

## 65th Anniversary Newsletter

Sept 2023

### **Our Anniversary Service this year will be held on Sunday 15th October—read on for more details**

Dear Friends of Pilsdon

Celebration, Celebration... 65 years of Pilsdon. In this Anniversary newsletter you will hear from people both new and familiar. The hundreds of people who have come for just one night or for many years tell the story of Pilsdon. Their contribution to our book 'Living Life in Common' will have touched and unfolded the threads of your own memories and the book itself has brought new people to the community.

The founding visionaries, Percy and Gaynor and others, many Members, hundreds of volunteers, seven Wardens, supporters and Trustees have woven something of God's kingdom out of prayer, hospitality and work that has stood the test of time. My gratitude for the privilege of being part of this special place chimes with a friend of mine. Rev Lynn Uzans, from Canada, a longstanding friend of the community and sometime residential volunteer, who on her last visit in 2020 made Hazmats and meat loaf, had fun and conversations that lifted our souls.

She writes, in the last days of her life in the beginning of June this year:

*'What I wanted to say to everyone in this very, very special community is that Pilsdon and its people, animals, flora, fauna and general way of being was and will continue to be life changing for me. Nowhere else have I ever felt so much 'me' and yet so connected with the whole cosmos than at Pilsdon. From my first visit to my last (at the beginning of Covid) the place and its people has reminded me it is possible to live the kingdom here and now. And the sense of kingdom living stays with you in other places if you let it. Please let folks know they are on my heart these days.'*

Thank you, Lynn and thank you to everyone who takes the time to share their experience and love for this community. Not easy, undoubtedly challenging, there is always an invitation here at Pilsdon. An invitation to be real, authentic and true, to take the risk of keeping our hearts open and working together to learn how to love, to be fully alive. As St Irenaeus reminds us, 'The glory of God is a human being fully alive.'

One of the pieces of prose we have come to love and often say before morning meetings and at midday prayer expresses something vital about how to live well into the joy of this life:

*Above all, trust in the slow work of God. We are naturally impatient in everything to reach the end without delay. Only God could say what this new spirit gradually forming within us will be. Let's give God the benefit of believing that God's hand is leading us, and accept the anxiety of feeling ourselves in suspense and incomplete.*

Pierre de Chardin

My love and blessing to you all, thank you, thank you, a million times thank you.

**Sue**



### Grateful Hearts

We are thankful for so many things not least your continued support. My personal gratitude to Mary Davies, James Newman and Jane Kilty in our office, who have held this community over these years while we looked and prayed for new members to join us. You will hear from Lisselle, Mary Fry and Nigel in this newsletter.

Thanks too, to our occasional resident and day volunteers Andy Davey, Ianthe Wicks, Dilys Hunt, Marian Barnes and David Prior and Tony and Adrienne Rowe.

For our Chair Amanda Streatfeild and Vice Chair Rev Eddie Howson and Trustees Els Jolly and Tim Lockett for their kindly generosity and myriad ways they have supported us. Being a Trustee at Pilsdon is unusual to say the least, we are blessed with people who have a heart for the 'way of Pilsdon' and go to extraordinary lengths to be of practical help as well as holding governance responsibilities.



### Sue



**Date for your diary:** Our 65th Anniversary will be held at Pilsdon on **15th October 2023**

Let us know if you are coming....01308 868308 or [Pilsdon@pilsdon.org.uk](mailto:Pilsdon@pilsdon.org.uk)

We are delighted the Bishop of Salisbury Rt Rev'd Stephen Lake will be coming to preach and preside at our Anniversary celebrations.

The day begins at 11am for coffee. Service in the Church at Noon. Followed by lunch. After lunch there will be another bell! Do come back to the Church again to hear more of our life and latest news. Then cutting the anniversary cake at tea, do stay if you can.

We know many of you who supported the community in the early years are finding it difficult to visit us now and we are hoping we will be able to offer a live stream of our Eucharist service at noon on our YouTube channel. We'll keep you posted!

