

The Letcombe Register



Issue 186

February 2021

VILLAGE DIARY

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1  Garden waste currently suspended check updates	2	3 <i>Book Buffs 8pm Zoom - for code click here</i>	4	5	6 <i>Junior only Tennis Coaching 10am check</i>	7 <i>Holy Communion 10am on Zoom for code click here</i>
8  Garden waste currently suspended check updates	9	10	11	12	13 <i>Junior only Tennis Coaching 10am check</i>	14 <i>Communion 8am on Zoom Family Worship 10am on Zoom for code click here</i>
15  Garden waste currently suspended check updates	16	17 <i>Communion 11am on Zoom for code click here Gardening Club 7.30pm on Zoom code for paid up members only</i>	18	19	20 <i>Junior only Tennis Coaching 10am check</i>	21 <i>Holy Communion 10am on Zoom for code click here</i>
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* Most Events shown in the Calendar must be booked in advance, and could, currently, be changed at short notice. Please check the details before attending.

Past Registers are available to view, along with much more information, on the Village Website: www.letcomberegisp.org

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO RECEIVE UPDATES ON LOCAL ISSUES, THE COBRA BULLETIN AND THE LETCOMBE REGISTER, DELIVERED DIRECT TO YOUR INBOX, PLEASE CONTACT THE PARISH CLERK: LETREGISPC@GMAIL.COM

To submit items email: Register@oldstableyard.co.uk
(They will generally appear in the order they were received.)



Message from the Parish Council

The PC met on 18 January, 2021, and can confirm that the Parish precept for 2021-22 will remain the same as last year with no uplift.

We are aware of ongoing issues with flooding in parts of the village and we remain in discussion with Oxfordshire to try to find a resolution. Much of the problem relates to blocked drains which means the water is forced to remain on the surface and then run to the lowest levels. Our County Councillor Yvonne Constance, who was in attendance at our meeting, was fully apprised of the situation and we are hopeful can help provide clarity on the maintenance regime. In the meantime please take extra care when driving or walking during and after wet weather.

The newly introduced signage in the village does seem to have lessened the heavy traffic, especially on the Court Hill and Windmill Hill routes. Residents in these areas have already confirmed that they have noticed a positive impact. Speeding does still occur though and we will continue to monitor this.

On to Green Lane – we are very grateful to Cllr Yvonne Constance who arranged for the replacement of the concrete blocks which have been sited on the openings on either end of the lane. From our observations and those of our District Councillor Paul Barrow, there appears to have been no access for 4x4's off Windmill Hill. Sadly this is not the case from the other end of the lane. We would ask that if you do see any motor vehicles using the land please do not challenge the drivers but take a note of any registration and report to the police by calling 101.

Sadly despite the best efforts of the PC the consultation offer of an improved internet supply to be provided by Airband has failed to materialise. However we were advised by County Councillor Yvonne Constance that the County have a new Transport and Connectivity Strategy which, amongst other things, will aim to address the poor Digital Broadband in areas such as ours across the county.

The Letcombe Brook and its tributaries provided our village with a unique environment, and we are pleased to be able to support the Charity which protects and cares for it. Elsewhere in the Register you will find a full and very interesting report, which shows the work being done to keep this rare habitat safe. Indeed its beauty has been discovered by the many who have come walking to the village during this lockdown. We are aware that the numbers enjoying our environment have increased significantly and we are in contact with our PCSO to try to ensure we do not become overwhelmed.

The PC Emergency Plan has now been updated and approved and placed on the PC Website. The PC has put together an emergency 'toolkit', including two sets of Walkie Talkies, a dedicated mobile phone, and a number of orange Hi Viz jackets, ready for use should the need arise. Thanks again to all those who have volunteered to be available with their 4x4's.

For those regular users of the Millennium Green, you will have noticed that there are several trees adjacent to the road which are unsafe, and are also interfering with overhead cables. The PC has engaged a specialist contractor to remove these and we will inform you of any dates once they are known, as there will inevitably be a temporary disturbance in the area.

The next PC meeting, held on Zoom, is scheduled for Monday 15 March, 8pm. You are all welcome to attend, just let the Parish Clerk know and the invitation will be sent to you.

Finally, the PC is very grateful to all of you who are contributing to the wellbeing of our community in many ways, no matter how small, to ensure we all remain safe.

THANK YOU.

Jeanne Lapsley
Chairman
Letcombe Regis Parish Council.



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200 Club results

200 Club Draw — No 11		February 2021
86	Catriona GALBRAITH	£50
213	David GOODCHILD	£25
188	Tony PRIOR	£15
216	Denley & Gill GWALCHMAI	£10
119	Angela WILDE	£5
Special Draw:		
120	Martyn REED	£25
47	John HOWARD	£20
87	Margaret BOWRA	£10
170	Sue WAKELING	£10
63	Des WILLIAMS	£10
142	Yvette & Alistair STANDRING	£10
66	Mick & Sue DARBY	£10
No New Numbers left to draw		



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Sophie Sayer, Specialist Teacher, Dip SpLD

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COMPUTER PROBLEMS? CONVERSION TO WINDOWS 10?

