

Osney Island Residents' Association Newsletter

Good news about food waste

Jude Carroll, East Street

Amid the West Oxford stories of doom and delay there's good news about local efforts to reduce food waste. You don't have to look far. My allotment kept me in onions until Christmas. On Fridays, I've shared a free curry (and pudding) in St Frideswide Church. After curry, you can go to the Food Larder in the Community Centre, where you pay a small monthly sub and choose from dozens of items.

None of these efforts disadvantage people in food poverty – everything in the curry and the larder would have gone to landfill if the volunteer cooks and organisers hadn't stepped in. For those in real food need, local providers include the Botley Fridge at St Peter and St Paul Church. Here anyone can help themselves to fresh fruit and vegetables plus a few staples.

The Food Hub serves as warehouse and supplier to all of these, servicing more than 200 local non-profit organisations. It sits behind McDonald's (food irony?) Many islanders volunteer for the Food Hub, curry supper and Food Larder. New recruits are always welcome.

For me, helping this positive work goes towards balancing out the negatives we all face, every day. A bit.



▲ The Food Larder at WOCC

Open Gardens 2025

Susan Hutchinson, West Street

Open Gardens is planned for Saturday 14 June. There will also be Tea on the Towpath, and, I hope, live music. More detailed arrangements will appear in due course. This was such an enjoyable and popular event last year, I hope we can match it again this year. We need a few more gardens still so please let me know if you would like to open yours. A highlight each year is the variety of gardens – some orderly, others wilder. All wonderful and very welcome.



▲ Spring, by Elin from South Street

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 would like to open your garden, help with Tea on the Towpath or contribute a cake.

Islanders help track river pollution

James Ashford, South Street

Like many Osney Islanders, my partner and I love our daily river walks. However, unchecked corporate wastage has left the Thames' ecosystem in dire shape. Existing measurements of river health are spread thin and real action to preserve it requires more data.

Enter Thames 21, a group that equips local people to become 'citizen scientists'. On 16 April, Dr Claire Robertson trained 16 local residents. Eight of us were Osney islanders. We each have a location along the river to sample. We will take readings of phosphate and nitrogen levels, water turbidity (transparency), and environmental observations such as flow rate and algae, once a month. We can also culture bacteria in water samples weekly. I will take my monthly measurements from opposite The Punter, and bacterial measurements from Folly Bridge – so look out for me dangling a bucket in the water.

So what happens to these data? Our measurements will be added to a publicly accessible database at the Oxford Rivers Data Portal. This, according to Dr Robertson, has helped experts designate sections of UK rivers for wild-bathing, meaning companies can't dump raw sewage around them. The data will also play a vital role in other cases downstream.

Osney Lock Hydro is 10 years old

Simon Collings, South Street

This May it is 10 years since the hydro started generating electricity. It was the first community-owned hydro to be built on the Thames.

Most of the cost of building the hydro was raised from members of the local community through share offers. It is owned by West Oxford Community Renewables (WOCORE), a community benefit society. All the electricity generated by the hydro and its solar panels is consumed by the EA depot and homes on Osney.

In addition to the hydro, WOCORE operates solar PV arrays on the King's Centre, Aldi supermarket and Matthew Arnold School. WOCORE uses the money it makes to promote carbon reduction in the local community and to fund nature recovery projects.

Local volunteers Daniel Wagner (East Street) and Matt Haigh (South Street) have recently created a digital display at the site explaining how the hydro works. A new oak bench commemorates Osney resident David Hammond, architect of the hydro and a driving force behind its existence. David sadly died in 2023.

The hydro site is open to the public Friday to Sunday, 10 a.m.–4 p.m.



Hedgehog rescue in Bridge Street

Osney neighbours Tom Hill and Debbie Hall carried out a late-night hedgehog rescue in a Bridge Street garden in April.

The hedgehog, originally moved to safety from the road, did not have enough foraging room across our small Osney gardens. Hedgehogs need to be able to roam up to 3 km. Tom realised it was not thriving and took advice from Oxfordshire Wildlife Rescue.

With his East Street neighbour Debbie, Tom set out cat food after dark, caught the hedgehog and took it in a cardboard box to the allotments. From there it has access to wider green areas upstream.

'It was so sweet,' Debbie said. 'I hope it's happy at the allotments.'

Osney on the telly

Several islanders appeared on BBC South Today on 23 April, in an item about flooding and flood resilience. The short film, presented by Alexis Green, showed how vulnerable residents protect their properties using pumps and floodgates, and included a conversation between local flood-affected people filmed in the Vishuddha Yoga Centre. Because the centre was built on a former commercial site it was not permitted to take up any



floodplain capacity and was therefore built to allow water into the ground floor during a flood, and to withstand this.