### Birdwatching at Pilsdon

Over the last twelve months, there are no shortages of goldfinches on my bird feeder and plenty of sparrows. There are lots of jackdaws and corvids and I wonder if its because there's so much food lying around especially next door on the farm. They roost and fly over Pilsdon in great flocks just after dawn. We have a sparrow hawk that flies elusively around and surprises you by appearing over a hedge to take the sparrows. The most surprising spring visitor I had was a wheatear, normally associated with heathland like at the top of the Pen. We did have some starlings but not as many as in previous years. You hear owls a lot at night I think barn owls, but James saw a tawny owl perched on one of the wires in the court yard. The most surprising 'spot' was a red kite flying about 20 feet above the court yard. A green woodpecker is seen most days on the front lawn eating ants. We have plenty of pheasants and I've seen a red leg partridge around, they are actually quite common. We have a resident buzzard that flies around the field. We had a heron on the pond! I was happy to see a family of tree creepers on the willow tree in the yard. We seem to have a fair number of swallows some of which have nested in the looseboxes. Overall there is less diversity amongst the birds, it has steadily decreased since I have been here. We are experimenting with more sustainable agriculture and horticulture. Please can I encourage you to feed your birds if you can. **Henry**

Hello! My name's Lisselle and I was welcomed as a new member to the Pilsdon at the very beginning of March, this year. It's taken me a while to find Pilsdon, and I spent some months visiting last year and exploring, discerning alongside the community whether it would be a place I could call home. But I was delighted to say the answer was a mutual yes... so here I am!

My last few years have been spent in ordination training (at Trinity College, Bristol) and in curacy (vicar apprenticeship) in the Diocese of Chelmsford, in Essex (my home county). Throughout my time of training, I'd always held onto the sense that, at least for me, living together with others is not only a helpful thing, but also a deeply transformative thing.

It's with that in mind that I arrived at Pilsdon, prepared for lots to be changed in and around me. I came very aware of my lack of experience in communities as large as Pilsdon, aware of my unfamiliarity with rural life, and aware of the limitation of my life experience as a 35 year old - But I also came committed to a journey of growth...

As a child, I remember a period of time where I woke up in the night a lot. I woke with dull aches across my body, particularly aching in legs. It was uncomfortable and I didn't like it at all. I remember calling out to my mum in the night, and learning that the aches were "growing pains". I hurt, I ached and it left me feeling tired it kept me up at night and interrupted my sleep... But my body was just doing what it needed to do, in order to be able to take me into grown up life.

As I live in Pilsdon, in my own journey, surrounded by others who are also deeply committed to their own journey of growth... I'm frequently re-minded that that transformation is often a really uncomfortable thing; at times the sensation can even so uncomfortable, that it feels more like breaking, than anything as constructive, developmental or strengthening as growth!

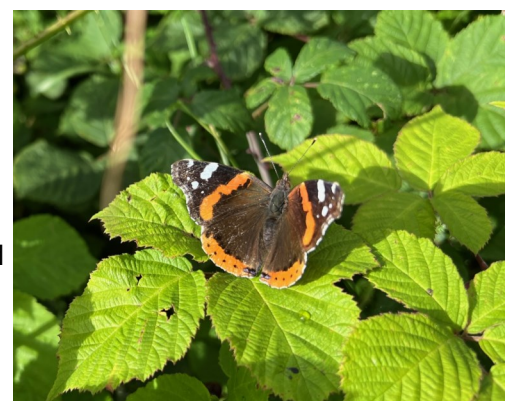
In recent weeks, a few from the community joined in with the national 'Big Butterfly Count'. This required participants to spend a short time outside spotting, identifying and recording the numbers of different species of butterfly, in order to help reflect back an idea of the population.

As I think of those butterflies, as I look at pictures taken by the community... as I look at the shape and colour of each creatures beautiful wings... I think also of the work of that little insect; the strain on it's body as (after waiting and being shaped inside,) it did the incredible work of pushing through the chrysalis wall. I think of the growing pains it would have experienced, I consider the force required to come up from somewhere deep within it, in order to push through the barrier that had once been enough to contain it. I think of the strength required to press on, in order for it to be able to enjoy the new wings that would enable it to inhabit a greater freedom in the world it had formerly only ever known from ground level.

As I think on that beauty and imagine the new freedom God has purposed and planned for me (– for us all!) – that waits just the other side of the chrysalis wall – I am grateful for the gift of this place, the generosity of this community that provides an environment where such growth can happen. I'm grateful for the opportunity I have in being here, warmed by the knowledge that others are growing here too and thankful for the encouragement I find here to work at building the strength needed to persevere, and press through the walls and limitations I came with, (perhaps even become comfortable with?) in order to be able to enjoy greater levels of colour, freedom and life from a new perspective.

So with that I also want to say thank you, to you who (by sharing with us, praying with us, financially supporting us, offering kindness, care and practical support in many ways as well as talking about the work here and inviting others,) are partners, encouragers and enablers of this enormously powerful work of transformation. It's something I benefit from, so that thank you is from me personally – but I also see it others growing and benefitting from it as well – so I extend a wider thank you on behalf of us all!

