

# The Beckley Newsletter

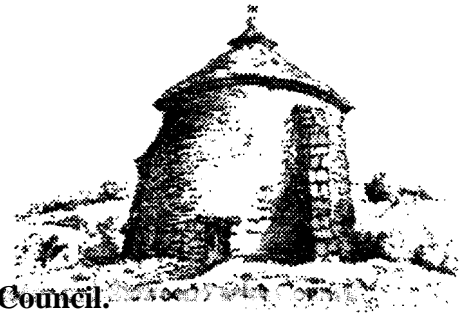
News Views and Comment from  
around the Parish

Autumn 2009

Produced under the auspices of the Beckley and Stowood Parish Council.

Any comments or opinions expressed herein are not necessarily those of the Council

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## PARISH COUNCIL NEWS AUTUMN 2009

### Vacancy

In September 2009 Cllr Geoff Henman is resigning from the Parish Council to carry out more exciting pursuits, including travelling to Africa. We would all like to thank him for his valuable contributions to the council during the past 3 - 4 years and wish him 'all the best' for the future.

This will of course leave us with a vacant seat on the Council. Would anyone who may be interested in joining the Parish Council contact either the chairman Pete Gibbons (351466) or the Clerk Sam Hawkins (872328) or any Parish Councillor, so that we can co-opt a new council member. If there are ten or applicants there will have to be an election.

### Mains Drainage

Thames Water now say that anyone who has paid the Application and Building Regulations fees (requires an inspection for a Completion Certificate) may connect to the mains.

Also, there were doubts about three properties at Standard Green, Otmoor Lane being included in the system but we have been assured these works will now be carried out.

**Pete Gibbons Chairman 351466**

### DOG-FOULING – A PLEA

Surely just as bad as *not* clearing up after your dog, is clearing up but leaving the bag by the road or in the hedge where it looks unpleasant and litters the countryside!! **Gina Robson 351637**

## PROPOSED TWINNING WITH ST LOUANS, FRANCE

Readers of the newsletter may have seen a notice earlier this year about an enquiry received by the Parish Council from Richard Packer – a former resident of Cripps Cottage – investigating the possibility of arranging twinning activities with Beckley. Richard is a retired vet, now living in St Louans, just a short distance from Chinon in the Loire valley, and is a member of the village association that organises social functions around the year.

Those who responded to this notice (see below) have met informally, exchanged information with Richard and taken soundings to see how this proposal could be taken forward. The neighbouring village of La Rochelle has an école maternelle (infants only school) and the head of Beckley primary school has expressed an interest in developing contacts. Groups currently meeting in Beckley may also find reasons for sharing in their activities and other opportunities for combining social occasions will be explored. To this end, Peter and Pru Dickson will be passing through St Louans in September on their way south in order to meet members of their association and to establish the basis on which a twinning arrangement might be conducted.

Any reader who has a suggestion for developing the twinning or who is willing to contribute to any future planning or organisation, may contact one of the members of the group listed below:

**Mary Ashdown 358971**

**Peter Dickson 358237**

**Sue Roberts**

**Ann Henman 351492**

## **BECKLEY VILLAGE HALL ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 20 JULY 2009**

### **Treasurer's Report**

The Committee has £1,780 income over expenditure. Income from letting has increased by over £200. Fund raising has also increased thanks to Harvest Supper and Buddy Holly tribute evening. The Hall needs redecorating this year and an additional step to the outside steps needs to be built. Cleaning costs: £1,000. We're still holding Tennis Club monies and Kick Wall monies. John Lord has audited the accounts for which we're extremely grateful. These accounts were proposed by Sue Cox and seconded by Dick Winfield.

### **Chair's Report**

The Committee met six times during the year. Colin Day has retired as Chairman and John Baker has taken over as a stop gap. We have welcomed three new members on to the Committee. Clare Marsh, Georgina Matthews and Sue Cox.

This year there have been three fundraising events: an Autumn Supper, a Bonfire Night in conjunction with the Parish Council, and a Buddy Holly tribute evening. We have been involved with a thank you party for Neil and Michelle Wass, who left the Abingdon Arms during the year and were so helpful with our catering needs. We have arranged for a further theatre visit on 10th February 2010.

As a Committee we have considered the state and upkeep of the hall, its finances, health and safety issues and ways of maintaining a useful facility for the village.

