

Osney Island Residents' Association Newsletter

A soggy start to the year

On the evening of 4 January, with river levels already high, we had torrential rain. Within a couple of hours South Street and Bridge Street extension filled with water. Some residents of those streets spent sleepless nights moving their possessions upstairs and battling against the water trying to enter their houses. Simon Collings called the Environment Agency and a large pump was brought that night.

By the following day the streets were dry, and flood barriers were being erected in West Street. But river levels were still rising and did not start to fall for another 4 days. The large pump in Bridge Street ran for a week.

This was a tense time and a reminder that flooding is always possible. On this occasion we were lucky. We owe a lot to Simon Collings and Richard Thurston of the Oxford Flood Alliance, who worked with the City Council and the EA to effectively manage the situation and to keep residents informed.

Here some of the affected islanders describe their experience.

Alistair Butchers, Bridge Street

'Flood Alert: River Thames and tributaries in the Oxford area'. These are words that no Osney resident wants to read. Least of all when you and the family are 100 miles away. We've lived on Osney for 4 years. We were aware of the possibility of flooding but hadn't experienced it until now. When the Flood Alert came we were visiting grandparents in Kent. We decided one of us should come back to look after the house, leaving the kids at a safe distance.

I returned just in time on 4 January afternoon. There was water in the back garden and coming up under the floorboards. The level rose, as it did out on Bridge Street, until the house was surrounded, leaving us a little stranded and, really, clueless as to what would come next.



▲ South Street around midnight on 4 January
credit: Richard Thurston

After a week or so the water level finally came down and we were able to stop pumping water out of the window. Thanks to our friends and neighbours on Osney for all help and support, with everything from cable ties to lessons in managing pumps.

Eli Harriss, Bridge Street

As a resident of the Bridge Street extension since 2010, I'd never seen flooding in the street as bad as on the evening of 4 January. It was very frightening. It was a good opportunity to deploy the floodgate that I received a decade ago and haven't had to use until now, and my neighbours were wonderfully helpful, reassuring and kind. As I didn't sleep much that night, I can report that the street was still flooded at 12.40 a.m., but dry (apart from the gushing manholes) by 1.30 a.m., thanks to the Environment Agency pump and the neighbours who urged them to deploy it. We have the EA to thank for keeping the fronts of our houses dry.

Anna Pendry, South Street

Watching helplessly while the water came into my house is an abiding memory from the floods of 2007. It presaged months of wrangling with insurers, dealing with builders, moving out for 7 months while the wrecked downstairs was stripped out, dumped in a skip and then replaced; a host of practical problems to be resolved, decisions made and challenges faced.

But worse than trying to cope with all this was the emotional toll. My home was invaded by an unstoppable force. I find it pretty much impossible to convey the sense of intrusion, violation and personal vulnerability that I experienced both at the time and over the ensuing months.

This January, those memories and the associated fears came perilously close to becoming a reality again as the waters around us rose. It was a horrible few days.

January’s flooding in context

Simon Collings, South Street

The flooding in early January was the worst we’ve seen in the last 10 years, although levels were not as high as in 2007 or 2014. And a lot has been done since 2007 to improve the response to flooding, including providing some houses with pumps and floodgates.

Richard Thurston and I have been talking to residents in the most vulnerable parts of the island, and to the City Council and Environment Agency, about how we cope with these events in the future. We need a robust plan, so that those at risk know who to contact when the situation becomes worrying, and how to be better prepared.

Yes we did survive this one with minimal damage, but it was a relatively low-level event. There could be much bigger floods, affecting a lot more of the island, in which street pumps and demountable barriers would not be able to save us. A number of people have told me that the proposed flood alleviation scheme would not protect Osney. This is simply untrue. Had the scheme been in place, we would have seen no flooding on the island during this event. Botley Road and Osney Mead would also have been dry.

Hip, hip, hooray!

Marion Hanbury Brown, Bridge Street

Several of us in Osney have had new hips recently. So far so good at the various stages for me and the two others with whom I have interacted: Elizabeth Newbery and Pauline Massey. It has been quite an island affair: Elizabeth and I had the same surgeon, who used to live next door to me.

