

Osney Island Residents' Association Newsletter

Farewell to Phil

Phil Butler, our much-loved postman, is hanging up his postbag on 18 July, after 49½ years in the job. What will he miss most? Seeing work colleagues and chatting to customers. And least? Getting soaked in the rain.



Phil started with Royal Mail aged 16 as a telegram boy, and at 18 automatically became a postie. After stints in East Oxford and the Eynsham Road he moved 15 years ago to his current route (Abbey, Cripsey, Mill, Osney, Henry, Tumbling Bay Court). He often starts work at 5 a.m., sorting the post for his 800 addresses, which give him a step count of 20,000 a day.

Only once has Phil been stopped by impassable snow, and he's only had one dog bite, when an Alsatian that had always disliked him was accidentally let out.

Over a pint in The Holly Bush Phil revealed who receives the most parcels on Osney, and the famous people he's had on his route. In his younger years he played cricket for Cumnor, where he lives. What does retirement hold? There's his Dachshund puppy to walk, a big garden to tend, but watching the cricket takes priority.

Raising frogs is easy and fun

Elin Döbeli (aged 6), South Street

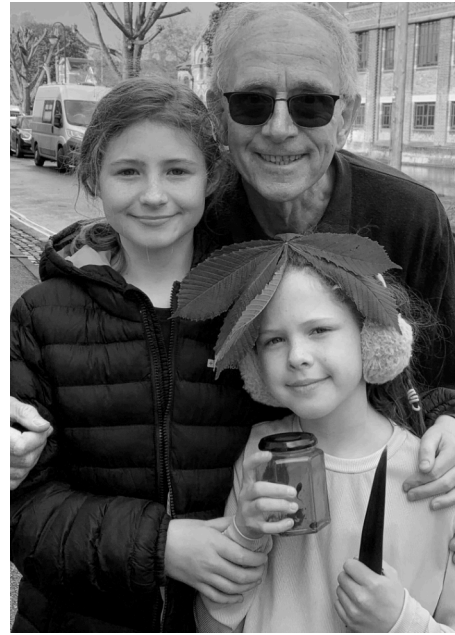
First you need some spawn. We were lucky that Eleanor shared some from her pond with us. The spawn only develops if it has not been exposed to temperatures below 0°.



You need a tank with pond water and plants to put the spawn in. The water plants provide oxygen.

After a while the tadpoles hatch. Then you check in the morning and in the evening whether the tadpoles got bigger. The tadpoles eat algae,

◀ Elin with her tank



▲ Avalyn, Ruby and Vernon with tadpoles from Eleanor's pond

so don't clean the water tank!

After a few weeks the tadpoles grow legs and become froglets. They are now carnivorous, so you can give them fish food. Watch out: when they become frogs, they might jump out of the tank.

We raised four frogs and released them in Eleanor's garden. We hope they live a happy life.

Osney bee-flies

Will Scarratt, Bridge Street

One of the signs of spring I look out for every year is the emergence of the bee-flies, which hover at early spring flowers like furry, ginger hummingbirds.

On a warm April day in an Osney garden, I watch as a female dark-edged bee-fly lands on the soil, poising on her delicate, spindly legs as she wiggles her abdomen tip into the dusty ground, packing grit into tiny dust-baskets



▲ Dark-edged bee-fly

▲ Dotted bee-fly

beneath her belly. She elegantly sips some nectar from a primrose and speeds away into the distance to flick her now dust-coated eggs over exposed ground near bee burrows. The dust gives the eggs weight, so they don't blow away, and increases the chance the larvae hatch near a host-bee grub burrow.

There are two common species in the UK, the dotted and the dark-edged bee-fly. While sometimes confused with bees, they are true flies with long, permanently protruding tongues that give them a unique appearance.

Pigeon rescue on East Street

Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service responded to a call from concerned residents last month and extricated a stranded pigeon that had become tangled in fishing line atop a tree on East Street. Between that and taking in orphaned ducklings from the towpath a week later, Oxfordshire Wildlife Rescue volunteers have been kept busy on the island. The wildlife of Osney lives alongside all the other users – residents, commuters, contractors, pub patrons, ramblers, anglers, paddlers, canal boaters, cyclists and dog walkers. Dogs that are running or playing can be perceived as predators by birds, so please bear this in mind when letting your dog off the lead during nesting season.