The Hall has been used for a Dog Show in July 2008 and Village Fun Day in May 2009 organised by Geoff Tagg in aid of the church and the hall in Beckley - our thanks to him. The local police have begun using the Hall for six - monthly surgeries in order to bring them closer to the local community. In October 2008 Colin Day left the Committee and we organised a thank-you party for him in January 2009.

During the year the Hall has been well used by seven village organisations and by the community in the village and elsewhere. As Booking Secretary I receive complimentary comments about the hall and the facilities it offers; there has been, on average, ten to twelve bookings per month this year.

I would thank Gill Westbury for her untiring work as Treasurer, Pat Moss as Secretary and Peter Carter for his work with the 150 Club, which is such an essential part of our fund-raising, Dick Winfield for his practical expertise and the volunteers, mostly ladies, who organise the logistics and catering for our events.

We lost two servants of the hall during the year. Peter Jacques, who gave of his time and expertise unstintingly and Colin Day, who over eleven years guided the Committee with patience and understanding; they will be missed. I know that Colin had ambitions to build a new hall and we need a younger person to fill the position as Chair of the Committee. In eleven years time I'll either be in my dotage or Beckley churchyard! This is a great little Village Hall, in a great little village, but it needs help from the younger members of the community to run it.

**John Baker, June 2009**

## **BECKLEY VILLAGE HALL COMMITTEE CAN YOU HELP?**

The Village Hall Committee would like to recruit new members as Committee numbers are dwindling and it is important to keep this wonderful village resource going. The Village Hall is a fantastic and well used venue occupying an amazing location with a view unrivaled in the county.

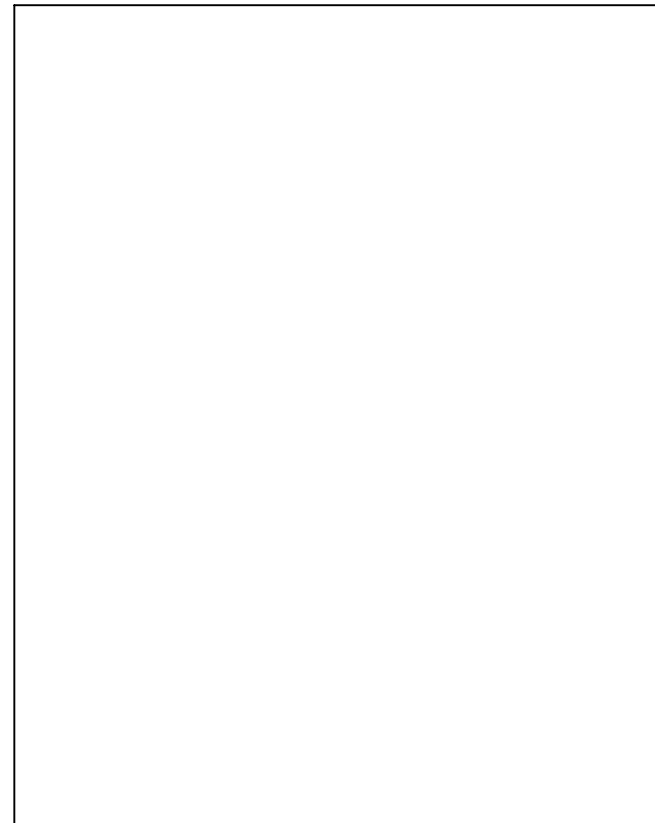
The Village Hall Committee meets approximately once every two months. It manages the letting of the Hall to local groups and individuals, arranges fun social gatherings to get members of the village together, organizes the upkeep and maintenance of the hall and manages the finances to ensure that funds remain in a healthy state.

Meetings are relaxed and friendly and the events are always fun to arrange. If you can spare just a few hours every couple of months and if you think you would like a way to be involved with the local community, the committee would love to hear from you. To find out more, or just to come and sit in on a meeting, please contact either **Sue Cox 351415** [suecox17@supanet.com](mailto:suecox17@supanet.com) or **Kate Carruthers 358711** [k8@carru.demon.co.uk](mailto:k8@carru.demon.co.uk)

**BECKLEY HARVEST SUPPER PARTY**  
**Saturday, 10 October, 7.30 pm Beckley Village Hall.** Tickets: £10 - to include buffet supper - bring your own drinks. (As we went to press, tickets were almost sold out. Anyone wishing to see if there are any still left is asked to contact a committee member.)

