

Osney Island Residents' Association Newsletter

The oracle, the coracle and WOW

Mark van Oss, East Street

Not long ago I consulted an oracle on our island – the OSIRA email group. 'Who would do what with a coracle if it was given to them?'

I was inundated by OSIRA's replies, including one from a kind neighbour. Their local school was teaching children about the history and importance of our rivers. The problem was where to store the coracle at the school and so that fell through.

I am delighted that the first West Oxford Womble (WOW), an email group member, is now using the coracle for litter picking in back streams near Osney before spring growth makes it more difficult. Soon he may have reached the stream beside West Street.

Wombles, that in my childhood were whistling woolly TV stars, are now in human form all over the UK. They exceed 4,000 and have collected more than 90,000 bags of rubbish. Litter pickers only cost £3 in Poundland. If you would like to help clear our local waters of litter on its way to the sea please ask in the OSIRA email group for more information about WOW.



Open Gardens and Tea on the Towpath

Susan Hutchinson, West Street

Open Gardens is planned for Saturday 15 June. There will also be Tea on the Towpath, and live music. More detailed arrangements in due course. This was such an enjoyable and popular event last year, I hope we can match it again. As ever, it relies on the efforts of many people. I am delighted that we have several new gardens this year as well as some old favourites. If you are happy to help with Tea on the Towpath, please let me know.

Gardens will be open 2.30–4.30 p.m., Tea on the Towpath, 3–5 p.m.

It also relies on the weather. In the past, we have gone ahead if there is light rain or occasional showers. Torrential rain, howling gales we won't.

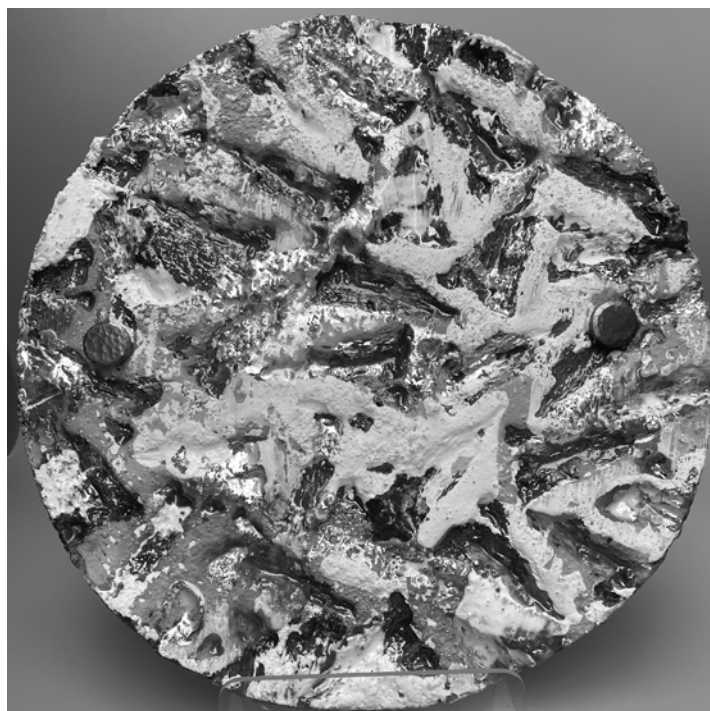
Please contact osney.open.gardens@gmail.com if you can help with Tea on the Towpath or contribute a cake.

Artweeks on Osney

Elizabeth Newbery, North Street

The 42nd Oxfordshire Artweeks festival takes place from 4 to 27 May. Oxford City, which includes Osney and Botley, is 11–19 May inclusive.

Osney Island is represented by Elizabeth Newbery (venue 159) who shows ceramics and Mani Manson-Reeves who exhibits his paintings at The Punter (venue 158) and at Hobbycraft (venue 162).



WocART (venue 155) has eight West Oxford artists exhibiting at the WOCC. They include Dave Lambert (venue 157) with his 'We're all in the same boat' interactive show. Wendy Skinner Smith (venue 160) is exhibiting paintings, Frieda van de Poll (venue 161) works in mixed media and paintings and Maia Ottenstein (venue 524), new from the US, shows ceramics.

There are four venues in Botley, all with more than one artist exhibiting a variety of different work from Chinese style paintings, wood turning, life drawings to pyrography. At least two artists have moved to Osney recently so next year our presence could be even greater. Further details online and in the catalogue, available in shops and businesses nearby.