Tea on the Towpath

6 June, East Street

Open Gardens is taking a pause for this year, but there will be plenty of events for adults and children happening around Tea on the Towpath on 6 June, alongside another 'all-island freebie day'. A date for your calendars.

West Oxford Beer Festival

David Jeffrey, South Street

20 June, 7 p.m., West Oxford Community Centre

WOBfest is back, for our eleventh festival, and will once again be featuring a range of local ales. This event has always been a great success, bringing together local residents for an enjoyable time, while raising money for local causes.

Tickets can be purchased in advance at wegottickets.com/f/18317. The price of £8.50 (+ booking fees) includes entry to the beer festival, and the now-iconic commemorative WOBfest pint glass for you to keep.

Please get in contact if you are interested in pouring pints on the night (no experience necessary, and good fun), or becoming a beer sponsor, either corporate or individual. Without our sponsors and volunteers, WOBfest would not be possible.

Website: www.wobfest.org.uk, email: david@wobfest.org.uk, or search Instagram for 'WOBfest'.

We look forward to seeing you.

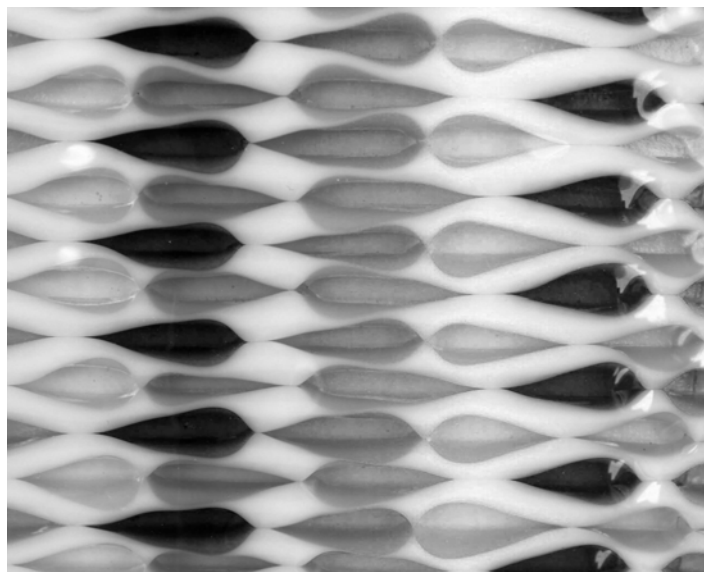
Artweeks in West Oxford and Botley

Elizabeth Newbery, North Street

16–25 May

This year we have 14 Artweeks venues in our area, with 25 artists exhibiting. Work includes painting, drawing and printing, fused glass, jewellery, sculpture, ceramics, and photography. We also have a smart new map guiding visitors to venues, and to local eateries. Do come and help support our thriving artistic community.

On the island, I am showing at Venue 352, 3 North St, on 16, 17, 23, 24, 25 May, 11 a.m.–6 p.m. This year, many of my dishes feature themes local to Osney.



▲ Fused glass by Rebecca Rowland, Venue 340

Binsey Whimsy Walk

Mark Davies, local historian

28 June, 2 p.m.

As part of Oxford Festival of the Arts, join me on a short walk to the 'Treacle Well' in St Margaret's Church graveyard at Binsey. Starting at The Perch, this walk will reference the area's varied literary and factual associations, within the festival's theme of 'Signs, Symbols, and Secrets'. Tickets £12 at: artsfestivaloxford.org/events/binsey-whimsy-walk-2/

Remembering Joan Stubbings

Joan Stubbings, who died in January aged 87, first came to the island in the 1980s with her husband Simon and children Jennifer and Philip. Jen returned with her own young family in 2018.



Known locally as a warm and public-spirited neighbour – for many years she hand-weeded the East Street towpath and gutter – Joan was also a woman of considerable intellect, energy and culture.

Born in Oxford, as a teenager Joan gave riding lessons on Boars Hill. Later she trained as a cordon bleu chef, ran a catering company with her twin sister Gill, and practised law in the City. A keen gardener, she enjoyed red wine, loved Wagner, pored over share prices, threw great parties, and was devoted to her family.

Joan had a very personal faith and social conscience. She volunteered for the Islington Legal Advice Centre and frequently helped others. Her neighbour Maureen remembers a typical act of kindness. Learning that Maureen's dog Patch missed out on juicy bones to gnaw, Joan always brought him the bones from her family roasts.