The Oxford Theatre Company  
PEACH BOY:  
THE ADVENTURES OF MOMOTARO  
Saturday 13 February 2010 3.30  
Beckley Village Hall

When a washerwoman goes down to the riverbank, she sees a giant peach bobbing towards her! When she takes it home, out pops a baby boy with superhuman powers....so starts the incredible story of Momotaro - the Peach Boy and his struggle to find his place in a world that no longer believes in heroes. This is play promises to delight audiences of all ages with its wonderful range of characters, fusion of puppetry and live performance. It's a thrilling epic of growing up, idealism, friendship, heroism, daring deeds and comic misadventures.



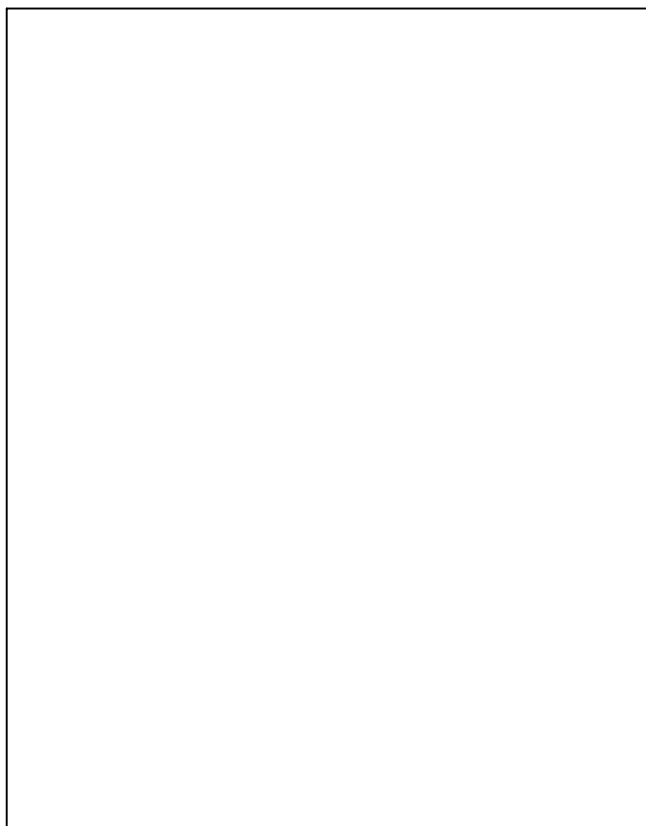
### **NEW CHURCH STREET**

There was great excitement in Church Street on 24 August as the overhead power cables were finally dropped from their poles – this followed nearly a month of preparatory ground works by SSE and over two years of planning, meetings and letter-writing.

I had expected that removing the four chunky cables that ran down the length of the Street would provide the most pleasing visual improvement but in the event it was seeing the cables unclipped from ‘Alflyn’ and ‘Old Bake House’ that provided the greatest satisfaction. My thanks go to all the households in Church Street who generously contributed to the cost of the work but especially to Ann, Geoff and Liz for the many hours they have devoted to this project; I do hope you are all pleased with the results.

The next phase in the Grand Plan is to negotiate with BT to bury the telephone cables in Church Street. This will allow all the poles in the Street to be removed except for the one pole opposite Kate Lee Cottage. That pole will be the focus of phase three when we hope to bury the power cable that crosses Church Street from behind Kate Lee Cottage and continues into the garden of St Mary’s House.

**Steve Smith (Bark Beetles) 351332**



## RSPB NEWS

### Volunteers

Since May our volunteers have been busy maintaining and improving the reserve's infrastructure to enhance the Otmoor visitor experience. Work included cutting the site's network of footpaths, and completing the track repairs along the first section of the visitor trail.

Improving things for visitors has also included modification to the reedbed viewing screens. The northern screen has received a fresh layer of stone to save visitors' boots from the mud in winter. The southern screen has been modified with a new backing screen, which will reduce disturbance to the reedbed and, in turn, provide everyone with great views of wildlife.

June and July brought the least favourite job of the volunteer's annual work calendar – ragwort control! Armed with 'Lazy Dog' pulling tools, the teams set about this task with typical gusto, and made great progress.