**Lisselle**



*'Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.'*

Corinthians 4:16-17



I've just been putting together a turkey salad. I haven't quite finished it yet so I've decided to sit down in the quiet of Pilsdon to write this piece for the newsletter. I'd never visited a community before so I was both excited and nervous, when in 2022 we set off for Pilsdon. I need not have worried as we were greeted with a very warm welcome and put at our ease straight away. Sue's big smile did it.

This was the first time I had ever milked a cow or held a lamb, it made me feel so grounded while I was here. At the end of the weeks stay we drove back to Northamptonshire. I couldn't get Pilsdon out of my mind. My husband Nigel and I visited many more times over the year and decided in the end to move in lock stock and barrel.

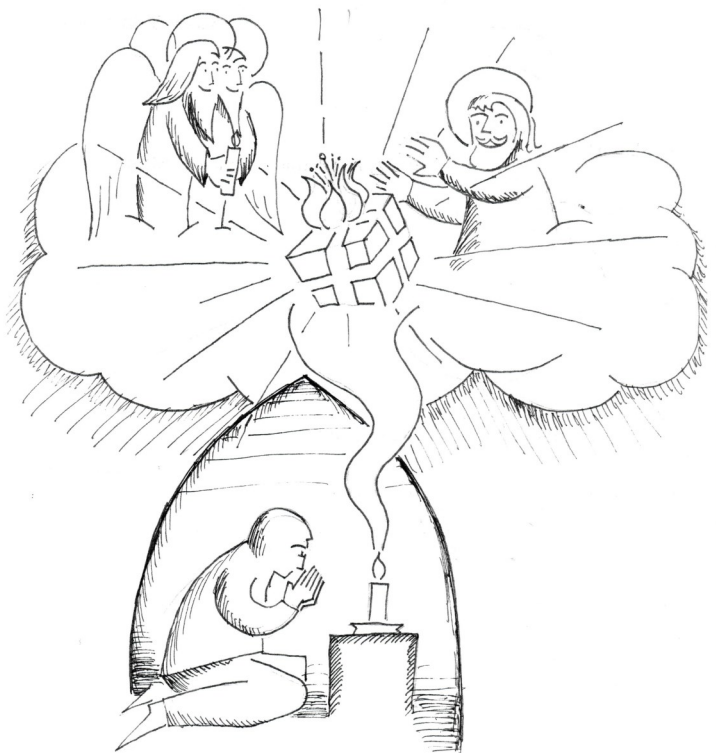
Living here in Pilsdon I get a sense of freedom and peace. There is prayer four times a day that gives rhythm to my day. We all meet in the dining room for meals cooked by guests, members and volunteers here in the community.

I'm learning a lot about the meals we cook with the produce from our very large kitchen garden, which we all help to tend. The cows are milked here and we pasteurise the milk on site ourselves and make butter and yogurt each day from the milk.

Pilsdon is always worth a visit. If you've never been here to feel what it's all about you will always have a warm welcome, a clean room, and good food, and of course good company. Why not give it a try? I'm sure you will find it time well spent. If you've been before why not come back and pay another visit?

I'm now off to midday prayer, after which I'm going to have homemade soup and freshly baked crusty bread.

May God's blessings always be with you.  
**Mary (Fry)**



ANY TIME YOU SAY A PRAYER FOR PAPA IT WILL REACH  
 HIS SOUL LIKE A BEAUTIFUL GIFT



Whoosh. We've been here 2 months already. Where did that time go? Yet Mary and I feel as though we've been here forever. As we drove down on 1st July we had a sudden sense of, 'well this is it, there's no home to go back to; home is where we are going; home is our destination.

It was 18 months before that we'd set out to explore this place called Pilsdon that I had visited 10 years earlier, and said I would take her 'to have a look at'. There was no intention then of moving in. Yet here we are. It was the subsequent visits throughout 2022 that changed our way of thinking; a growing sense of belonging. We went from thinking about visiting now and then, to working stints, to, well if we're going to do it, we should just do it. As I found myself saying to Sue in conversation after lunch one day.

Making the move has entailed a lot of upheaval, a lot of sorting (still in progress), a lot of letting go; a farewell to an established lifestyle, a chipping away at accreted layers of identity, the risk of exposing vulnerabilities, and being farther from family and friends. All in a day's work.