Pre-op communication via the email list provided a resource of assistance available if needed. I kept this and passed on. In the end a friend came to stay with me post-op. Neighbours came forward with offers of support: a lift to the hospital on the day, transporting or doing the shopping, dropping in for a cuppa, making me a cake, taking me for a potter, chatting to me on my twice a day constitutional to the lock at the beginning of recuperation.

It is rewarding to be able to stride up the river again without staggering about with sticks. I am back on my bike, so sorry that extra bike-rack space is no longer available. Thank you all.

Pauline Massey, Bridge Street

Many thanks to all kind neighbours who have helped me recently. An especial thanks to the agile house-breakers (quite legitimate!), and to my emergency cat feeder. And to all those who have offered their assistance and good wishes during my recuperation. Much appreciated.

New on Osney

Heba F. El-Shazli and Anthony W. Gray, Bridge Street

It is wonderful to join the Osney Island community, albeit for just 1 year. We arrived in early September with our Australian shepherd, Derby, and we will be here until mid-August. Heba is on sabbatical from George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia, and Anthony (aka Gray) is a

retired automotive technology teacher in high school and community college.

Heba teaches political science courses focused on the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), including government and politics, Islam and politics, civil society and social movements. She is a visiting academic at St Antony’s College Middle East Centre. Gray enjoys all things mechanical including steam trains and cars (yes, we have been to the Morgan Motor Factory in Malvern).

We love being in Oxford and exploring the wider area. For example, we visited Winchester Cathedral because of Tracy Chevalier’s novel *A Single Thread* which we both read. We have four adult children aged between 35 and 28. We look forward to exploring more places in the UK and meeting our lovely neighbours.

John Wain, *Where the Rivers Meet*

Mark Van Oss, East Street

Where the Rivers Meet is a novel about life on Osney Island, in Oxford and in its surrounding countryside. Like the river beside our streets this book flows gently but is sometimes quite racy. It is full too of beautiful, evocative descriptions of places we all know well, despite being set in the 1920s and 30s.

Some places are thinly disguised, such as The Bargeman in East Street (The Waterman’s Arms, now The Punter) where the parents of Peter Leonard, the narrator, live and work. The large cast of characters forms a cross section of town, gown and nearby countryside. A lot of historic information about our island and Oxford is subtly woven into the book too. This 600-page book is highly recommended – no longer in print but I obtained a copy in good condition online. It is the first part of a trilogy.

Recent history of The Holly Bush

Susanna Pressel, City and County Councillor

About 10 years ago we nearly lost The Holly Bush. New owners ran it so poorly from about 2010 that it seemed doomed. They were hoping to prove that it was not viable as a pub, so they could get planning permission to turn it into a large house, at huge profit. Longer-term residents may remember the battle to save it.

Naomi in West Street launched a magnificent survey, which proved that a well-run pub *would* be viable. Eleanor in Bridge Street helped me get it recognised as an ‘asset of community value’, so that we would have time to raise money to buy and run it as a community pub, if necessary.

In the meantime, it was used as an HMO, a hookah lounge (in a large marquee) and possibly a brothel, causing all manner of problems to its neighbours and to both councils.

Thanks to support from residents, and the City Council standing firm on the need to keep community meeting places, we hung on. In 2019 the pub was bought by Wells & Co, the current owners. Residents were able to comment on the proposed new licence, and it seems to be working.

Chatty Wednesdays

Eli Harriss, Bridge Street

Remember Osney Chatty Wednesdays? They’re back for 2024. Chatty Wednesdays are for those who want to meet

for a chat on the third Wednesday of the month at The Holly Bush. This is a low-key, low-effort and wonderfully rewarding idea that I started in 2019 to encourage neighbours to meet, talk and have a drink. We discuss films, local planning issues, football, life stories, whatever feels right. I’ll wear a hi-vis jacket so as to be recognisable as The Chatty Woman From Bridge Street. We’ll meet inside the pub from 6 to 8 p.m., then outside in the pub garden once it gets warmer (optimistic) from 7 to 9 p.m.