July also brought forth the annual willow sapling management, where small willow trees invading the grassland are pulled to keep things favourable for the grassland dependant wildlife. As with the ragwort, the volunteers have been on top of this task and a large number of plants have been removed.

### Bird/Wildlife News

After the hectic spring, bird life settled down a little in June. Whilst warblers and passerines could still be heard in the hedgerows, numbers were very much decreased compared to those earlier in spring. Lapwing chicks could be seen darting in and out of the long grass at ditch edges, with parents close by, ever watchful for danger. The star bird of June was undoubtedly an incredibly vocal marsh warbler, the first for 20 years! The reserve was host to many visitors from far and wide to hear this incredible mimic sing - what a song, what a repertoire!

Other unusual sightings included whinchat and spotted flycatcher. Although bird activity dropped off, the insect world was literally taking off. With the welcome June sun, many species of dragonfly and damselfly took to the wing. With them, of course, came the graceful hobbies, displaying breathtaking feats of aerial acrobatics on a daily basis, as they hunted their insect prey.

The sun brought out the grass snakes too, seen basking in the sunlight. Visitors to the reserve are encouraged to keep an eye out, and possibly experience a glimpse of Britain's largest snake.

Moving into July, all the warbler species like whitethroat and chiffchaff could still be heard, but less in number and infrequently, as parent birds focused on rearing their young. Compensation came in the form of the maturing lapwing chicks. Many visitors watched as the balls of fluff grew towards adulthood.

### Wetland Creation

Any visitors to Otmoor could not have failed to notice that bulldozers and diggers came back onto the fields towards Noke (Ashgrave and Big Otmoor) in June. They are aiming to finish the project delayed for the past 2 years by back-to-back wet summers. The project to create a large lagoon with islands in Ashgrave and to reduce the high banks on Big Otmoor has made good progress, despite the rain in July. When complete, these works will enhance both fields as habitats for a wide variety of wetland wildlife.

### Events

The annual 'Otmoor Family Fun Day' was held on 11 July. This event gave us a great opportunity to meet with the local communities of the moor. We hope that everyone who came along enjoyed the day, which included activities such as pond dipping, mini beast hunting and guided walks.

**And finally...** A date for your diary:

**Wednesday 28 October**

### Feed the Birds Day

Come and join us for this annual event, hosted by RSPB Otmoor. It will be half term, and there will be many activities for the children. An event not to be missed, please contact **Judith Lloyd on 01865 351163** or **e mail Judith.Lloyd@rspb.org.uk** for further information. We would love to see you!

**ANNUAL CRAFT SALE  
IN AID OF  
TEARCRAFT & TRAIDCRAFT  
SATURDAY 31 OCTOBER, 2009  
10AM - 2PM  
BECKLEYVILLAGE HALL  
REFRESHMENTS AVAILABLE**

It is felt that this change of venue will give more space for the display of items for sale, the kitchen facilities for refreshments (including drinks, mince pies, soup and rolls), toilets, immediate access to the Beckley recreation field/new children's playground and ample car parking.

This gives Beckley and surrounding villages, particularly Forest Hill, Horton-cum-Studley and Stanton St John, the opportunity to purchase attractive fair traded hand-made crafts, dry foods and Christmas cards/paper, and the money raised all goes direct to the producers in the developing world.

Should anyone wish to see a brochure ahead of the Sale date, please contact **Heather and Richard Moore (Tearcraft representatives from Tetsworth) 01844 281305** or **Erica and Ian Cave of Whistlers Cottage, Common Road, Beckley 351226**.

### **HARVEST FESTIVAL**

Because of the wedding of Rock Fielding and Zoe Crowley on Saturday 19 September, we shall be decorating the church on the afternoon of Friday 18 September in preparation for the Harvest Festival service on 20 September during which the refurbished organ will be blessed by Bishop Colin. Donations of flowers and harvest produce will be most welcome on the Friday – please bring them to the church as usual. Please **contact Gina Robson 351637** if you have any queries.

### **HARVEST FESTIVAL SERVICE**

Sunday 20 September 9.30am will be a special day as we are planning to combine our Harvest Festival with the blessing of the restored organ. Bishop Colin will be leading our service. I know that many people remember pumping the organ in their childhood and would like to invite as many 'pumpers' as possible to join us for this special day. We would like to invite everyone to join us for this celebration, both of God's goodness in his creation and the dedication and skill of many to our beautiful church. **Rev Stevie Cross 351142**

### **CHURCH FABRIC APPEAL**

The external renovation of the church is now virtually complete. I hope everyone will spare a moment to look at this architectural gem in our village, now gleaming with fresh stone and pointing, and proof against the weather for another century or so. A huge thank you to everyone in the village who has contributed so generously to our fabric appeal and has made it possible to undertake this work.