A locally-based service (from Letcombe Bassett) has been helping people here for the last 15 years

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Thank You



To all the parishioners of Regis/Bassett, I would very much like to thank everyone for their Kindness, Thoughtfulness, Generosity, on the run up to Christmas and New Year, all of which is very much appreciated. I sincerely hope this year turns out to be a much better year for everyone as the months roll by. Kindest Regards, Paul.

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LETCOMBE REGIS RECREATION GROUND AND VILLAGE HALL

'200 Club'

23rd Season – commences April 2021

The Letcombe Regis Recreation Ground and Village Hall Management Trust '200 Club' is about to enter its 23rd year. The 200 Club is a key means by which the Trust raises funds for investment in and maintenance of the Recreation Ground and Village Hall. Some £95,000 has been raised over the past 22 years. About £42,000 of this has been won in prizes and £53,000 passed to the Recreation Ground and Village Hall Management Trust. Money raised in this way constitutes important 'locally raised' funds, evidence of which is essential for many competitive grant applications.

For those who haven't yet participated in the scheme, the Club sells numbers, each costing £24 per year. Approximately half the money received goes to supporting the Village Hall and Recreation Ground. The other half of the money is given out in prizes – typically five per month ranging from £5 to £50 with a top prize of £100 at Christmas. In addition there are two other monthly draws, details of which are given below. The amount of money available for prizes depends, of course, on how many numbers are sold. The result of each draw is posted on the Village Notice Board near The Greyhound. The Letcombe Register also contains a list of the winners each month. During the 22nd Season, 224 numbers were sold raising £5,376 of which £2,620 was given out in prize money. Since 2017, the money received has been ring fenced for improvements to the Children's Play Area, and in 2020 £3,000 was added to this fund.

This year, as a result of both the Covid-19 pandemic and the Nationwide Building Society closing down accounts of the type used until now for the 200 Club, there are new bank account details to receive payment. It will be preferable if you could make a Bank Transfer payment into the Barclays Bank account with the below details:

Account Name: **Letcombe Regis Recreation Ground and Village Hall**
Sort Code: **20-84-58**
Account No: **93353486**
Reference: ***Your name/surname***

Payment can still be made by cheque or cash directly to Ian Taylor, if you are unable to pay by Bank Transfer. Cheques to be made out to "**Letcombe Regis Village Hall**"

If you have received the letter via email/electronically, then if possible, please complete and return the slip below. Alternatively, contact Ian Taylor who can provide a slip to be filled out, or can fill it out on your behalf. You will then receive a receipt and confirmation of your number(s). Note you can purchase as many numbers as you wish and you don't have to live in Letcombe Regis to become a member. Anyone joining part way through the season simply pays for the remaining months.

If you'd like further information, please contact:

Ian Taylor, 200 Club Treasurer, Tara, Warborough Road, Letcombe Regis.

Tel: 764677

letcomberegis200club@gmail.com

Christmas Draw

The December draw will have the normal monthly prizes. In addition to the £100 prize in the main draw, there will be a £50 prize in the Special Draw and a £25 prize in the New Numbers draw. All the special prizes will be **limited to those who pay the full £24 to join for the whole season.**

Special Draw

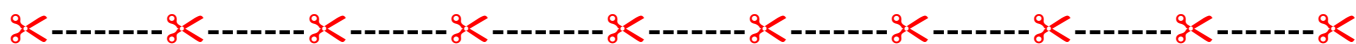
Prizes will be given every month for those who did not win in the 2020-21 season. You must, of course, have bought a number for the whole of the 2020-21 season.

'New numbers' Draw

If you have not been a member of the 200 Club previously, or if you buy an additional number, you qualify for the 'new numbers' draw. This is also limited to those who pay the full £24 for the whole season.

Note. If a winner has left the area and cannot be traced, the money will be regarded as a donation to the 200 Club funds at the end of the season.

Please either print off the below slip, fill it out and return it to Ian Taylor, or ask for a slip to be filled out on your behalf if you have paid, or plan to pay via online banking.



Letcombe Regis Recreation Ground and Village Hall '200 Club'

Please allocate me/us _____ numbers in the '200 Club' (April 2021 – March 2022)

Name(s): _____

Address: _____

Tel No: _____ (or preferred method of contact. All information is only kept for the purposes of administering the 200 Club. It will be stored securely and not shared with any 3rd parties)

I enclose £ _____ (£24 per number)

Account Name: **Letcombe Regis Recreation Ground and Village Hall**

Sort Code: **20-84-58**

Account No: **93353486**

Reference: **Your name/surname**

Payment Method - please indicate your method of payment [ONLINE / CASH / CHEQUE]

Return ASAP to Ian Taylor, 200 Club Treasurer, Tara, Warborough Road, Letcombe Regis

For Treasurer's use only:

ONLINE / CASH / CHEQUE

*Thank you for supporting the 200 Club in its 23rd season (April 2021 – March 2022).
Your numbers are:*



The Letcombes Conservation Group

The link between the natural world and human activity is often stark. Following 2005, dubbed 'the year of bird flu' when the H5N1 strain spread across poultry and migrating wild bird populations in Asia, Russia and eastern Europe, the WHO named avian influenza as the number one global health concern. At the time 142 humans were known to be infected and an equal number of poultry workers were found to be carrying antibodies for the virus strain though they were asymptomatic. Sound familiar? The threat of a future human pandemic, shortly after the 2003 SARS experience, led to greater accountability by local health authorities to the WHO Influenza Surveillance Network and also to funding increases for laboratories analysing new isolates of influenza viruses and for research into rapid production of effective vaccine manufacture for virus mutant combinations.

The Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) is the UK executive agency, sponsored by DEFRA and the Welsh and Scottish Governments, which aims to safeguard animal and plant health for the benefit of people, the environment and the economy. APHA conducts an ongoing routine surveillance for avian influenza in wild birds compiled from reports by wild bird reserve wardens and from information from members of the public on 'found-dead' wild birds. The first 2020 positive tests of avian flu in wild birds in the UK were recorded in November for a Greylag goose and a Canada goose in Gloucestershire. The virus had not been detected in the UK's wild bird population since mid-April 2018, but late 2020 then saw 277 recorded cases, the majority in species of swans and geese with a very low numbers in other waterfowl (a Shelduck, a Widgeon, a Little Grebe and a Great White Egret) as well as in birds of prey (four Buzzards, a Kestrel, a Peregrine falcon and a Sparrowhawk). There was only one record from Oxfordshire of a Black-backed gull at the end of November. Available positive records for Week 1, January 2021 are one Pink footed goose in Lancashire, a Canada goose in County Durham, a Mute swan in the Western Isles and a Mute swan in Warwickshire. Members of the public are asked to report dead wild birds to the DEFRA helpline on 03459 33 55 77 (option 7), and bird keepers should report suspicion of disease to APHA on 03000 200 301. Avian flu is not connected to SARS-CoV-2 virus, but it is APHA scientists who have advised owners of dogs, cats and ferrets to avoid close contact with pets if self-isolating due to possible or positive Covid-19 to protect against the possibility of infected humans passing on the virus to pets. Evidence suggests that Covid-19 virus does not easily pass between cats or most other pets, but this transmission cannot be ruled out.



Hopefully the current pandemic will be a distant memory at some future date, but the interaction between human activity and climate warming will continue unless we all commit to rapid changes in energy use. Recent data confirms the past decade as the warmest on record, [see 2020 ends earth's warmest 10 years on record - Met Office](#). Many have been buoyed up during the past months by wildlife documentaries, including those on species such as the majestic polar bears of the Arctic whose habitat is threatened by sea ice loss. To end on a positive note, the Earth is a globally interconnected planet and it is not too late for actions here to help to reverse the situation. Why not use International Polar Bear Day on February 27th to find out more about this mammal and how our actions can help their survival, [see International Polar Bear Day](#) - Polar Bears International.



(Photo credit: Linda Rawlings, Churchill, Canada.)



Take a look at some of our work during the last year, including some of the [funded projects](#), [volunteering activities](#), [fundraising](#), [wildlife highlights](#), and looking at [the year ahead](#).

Funded Projects

LBP were successful in securing funding from the Environment Agency's WEIF (Water Environment Improvement Fund) for 2 projects. Funding paid for the Lower Mill Fish Pass which has now been completed and improves fish passage along the Letcombe Brook as well as creating some excellent habitat and improving water conveyance.

Funding for the 'Love the Letcombe Project' has enabled us to carry out habitat improvement works at several sections along the brook. We have focused on pollarding bankside trees to allow more light to reach the brook and its banks which will encourage riparian habitat recovery which will in turn support water vole, brown trout and aquatic invertebrate populations.

Volunteering Activities

Activities have been heavily impacted by Covid and fewer work parties took place this year for that reason. Riverfly monitoring was also reduced and no events were held since the Volunteer thank you event in February. We did manage to hold some work parties including habitat improvement work at Letcombe (Millennium Green), Wantage (Limborough Rd and Willow Walk) Grove (Grove Green, Mably Way, Kingfishers) and East Hanney (Poughley Farm). Huge thanks to all those volunteers that come out in all weather to help us look after the brook!

Many thanks to the youngsters that are continuing with river wardening surveys as part of their Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme activities.

Fundraising

In what has been a tough year LBP have managed to secure some additional funding which is great news. Aside from the EA funding mentioned above, Lesley has been able to secure funds from several private Trusts. This money can be used for additional project work and to purchase equipment for our volunteers. We also secured Section 106 funding for interpretation at Letcombe Regis and Councillor Priority Funding for improvement work at Willow Walk in Wantage.