The item was trailed in the morning on both Radio Oxford and BBC local television news, where you may have caught it. The short film is available on YouTube: tinyurl.com/bdf6fwvy

Artweeks show

Elizabeth Newbery, North Street

This year, from 13 to 17 May, 10 a.m. to 8 p.m., I'm showing my ceramics at the Magdalen Road Studios. It's just off Magdalen Road at the Iffley Road end (OX4 1RE), part of what may be Oxford's most vibrant artistic quarter. Buses 1 and 5 go from the railway station to Cowley Road every few minutes (Magdalen Road stop).

I normally have my Artweeks show at 3 North St but the roadworks have made it too inaccessible for visitors.

The private view is Tuesday 13 May, 6–8.30 p.m. It would be lovely to see you there.

Talks, walks, art

Mark Davies, local historian

A reminder that my talk about Oxford and the Pre-Raphaelites is on Thursday 8 May, 1–2 p.m. at West Oxford Community Centre (£7, book on the WOCA Events page).

It is timed to coincide with Oxfordshire Artweeks and the WOCA residency of local artists Helen White and Deborah Williams, who as wocART will be exhibiting ceramics, collage, jewellery, painting, photography, and more, 3–10 May.

And on Tuesday 13 May I will be leading a walk through Jericho preceded by a short talk by the archivist of the Oxford University Press. The walk will trace Jericho's transition from lush meadowland to vibrant, sometimes controversial, suburb. 11 a.m and 2 p.m. starts, £12, book on Eventbrite (search for Jericho 200).

Osney 2012 booklet

In 2012 Osney hosted its own Olympics – a fantastic event with an Olympic torch, the 'queen' arriving by river, a hobby-horse slalom and a decorated duck race in the Osney stream. Elizabeth Newbery has some copies of the booklet published to mark the occasion, which you can also see on the website (under the 'History' menu). Many current residents feature in the photos. If you would like a copy please collect from Elizabeth at 3 North Street: elizabeth@newberyandengland.com



▲ *West Oxford Girls' School, class V, 1929–30*

From the archive

The photo above shows Miss Holliday's class V at West Oxford Girls' School, for the academic year 1929–30. Does anyone recognise a family member in this photo?

The girls' school is now West Oxford Primary. The boys' school (since demolished) was in Helen Road and the boys joined the girls at West Oxford in 1956.

Look out for more archive images in future newsletters.

Cargo bike rental scheme

You'll soon be able to hire a cargo bike from West Oxford Community Centre in a scheme launched by Low Carbon West Oxford (LCWO). A two-wheel Bakfiets electric cargo bike will be kept in the new bike hangar at WOCC and charging equipment is being installed.

Enquiries and bookings will be through the Oxford Cargo Bike website oxfordcargobike.com where there will be a dedicated Botley option modelled on the one currently available for Rose Hill.

First-time users will be shown how to use and access the bike, and allowed a trial ride in Botley Park. The first hour will be free, with charges after that similar to those at Rose Hill. A regular service agreement has been arranged with Warlands.

Contact LCWO if you'd like to volunteer to help the project succeed.

New neighbours

James Ashford and Ayesha Tandon, South Street
Hello everyone! We recently moved into South Street, and it's great to have the river and city centre so close. We met 10 years ago, studying at Exeter University, and came to Oxford pursuing science-related careers: James for his DPhil in medical sciences, and Ayesha to work as a science journalist, focusing on climate change.

We've only been on the island for a few months, but already love The Punter and walking along the Thames.



James is a keen runner and a software engineer with an interest in all things technical. Ayesha loves dancing, playing badminton, and has just joined Buzz gym. We have been dogsitting a cheeky mini husky

but plan to get a puppy soon, and are looking for dog-owning neighbours to share tips/socialise the dogs. Thank you to everyone we've met for such a warm welcome to the area.

Osney Chatty Wednesdays

Eli Harriss, Bridge Street

Come, have a drink, and meet your neighbours! I'm Eli, I live on Bridge Street, and I book a table at either The Punter or The Holly Bush from 7 to 9 p.m. on the third Wednesday of the month. I'm recognisable in my yellow fluorescent cycling jacket. Osney neighbours can meet each other and talk about planning applications, building a shed, holidays, work dramas, whatever we like. We had a record-breaking 16 people turn up for the February chat, which was lovely, and thank you all for coming

along. There'll be emails on the mailing list about exact times and locations, as I hope to move to The Holly Bush garden for the spring and summer. Chats coming up: 21 May, 18 June, 16 July, 20 August, 17 September.

Osney Island Boat Club

Fiona Ravenscroft, South Street

Spring is here and, once again, membership is open for the Osney Island Boat Club – no experience necessary. Our boats allow you to explore the local rivers and tributaries and experience a different aspect of the city. We have two kayaks, a Canadian canoe, a sit-on kayak and a selection of buoyancy aids stored within easy reach of the river. The boats are suitable for beginners or more experienced boaters, sole use or families. Membership is open to any islanders and other local households. It costs just £60 per year per household with a one-off £30 joining fee. If you'd like to find out more, please contact me: osneyislandbc@gmail.com



Allotments news

We are into prime planting time, and the allotments shop is open on Sunday mornings, 10 to 12. It's a convenient, friendly place to buy peat-free potting compost, bags of fertiliser, and seedlings grown by allotment holders. There's coffee and cake on sale too, and all are welcome.