Neighbours new and not so new

Violetta Splitter, Jeremias Döbeli and Elin

At the end of February, we – Jeremias, Violetta and our daughter Elin (4) – moved from Switzerland (Zurich) to a lovely house in South Street. We felt right at home straight away. With the beautiful view over the Thames, our fantastic next-door neighbours (Daisy and family) as



well as the vivid and welcoming community here it seems that we won't even miss the mountains.

Jeremias is trained as a carpenter and worked as a construction-site manager for almost two decades, and Violetta is an associate professor in strategy at the Säid Business School and a fellow at St Peter's. Elin is learning English in nursery and will go to school from September.

We are very happy that we chose Osney Island as our new home, and we look forward to being part of the community.

Jeremias is looking for work. Please contact him for handyman tasks, especially carpentry: doebeli@me.com

Elise Coote and Mark Wright, South Street

We moved into South Street with our Labrador Freddy in November last year. We especially enjoyed joining in with the caroling at Christmas (as well as the sweet treats for participating).



Mark works for Zoom (the video conferencing app) in the sales department. In his spare time he likes cooking and baking bread. Elise is a cognitive behavioural therapist with the NHS and enjoys any kind of crafting activity from crochet to embroidery. Freddy is an avid stick collector, swimmer and ball retriever.

We have been welcomed by some of you in such a warm fashion already. We look forward to meeting more people as we live on the island, and hope to enjoy a nice warm summer by the river.

Laura Mallows, Leo Eastley and Rego Mouseman, East Street

Having lived on Osney for just over two years this beautiful patch of Oxford is now home.

Leo moved here to further his career as a cabinet maker and to escape the traffic of south London. (The business part worked....) He has a workshop in Steventon and having done some work for islanders is keen to take on more (07496 701244, IG: @l.eastley_maker).

Laura grew up in Oxford. She runs a floristry company, soon to be featured at RHS Chelsea, and works as a freelance florist for a number of local businesses. Rego is a friendly grey cat with notoriety on the island via the email group.

We love being able to stroll up to the allotments, cycle down to Christ Church Meadow or kayak up through Port Meadow thinking of Malcolm and Lyra, potentially only getting as far as the Medley or the Isis farmhouse.

Robert Mosedale, West Court

I have been a resident of Osney since February 1984, but had been in this area of Oxford before, around 1970-72, when I came here to work for British Railways Signal Dept. This was my first job after training in South Wales at Neath, near Swansea.

I came back in 1983 to work as before, and bought my long-term flat in West Court, with the purchase starting in that year. I have seen many changes for the good, I feel, in both Oxford and the surrounding area, as I travelled quite a large area of Oxfordshire as part of my job.

I was born in 1950, to English parents. My father was working for Regent oil refinery in Trinidad, which was then British. When Trinidad became independent in 1963 we moved to Wales, Pembroke, and the new oil refinery there. It has been a good life!

Osney hedgehogs

We suspect they are there but we don't often see them. This hedgehog is living in a garden in West Street. They like to move between gardens if they can, so it is good to leave little holes in fences at ground level for them.



In memory

Sir Anthony Epstein, West Street

Tony Epstein studied medicine at Cambridge, became a medical virologist in London, and then department head at Bristol University. He was interested in the (then controversial) idea that viruses might cause cancer and initiated attempts to isolate virus from a cancer called Burkitt's lymphoma.

In 1964 he, along with two colleagues, identified a new herpes virus, which was named Epstein-Barr virus (EBV). It's the cause of glandular fever and its discovery was momentous. EBV infects more than 90% of the global adult population, was the first virus to be associated with human cancer, and infection is linked to multiple sclerosis. This raised the possibility of a preventative vaccine. Tony was recognised for his discovery by a proliferation of awards, including Fellowship of the Royal Society, Extraordinary Fellowship at Wolfson College Oxford, a CBE, and in 1991 a knighthood.

He was a private person who enjoyed cultivating roses and observing newts and frogs in his garden pond. He came across as wise, energetic and engaging, a man whose historic discovery and academic leadership

had not gone to his head. He said 'it was a series of accidents, really – lucky quirks'. He will be missed by global academic and local communities. Tony died age 102 on 6 February.

Professor Kate Ward (Tony's partner for 53 years) and Professor Quentin Sattentau (neighbour and colleague). A

blue plaque is planned for Tony's house in West Street.

