

Anniversary Newsletter

October 2022

How are you dear Friends of Pilsdon?

Writing between the two main political party conferences I hear my influential grandmother saying, "Fine words butter no parsnips!"

Since our last newsletter we have all experienced momentous change and despite our Queen's great age, monarchists or not, her death causes ripples in the very fabric of our lives. Living out of a faith urging us to hope, we have moments when we wonder how, if we face reality, we can move through apparent chaos creatively.

Knowing many of you are deeply concerned and appalled at the way social justice, basic freedoms, standards in public life have been tossed aside; we contrast this lack of political integrity with the daily workings out of people's lives, where goodness, generosity and care for neighbour remains true, but hardly mentioned in the media.

That it is now unlikely anyone on basic Universal Credit can leave here and live a decent debt free life, is shameful.

The government hopes our King will not 'meddle' in constitutional affairs. Here, many of us hope King Charles will use his extensive knowledge, long experience and significant influence to bring together world leaders, powerful global influencers and invite, indeed expect, them to face up to the environmental crisis.

Could the deeply active hope, in this and other places, be made manifest now?'Cometh the hour cometh the man' we pray.

Events outside and the realities in our personal lives impact everyone in the community; I am reminded of the words of Helen Knott who says, 'Healing has no choice but to ripple out when we are real with each other.' and I give thanks for the sharing that takes place within this community.



A Common Blue butterfly, found on our Butterfly Count



We gathered apples from all across the Marshwood Vale and pressed 922 bottles of juice this year

Helen Knott's quote comes from 'The Myth of Normal' written by the doctor Gabor Mate (someone held in high esteem here) and his son Daniel. Here is the last page in this wise book:

"It all starts with waking up: waking up to what is real and authentic in and around us and what isn't; waking up to who we are and who we are not; waking up to what our bodies are expressing and what our minds are suppressing; waking up to our wounds and our gifts; waking up to what we have believed and what we actually value; waking up to what we will no longer tolerate and what we can now accept; waking up to the myths that blind us and the interconnections that define us; waking up to the past as it has been, the present as it is, and the future as it may yet be; waking up, most especially, to the gap between what our essence calls for and for what 'normal' has demanded of us.

We are blessed with a momentous opportunity. Shedding toxic myths of disconnection from ourselves, from one another, and from the planet, we can bring what is normal and what is natural, bit by bit, closer together. It is the task for the ages: one that can redeem the past, inspire the present, and point to a brighter, healthier future. It is our most daunting challenge and greatest possibility."

Leadership is never about one or a few doing for the rest. Inspiration for change comes out of an up-swelling of feeling that we can all be better if we work together for the overall good. Our late Queen inhabited her role by not being the centre of her world. We offer an invitation in our new handbook to everyone who comes here:

"To live in community is about understanding we are all more than the labels people and professionals have given us. Realising we are not the centre of the world is challenging for all of us and living in community is one of the best ways to help us do this work."

This Sunday's reading from Luke reminds us Christ said we didn't necessarily need more faith, but what matters is we put the little faith we have into practice, to do what is our to do.

My love and blessings, Sue



'A Volunteer Remembers'

Bridport – a town of childhood holidays and many happy memories. My father had a cousin then living in South Street above a baker's shop. The apartment was quite spacious and could easily accommodate us all. The 1950's was a time of scrimping and saving in our family, but we were fortunate that my father had a 'works' car, usually an elderly black Austin 10, that found the hills around Bridport a tiring challenge, especially before the roads were improved for modern traffic.

Our home was in Oakdale, Poole, next to the current rectory for St. George's Church. As I remember, the church supported Pilsdon in some way during the early years so it was not surprising that my parents should want to visit it when staying at Bridport. I'm guessing that I would have been about 12 years old when we first navigated the twisting lanes and eventually arrived at a muddy farmyard. My over-riding memory was of being met by Sidney who suffered from cerebral palsy.



Rosie, one of our beautiful ewes

In those days, people who were 'different' were often institutionalised, becoming almost invisible to the outside world, so it's no wonder that this encounter remained in my memory to the exclusion of much else.

As I grew older, I had little to do with Pilsdon. Our relations moved to Salisbury and eventually I went on to college. Occasionally I would hear that my mum had been on a Mothers Union trip to Pilsdon or that there was some sort of appeal or other news. It was to be a long time, however, before I renewed any significant personal connection. Around 1999/2000, there was an article in the now defunct Sarum Link (Salisbury Diocese newssheet) about an appeal for Pilsdon and this was to be a signpost back for me. So it was that I attended the Pilsdon anniversary day in 2000 and experienced the hospitality that is such an essential part of the community.

This was a difficult time in family life. I had been the head of a small village school for a number of years and had become weary with the pressures of continuous change. A difficult Ofsted inspection was the turning point and in late 2000 I decided to resign. We started exploring various options and spoke to Peter Barnett, the warden then, exploring the possibility of a sort of 'alongside membership' of the community by purchasing a nearby bungalow then up for sale. However, still with the financial dependency of children, this was not to be.