There aren't many times when you move that you can feel settled while still surrounded by boxes and everything being somewhat chaotic. But that's how it's been. I anticipate a little more order, but (so far) I'm happily going with the flow of the fluidity of community life, where getting along with others has a higher priority.

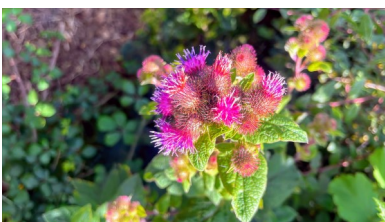
I have a deep sense of everything that's happened in my life coming together here: the good, the bad and the ugly. Somehow all of it is very reassuring. It's given me a lot to reflect on as I immerse myself in the variety of tasks this place offers.

So now we are in the thick of it, enjoying a rural life, the variety of tasks, the 'from the garden to the plate' food, the rhythm of each day, and the opportunity to lead an unplanned fire drill.

Funnily enough, my Mum was from Yeovil which she never ceased from referring to as Home, despite spending two thirds of her life in the Midlands. (She never lost her twang either). Consequently we spent many a summer holiday visiting rellies, having trips to the coast and scrabbling about on Ham Hill. I think she would have approved of our move—and been a little surprised.

It is all grace. Thank you.

**Nigel**



I'm George, I've been saying to myself for years I'll fit in something for the newsletter. My main job is getting logs and kindling wood for the fire, which we do in the common room in the main house every day at 4.30pm from the anniversary onwards until it gets too hot.

I first came to Pilsdon in 1976 when Percy and Gaynor were here. Over the years I have taken responsibility for keep the yard and paths clear of weeds, it's a long job and a bit like the Forth Bridge. I also help serve meals and wash up after supper on a Sunday.

There was a big gap of years before I started making regular visits. I would love and sit and write to you all day but that is another episode in Pilsdon life. I'm 82 now but don't feel a day over 60 all the good food and fresh air has kept me in good shape. So goodbye to you and thank you for listening.

All the very best to you, all my love **George**.







Pilsdon Manor is a fine Jacobean building set in lovely surroundings but it's not the building I wish to describe rather some of the contents and furnishings that make it a home for so many people. The public rooms: the common room, dining room, library and halls. They all receive a fair amount of wear and tear but still manage to look in keeping with the building.

The common room is used for coffee and teas, meetings, games and the celebration of birthdays. It benefited from the massive restoration in the year 2000 funded by the Lottery Fund and public donations. The furnishings are a different story. Many are salvaged or from house clearances, some from previous generations of inhabitants – only two were the result of judicious purchase, the curtains and the carpet.

Both were purchased by a then member Mary Barnett. The carpet is a good one, what is known as an elephant foot design, became popular in the 1950s after an early example of the carpet had been found in a grave dig in Turkmenistan. The carpet costing around £200 was a bargain. The curtains were made by Sue Sollars, that tireless seamstress who did so much skilled needlework for Pilsdon. Another example of her work is the covering of the bench behind the sofa. The bench is in fact the base of a long vanished craft movement wardrobe put to continued good use. Sue can also be thanked for the innumerable small repairs and alterations made on guests shirts and trousers.



The corner dresser may have been in the house for some time. The handles on the drawers themselves date from the time when things Egyptian became fashionable. We got it from the French, think Napoleon's invasion of Egypt, think of the high-waisted Jane Austen heroines about then. The Industrial Revolution made these stamped articles readily available. The nails made in the .... And drawers are blacksmith made, and the moulding is not machine made. It could have been made locally. This is of course conjecture, but according to the 1841 Tithe apportionment map, Bill's Cottage was occupied by one Daniel Welsh, carpenter, along with two apprentices. It's simple construction would have been easy for such a man. The late date for the fashion can be explained. We're out in the sticks.

The two coffee tables have a more humble origin, they are modern, most likely "acquired" but the hideous orange, black and red tiles replaced by plain green ones to match the then ceiling.

Other rooms to follow. **Trevor**





## Our Swiss friends

'We can't think our way into a new way of living, we have to live ourselves into a new way of thinking.' - Parker Palmer

Maude first found herself at Pilsdon in 2015. Since she has been some 8 times; holidays are given over to coming to Pilsdon out of a deep desire to share in the life here. However, Maude's home is Switzerland, so it's no small undertaking. What is it that she has found here that is so special?

We're sitting out on the front lawn in the warmth of the afternoon sunshine, in the quiet of the Dorset countryside, surely the answer is obvious? But, as anyone knows who's been here, it isn't always like that and there's work to be done. Maude is just taking a break from preparing the evening dinner (even though tonight will be her 'last sleep' here and there is an early train to catch). And that is where we get a first hint of an answer: Others are willing to step in and help, whilst she takes some time out to reflect on her visits past and present.