Wildlife Highlights

I don't need to tell you that 2020 has been a strange year but as far as the wildlife on Letcombe Brook goes, it seems to have been a pretty good year. The brook is such a rare habitat and supports some quite rare and specialised species a few of which are mentioned below.

Water voles

Water voles are still classed as Britain's fastest declining mammal but seem to be doing OK on the brook. The population is surveyed every 3 years as part of BBOWT's Water Vole Recovery Project and was due to be carried out this year but was cancelled, like many other things, due to Covid. I found time to get out though and do some ad-hoc surveying and the populations at Grove Green and Mary Green in Grove and Limborough Rd, Wantage seem to be doing well. I



managed to get some photos and video which was posted on Facebook and received lots of positive reaction. The only downside was the amount of disturbance at Grove Green particularly with lots of dogs in the water. One adult vole was found dead with what looked like a clear dog bite.

Vole activity was also identified at Willow Grange and Willow Walk in Wantage, Mably Way, Grove Bridge and the area downstream of Grove towards Williams F1 as well as at East Hanney downstream of the iron bridge. There is still a notable lack of voles in the Letcombes but one was spotted just upstream of the BBOWT reserve so fingers crossed

that 2021 might see them recolonise that BBOWT reserve where there is some great habitat for them. We continue to monitor the brook for mink and some footprints were found in East Hanney during October so we will continue to do so.

Otter

Following the sad death of a mature male otter on the road at Grove in late 2019, we were very excited to learn a new male had arrived on the patch by the start of 2020. We were even more excited in the spring to hear we had a female with 2 cubs



Otter Prints at Mably Way

using the brook, the first time we have been aware of cubs. Thanks to the riparian owner that alerted us to this fact and provided some wonderful video footage of the mother and cubs. By late 2020 the cubs seemed to be travelling solo and may well be driven from the territory by any resident male. During the year otter activity has been recorded along the full length of the brook and a few people have been lucky enough to get a brief glimpse with 3 sightings in the evening in the Wantage Mill/Betjeman Park stretch.

A few people have raised concerns about otters eating all the fish but this isn't really an issue in a natural system like the Letcombe Brook. They will of course catch and eat some fish but also eat the signal crayfish, eggs, birds, frogs and anything else they can catch. Otters can be a problem in over stocked commercial fishing lakes as they act like honey pots and are easy fishing. Wild brown trout in a

small brook are not an easy target. Otters are also territorial, on a small watercourse like the brook, that territory will be very large so any pressure they exert will be spread over a large area.

Birds



Grey Wagtail at Letcombe

Kingfishers also seemed to have a good year with at least one brook raised by a pair in Grove. I believe nesting also took place in Letcombe and East Hanney. Good spots to watch for them include the Cressbeds at Letcombe Bassett, around the lake area at Letcombe Valley Reserve, Grove Green and the iron bridge at East Hanney. Having said that I do see them regularly along most of the brook but it's always a quick glimpse! Please remember they are a fully protected bird and it's illegal to disturb nesting activity. If you do become aware of a nest (situated in a burrow in the bank) please move immediately and carefully away from the area and notify me of its location. The little egret continues to put in appearances along the brook. They seem most active at Letcombe but are now being seen more in Grove and East Hanney.

Grey wagtail is a red list species due to their declining numbers but can also be seen all along the brook. Please keep an eye out for yellow wagtail, a similar species but a summer visitor, much rarer in this part of the country and I am keen to collect records of this species along the brook. Spotted flycatcher are another one to look out for – seen in Letcombe Valley and Willow Walk during 2020 but a rare bird these days.

Reptiles

Grass snake were seen at Letcombe Bassett, Grove Green and down near Wick Farm during 2020. They are great swimmers and can catch fish. Unfortunately, they are still killed as people mistake them for adders, our only poisonous snake. Adders are protected and should never be killed, not that you are likely to see one in Oxfordshire, there are concerns they are now lost to this County which is a great shame.

Common lizard is probably present more often than we realise. Sightings were made in Letcombe Bassett and Grove in the past year but they are another fast declining species. They have no special association to the brook, but the adjoining green corridor provided along its banks is important for many species.

Fish

Brown trout are present all the way along the brook but populations are impacted by the many obstructions present which prevent movement to better spawning areas, mixing of populations and movement away from low-flow areas or pollution. Modification or removal of these obstructions remains a major aim of LBP and the EA.

Other fish present include the bullhead, 3 and 9-spined stickleback, minnow, gudgeon, roach and stone loach. It is hoped that as obstructions are removed and connectivity improved these populations will increase and be joined by chub, dace, perch and perhaps even the odd pike, eel or barbel. Not all stretches of Letcombe Brook are deep enough to support these species but the lower sections certainly are and could provide great spawning habitat for them on the clean gravels and rich water plants present.



Banded Demoiselle male

Dragonflies and Damselflies

I have been excited to find both banded and beautiful demoiselle along the Letcombe Brook this year. Beautiful demoiselle are much more unusual but seem to be spreading. A few were seen in Wantage, Grove and Hanney and are worth looking out for next year. The males are very distinctive, the females much trickier! Please let us know if you see any!