The times and dates for your diaries are:
21 February, 20 March, 17 April: 6–8 p.m.
15 May, 19 June, 17 July: 7–9 p.m.

Open Gardens and Tea on the Towpath

Susan Hutchinson, West Street

Summer feels a long way off. But it will come and – weather permitting – Open Gardens and Tea on the Towpath will happen in June. If there are dates which clash with other events or half term, please let me know. My initial plan is for Saturday 8 June.

If you would consider opening your garden, please email me: osney.open.gardens@gmail.com or phone 01865 428323. Everyone is welcome to join in. Provisional offers are not binding, and gardens don’t have to be manicured: the overall aim is variety. New gardeners are particularly welcome.

I would also like to start planning Tea on the Towpath so if you would be able to help please get in touch.



West Oxford Academy

Iain Tullis

The Academy is back, with a new team of organisers. We meet at West Oxford Community Centre, Tuesdays at 8.15 p.m. Tickets are £3 for a short talk, informal discussion and a glass of wine, all lasting just an hour. This term we have talks about Salomé, scrolls from Herculaneum, freemasonry, war propaganda posters and green growth. For more details go to www.woca.org.uk

We are always looking for local residents to give talks, on a subject of your choice. If you are not up for speaking we also need help to deliver flyers door to door. Contact: westoxfordacademy@gmail.com

St Frideswide’s Church

Jo Moffett-Levy

A group at St Frideswide’s Church has started working towards an environmental award through Eco Church (ecochurch.arocha.org.uk). This interdenominational scheme is run by A Rocha, a global family of Christian environmental organisations set up in the 1980s to promote the care of God’s creation. Eco Church helps churches weave environmental issues into all they do. We will start with a survey of the church grounds, the activities of the church community and at the way we use the building. In time we hope to include St Margaret’s in Binsey.

If you would like to know more please contact Jo Moffett-Levy (jo.moffett-levy@virginmedia.com), a former associate priest at St Frideswide’s.

Two reminders

Osney Island is an **Article 4 Conservation Area**. Any changes to street-facing parts of properties, including windows, doors, rendering, brickwork and roofing materials, require planning permission.

The island is inside Oxford’s **Smoke Control Zone**. Burning anything other than ‘authorised fuel’ (smokeless coal and gas) is an offence. Dry wood can be burnt but only in DEFRA-approved stoves.

Check out the City Council and DEFRA websites.

And a Christmas thank you

A big thank you to Matt Dyson and Debbie Hall for once again organising (respectively) carol-singing and the Advent calendar on Osney. There was a fantastic turn out for the carols, and many lovely windows on the island, including houses that weren’t part of the calendar joining in the festive display.

Directory of local suppliers

This list is compiled from islanders’ recommendations only. Suppliers are removed if there are reports of unreasonable rates or service. The list is online at: osneyisland.org.uk/directory-of-local-suppliers Local shops and services are listed at: osneyisland.org.uk/local-shops-and-services Please contact Jane Buekett to submit additions or changes.

Baby kit

Baby kit for hire: 01235 280081, www.babycomes2.co.uk

Bicycles, repairs and accessories

Jon Wyver: 07842 901873, info@oxbicycles.co.uk, www.facebook.com/oxbicycles (will deliver and pick up in Oxford free of charge).

Building and roof repairs

Rob Cassettari, North Hinksey Builders: 01865 242312/ 07977 152884/07900 881511, robnhc@virginmedia.com
Everest Roofing Ltd: 01865 881685, enquiries@everestroofing.co.uk
Brian French: 07957 315303 (local general builder and plasterer: takes on small jobs)
Paul Hackett, P & R Roofing Ltd (Horspath): 01865 875523, info@prroofingoxford.co.uk, www.prroofingoxford.co.uk
Mark Mavrommatis: 07970 974792 (installs new windows, repairs old ones)