The gate of the allotments site across the road from Osney is open on Sunday mornings and the shop is just inside, on the right. There is some parking if you are buying heavy items.

If you have a hankering for fresh air, fresh veg and rewarding work, it is not too late in the year to take on an allotment. There are vacant plots available. All will need some work to get them ready for planting.

OIRA Annual Meeting

Thanks to everyone who came along to a packed Annual Meeting in St Frideswide Church on 23 April. As well as paying tribute to those residents who organise regular island events, the meeting thanked Maureen Ergeneli, who stood down from the committee. Maureen has made a massive contribution to island life. The rest of the committee was re-elected unopposed, with Maria Holt taking over from Julia Turner as treasurer.

The updated constitution proposed by the committee was voted in by a large majority.

To end the evening local historian Malcom Graham spoke about Osney using a series of old maps and photos. These showed how the island became populated during the nineteenth century (including a map of cholera cases), the location of public air-raid shelters in 1941, flooding at the south end of the island (no change there) and the church that once stood at the junction of Bridge and South Streets (now the site of nos 33–38 South Street).

Directory of local suppliers

The directory will appear in the August newsletter. It is online at: osneyisland.org.uk/directory-of-local-suppliers Local shops and services are listed at: osneyisland.org.uk/local-shops-and-services

If you contact someone on the directory and find they are no longer working, please inform Jane Buekett so they can be removed.

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
Email guidelines are on the website: osneyisland.org.uk/about-oira/email-group/

OIRA committee

Andrew Boag andrew@boag.org.uk, Alison Burdett alison.burdett@gmail.com (email list), Alan Goodwin (chair) 07765 034918 alan@alangoodwin.co.uk, Eli Harriss gekh2@yahoo.co.uk, Maria Holt (treasurer) mariaholt@yahoo.com, Philippa Lanchbery planchbery@icloud.com, Karen Schoenemann 07718 632742, Julia Turner 07971 881258.

Newsletter and website editor (and secretary): Jane Buekett (janebuekett@yahoo.co.uk, 01865 251454/07716 408085).

Newsletter distribution: Anna Truelove.

If you are interested in joining the committee, please contact a committee member.

OIRA newsletter supplement – May 2025

Network Rail (NR) project

The government has instructed NR to concentrate on reopening Botley Road, with the new train tracks and the new western entrance coming later – though they will come. There is now a more competent team in place and Thames Water is no longer holding things up, so I feel confident that we will get the new pedestrian walkway by August this year and the road under the bridge by August next year – at last. NR is also still trying to find some way of compensating local businesses for loss of trade and still trying to improve the westbound bus stop by Osney Island.

Thames Water's Osney Bridge project

This work is also now on-schedule. By the end of June the various companies should have finished diverting their utilities away from the unsafe northern pavement, so that it can be demolished, and the damaged water-pipe removed from under the bridge. A new pipe will then be installed and the newly strengthened pavement re-built, with the utilities replaced. By June next year everything on Osney Bridge should at last be back to normal.

Sewage on the Island

Many residents are worried about the capacity of the sewage system on the Island. There were some upsetting sewage overflows recently, when Barhale ruptured a pipe. I am arranging a meeting for residents with Thames Water to discuss this. I hope an online meeting would be acceptable, otherwise we would have to wait until after the next newsletter – unless people are willing to help me deliver the invitations?

Grandpont Nature Park

There have been rumours flying around about a massive loss of trees in the Nature Park if the City Council goes ahead with the new footbridge. They were planning to realign the footpath, to make the gradient less steep, but they now think they will get permission to keep much more of the current alignment. That means fewer trees will be lost. Any trees that are removed must be replaced and the habitat has to be restored and improved.

Bowls Club Open Day

We can be very proud of West Oxford Bowls Club, now 101 years old. Come and celebrate at this year's Open Day on Sunday 25th May from 11am to 4pm. Entry is free and everyone is welcome. As well as the bar, there will be tea and coffee, a cake stall, games, and stalls with books and jumble. You can also have a free go at bowls, of course. You can find the Club behind the community centre and the tennis courts.

Botley Park tennis courts

There are sessions of free group coaching every Saturday morning for children and adults. At other times it costs from £2 to £4 an hour at the less popular times or if at least one player is under 16 or over 65, and otherwise £8 an hour. Book online at "tennis oxford".

Textiles recycling

The collections are now weekly, but you have to request them. You can do this on www.oxford.gov.uk (search for Textiles) or by phoning 01865 249811. You can book as often as you need and recycle any number of textile items, including shoes.

Susanna