### **CHURCH ORGAN RESORATION**

The organ restoration work by Foster-Waite Organ Builders of Newbury will be finished sometime in September. At the same time, the original nineteenth-century decoration on the front pipes is being uncovered and restored by Jenny Duffy. They will be in place for all to see from the beginning of September. An inaugural organ recital is being planned for summer 2010 to give the organ time to settle down. Many thanks to all those who contributed to the fund over the past four years by coming to the concerts and taking part in the other fund-raising events, making this important work possible.

Please support the final concert in the 2009 series, details in the inset box. Concerts will continue in 2010. Watch this space.

**Mary and Michael Worthington 351270**

### **BECKLEY CHURCH CONCERTS FOR THE ORGAN RESTORATION**

**Saturday 26 September at 7.30 pm  
The Banks Quartet**

Miranda Wilson and Judith Henderson *violins*  
Stephen Terepin *viola* and Rickman Godlee *cello*

Haydn, Quartet in G, Op. 76 No. 1

Nicholas Hooper, Quartet No. 3

Schubert Quartet in G, D887

*Tickets on the door. Information from*

*Mary Worthington (01865 351270)*

### **CHURCHYARD TIDY-UP 1 AUGUST**

Many grateful thanks to everyone who came to work so hard on this incredibly wet, but very successful day. Special thanks to Richard and Christopher Cox for again so kindly lending their trailer, and taking away 3 full loads – without their help, the work could not have been done. We shall need to have another similar session perhaps in the winter, to tackle the ivy and brambles again! **Gina Robson 351637**

## THOUGHTS ON RETURNING FROM MALAWI – A BOYS' PERSPECTIVE

*How have you found the first few weeks back in Beckley?*

**George (10):** Well, it's been great – I've managed to see a lot of my friends. I've had fun going around Oxford and seeing everybody again.

**Abe (9):** Fine, except it rained a lot in July! In Malawi the rain can be more torrential, but it happens less often. It doesn't rain at all between April and November. I've liked seeing my friends again.

**Josh (6):** Great, because we've been going to fun places like St David's and the Oasis swimming pool at Swindon. We also went to Legoland and I have ridden on buses and trains. In Malawi I rode on a pony on Zomba plateau, but there were no passenger trains to ride on. It's been great to see my old friends back here. In England they're all white, but in Africa some of my friends came from Africa, India or other countries like America. Here they only come from England.

*What have you noticed that's different from Malawi?*

**George:** You name it – it's different! England is different in almost every single way to Malawi, but also there are a few things that are the same, like we have all the wooden sculptures that we bought in Malawi that remind us of being there. We've still got the drums that we had, and the garden still reminds me of Malawi because it's big. Shops are quite a lot different, because in England, they're much bigger and you can get about twenty times more things than you can in Malawi. Malawian shops are usually small, a bit dusty, and have plenty of hand-made goods. You never know what might turn up, and it's basically the luck of the draw what you can buy. Walking up Church Street is very different from walking up most Malawian streets. In Church Street you see all the thatched cottages with not many people around and often the big church bell rings, whereas in Lilongwe the streets are full of people, potholes and you can hear the mosques. In Malawi you see cars that have their windscreens broken or other damage to them and you can also see lots of stalls and everyone crowding round them.

It's hot and dusty there, but the amazing thing is that with everyone you meet, if you greet them in Chichewa – the Malawian language – they'll always greet you back and be really friendly. Not that people aren't friendly here, but that's what I miss about Malawi. You can't really count how many people are on the streets there – it's a lot more than there'd be on Church Street. It's really crowded –

like a good 200 people up every street. I think only one in every 1000 would be white. The people are mostly black, some are coloured and only a few are white. What I'll miss is having friends from all round the world. At the international school I had friends from every continent.