Tim Mera, KM Builders Oxford:
01865 608649, 07462 971475,
k.mbuildingservices@yahoo.com,
kmbuildersoxford.co.uk
Oxford Roofing and Maintenance:
01865 820323, 07468 429000,
oxfordroofingandmaintenance.co.uk
Richard S. Pocock: 07766 026648 (general
builder)
Mike Shephard, MJ Construction
(Abingdon): 07834 321274,
mjconstruction@hotmail.co.uk (larger jobs)

Carpenters and flooring

Steve, Amazon Flooring: 07899 918015
Jonathan Everett, Lockwood Carpentry:
07597 952381, j.everett.lwc@gmail.com
Bill Spires: 07786 672492 (carpenter
willing to take on smaller fiddly jobs)

Car repairs and MOTs

Oxon Autos in Grove near Wantage
(will come to you): 07899 762949,
oxon.autos@live.co.uk, oxonautos.co.uk

Cat sitting/feeding and dog walking

Shirley Gibson (also housework, shopping,
companionship): 07510 991213 (Binsey)

Chimney sweep

Martin Simmonds: 07762 816185,
enquiry@ashlogs.com, www.ashlogs.com

Cleaners

C&S Cleaning Services: 01865 872395,
07824 159855
Edna: 07548 384737

Computers

Bill Baxter, The Animated Laser Company:
07774 412944 (noon to midnight, Old
Marston), bill@animatedlaser.co.uk
Bill Richardson: 01865 376100,
bill@macfaction.co.uk (Macs)
Mac Simple: 01865 580886/
07974 321064, www.macsimple.co.uk

Damp

Damprot Renovations Ltd: 01865 742144
Stonehouses:
stonehousewaterproofing.co.uk

Electricians

Baldwin Appliances: 01865 377484,
www.baldwinappliances.com
Jamie Cooke: 07775 700300,
JC.Electrical@hotmail.com
DEC Electricians: 01865 725453,
mail@decoxford.co.uk,
www.dec-oxfordltd.co.uk
RJB Electrical: 01865 882723/
07711 934348 (rewires and new
installations)
Mark Morris (Botley): 07970 342375 (also
plumber)
Andy Webb (A W Electrical Services,
Yarnton): 01865 377171, 07931 127982

Footcare in your home

Kate Reid: 07952 127534

Garden compost and manure

George: 01793 575100/07831 437989,
info@muckandmulch.co.uk,
www.muckandmulch.co.uk

Gardening services

David Morris: 01865 725875 (gardening
maintenance and some diy)
Jason: info@oxfordgardenservices.co.uk
(tree surgery)
Rory Whelehan: 07341 849035,
rory@rorlyn.co.uk (gardener, lawn/hedge
cutting, general tidying)
Clive: 07787 741968
Heather: 07522 856744 (one-off or
regular jobs, heavy or light work including
pruning)

Green builders and installers

Energy My Way: 08453 713181,
www.energymyway.co.uk
JoJu Solar: 01865 403336,
www.jojusolar.co.uk
Next Generation Renewable Energy Ltd:
01993 810130, office@ngre.co.uk

Gutter clearing

Ben's Gutters: 0800 917 3157/07778
240161, info@bensgutters.com,
www.bensgutters.com
Greg Zasuwa: clearviewforyou@gmail.com
(also window cleaning)

Handymen

Andrew Russell: 01865 453497/
07977 837675 (painting, decorating and
garden maintenance)
Colin Stanley, The Small Odd Jobs
Company: 07804 908545

Home hairdressers

Sally Horton: 07815 445229
Nadine Wright: 07824 660184

Newsagent delivering to Osney

Mr Patel, Court Candy Shop,
65 Woodstock Rd, Oxford OX2 6HJ:
01865 515506/07917 990029,
court CANDYSHOP@GOOGLEMAIL.COM

Oven cleaning

Wayne: 07917 785906 (doesn't use
chemicals)

Painters and decorators

Rob Bennett: 07905 819310
Steve Brierty: 01491 836762/07850 357414
Dave Buckle: 01865 848630
Paul Buckle: 07920 099196
John Chappell: 07985 490970
Dan Driscoll: 07934 718788,
danieldriscoll63@gmail.com (also home
repairs)
Sam Gordon: 07976 516941 (plasterer)
Brendan McCarthy: 07982 614633

