I look to what I can control, in my new much physically smaller world, alone in my house. I don't have pets, just clean canines. (*Matt Dyson, Bridge Street*)

Before lockdown I was sent in a taxi, with six others from John Lewis Oxford, to help out in Waitrose in Witney. It was as busy as Christmas, and had been like this for five days. Control on numbers entering the shop was another two weeks away. There was a bit of bumping from customers when I was stacking shelves, but it was rewarding to know I was helping people — both partners and shoppers.

Since the surge stopped I have been on furlough. My days are occupied writing three opera librettos for a competition in Italy. (*John Tatlow, South Street*)

When I reached out to the email list to see if anyone would be interested in a COVID-19 community support group, I couldn't have imagined how many people would show such overwhelming generosity and kindness. Since then, we have shopped for each other, clapped with each other, shared rainbows, Easter eggs, dinosaurs and so much more. The last couple of months haven't been easy, but getting to know new friends on the island has brought so much light to me, and to many others. <https://osneyisland.org.uk/coronavirus-local-support/> (*Sian Allen, West Street*)

Since 2018, me and my boyfriend had been planning to move to Australia in May 2020 on a two-year working visa. Now with it being impossible to know when borders will reopen, we have had to accept that our plan to live in Australia is on hold indefinitely. (*Lexie Allen, South Street*)

I qualified as a midwife in February, and started work at the John Radcliffe in March. On the postnatal ward where I am working, women are unable to have visitors, which is challenging after childbirth when they would usually rely on support from their birth partners. However it has been great to see mothers being able to bond with their babies and establish successful feeding, away from the usual open visiting which can feel busy and disruptive. The hardest challenge for me has been wearing PPE all the time, as it can act as a barrier to communication. Care for pregnant women and their babies remains very good at the John Radcliffe and I am proud to be part of the team. (*Heather Marsh, Bridge Street*)

A month ago Oxford University asked me whether I would return from maternity leave to help them run a

vaccine trial for COVID-19. My first day was not the ease into work I had planned. Information was thrown at me while I tried not to be too anxious when someone coughed and ignored the sense of guilt as my milk came in.

On my way home, I felt unexpectedly peaceful. I realised I am lucky: I have skills that mean I can do something to help. As I walked through the front door my daughter's face lit up and then dissolved into despair as she realised I hadn't been there. I hugged her and my husband tightly.

People living alone have sacrificed a lot to isolate themselves. Friends say they feel useless being told to 'just' stay safe. We can underestimate what a hard and powerful thing it is to stay at home at the moment. When we clap on Thursdays we must clap ourselves as well as others. We are all making sacrifices. Be kind to yourselves. (*Piper Griffin, Bridge Street*)

Other COVID-19 projects to which islanders are contributing:

- A device for Parkinson's Disease patients to wear that will diagnose changes in their condition remotely and save them attending medical appointments at this time of high risk.
- Artificial intelligence health-check agents that work through mobile phones or devices like Alexa and send information direct from patients' homes to carers or medical teams.
- Simple designs based on locally available parts for equipment such as ventilators and blood oxygen monitors which are normally imported from overseas.

And one who got away

Peter McLeod (formerly West Street)

Our plan was to move to Norway on 22 March so Mette could start a new job. By Friday 13th we'd realised flying was impossible and we would have to drive. Then we heard that Denmark was closing its borders at noon the following day. We packed kids, dog, a few clothes into the car and set off, reaching Calais via Eurostar at 2 am. Mette drove all night, through Belgium, Holland and into Germany. At 7:30 I took over, and we reached the Danish border 100 minutes before it was due to close. We celebrated with a runabout on the enormous beach at Tornby.

We arrived at the ferry terminal for Bergen that evening, to be told they wouldn't take us: they didn't think we'd be allowed into Norway. Mette was adamant: she's a Norwegian citizen with a contract for a job. They let us on board. We docked in Bergen at noon on Sunday. They took everyone's temperature, we drove off the ship and Mette's sister Kristin was there to greet us.

I still get the OIRA emails. What a pleasure to have been a part of that community. I hope to see it again before too long.