Carole Shelby Carnes and James Shelby Tucker, West Street

Carole Shelby Carnes (1940–2024) grew up in Shelby Mississippi, an only child, destined to marry well and be a mother. Her distant cousin (Shelby, 1935–2023) had other ideas. Fresh out of Yale and Oxford, he encouraged her to get an education too. They travelled extensively, usually hitch-hiking. Nine years into their engagement, they married, in Zanzibar, on the site of the old slave market. They made their home in Osney.

Carole worked as a lawyer throughout their marriage, while Shelby, also a lawyer, hitch-hiked around the world, wrote about his travels, and occasionally got into trouble. He spent months in an Indian prison. Carole had no children.

In the 1990s we were West Street neighbours. Kath Boyles, who kept house for Shelby and Carole, also helped us with our babies. I didn't know them, and we only met in 2016, just after I had discovered that Shelby was my father.

Shelby was too much of an adventurer to have time for domesticity, but it was nice to know him as a father, and a grandfather to my children, for a few years. He and Carole led full lives, surrounded by friends. They will be missed, not least by their devoted dog, Caesar.

Rebecca Aylward

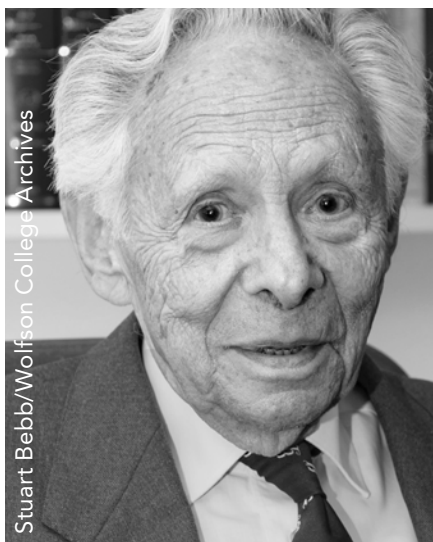
Assisted Reading for Children

Ros Carne, North Street

Can you spare three hours a week to help children with their reading? Volunteering with ARCH Oxfordshire is fun, absorbing and much appreciated by Oxford primary schools. As a volunteer you will be allocated three children and asked to commit for one school year. Each child will spend two half-hour sessions with you each week, reading, playing games, sometimes just chatting. I joined at the beginning of this year and now look forward to every session. The organisation offers excellent training and support and is looking for more volunteers.

For more information see archoxfordshire.org.uk or contact Marie Brookes: marie@archoxfordshire.org.uk.

Or, for an informal chat about what is involved, contact me: rosarne@gmail.com



Making sure we're ready for flooding

Following the high river levels at the start of the year Richard Thurston and Simon Collings have been talking to the Environment Agency and to residents in the streets at the (lowest) south end of the island about how to improve response to flooding.

They're looking at a number of ideas including:

- a flood preparedness day each autumn for residents
- a communication system to ensure a rapid response if the roads start to flood

Flooding is an issue for the whole island. If anyone has other suggestions or concerns please contact Richard Thurston: richardthurston@btinternet.com

Riverside walk to Binsey

Mark Davies, local historian

On Sunday 7 July, 2 p.m., I'm leading a walk of about 2 miles along part of the route of the famous boat trip of July 1862 during which the story of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* was first told. The route is flat, and includes a chance to view the St Frideswide door carved by the real Alice's sisters. It ends at Binsey Church where the Oxford Children's Book Group will be hosting activities. To reserve a place (minimum £5 in aid of OCBG and St Frideswide's Church) email: oxfordtowpathpress@gmail.com

West Oxford Fun Day

Saturday 13 July, 2–6 p.m. Bounce on the bouncy castle, pet the animals from Farmer Gow's, slip and slide, listen to local bands, enter the dog show, eat tasty BBQ, have a drink in our beer tent or cake from the school tea tent, try to beat the goalie or use the human fruit machine. Keep your eye out for information.

If you can help out on the day or before please email: funday@woca.org.uk Also get in touch if you have any memorabilia from past fun days, flower festivals, annual fetes on Botley Park. We'll photograph them to include in our history of events on the park.

