

Christmas Newsletter

December 2021

Hello dear friends of Pilsdon

Like many children I loved Christmas but it has become an increasingly difficult time of year as I've grown older. It's the gap between the romantic story and the reality of life for the Holy family that causes me to struggle painfully inside. At the risk of being a spoiler of what might, for some, be a comforting time, perhaps you'll allow me to explain.

Here is the scene, hardly a woman yet but heavily pregnant, she is forced to find shelter to bring her child to birth, .. her husband is in doubt about who the father of the child is, but out of duty stands by her. Having made a tough journey they are refused accommodation suitable for her condition and they find themselves being put in animal quarters by someone who gives them all he has to offer. The baby is born into a world where people are under occupation, disempowered by those with the responsibility of leadership in their own country and who collude with the occupying forces. And we, successive generations of Christians have turned this foundational 'happening' into a story that brings us comfort! How has that happened? Did we not pay attention to the reality and why are we not raging with anger at the particular plight of this vulnerable family and what they represent for us all to see in our present world. The only people who are paying attention are scruffy shepherds whose innocence stops them being caught by overthinking and the Wise folk who discerned, through their contemplative approach to reality, something of importance was to happen and made a long journey to be part of something bigger than themselves.



Sue cutting the anniversary cake



IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT CHRISTMAS THIS YEAR

Our Carol Service will take place on **Sunday 12th December at 6.30pm**, and we are delighted to say that this year we will be joined by the Broad Oak choir. We ask that you contact us to let us know if you would like to come; we will have to limit numbers so drop us an email Pilsdon@pilsdon.org.uk or give us a ring 01308 868308 as soon as you are able. We are asking that everyone has been double vaccinated and tests themselves before coming. Wrap up warm the church will be well ventilated. Unfortunately we will not be able to invite people back to the house afterwards but we will serve mince pies and mulled apple juice in the church after the service.

On **Christmas Day** we will be having our **Barn Service at 11am** and we will be having a **midday Eucharist service on Boxing Day Sunday 26th** —do let us know if you would like to come.

Our dates for wayfarer stays over the festive period will be for Christmas: Friday 24th to Wednesday 29th, and for New Year: Friday 31st through to Tuesday 4th January.

I've realised, of late, the weight of unexpressed anger I have been carrying about and know now some of my heaviness is directly attributable to the held in anger I feel at so many things, ... social injustice, huge inequality due to lack of leadership in our world and the anaemic attempts at taking responsibility for making the changes needed to save our planet. Maybe I'm echoing something for some of you? It's easier to bear now I've made it more conscious.

Percy Smith says it well in his Christmas letter of 1959

'Christianity is too near to life to be evasive. It has bony ribs and joints of realism. Its sinewy arms were trained in carpenter's shop, and those same arms groped and felt about redemptively in the pits and mire of life..... The Incarnation is God's realism, facing all the facts, including the fact that we like the prodigal, are capable of running away and living in a piggery, or, like Judas, of selling the Good in a dirty bargain for thirty pieces of silver.

It is this realism that we want to incarnate. But realism is not an easy achievement. As soon as we dare to dig down below the surface we find strange and uncomfortable facts, like points of honour and unreasonable loyalties, and we can either follow the light, whatever the cost, or walk in the great darkness of self-deception.'

Love came down at Christmas, yes, but so did righteous anger as we can see in many of the scripture passages in the Gospels. Making anger conscious in myself I am less likely to let it spill out on others but to use the inspirational fire inside me to keep going, .. keep going Dear Ones, keep going.

With my love to you all this Christmas, and this blessing which encourages us to live in active hope, Sue

Blessing of Hope

So may we know
the hope
that is not just
for someday
but for this day—
here, now,
in this moment
that opens to us:

hope not made
of wishes
but of substance,

hope made of sinew
and muscle
and bone,

hope that has breath
and a beating heart,
hope that will not

keep quiet
and be polite,

hope that knows
how to holler
when it is called for,

hope that knows
how to sing
when there seems
little cause,

hope that raises us
from the dead—

not someday
but this day,
every day,
again and
again and
again.

Jan Richardson



Welcome to Monkey World

I should have the heading written on the workshop (monkey house) door. Pilsdon runs on monkeys! I see the confusion on your faces, so let me explain.

If someone is given a problem to solve at Pilsdon then that problem becomes the monkey on their shoulder, if they then offload the problem to someone else then it becomes that persons monkey and often the monkey ends up, sometimes after a number of passes at the monkey house (workshop) with me the primate keeper. Often the monkey house is full of various size monkeys even the odd guerrilla (big job). I can hear you saying that a guerrilla is not a monkey, ok that's fine but don't be picky it's only a story and near enough.