Modelling an epidemic: try it yourself

Simone Sturniolo, South Street

Mathematical models of epidemics are having a big impact on our lives right now. They consist of mathematical equations which scientists use to predict how much a disease will spread, how fast, and how to counter it. But how do they work?

I usually work on the mathematics of chemical reactions, but at the moment I'm also doing work related to COVID-19, collaborating with a team of epidemiologists in developing models to assess the efficacy of potential containment strategies.

Although such models are complex, at their core are some simple principles. To demonstrate this you can try out of a simple modelling principle. All you need is a pen and paper, and two six-sided dice (or virtual dice). The instructions are on the OIRA website here: <http://osneyisland.org.uk/modelling-an-epidemic-exercise/>

Managing anxiety during the pandemic

Seth Osborne, Bridge Street

In these extraordinary times it is easy (and natural) to feel anxious, afraid, lonely, and frustrated. Sometimes these feelings remain manageable, at other times they become overwhelming.

Websites of groups such as Mind, or Young Minds, have simple advice to help us cope, stressing the value of developing a routine, limiting exposure to news, and immersing oneself in creative tasks.

The intense feelings stirred up by the pandemic are common to us all, but experienced in unique ways by each of us. This is because the current situation 'reactivates' our earlier personal experiences of fear, insecurity, loss, and separation. It is useful to be curious about the nature of our anxieties and frustrations because we may then be able to place them in some sort of context. This gives us a greater sense of perspective, and frees us from their grip in the process. In short, we can treat ourselves as a good therapist (or parent) might.

If we are able to be more understanding of our own vulnerabilities, we can also be more patient with others, and that is valuable, because we've never needed each other more than now.

Your garden in June

Gus Fagan, Bridge Street

If you haven't already been sowing and planting in your back garden during lockdown, there's still plenty you can start off in June. Lettuce grows rapidly at this time of year and there are quite a few varieties that let you pick and come back for more. Beetroot can be sown directly in the ground or in pots to be transplanted later. Chard, especially the rainbow variety with its bright stems of red, yellow and white, will produce small leaves for salad or larger leaves that can be cooked like spinach. If the winter

isn't severe, they'll survive to give you plenty more in early spring.

It's best to sow wild rocket in July and salad rocket in August when the flea beetle is no longer a problem. You can harvest these spicy leaves in the autumn and, like chard, again in the spring. Put some netting over it to protect it from pigeons. There's still time to sow kale, purple sprouting broccoli, carrots, land cress, and spinach.

Oxford sits on clay which gives us a firmer soil but also one that's moisture retentive. Most plants fare better in a firm soil. If you're not attracted to heavy digging, try the no-dig method promoted by Charles Dowding (<https://charlesdowding.co.uk/start-here/>). Buy a few bags of compost, spread it over a given area at about 4 inches (10 cm) deep, firm it down and sow directly into the compost. The roots will make their way into the firm soil beneath. Water regularly but don't overwater – roots need oxygen and don't like too much water.

Fish and fishing

Fast-flowing water over gravel beds, quiet backwaters, deeper pools, a mixture of plants and shading trees mean that, across the city, Oxford's waterways offer some of the finest fisheries on the River Thames. They provide habitats for common species such as roach, chub and dace, but also rarer fish like barbel and brown trout. The waterways are also home to a rich biodiversity of plants, insects and invertebrates. (Tim Wiseman, Oxford Waterways Coordinator)

To fish (or trap crayfish) in the waterways, anyone over 13 must have a rod (or trap) licence. Native crayfish are a protected species. The close season for coarse fishing is 15 March–15 June, and for trout and salmon 1 October–31 March. The fishing byelaws are here:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/regional-rod-fishing-byelaws-south-east-region>

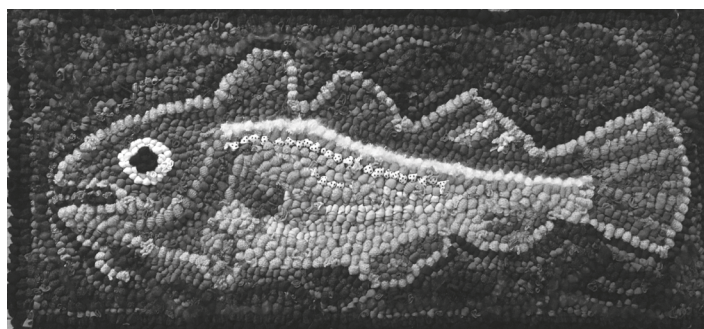
Fishing is not allowed under lockdown.