Eventually in 2001 we decided to purchase a village Post Office and once again found ourselves near Pilsdon when we viewed Beaminster P.O. My parents by now were in poor health and we needed accommodation that could include them if necessary, so sadly once again we were not to end up living near Pilsdon. Nevertheless, I continued to keep in touch, if only by attending the anniversary days when I could and receiving the newsletters.

In 2007 we were able to retire and start a new chapter in life and I was able to stay then for short spells as a volunteer at Pilsdon. I have always been more involved with the garden there than anything else although in Jonathan's time as warden, I remember a great emphasis on collecting and sawing up wood for the winter. I continued these occasional weekly stays during Adam's time as warden and also visited the Brook House project in Dorchester several times. When Adam and Teresa left, my residential visits ceased. Looking back, I'm not really sure why, but I guess that life back home had become more demanding as I took on various voluntary roles. I continued with the anniversary visits where possible and enjoyed the newsletter updates. On to 2022; realising how low the membership was, I contacted Sue, who I had known for a number of years, and was kindly invited to come back for residential visits after a break of 10 years.

So, what do I find special about Pilsdon that keeps calling me back? In many ways it's the ethos of acceptance and inclusiveness of so many different personalities and backgrounds and the acknowledgement of our shared humanity in living simply with the land and the animals. When I first heard the Donald Reeves prayer at the breaking of the bread in the Pilsdon Eucharist, it so resonated with me that it felt almost like a homecoming. I am still deeply moved whenever I hear it and, for me, it points to the essence of Pilsdon – the fusion of religious practice and reflection with communal service and living; all the while being open to seeing that of God in everyone. It would be wrong, however, to omit the significance of the sheer beauty of Pilsdon's location and the nurture through nature which that can provide: the sense of peace with little noise of traffic and the night sky with barely any light pollution can offer a degree of healing in this damaged and difficult world.

John Hall (occasional volunteer)





FRIDAY MORNING AT PILSDON

P.G. CRIDLAND
 HIS MARK
 2022

Words of wisdom

As we approach the celebration of Pilsdon's 64th anniversary, we always find re-reading the early newsletters a great source of encouragement. These words were written in October 1959, just one year after the community opened its doors for the first time:

"There is always plenty of work to do, and all the work is part of each person's contribution to the community. No one is paid for it, none of it is done solely for profit, and it is this sense of giving to the community that plays such an important part in our lives. There are many whose loyalty to any community has been spoilt, either by a poor start in life, or by doing something which turns the face of society against them. Yet such people still have the right to be accepted."

"The men and women who share the life of the House do so for widely different reasons, and it would be wrong to write about the hardships which many have been through. We only know that every day we are learning from one another. Again and again the question is asked, "what are your aims?" and we can only reply, "we have no aims except to do the will of God at any particular moment, and often we act under sealed orders, not knowing in any detail what this will is."

"Pilsdon is difficult to write or talk about. It has to be lived in and shared, in order to be understood. Always we want to point back to the way of Little Gidding in the seventeenth century, however much, in practice, we fail to capture the spirit of that community. Again and again we find ourselves saying "Pilsdon is this, but it is also that, a many sided thing." One thing is certain. We are very ordinary people, and our faults and weaknesses do not suddenly disappear because we live here. If we have bad tempers we keep losing them. If we are by nature lazy, we do not suddenly become gluttons for work. It is, however, the constant giving and receiving of forgiveness that, under God, makes life in community possible".

Percy and Gaynor Smith

Living Life in Common - the Story of the Book

When we began volunteering at the Pilsdon Community early in 2018 we had a general sense of the kinds of things we might be doing: helping with cooking and cleaning, working in the garden, assisting in care of the animals and of course spending time talking and interacting with guests. What we did not imagine is that four years later we would have co-written and published a book based on the experiences of a large number of people who have been part of the Pilsdon story since its foundation.

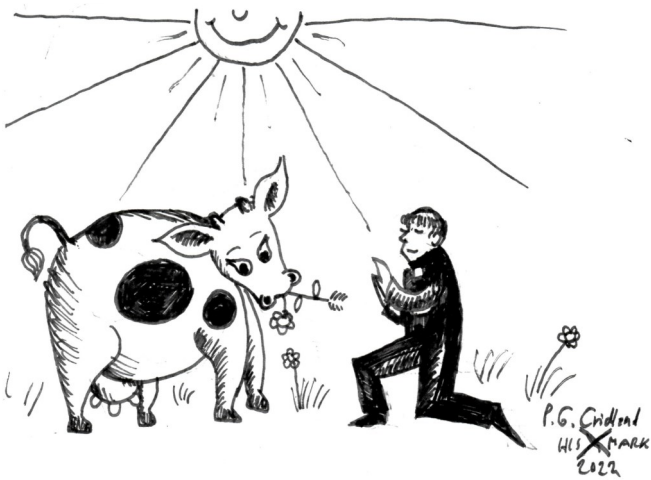
Our arrival at Pilsdon coincided with the start of a project developed by Mary Davies to mark the forthcoming 60th anniversary of the community in October 2018. Mary's idea was to record interviews with people who had known Pilsdon as members, guests, wayfarers, trustees, volunteers or friends and create an oral history of the community; a set of recordings of people talking about their experience of Pilsdon that would be incorporated in creative ways into the anniversary celebration and would eventually be made publicly available in the Dorset Local History Centre.