Well now we have cleared up the monkey problem which throughout my years here I have never tired of or am any longer amazed at the variation of them that arrive to me but I am now entering Santa's little helper time and I become Head Elf, in fact I am the only elf but I do love a title, and the making of Pilsdon Christmas gifts begins.

This is a time when I can become creative, well I think so, others may not but hey! Using Pilsdon oak and mahogany from old Pilsdon furniture I will make crosses, eggs, egg cups, earrings, and anything else that enters my mad head, oh I forgot to mention mad, it goes with creative.

Anyway, enough of my rambling. I wish you all a merry Christmas and a monkey free New Year.

Eddie

The Warden would like it to be noted that the monkey economy extends beyond the workshop! ☺



Making the harvest loaf was a beautiful group activity



Pilsdon's 63rd Anniversary Celebrations

On the 17th October we were happy to be able to celebrate our anniversary with several of you who have not been able to visit the community over these past months. It was a joy for us to prepare and decorate the church for harvest thanksgiving on that day, to sing, and to share apple juice and anniversary cake with those who came to give thanks for this place with us.

We are only too aware that many of you who were unable to attend will have been praying for us and giving thanks for the life and work of this community that we are all so privileged to have been a part of over the years.

If you would like to watch our preparations and the service from the day then do find it on our Pilsdon Community YouTube channel or follow the link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n9iVPHq6i7U>

You can always keep up to date with our latest news and activities on twitter @pilsdoncomm



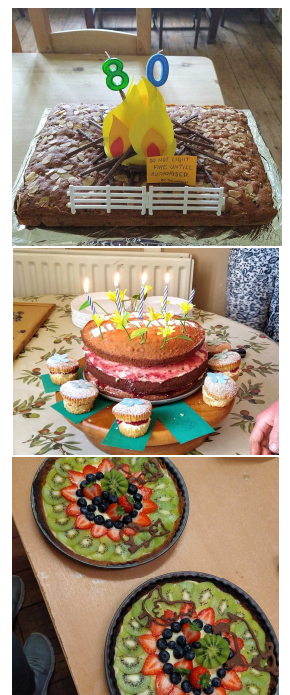
Pilsdon and Cake

Before I came to Pilsdon I had little to no experience cooking or baking, so being introduced to the kitchen through full immersion has been a really exciting and educational experience for me. You learn with the best as a Pilsdon cook, and there's no limit on creativity - in fact, creativity is often a necessity with gluts of garden vegetables to be used up, or donated produce nearing the end of its shelf life.

One of the recurring projects I personally look forward to the most though is making the birthday cakes. In a community this size we never go for long without one, and of course, we try to specialise each one for its recipient. There have been marzipan chickens, chocolate cows, paper flowers, Scrabble tiles, rainbow interiors, cat silhouettes, electrically lit stained glass windows - the list goes on.

Not only are these masterpieces some of the closest possible meetings of food and art, they're also a way to take an individual and pour a few hours' craftsmanship, inspiration, and hard work back into them, as a thank you for their contributions, a celebration of them as a person, and an appreciation of their unique presence in the community. And if there's one thing that doesn't change here, it's that you can never have too much cake.

Craig



Bird notes from Henry

Lots of Blue Tits at the bird table, great tits and sparrows nothing particularly unusual lately.

What was unusual was a red kite about two months ago, it flew directly above the courtyard and soared away on thermals having been mobbed by jackdaws or crows, ... they were too far away to see. It was the first one I'd seen at Pilsdon for about ten years, I got quite excited as I'm always hoping against hope to see one again, they make a nice change from buzzards which are quite commonplace here.

One thing we don't have a shortage of is corvids, that is magpies, jays, jackdaws and crows.

The young green woodpecker that came to our front lawn on a few occasions earlier in the year seems to have disappeared, they come and go.

I have seen a sparrow hawk for a few months, they swoop over the dairy block and take our sparrows who reside in a bush in the duck enclosure. Though I hear the owls through the night I don't see them.

The martins were late this year but there seemed to be more around than last year though they didn't seem to nest here as much. Swifts would now be a rarity at Pilsdon though I still look for them coming.

It was rarity to see flying swans this year, not sure which species they were as they were too far away to identify.

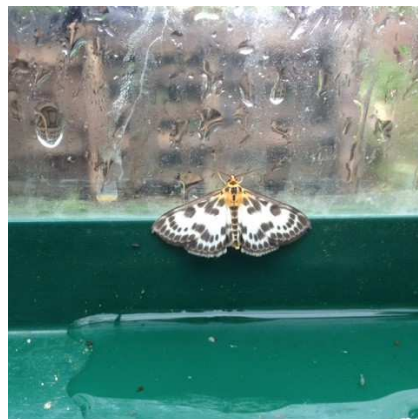
An egret flew over the house the other day. We had a resident moorhen it was eating the chicken feed, but sadly it disappeared when our new hens arrived.