Pests

Avenge: 02865 246195/07879 405060
(based in Binsey)

Plumbing and heating

APV Boiler Services: 01865 377264
Byron Morris, Avid Heating (boiler repairs
etc.): 07899 629629, 01865 703303,
www.avidheating.co.uk
Jules Jones: 01993 778244/07790 961395,
reallygoodplumbing@outlook.com
Ivan Kilbee: 01235 847527 /07771 787585

Mark Morris, Botley: 07970 342375 (also
electrics)
Oxtech Facilities: 07868 190748,
www.oxtechfacilities.com
Remloc Plumbing and Heating:
01235 536345 (Abingdon)
Simon Crowther Plumbing and Heating:
07709 102328, sjcplumbheat@gmail.com

Removals

A. G. Jacob and Sons: 07977 963929,
www.agjacobandson.co.uk
House and Carriage: 01608 811444/
07769 585988

Sewing services

Maria Skoyles: 01865 721460/
07590 264246 (sewing, repairs and
alterations)

TV aerials, wi-fi and satellite dishes

Oxford Aerials: 01865 400141,
<https://oxfordaerials.co.uk/> (installers and
repairers)

Window cleaning

Mark Jennings: 01865 848904/
07773 159198
James Middlebrook, Transparent
Window Cleaning: 07957 410771,
messageTWC@gmail.com
Torridon Slaney: 07746 356307

Windows

Oxford Refurbished Sash Windows, John:
info@sashrefurbcompany.co.uk (refurbish
the wooden frame and insert double-
glazed panels)

OIRA info

Bridge Street noticeboard

To display something on the noticeboard
(no larger than A5) contact Julia Marsh
julia.marsh@btconnect.com or put it
through her door at 26 Bridge Street.

Osney email list

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

OIRA committee

Andrew Boag andrew@boag.org.uk,
Alison Burdett alison.burdett@gmail.com
(email list), Claire Dalton (secretary)
claire.dalton@hotmail.co.uk,
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Osney and St Thomas Ward

OIRA Newsletter Supplement – February 2024

Flooding

I'm sorry this year began with some anxious days. Please let me know if you think the authorities could have handled things better (I know about the annoying water by the bus stop, which must be addressed in any future flood events). There was a lot of helpful information on the City, County and EA websites. The Food Standards Agency has information on food safety after a flood. If you can't access them or if you have other questions, please don't hesitate to get in touch with me, because I stay in regular contact with the emergency services. Many thanks to the residents who were helpful to their neighbours.

Icy roads and footways

Thank you also to the other good neighbours who took out their shovels and spread salt on some of the icy pavements during the cold spell. In case you haven't noticed, there are two salt bins on the Island, and I'm making sure they are topped up when needed. Do feel free to use them when it's icy.

Botley Road

We may well be rid of the horrible pedestrian tunnel under the railway lines as soon as August: the new bridge should go in at the end of July and then we will have *two* much wider pedestrian tunnels. Sadly, it's still six months away.

We should soon be able to see Thames Water working on Osney Bridge -- at last. They have promised to attend a drop-in session jointly with Network Rail and Kier at WOCC in February.

West Oxford School

We can feel very proud of our local school, which is in the *top 5% in the country* for attainment, as well as being an extremely happy place. They are currently looking for one or two more school governors, especially people with a background in Education. I have had the privilege of being a governor there for many years, so you are welcome to ask me if you have any questions – or contact the school.

Food waste

Oxfordshire is the top county in the country for recycling, but we need to do more. You are probably entitled to two dark green food waste containers, a small one for your kitchen and a larger one to put outside every week for collection. Please contact the City Council or me if you don't have both and would like another. Please write your house number on the one you put out and remember to take it in after collection.

Litter-picking

There are some wonderful Osney residents who go out litter-picking regularly. Thank you! There is also an annual litter pick organised by the Oxford Civic Society and the City Council on the first 2 weekends in March. All the equipment is provided, and the rubbish is collected afterwards. If you would like to take part, please contact me or www.oxclean.org.uk

Best wishes

Susanna