**Abe:** There are cinemas in England! There were no cinemas in Malawi when we first arrived. They've built one in Blantyre now, but that is four hours' drive from Lilongwe, where we lived. Once we saw a film in a kind of lecture hall that had been turned into a cinema for the day. We saw *Born Free*, about a lioness. You can't really buy toys that don't break in Malawi. Here you can buy electronic games in shops. If you wanted a new game in Malawi, you'd have to order it on the internet, but we never did.

Nearly three times every week we had power cuts, but if one happened in England everyone would be surprised. In Malawi power cuts are very common and we expected them all the time. We had a machine called an inverter which powered the TV/DVD, or if you plugged it into something else it would work that as well. The inverter didn't work perfectly, because sometimes it ran out of power and we could only watch telly or a DVD if it was fully charged. Even then it would only last an hour. Both England and Malawi are really, really fun when it's not raining because you can play outside. When it's raining you have to play inside all day instead. In England my mum says we have to go shopping a lot. In Malawi we didn't have to go shopping much because we had our staff who could look after us at home.

**Josh:** Mostly everything is different. It rains more here. The food is different because they don't plant it here – we buy it from the shops. There are more different foods here. There are different kinds of animals and there are zoos in England, but there aren't zoos in Africa. In Africa the animals live in the wild. There are kudus, buffalos, impala, baboons, giraffes, bush buck, bush babies, chameleons, monkeys, lions, snakes, crocodiles, dolphins, hippos, fish and elephants and a few rhinos, although we didn't see one. In England, I don't know any animals that live in the wild apart from squirrels, birds, butterflies, wasps and flies. I've also seen cats and dogs. They are in Malawi too. We had a cat called Couscous and a dog called Tosh. We also had a hamster called Chuckles, a chicken called Vanessa, lots of rabbits and a tortoise called Cabbage. I will miss the animals and my old friends like Erik, Sam, Tweende, Khurram, Wanga and Estella. **George, Abe, and Josh Lea**

## THE MEN OF BECKLEY

The MOB meet at the Abingdon Arms on the first Wednesday of the month at 12.30 for a chat, putting the world (and others) to rights, a laugh and a pint and a pie, or whatever! Dates: 2 September, 7 October, 4 November, and 2 December. No fees / ceremonies /oaths: the only qualification is be one of the MOB. See you there. **John Edmonds-Seal 351582**

## WI

The Womens Institute continues to meet on the first Tuesday of the month at the Village Hall unless otherwise specified. Programmes are varied and guests welcome. September 1 will see a repeat visit by Christopher Cook, who will share slides of Zimbabwe. On 6 October the programme will be Russell Cherry, another perennial favourite, on Walking the Ridgeway. 3 November's programme will be Beckley resident Donna Dickenson on her recent international best-selling and thought-provoking book *Body Parts*. Business meetings start at 7.15, followed by programs at 8.00. Transportation can be provided. Come join us!

**Marion Winestein 351251**

**Brenda Lambourn 351793**

## BECKLEY BOOK GROUP

The Book Group met on Friday 28 August at Sue and Ted Cloke's house, Hornbeam. The book discussed was Victoria Hislop's *The Return*. The next meeting will be on Friday 16 October at the Stradlings' house in the High Street; the book to be discussed is Lucy Beckett's *The Time Before You Die* (available from Amazon at £10). Anyone wishing to join the group should contact **Mary Worthington: 351270**

## VILLAGE HALL 150 CLUB

Anyone not already a member of the 150 Club is very welcome to join. If you'd like to know more, please contact Pete Carter **351352**.

## WELCOME NEW NEIGHBOURS

A warm welcome to new neighbours Katherine and Philip Cropper, who have moved to Kate Lea Cottage from Rigby in Warwickshire. Philip is a stockbroker for Charles Stanley in Oxford.

## JAN WELLER PRE-SCHOOL

Since our last newsletter we have welcomed Ellie Briggs as our latest new recruit from Beckley. Her dad Steve and her mum Emma are also now our new Chair and Vice Chair, and her little brother Alfie is on our waiting list.

Of course, the biggest event of the year was Jan Weller's retirement. Jan started our pre-school some 33 years ago and has been involved for nearly all that time, although she has left and come back at least twice! It is sad that Jan has now left us but she deserves a rest and is most definite that she really means it this time. Thank you to everyone who contributed to Jan's farewell do and to her collection and book of memories. We were able to give her vouchers towards her summerhouse where she will be able to sit and look at all the lovely messages and pictures.