I'm looking forward to a big herring gull coming this winter.

We lived in dread that we would have to contain our chickens due to the progress of bird flu, sadly this is upon us now and we have tented them in their enclosure and moved the ducks to the glasshouse.

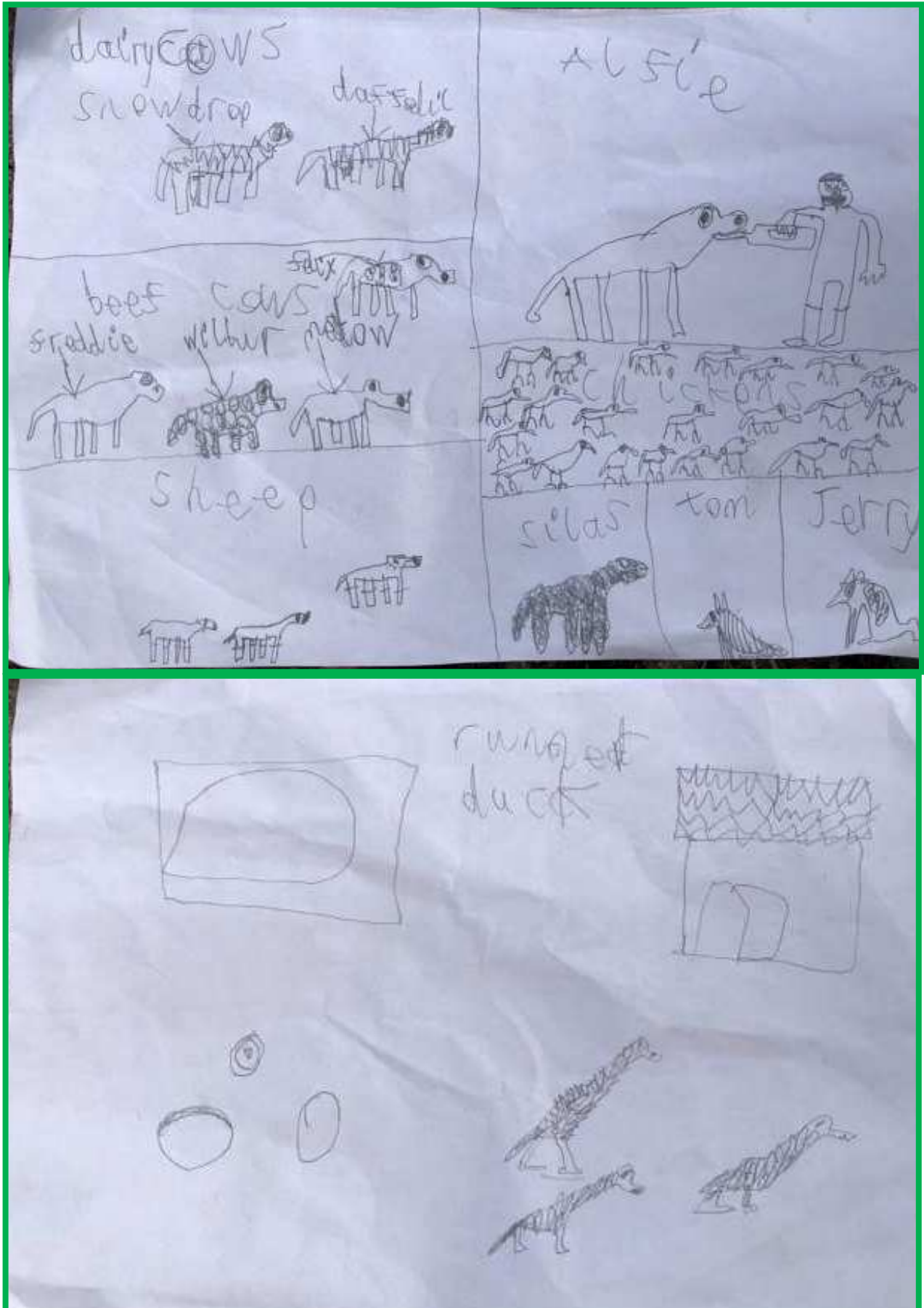
The robins come to the feeder and love sunflower seeds, I see blackbirds but very rarely see thrushes anymore. The numbers and variety of birds has gone down over the years I have been here.

Henry



We spy other things too...a common toad, a small magpie moth, a gate-keeper butterfly...among others





So many of you like to know how are animals are and who we have currently residing in our fields, looseboxes and house. A recent visitor, 8 year old Edward, wanted to draw them all for us. Thank you Edward, we love how you see our animal friends.