Other species recorded on the Letcombe so far are:

Dragonflies- southern hawker, brown hawker, four-spot chaser, broad bodied chaser, emperor, common darter, ruddy darter.

Damselflies – azure, common blue, large red, blue-tailed, banded demoiselle, beautiful demoiselle

Invasive Species

Himalayan (Indian) Balsam - We continue to remove this along the brook as its an invasive non-native and can lead to erosion of the banks and reductions in native species.

Please do remove any you find or let us know where it is if you are not able or willing. Many thanks to the Hanney volunteers for their many hours of hand-pulling balsam, it is paying dividends!

Mink – please let us know if you see a mink or any footprints with as exact location as possible. We are keen to eradicate mink from the Letcombe Brook so that water voles and birds can continue to recover. Field Studies Council (FSC) produce a great cheap guide to identifying mammal footprints, available online for about £4.



Signal Crayfish – these were first identified in the Wantage section of Letcombe Brook some years ago and the population in Wantage seems to be fairly high. Interestingly upstream and downstream seems to have much less signals, this would appear to indicate that this invasive species was introduced (accidentally or purposefully) to the brook at or near Wantage. No white-clawed (native) crayfish have been identified in the brook since approximately 2009 which is not a surprise. Once signal crayfish are present in a watercourse the native crayfish soon die out due to the crayfish plague carried by signals.

Other species

Bats The brook is an important feeding corridor for several bat species including common and soprano pipistrelle and daubenton's bat. No doubt other species such as brown long-eared, noctule and serotine are also present at times. The high levels of insects emerging from or attracted to the brook are an important food source and some of the larger trees along the brook act as roost sites. Good places to watch bats include the BBOWT reserve at Letcombe, Betjeman Park area and Willow Walk in Wantage and the iron bridge in East Hanney. Its even more fun listening to them with a bat detector!



Water shrew are present on the brook but a very overlooked species and easily missed due to their small size. Do let me know if you spot one. They are very distinctive compared to other shrews with black fur and a silver-grey underside. The picture is of a dead one I found at Willow Walk in Wantage. Predators catch them but often do not eat them as they secrete a foul -smelling liquid from their glands.

Looking Ahead

We will endeavour to return to normal volunteering activities as soon as it's safe to do so. In the meantime, if you are kicking your heels the brook corridor makes a great place to take your exercise walk. Keep an eye out for wildlife and do let us know if you see anything exciting You can help us demonstrate the importance of Letcombe Brook as a wildlife corridor by reporting your wildlife sightings using the iRecord app – its free to download to your smartphone and easy to use.

Please do let us know if you spot a potential problem or something that concerns you such as dead fish or an obstruction in the brook that could cause a flood risk. If you would like to help with some litter picking during your exercise walks do let me know and I can provide you with some equipment.

Continued

2021 may prove to be a tricky year for event but if we get on top of Covid we will try and put on some small-scale events such as guided walks, river dipping or bat walks. We will be supporting BBOWT's Wildlife Discovery day at Letcombe in July if it gets the go-ahead. Keep an eye on the Letcombe Brook Facebook Page, follow us on Twitter and keep an eye on the website for updates.

We will carry on with further tree work as part of the Love the Letcombe Project and hope to be able to get volunteers involved with that later in the year. We will also be carrying out further feasibility studies as part of this funding to assess removal or modification of other obstructions to fish passage.

We hope to take part in the next WaterBlitz survey organised by EarthWatch as we are keen to keep an eye on water quality in the Letcombe Brook and its tributaries.

Finally a huge thank you to all our funders, project partners, trustees, volunteers and riparian owners that enable us to care for this precious natural resource and community asset. You can be sure we are still working as hard as we can to look after our fabulous chalk stream. Thank you, keep in touch, be safe and enjoy the fabulous community green space provided along the brook!

All the best,
Mark Bradfield, Project Officer
www.letcombebrook.org.uk



David Johnston MP

There is no denying that lockdowns are grim and this one is possibly the worst, given it is the longest and we don't yet have a clear idea on the timetable for leaving it. As I write, my phone says the temperature in Didcot is a balmy 4 degrees – which is higher than it has been in recent days and which of course makes it more challenging than the first one was. But I am reasonably confident this will be the last one.

It has been wonderful to see the progress with the vaccine, with over 5.4 million people having already received one at the time of writing, one of the fastest rates of administering it in the world. I volunteered with the Ray Collins Charitable Trust in Wantage earlier in the month, registering patients from the Newbury Street and Church Street practices as they arrived every 3 minutes for their jabs. They were delighted to be receiving them, not least as so many have spent much of the last year inside.