We had a lovely Princesses and Pirates Party at the end of term to say good bye and good luck at big school to: Oliver Conway, Marcus Berridge, Thomas Giles, Grace O'Gorman, Luke Webb, Jamie Wright, Ben Walwyn, Joshua Norman and Sabine Kimball, all from Beckley: Arabella Burns and Archie Duffy-Murphy, Stanton St John: Abigail Hobbins, Forest Hill; Alex Marsden, Sandhills; Imogen Ault and Felix Hunt, Islip; Issy Lange, Poppy Priestley and Isaac Weston, Horton-cum-Studley.

We will have a lovely small group of children for fun and learning in September. Please look at our website: **[www.janweller-pre-school.org.uk](http://www.janweller-pre-school.org.uk)** to see what we have to offer or ring **Hazel on 01865 358076** school term-time mornings for further information.

## **FROM LITTLE ACORNS DO MIGHTY OAK TREES GROW**

Beckley playgroup was started in 1976 by Jan Weller in her own house and consisted of only 3 children - Martha Lane-Fox, Harriet Lockhart-Smith and Richard Weller. It soon proved very popular in the village and neighbouring area but space was always a problem, moving constantly from Manor House to High Corner House and then to the old WI Room.

In 1981 due to the merging of Beckley and Stanton Schools, a room became vacant at Stanton School. The parents then decided as a tribute and thanks to Jan to rename this playgroup which is run as a registered charity 'The Jan Weller Pre-school'. Jan retired a few years later due to family commitments but was encouraged to rejoin the staff as a valuable member.

In 1978, Jan, along with a few friends began the Beckley School Playlink. This introduced the children about to start school to their new teacher. By meeting once a week for half a term the transition from pre-school to school was made much less daunting. Jan was also one of the first in Oxfordshire to establish an After School Care Club in Beckley School. She can recall many schools contacting her on how to run such a scheme. These days they are very popular. Both Playlink and the A.S. Club are still flourishing at Beckley School.

Jan became a registered child carer and it has been known that if any family was experiencing any troubles a welcome room was found in Jan and Fred's home.

Jan retired this July after a severe case of shingles and points out that she really means it this time - after 33 years of child care, a line has been drawn, although with seven grandchildren she will still be kept active. The retirement party Jan was given was a very happy occasion with over 200 people attending. The sun certainly did shine that day. Jan was given a very special memory book of photos and tributes some of which are quoted here to give a flavour:

'The Pre-School has provided a great service to the local community over many years. We would like to take this opportunity to thank you for the many years of dedication and hard work that you have put into the creation of the Pre-school and its day to day running. We would also like you to know that generations of families, staff and committee

members have benefited from your practical input, and the children in particular will cherish the many happy memories you have provided them in their formative year.'

'Thank you for all you have done for local children over the last 3 decades. Our community would be much poorer without a pre-school playgroup.'

'Jan, you were one of the first people we met when we moved up here from the New Forest. You made us feel so welcome that we knew we'd moved to the right place. I feel privileged that you took care of all 3 of our children'

'Thank you Jan for the phone calls to our children the evening before they started school, and our Easter chicks, you are a very special lady.'

'We loved playgroup so much that we came all the way from Indonesia every year!'

Finally from Louisa Lane-Fox without whose encouragement and initial support this playgroup would not have started: 'From the moment I met Jan, when we moved to Beckley in 1974 it was clear to me that here was a woman with a truly exceptional gift with children. She could settle and delight the most exhaustingly demanding child (Martha), boost the confidence of the shyest, stimulate and control the most energetic (Richard and Henry) and make each one of them feel as if they were the focus of her exclusive attention. I never remember Jan being irritable, tired or fed up. She set a standard for me in child care that I have never seen equalled. I am very pleased to have this opportunity to celebrate her life's work and extremely proud to have had a small part in encouraging her to do what she has done so well for so many years.'

Finally a word from Jan: 'I would like to thank parents, friends old and new, staff and committee members for my Retirement Party and gifts. It was a most memorable day that I will cherish forever. Thank you for letting me share your children.'

## **DONNA DICKENSON:LEST WE FORGET**

One of the many outstanding people who call Beckley home is professor and author Donna Dickenson. Born in the US, but moving to the UK in the early 1970s, Donna is a contributing and vital member of both the local and world-wide community, maintaining a schedule that crosses borders and disciplines regularly.