Joan's declining years were greatly eased by the companionship of her carer Joyce. She is much missed by her family, friends and neighbours.

Archive photo revisited

This photo appeared in the November 2025 newsletter. We don't know anything about it – who were these people and where were they going? Two former residents have now identified quite a few of the faces, and an annotated version of the photo listing the names is on the website: osneyisland.org.uk/1950s-excursion/



Osney Mead development

Many islanders attended the March drop-ins on the Osney Mead development. A summary of our feedback will appear on the developers' website in due course: osneymead-oud.co.uk

The next stage, in a few months, will be the publication of a draft masterplan for the site. Oxford City Council requires this as part of the planning submission for the new engineering building, which will be the first stage of the redevelopment. It will replace the unoccupied Alden Press buildings at the eastern end of Osney Mead.

Once the full redevelopment takes place there will be a lot more people living and working on Osney Mead. Access to the site could impact our streets. Some other key issues for the island are ensuring that the new development:

- respects the Conservation Area and special character of the island
- focuses on the needs of residents (new and existing) rather than creating a tourist attraction
- reduces flood risk for the island, and builds adequate sewage infrastructure
- has an attractive sustainable design, that reflects the heritage of the area
- protects and increases wildlife habitat



▲ A familiar sight on the river. Photo by Sushanto Sarkar

Chatty Wednesday

Eli Harriss, Bridge Street

Chat, have a drink, and meet Osney neighbours. Chatty Wednesday has been running since 2019. We now meet at The Punter on the third Wednesday of the month, 7–9 p.m. at the big top table. Look out for me in a fluorescent yellow cycling jacket. It's a friendly space to talk about anything you like, and get to know each other better. As well as catching up on how our days have been, and what the cats have been up to, we had a (brief) Burns poetry recital and translation in January, a hint about WOBfest 2026 in February, and a lengthy discussion about Disney princesses in March. I now know to expect the unexpected topic. Chats coming up: 20 May, 17 June, 15 July, 19 August.

It's not too late to get an allotment

There are still some plots and half plots available at Twenty Pound Meadow, just across the Botley Road. It's a friendly site, with plenty of free advice available for beginners. And if you start now there is still time to plant some delicious veg for harvesting this year. Rents are very reasonable. To find out more contact Nick Jackson: secretary@westoxfordallotments.org

News from St Frideswide

Rev Rachel Cross

The church is celebrating the Easter story, a season that boldly declares hope in the face of temptation to despair and hopelessness. Not a sentimental hope, laced with saccharine, and ignoring suffering. Easter is hope born in the midst of suffering and death. Hope that begins at the foot of an empty cross, hope that can be trusted precisely because it does not deny pain or confusion but transforms them. The evils that seemed to triumph on Good Friday: violence, injustice and death, are actually defeated. As the Easter anthem puts it, 'death is swallowed up in victory'.

Osney Island Boat Club

Fiona Ravenscroft, South Street

The boat club provides canoes and kayaks for islanders to take to the water. Membership is open to any local household – no experience necessary. Members have access to three kayaks, two Canadian canoes and a sit-on kayak for kids and small adults kindly donated by islanders. The boats suit whole families or individuals, beginners or those with more experience. You can paddle up to The Perch for lunch, picnic on Port Meadow or explore the Cherwell through town.

Membership 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



New activities at WOCC

- Circuits with Dave Lambert: build strength, stamina and confidence, Sundays 9.30 a.m.
- Pilates with Denise: beginners and intermediates classes, Tuesdays 12.05 and 1.05 p.m.
- Dance for dementia with MuMoCreative: music and movement for people living with dementia and their carers, Thursdays 1.30 p.m..
- Regular one-off sessions for younger children, including ride-on vehicle play with Ride On Time-and train-themed sessions with Trainmaster.
www.facebook.com/westoxfordcommunitycentre/

Recipe: rabbit in soured cream

Masha Unkovskaya-Harley, Doyley Road

This is adapted from a recipe used by my nanny in my childhood. Rabbit is available fresh or frozen from Aldens.

Rabbit (skinned)
700–1,000 ml soured cream
2 onions, finely chopped
2–3 carrots, peeled and chopped
1 large parsnip, peeled and chopped
Garlic to taste, chopped or crushed
Fresh flat leaf parsley, finely chopped
Dried cep (porcini), a handful
Mushrooms, a smallish box, chopped
Salt and pepper to taste
1½ tbsp flour
Butter and oil for frying

Cut rabbit into portions and brown in a mixture of butter and oil. Transfer to a casserole and season.