MPs have been advised to stay at home and participate virtually, so that is largely what I have been doing – back to asking questions and giving speeches to a webcam as I was earlier in 2020. However, you have to turn up in person if you are on a Bill Committee, which scrutinises legislation line by line, and I am on the one for the Telecomms Security Bill, which I spoke in favour of a few weeks ago. It's all about how we deal with high-risk companies such as Huawei in our telecoms networks and it is fascinating to hear from experts in the field as part of the process.

Just before Christmas I had my first visit to meet the Letcombe Brook Project. As you can imagine it was not a sunny day but it was still great to meet Mark Bradfield and hear more about the vital work they do there. I am a member of the recently formed Chalk Streams All Party Parliamentary Group and I am pleased I will be able to benefit from the knowledge of Mark and his colleagues. And on the subject of our waterways, the supporters (of which I am one) of my colleague Philip Dunne's bill to tackle sewage pollution of our waters just received the good news that the Government will be supporting the aims of the bill and working with us on how to achieve them.

There was very nice news at the beginning of the year when Andy Baker, the founder of Play2Give, received an MBE for his services to the community. Many of you will know his story, but he has now raised over £250,000 for good causes. I am a patron of his charity and whenever I meet him he has a smile on his face, is optimistic and is full of ideas about new ways to raise money for children and health services. He is a real inspiration.

As ever, if I can help then please get in touch via david.johnston.mp@parliament.uk



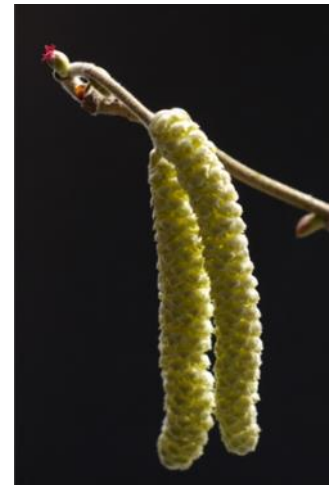
Friends of the Letcombe Valley Community Nature Reserve



Winter aconites and early snowdrops are already adding colour to grassy banks, and patches of primroses seem to have flowered through the winter, but the first tree to come out of dormancy is the hazel (*Corylus avellana*). On each tree the yellow male catkins, like lambs-tails, appear through winter and by mid-February hang in bright yellow clusters next to the small, bud-like female flowers. Inside a female bud are six flowers, each with two crimson styles that project from the bud carrying the red stigma that will catch pollen blown from male catkins on other

hazel trees. This explains why the oval fruits that develop in late summer form in groups of up to four nuts in a woody shell surrounded by a cup of leafy bracts. This native tree was grown on a large scale for nut production until the early twentieth century. Cultivated varieties are still grown in Kent for cob nuts, but now most hazelnuts are imported.

Hazel leaves appear around May arranged alternately on the stem and are rounded, toothed and broadest at the pointed tip similar to English Elm leaves but distinguished by being soft to the touch due to downy hairs on the underside which also cover each leaf stalk. The stems are bendy with smooth, grey-brown bark that peels with age and are often covered in mosses, liverworts and lichen. The trees can grow up to 15 metres and live for around 70 years but may thrive for several hundred years if coppiced. Coppicing provides wood for thatching spars, wall wattle, net stakes, pea/bean poles, fencing/hurdles, baskets, walking sticks and furniture. In the past a hazel rod protected against evil spirits, as well as being used as a wand and for water-divining. In England, hazelnuts were carried as charms and were thought to ward off rheumatism, whilst in Ireland hazel was known as the 'Tree of Knowledge' and a symbol of fertility.



Hazel coppice is now an important management strategy in the conservation of woodland habitats for wildlife. Coppicing every 7 to 15 years lets more light reach the ground so spring flowers like lesser celandine, wood anemones, bluebells, wood sorrels and dog violets flourish. Dog violet is an important food plant for caterpillars of fritillary butterflies which have been seen in the Letcombe area such as Silver-washed fritillaries, Dark Green fritillaries (left) and Marsh fritillaries. Catkins provide pollen for early bees though each grain repels against others and is not sticky so can only be gathered in small loads. Hazel provides shelter for ground-nesting birds, such as the nightingale, yellowhammer and willow warbler while the leaves provide food for the caterpillars of moths which in turn are food for dormice in spring. Hazelnuts are eaten by woodpeckers, nuthatches, wood pigeons, jays and small mammals such as squirrels and dormice.



Hazel is a good species to spot the changing seasons. The Woodland Trust has a survey which the public can contribute towards by reporting observations of dates of key changes in a particular species. The data is used by scientists to track the effect of climate change on wildlife. See [Nature's Calendar - Woodland Trust](#) for more details.

Photographic Club



The Letcombe Photographic Club March subject will be: **'A Close up'**.
The deadline for submission is the 20th of February.

Please send your images (max 2 per resident) as an attachment to stevenikarics@gmail.com

Please use ONE of the following formats for your image - Bitmap (.bmp), JPEG (.jpg, .jpeg), PNG (.png) or your own camera's format.

The January photos can be found on page 14



Not-quite-saint of the month - George Herbert.