When funds needed to be raised for basic repairs to the village church, Donna joined the committee. Would a Book Club help residents get together for sociability as well as the chance to exchange ideas and insights? Donna helped form one. Beckley's Open Gardens Day helps raise funds for church maintenance and helps promote village camaraderie. Donna and Chris's garden is always one of those open for view. Carol-singing is a part of what makes up the Beckley community. Donna and husband Chris are regular participants.

Contribution to village projects and activities is but a small part of what makes Donna special and unique, however. Donna, Professor Emerita at Birkbeck, University of London, is a world resource on medical ethics, and in addition to being in the middle of authoring her twenty-first book, she travels regularly to seminars and symposiums around the world to chair and lecture on subjects many of us glide over and fail to address.

What is medical science now capable of doing – and what is it about to achieve – and what are the ethics involved in all the questions such achievements create? Is it a field that should be left to the free market of science, or is it something that needs to be addressed, and thought out, and legislated by people and their governments across the world?

How did one woman, born to young parents in New Haven, Connecticut, come to make her home in Oxford, and have a voice which is heard around the world?

Donna's father was twenty-one and recently discharged from the US Navy when Donna was born. Diagnosed with Hodgkin's Disease, he opted to attend art school under the GI Bill, where he met and married Donna's mother. Shortly thereafter Donna was born, and shortly after that her father died at the age of twenty-five. There followed turbulent years in which Donna remembers the support both sets of grandparents gave the young widow and her daughter, culminating with Donna spending many of her youth with her grandparents.

At the age of sixteen, Donna entered Wellesley College in Massachusetts, where she earned a degree in Political Science and Philosophy, followed by a Masters in International Relations at The London School of Economics. At the LSE she met and married her first husband, and after graduation, both returned to academic life in the US, until 1973 when her husband was offered a position at the University of Warwick and Donna began teaching political science at the Open University. In 1974 son Anders was born, followed by daughter Kirsten in 1977.

During this time the family lived first in Leamington Spa and then in a village near Shipston on Stour,

followed by Oxford, where her children spent their school years. During this time, Donna authored and published two books of critical feminist biography – one on Emily Dickinson and another on George Sand. While teaching at the Open University, Donna pursued her PhD under the supervision of Professor Alan Ryan of New College, Oxford, on medical ethics and political philosophy. Her marriage broke up, and Donna and her ex-husband both continued living in Oxford so that the children were able to grow up having both parents close by. In 1983 Donna met the professional musician Chris Britton and in 1990 Donna and Chris married in Oxford's Quaker Meeting House. In 1991 Donna's thesis was published as the book *Moral Luck in Medical Ethics and Practical Politics*. In 1993 Donna and Chris moved to Beckley.

In 1994 Donna's promotion to Senior Lecturer at Open University entailed further regular commutes to the campus in Milton Keynes, where she had been chairing a course on Death and Dying since 1990, raising awareness of the hospice movement, and seeking consensus on care of the dying, mentally ill, and children. She also began chairing European Commission projects in medical ethics and women's issues. In 1997 she became Reader in Medical Ethics at Imperial College School of Medicine, London. In 2001 she moved to the John Ferguson Chair in Global Ethics at the University of Birmingham. In 2004 she decided to devote more time to writing and moved to a half-time professorship in Medical Ethics and Humanities at Birkbeck, University of London.

Publication of *Body Shopping* (by Oneworld) in 2008 led to Donna's appearance at both the Oxford and Edinburgh Literary Festivals, plus interviews on BBC Radio 3, 4, and 5. She has been on BBC 4's Women's Hour six or seven times, as science keeps inventing, and questions keep arising on the whole area of medical ethics – unprecedented commercialization of the human body, not just body parts, but things that people don't know that affect us every day.

The fact that one in five human genes is the subject of patenting, eliminating competition which might reduce the price of some drugs, is just one of many examples. Likewise for the BRCA1 gene in some forms of breast cancer, patients in the USA must pay \$3000 to a private firm to have themselves tested, since another company owns a monopoly on the gene.

Despite all the ramifications, *Body Shopping* is not pessimistic. Communal interests can and should be defended against private gain, according to Donna, who espouses a counsel not of despair, but awareness.

Asked her hobbies, Donna lists choral singing, walking, cycling, travel, cross-country skiing, reading, and gardening.