Brown the onions, add to the meat with the other chopped veg.

Boil the cep in water for 12 minutes. Reserve the water.

Make the sauce by melting butter in a largish pot, add flour and mix well, add the soured cream in batches, whisking all the time. When it's boiling add parsley and cep water, still whisking. Add the cep and chopped mushrooms. Season if desired.

Pour over the meat and cook at gas 4/180°C for 2½ hours.

OIRA AGM

Many thanks to islanders who attended the AGM at St Frideswide Church on 22 April. After a brief formal meeting (voting of new committee members, presentation of accounts etc.) there was plenty of time to socialise with neighbours, make suggestions for future island activities, and view some gems from the OIRA archives. Minutes will be available on the website in due course. New committee members are always welcome, please contact secretary Eleanor Dickey (e.dickey@reading.ac.uk) if you are interested or would like more information.

Directory of local suppliers

This directory will appear in the August newsletter. It is online at: osneyisland.org.uk/directory-of-local-suppliers

If you contact someone in the directory and find they are no longer working, please inform Jane Buekett (janebuekett@yahoo.co.uk) 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

OIRA committee

Alison Burdett alison.burdett@gmail.com (email list), Eleanor Dickey (secretary) e.dickey@reading.ac.uk, Maria Holt (treasurer) mariaholt@yahoo.com, Philippa Lanchbery planchbery@icloud.com, Sarah Parker (chair) sarahparker_29@hotmail.com 07834 772016, Karen Schoenemann 07718 632742, Kate Stewart kate.stewart1908@gmail.com.

Newsletter

Newsletter and website editor: Jane Buekett (janebuekett@yahoo.co.uk 07716 408085). Newsletter distribution: Anna Truelove.

Copy deadline for next newsletter: 22 July.

Councillor Susanna Pressel
7 Rawlinson Road, Oxford, OX2 6UE

Osney and St Thomas Ward

Home: 01865 554001
E: cllrspressel@oxford.gov.uk



OIRA newsletter supplement – May 2026

Network Rail (NR)

Work is slightly ahead of schedule for reopening the road at the end of August, though it's possible that only the road and the beautiful new southern walkway will be completed by then (because it looks as though SSE may cause a delay). If so, the northern walkway in its finished state should be open about 10 days later. We will have smart new junctions at the nearby roads too, designed to be safer for pedestrians.

Next year work will begin on the new western entrance and platform 4/5, so that we can have trains to Cowley and Bedford by 2030.

Thames Water (TW) project on Osney Bridge

It was a West Street resident who first alerted me to the leak in the mains water pipe under Osney Bridge back *in April 2021*, and I sent an urgent message at once to TW, which was the first they'd heard of it. It seems incredible that here we are five years later, with the pipe still not repaired and back in place. There have been various hold-ups along the way; the latest one just now is again caused by SSE. Once they have finished diverting and then replacing their electric cables, which should be next month, the unsafe northern pavement can be demolished and rebuilt much stronger, so that the water main can be put back underneath it. They have been given permission to work until quite late in the evenings in order to try and keep their promise of getting the road over the bridge fully open again by July. I hope this won't be too noisy for Osney Island residents. After that there will be a lot of tidying up to do, so it will probably be November before the city council is able to plant 6 or so new trees in place of the 3 cherry trees removed by TW from the "pocket park" opposite Osney Island. TW will pay for the trees, their maintenance and the work to the surrounding area.

By the way, one of the TW staff saw swallows flying under Osney Bridge before 13th April.

Road closure in South Street

I've had advance notice of the closure of South Street outside number 1 from 29th June to about 7th July. This is so that TW can do some further work on "essential sewer repairs relating to possible pollution".

Osney Power Station

The enormous building just across the river from East Street, which first opened in 1892, has been renamed as the Saïd Business School's Global Leadership Centre. It will be running executive education programmes from September onwards. There is no car parking on-site.

Weekly updates and bi-monthly surgeries

As some of you know, I send out weekly email updates on the NR and TW projects and other local matters to the Osney email group. Please join it if you want to know more. I also send it for inclusion in the West Oxford Community Association (WOCA) e-newsletter, which comes out every Friday, so you could join WOCA as well or instead.

I hold a ward surgery from 11 to 12 noon on the first Saturday of each month at Jericho Community Centre and on the third Saturday at WOCC.

Susanna