In its calendar of Holy Days for each month, the Church of England commemorates not only what might be called “full-blown” saints but also those who have lived lives of exceptional goodness or made a significant contribution to the church and to the world. On January 27th, the calendar lists George Herbert.

Living as he did in the age of Shakespeare and Milton, George Herbert (1593 - 1633) country parson and poet, was bound to be overshadowed by his great contemporaries. Why read Herbert’s poetry when you’ve got *Paradise Lost* or Shakespeare’s sonnets? Anyway, Herbert only wrote a few hymns, didn’t he? Nothing exceptional.

There is a programme on Radio 4 called “Something understood”. It was only when I Googled those words to see where they came from that I found Herbert’s poem “Prayer” and thought there just might be something worth looking at. George Herbert, quiet, modest, C of E country vicar is a literary giant who went on to influence poets such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Emily Dickinson, W H Auden, Gerard Manley Hopkins and T S Eliot, who said of his poetry, “Brilliant. Simply brilliant.”

George Herbert was born on April 3, 1593 in Montgomery, Wales, into one of the oldest and most powerful families in Montgomeryshire. His father, the High Sheriff and Member of Parliament for the county, died when Herbert was only three. His remarkable mother took over the running of the family estate and home schooled all her ten children (despite the lack of any online lessons!) Her tutoring was so successful that Herbert won a scholarship to Trinity College, Cambridge.

As a gifted scholar from a well-connected family, a glittering political career beckoned and he even attracted the attention of King James I. However, he was conscious of a calling to ordination as a priest and he abandoned his political ambitions, settling instead into the quiet country parish of Lower Bemerton, near Salisbury, where the church just happens to be called St Andrew’s.

Here he led an exemplary life ministering to his parish, serving the poor and finding time to write some of our best-loved hymns such as “The God of Love my Shepherd is”; “Teach Me my God and King” and “Let all the World in every Corner Sing”.

But it’s his poetry which is remarkable : complex metaphors, combined with plain-speaking, create haunting imagery. His verse has a wild and unpredictable nature, quite astonishing for the 17th century. Like some modern experimental poetry, it uses rhythms that makes you think that, were he alive today, he’d be a Hip-Hop star. His poems were collected in a volume called “The Temple” which contains the now rather unfortunate subtitle *Sacred Poems and Private Ejaculations*. Charles I took this with him to the scaffold to give him comfort in his final moments.

Softness, and peace, and joy, and love, and bliss,
Exalted manna, gladness of the best,
Heaven in ordinary, man well drest,
The milky way, the bird of Paradise,
Church-bells beyond the stars heard, the soul's blood,
The land of spices; something understood.

“Nature at its best and worst”

The subject for March is - *“A close up”*.



The Shard—Ms Hitchcock

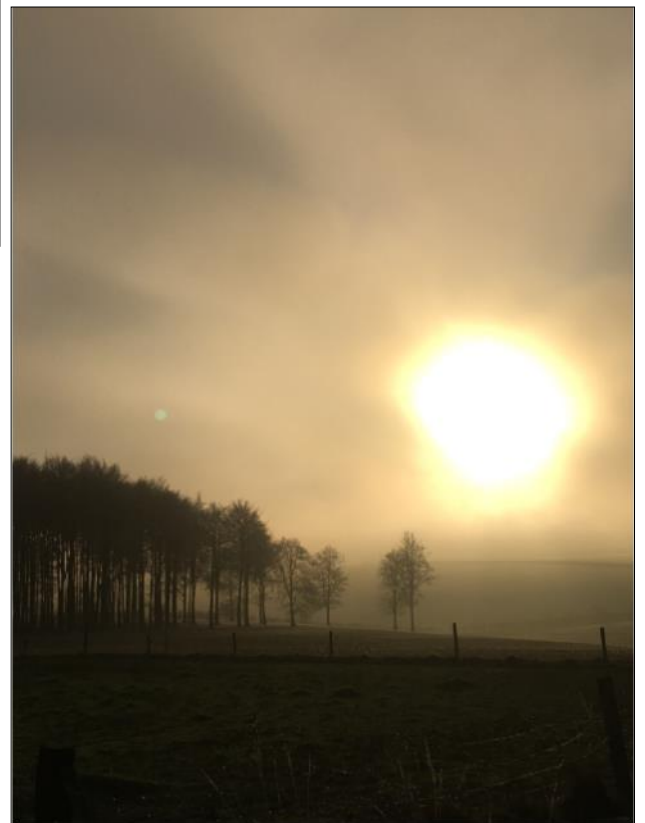
Frosty Morning - Jane Prior

Storm Approaching—Mike Price



Frozen in Time—Ms Hitchcock

Sun though freezing fog - Jane Prior





Issue 186

Letcombes Gardening Club

Topical Tips

February, and the last month of winter! February can often be a difficult month, with gloomy weather, but this year it's made even more difficult by the continued lockdown. There is light at the end of the tunnel though. Snowdrops and aconites are opening up everywhere and we even have the odd primrose flowering in our garden! There are jobs in the garden that you can be getting on with if the weather permits.