Artweeks and Open Gardens

As visiting each others' houses is not possible this spring, you can see a virtual gallery of Osney gardens at: <http://osneyisland.org.uk/open-gardens-online-2020/>

and Artweeks artists at:

<http://osneyisland.org.uk/artweeks-online-2020/>



▲ Rag rug by Louise Summers, Bridge Street

Allotments

Jude Carroll, field secretary, Twenty Pound Meadow

We have been busy all winter looking after Twenty Pound Meadow as it was battered by a succession of storms. In mid-March there was a big change — the fifth flood of the year subsided, and the world locked down.

The site has been in use for nearly 150 years but it's probably fair to say that it has never been cultivated by so many grateful people as it has this spring.

Many plotholders tell me it's vital to have the space to stand, to work, to watch the blossom unfold (is it me or has it been especially fine this year?) It's a time for work-arounds because normal supplies aren't available, so people make seed compost, build new structures from found timber, and share seedlings. The wildlife is noticeably more active, which is welcome when it's busy bees and the badgers who decamped during the floods and are now back. Less welcome are the ever-hungry geese off the river or the newly-resident muntjac deer.

We are being careful — insisting on social distancing, closing the shop, halting monthly coffee mornings. But we hope to be back to business-as-usual in time, and to hold onto the sense of gratitude for access to this community asset, even after we lose the quiet of the Botley Road.

Boat club

Fiona Ravenscroft, South Street

Although many of us can't wait to get on the water, we are following advice from British Canoeing, the Environment Agency, and the Canal and River Trust not to carry out any paddlesport activity on rivers or canals. The AGM has been postponed.

When we are able to enjoy our river again the Boat Club has kayaks and canoes available for use by members. To find out about membership contact: fiona@myphone.coop.

St Frideswide's church

We are unable to open the church for personal prayer or public worship during lockdown, but church life continues.

Our Facebook page has daily thoughts and prayers. We send resources for exploring faith and worship via weekly email, including details of church Zoom gatherings, discussion groups, and a WhatsApp prayer group. There is also a weekly email with resources for children. If you would like to join these please contact us.

We are sorry we are not able to offer weddings or baptisms (except in emergency) at this time. We are still able to conduct funerals at the crematorium, or graveside services at the cemetery.

The clergy are available to all for spiritual support and listening. Drop us a line to get in touch.

Rev. Kate Seagrave (kate.seagrave@oxford.anglican.org, 07905 342802)

Rev. Jo Moffett-Levy (jo.moffett-levy@virginmedia.com, 07765 175164)

Seasonal recipe: rhubarb charlotte

Here is a simple dessert recipe that doesn't use that currently rare commodity, flour.

600 g rhubarb (or other fruit, e.g. cooking apple)
200 g breadcrumbs (make them in the blender)
75 g suet
100 g sugar

Mix breadcrumbs, suet and sugar. Chop the fruit and cook in a splash of water for a few minutes. (If using softer fruit such as apple no need to cook.) Fill greased dish with alternate layers of fruit and breadcrumb mix. Bake for 1 hour at gas 4/180°C.

Children's quiz

You can download or print off an Osney-based quiz here: <http://osneyisland.org.uk/childrens-quiz-may-2020/>

OIRA info

Bridge Street noticeboard

Julia Marsh

While local events are on hold I thought it would cheer us up to display artwork by Osney children. If you have a picture, a favourite poem, or one you've written about the crisis please put it through my door (A5 size please) at 26 Bridge Street, or email: julia.marsh@btconnect.com

Directory of local suppliers

The directory will appear in the next newsletter and is available on the website: <https://osneyisland.org.uk/directory-of-local-suppliers/>

Osney email list

To join the residents' email list, moderated by Alison Burdett, contact: osiramanager@gmail.com

Welcome pack

New to the Island? Contact Jude Carroll, 10 East St, 01865 793247 for a free welcome pack with loads of useful local information.

OIRA committee

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