So what is it that is so special here? 'Love. Love that is shared. Feeling connected here... it is how love grows through what is shared.'

Despite being drawn to Pilsdon, Maude felt she should return home. Could she take the vision of Pilsdon back to Switzerland? She was inspired by the the story of Jesus in the country of the Gerasenes (Mark 5). Not so much by the demon possessed man! Or the herd of pigs! But by Jesus' response to the man, who once cured, wanted to follow him: 'Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.'

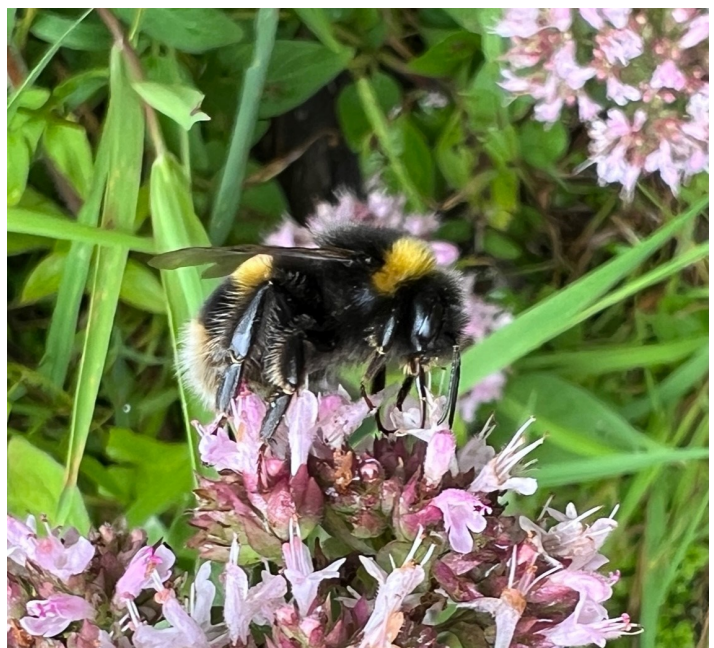
So this visit has been different, in that others - namely Antoine, Vanessa, Dimitri and Elliott with Clément, Valentine and Hugo - also visited, and are intent, with Maude, on establishing a similar community to Pilsdon in Switzerland. Maude felt a certain sense of responsibility! How would they fit in? Would they get 'it'? It was a fact-finding mission for them, to see how community works here. Yet would they see, in their short sojourn, beyond that to the love and acceptance of Pilsdon? 'Is it important to have milked a cow?' Maude wondered out loud.

For now it was time for another goodbye, to go home to her friends: 'When I go is is hard, but love is precious... so, in a funny way, hard is good. Love is not always just a fire that warms you up. I want to say 'thank you' and 'thank you for everything'. I am blessed.'

Thank you Maude, your presence has enriched us. Come again soon. (And thank you for the curry. It was delicious.) - **Nigel**



Maude & members of her community in Switzerland





## New build

We took a leap of faith last year and invited you to leap with us and you did!. Thank you, thank you for all your financial support for our new accommodation for Members. Mary is living in 'Pen' and James in 'Orchard' with 'Middleton' awaiting a residential volunteer.

We are deeply grateful to: The Alice Ellen Cooper Foundation; Benefact Trust; The Bernard Sunley Trust; Beatrice Laing Foundation; G.F. Eyre Charitable Trust; The Inlight Trust; Low Carbon Dorset; and all our many generous individual donors. The most sizeable single contribution (£172k) came from the legacy of Valerie Smith who lived in Seaton. Valerie was presumed to be the widow of Percy's first cousin once removed.

We'd particularly like to thank Andy Davey, former Chair of Trustees and Member, for all his immense hard work and commitment to making sure it all happened, thanks also, to Eddie Andrews, Rev Eddie Howson, Vice Chair; Chair Amanda Streatfeild and to Doug Taylor Saunders.



Andy taking a well earned rest on the new decking in a chair made by James



## Abundance

Lisselle and Nigel were licensed as Priests to the Community by + Karen, Bishop of Sherborne on 23rd August when we also celebrated Lammas Day. Wyld Morris a local Team came to dance us into an abundance of new life in this community.

Alleluia!

From L to R: James, Mary D, Lisselle, Bishop Karen, Nigel, Sue, Mary F