Any winter flowering shrubs that have finished flowering can be pruned now and you can also have a go at your wisteria. If you have a conservatory full of plants then any climbers, like bougainvillea, can also be pruned now. If you prune back fuschias and put them in a warm place they should start into growth.

This month is the big 'clematis cutting back' month. You should cut back later flowering clematis, eg. Viticella and texensis types and autumn flowering clematis like tangutica, to a strong bud about 20cm above ground level although here's a little tip. If you don't prune them it does no harm but you get all your growth and flowers near the top so if you have one growing into a tree you can just prune half of it back so that you get flowers both low down and right up into the tree branches!

You can continue tidying in the garden and ornamental grasses can be cut back this month.

Now that your snowdrops are showing themselves above ground and flowering you can divide them so you have an even more extensive show next year!

While you're tidying take a bit of time to inspect any trees you have. Bracket fungi are more visible at this time of year and if the tree is looking rather sickly it may be a good idea to get an expert in for their opinion.

On the fruit and veg front you can start chitting your potatoes this year; I hope you've been saving some egg boxes for this!

If the weather allows you can sow broad beans now. It is sometimes suggested that parsnips are sown this month but if the soil is wet they tend to rot off so you may be advised to leave this task until next month. There is also still time to plant raspberry canes.

Well I think that's all for now. Just remember that the lockdown will eventually come to an end and they do say that gardening is a really good therapy in these hard times so get outside and enjoy!

Gardening Club

The Gardening Club is holding another Zoom meeting this month on Wednesday 17th at 7.30pm. Remember that you can only participate if you're a paid up member of the gardening club. The sub is £10. Contact us if you have let your membership lapse and you would like to join. This month Anthony Powell will be talking to us on '*Scents in the Garden*' and has promised to convey those scents to us 'in a virtual manner' so come along, engage your imagination and be prepared to be 'surrounded by perfume'!



Issue 186

Book Buffs

The next meeting of Book Buffs will be held via Zoom on Wednesday 3rd February at 8pm.

We shall be reviewing 'Lottery' by Patricia Wood. The new library book is 'The Green Road' by Anne Enright which will be delivered to you.

Please return 'Lottery' to the blue box outside Blandy's Barn as soon as possible.

Thank you



Village Hall & Recreation Ground

After the last Village Hall and Recreation ground meeting in November, we were optimistic that 2021 would bring us all an improved situation. All of us know that with the more virulent strain of the virus and increasing numbers of lives being lost, this turned out to not be the case.

Most of us probably know someone, or know of someone who has been affected by the Virus personally, and we still must count ourselves lucky to have open spaces on our doorstep that we can use for our daily exercise.

Whilst the Village Hall and Sports Pavilion remain closed, together with Tennis, Football and Riding off the agenda for the time being, at least the open spaces of the Recreation Ground remain available for use. Please note that if you are using the Childrens Playground, that the Government has issued guidelines on their use, which is available here - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-managing-playgrounds-and-outdoor-gyms/covid-19-guidance-for-managing-playgrounds-and-outdoor-gyms>

The Playground is not (and never has been) supervised, and it is the responsibility of all users to ensure they do so safely, maintain social distancing and minimise any contact with the equipment. You may consider bringing your own wipes or sanitiser, particularly to use on any areas which are likely to be touched. If any readers have any questions on this, then please contact any of the Village Hall and recreation Ground Trustees.

Richard

Chairman, Letcombe Regis Recreation Ground and Village Hall Trust



The Greyhound Inn

We are delighted to share the news with you that The Greyhound Inn has been included in the prestigious Michelin Guide for the 3rd year running. We retained our "Michelin Plate" in the newly published 2021 guide which indicates a consistently good level of cooking. We are missing all our lovely customers and can't wait until we are allowed to reopen again to offer you our hospitality. Please sign up for our mailing list by email on our [web site](#) or follow us on [Facebook](#) for any news.

If you have any questions or requests please drop us a line at info@thegreyhoundletcombe.co.uk.

In the meantime, best wishes to everyone: stay safe and well.

Catriona and Martyn

Francesca Engelmann,
2, The Old Stables,
Letcombe Regis,
OX12 9LD

The views expressed in the Register do not necessarily reflect the view of
Letcombe Regis Parish Council

Deadline for inclusion is the 27th of each month.

Register@oldstableyard.co.uk
01235 769310



After maintaining a sterling service throughout the pandemic, COVID-19 finally caught up with Biffa and there have been last minute changes to collections as a result.

Binzone is an app for your phone that will notify you of any changes and generally advise you which collection week it is. You can find out more from the [VOWH waste collection information](#) site.

To download the app:

- For PC click [here](#).
- For iPhones click [here](#)
- For android click [here](#)

Waste Calendar

February 2021						
Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
Green Recycling Food Waste			Grey Landfill Food Waste			

Vale of Whitehorse Waste collection information
can be found [HERE](#)