Longevity and life in community

I arrived at Pilsdon on Bonfire Night in 2020 so have been here now for a whole year. Whilst last year I just had to introduce myself and enjoy the display, this year I had to move cows out of the field, pen up the sheep, go on a search for fireworks and actually prepare the food rather than just eat it. When I compare to how I felt all those months ago, starting out on another unknown adventure, I couldn't have imagined what immersion in community life would bring. This year has been amazing and I'm so grateful for the ways Pilsdon has taught and changed me.

I've become an expert at knowing which doors creak at night and how to minimise their noise, I've changed my body clock and now consider 6am to be a lie in, I know how to get a good rise on a Yorkshire pudding and what to do with hog pliers. I've developed an ear for the sound of different sheep, what not to put in the compost, and how long I can borrow something before it will be missed. I still however have to master the art of minimising the number of kitchen utensils in preparing a meal, how to outsmart rats which keep evading my traps and when to say no to second helpings, but there's still time to improve.

I was recently listening to a podcast interview with John Day. He's a cardiologist who carried out some research in a remote mountain region of China known as 'Longevity Village'. It is famous for its high proportion of people living over 100 years old and he was keen to discover what it was that they had in common. His study resulted in him identifying 7 principles that promote health, happiness and longevity; inspired by what I heard I thought I'd list them and see how they could be compared to our life at Pilsdon.

The first was *REAL FOOD*. This is a big deal at Pilsdon and probably the most discussed topic. It matters because we all share in meal times and although our preferences vary there is always enough and we know where so much of it comes from. Many of our daily tasks revolve around our responsibilities for the preparation of our food. It bonds us and connects us. It slows us down, helps us appreciate what we have and all that's involved in getting something to reach our plates. Eating is therefore a celebration of all our labour and combined efforts to take care of each other and to nourish ourselves.

The second is *POSITIVE MINDSET*. When interviewed the centenarians surprisingly shared that they were living the best years of their lives. What a remarkable thing to say at a hundred when so many fear getting older and going downhill rather than still climbing. It can't mean that they've been able to protect themselves from the harsh and painful things of life but they're obviously able to appreciate what they have and look forward to each day. Our daily prayers and conversations often focus on this as we encourage each other to be alert and awake, to anticipate the gifts of each day and to notice the beauty around us and the many opportunities that community life brings.

Third – *CONNECTIVITY*. You can't hide at Pilsdon. We are all known but that is so healthy for us. There's a real freedom and invitation to remove our masks and rather than putting our energy into displaying the most impressive image of ourselves, we have the opportunity to be our true selves as we share life together.

Fourth – *BEING PHYSICALLY ACTIVE*. They say one hour at the gym can't make up for the damage that's done from sitting all day and we know that we're designed as humans to stay in motion. There's such a diversity to the daily tasks here and I know I've really benefitted from this. I realise that for the majority of the day I'm on my feet getting a full body workout but it makes sitting in front of the fire with a cuppa on an evening so much more satisfying.





The fifth principle is FINDING RHYTHM. You can't talk about Pilsdon for long before mentioning the word 'rhythm'. We know it's good for us and what's established here has been developed from a long history of like-minded people who know what's good. It can take some getting used to and is often resisted because of its perceived limitation of freedom but there are so many plus points in maintaining a rhythm and a greater freedom to be found in the flow that results.

The sixth is MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR ENVIRONMENT. Pilsdon is such a beautiful place and we have the privilege of seeing it every day and living through the changes that come with each season. Nature speaks for itself but there are other aspects of our environment which are key and this place has

its own unique opportunities to offer which if willing and brave enough we can use to heal and shape us. I just can't tire of the wow factor though of standing on top of the Pen and looking across this stunning landscape.

And the final one is BELONGING and CONTRIBUTING. The sense of purpose and community are inextricably linked. Lots of people have a romantic idea of community and would like to think it's something you could pull off a shelf but we know that in living it out it's so much more than a lifestyle choice. Everyone contributes to our life here and our development whether they recognise it or not but it's such a joy when I see someone finding their feet, when they think of an idea that will benefit someone else, when they light up as they learn new skills and ways to participate. We know that we all depend on each other and wouldn't get far without others doing the things we can't or don't have enough time for. This humbles us but also increases our love for this place and each other.

So who knows if I'll live till I'm a hundred but I'm inspired to think that my later years could be some of my best and it's a real privilege to know that we have the chance to actually live out all those seven principles here at Pilsdon. It may have plenty of challenges at times as we get to discover more about ourselves but it's good to know that this place has all the elements necessary for a rich, healthy life that can enable a bunch of people like us to really thrive.

James