Osney Island Boat Club

Fiona Ravenscroft, South Street

Are you interested in getting out on the river? The Osney Island Boat Club keeps four kayaks and a Canadian canoe for use by members. They are stored on the island with easy access to the river. Yearly membership, open to any person/household/family on the island, runs from April and costs £50 per year per household plus a £30 joining fee. Please contact Fiona at osneyislandbc@gmail.com for further details and to view the boats.

Chatty Wednesdays

Eli Harriss, Bridge Street

Come to The Holly Bush on the third Wednesday of the month to chat and meet your neighbours.

We've had a fantastic turnout for the first few Osney Chatty Wednesdays of 2024, for which I'm incredibly grateful. Everyone likes the idea that all they have to do is turn up at the pub, look for the woman in the fluorescent

cycling jacket, and that's the cue to get a drink and come over for a friendly chat. We'll be meeting in the garden when weather permits, 7–9 p.m., 15 May, 19 June, 17 July. Dates and times for the autumn tba.

Allotments news

Verity Wilson, Field Secretary, Twenty Pound Meadow

We hope that we have seen the last of the flooding this spring. Both allotment sites are drying out and it is encouraging to see so many members beginning to clear and prepare their plots. Thank you to everyone.

Can the committee remind people that the May Inspection will still happen at the end of that month? While we remain sympathetic to difficulties brought on by the weather, we do expect to see people making a start on their plots.

In the coming season, the east gate to Twenty Pound Meadow will continue to be out of commission but we are moving nearer to making the 'back road' roadworthy.

Don't forget the Sunday shop (open 10 a.m.–12 noon) where there is also coffee and cake. The shop is open to everyone, not just allotment holders.

St Frideswide's Church

Rev. Rachel Cross

I find it interesting how many stories of Jesus' encounters with people happen around meals and hospitality. Using good-quality surplus ingredients that would otherwise become waste, we've been serving a free vegetable curry every Friday, 4–6 p.m. for over a year. We now include a delicious pudding. By our calculation, more than a tonne of food has been prevented from going to landfill.

Last Friday we served over 100 meals: some takeaways for people dashing home from work, others sitting in and chatting over their meal. And 'Curry Biker' volunteers have started taking meals into town directly to the homeless community.

Fridays are a joyful time, sharing food, stories and community. Do come and join us. After a busy week let us give you dinner, to take away or sitting in. We would love to see you.

Vishuddha Centre news

The yoga centre on East Street has received another award: a highly commended citation in the Civic Trusts Awards 2024, which described it as 'a small but significant architectural gem'. The citation praises the centre for its contemporary design respectful of its historic neighbours, its reliance on renewable energy and its use of a small footprint.

The judges commented: 'The community impact of Vishuddha Yoga Centre is evident in its role as a haven for practitioners, with increasing enrolment in courses reflecting its popularity. You leave a visit to the...centre with a positive feeling of a calm place where you can enjoy a physical activity that is doing all it can to allow that to be a positive spiritual experience.'

The range of classes continues to grow, with some more established local teachers joining the line-up.

The origins of OIRA

Vernon and Jenny Orr, East Street

Seeing the inside of the function hall at the West Oxford Democrats Club, as it was demolished last September, brought back memories. One Sunday afternoon in 1983(?) Osney Island Residents' Association had its inaugural meeting, chaired initially by Councillor John Power, in that hall. We were attendees and wonder if there are any other people still around here who remember that occasion? The local vicar Father John Sweeney was present.

At the gathering a few of us formed a group interested in the island's history. We started to meet and interviewed older residents. This work fizzled out a bit in the 1980s but was rekindled in the late 1990s and led to the production of the booklet *An Island in Oxford* in 2001. The publication was masterminded by the late Simon Stubbings for the 150th anniversary of the first dwellings being built on the island. A scan of the booklet is available at: osneyisland.org.uk/an-island-in-oxford/

West Oxford Democrats Club update

A developer now owns the former car-park site for the club on North Street, which was sold with planning permission. The Democrats is not involved with that development, but expects work to start in May and take about a year to complete.

Refurbishment of the Victorian Democrats building itself is at the detailed design phase. The architect, project manager, surveyor and engineers are all involved. The club hopes work on the building will start around October and also last about a year.

Options are still being considered for the single-storey block on East Street, behind the main Victorian building, and the club would ideally like this to include a function room.

Directory of local suppliers

The list will appear in the August newsletter and is online at: osneyisland.org.uk/directory-of-local-suppliers
If you have any updates please contact Jane Buekett (see below).

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

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