When Mary first told us about the project we were interested and excited. Although now retired, we both had professional backgrounds as social researchers so that the business of conducting interviews and analysing them to extract useful information was very familiar to us. Mary was equally excited to find two people who shared her enthusiasm for the project and were willing to get involved. Many discussions followed about the best ways to identify potential interviewees, conduct the interviews, analyse them and organise the results. Mary undertook the majority of the interviews herself and we and one or two others did the rest. But with Mary inevitably occupied with the responsibilities of being a member at Pilsdon, most of the subsequent work of organising and interpreting the interview transcripts was done by us. And what that work revealed was an incredibly rich body of material that we felt deserved to be turned into a book.

A good part of the Covid lockdown months, when we were unable to visit Pilsdon, was spent writing. Mary, with support from Sue, was able to find the time to write an inspirational chapter giving her personal view of life as a community member. We then realised that the community's experience of the pandemic as effectively a closed household of 19 people itself needed to be written up, and this provided an appropriate epilogue for the book. We were thrilled when, in February this year, a lorry load of boxes arrived from the publisher and we could see that, at last, *Living Life in Common: Stories from the Pilsdon Community* had become a reality.

Being part of this project not only gave us insights into Pilsdon and what it had meant to people over the years. It also contributed to our sense of the importance of the community, not only for those who are and have been part of it, but as an exemplar of alternative ways of living. In so many ways Pilsdon offers insights into the value of living with others, of accepting the diversity of what it means to be human, and how we can care for the other than human world. Becoming part of the extended Pilsdon community has enriched our lives and has offered hope in times when this can be in short supply in other contexts.

David and Marian



Welcome

We are so delighted to welcome Michelle Jones who joined us as a Residential Volunteer in August. Michelle is an experienced Community Mental Health Nurse, and has worked in New Zealand and in the UK before coming to be with us. As you will see from her ode to our cattle, she has discovered a real affection for the cows. She brings a wonderful energy to the community and loves a digestive biscuit.



At this point in timely fashion

Many timely bows

To the humble cows

To know the peace of these wondrous beasts

With a noble nose for a grassland feast

From the galloping stride

To the nugget mush

To the coaxing sighs and

The rear end push

To the wondrous cows

To the noble cows

Many humbling bows!

Michelle Jones

New Build...a quick update

We asked you to take a leap of faith with us for finding the money to build the new accommodation that we needed for members. You responded wonderfully to the call, and we are almost there with our fundraising; we are so grateful to all of you who have so generously contributed. Hopefully we will have moved in by Christmas. More on that soon...



Pilsdon's Marvellous Meadow

As we continue to wonder how to nurture our land and the creatures and plants that live here with us we have been resisting the urge to keep everything neat and tidy in order to allow their habitats to flourish.

Last year we began by participating in Plant-life's annual No Mow May campaign. By not mowing our lawn and allowing other areas around the community to get a little wilder we wanted to encourage bees, butterflies and other pollinators. For those who enjoy a well ordered garden, it was quite an adjustment. We did the same this year, and carried on allowing the grass to grow throughout the summer. During this time we were able to take part in the Every Flower Counts survey and The Big Butterfly Count in July, as well as setting up a moth trap in various locations around the community. It has been great to see so many people get excited about the variety and abundance of wildlife found right here on our doorstep.



Motivated by the build up of enthusiasm for the scythe through discussions, books and cross-community chit chat we decided to purchase two scythes of our own from Monkton Wyld and have a go at mowing the traditional way. This complements our plan for the church meadow which involves a cycle of growing, cutting, and grazing in order to maintain the rich seedbed of wildflowers. This beautiful display also offers a wonderful habitat for a wide variety of species that we are seeking to protect and learn more about.

Scything turns out to be quite a challenge, as we quickly found out. Not only does it require a significant level of skill, patience, and stamina; it also needs to fit into a wider farm plan of what to do with a large amount of cut grass. Fortunately our hot summer enabled us to dry the grass out so that we could feed some of it to the animals, and store the rest. Hopefully our scything volunteers were not put off by their blisters and will join us once again next year to share in the experience and improve their technique.



James and Mary