



Sharing a common life of prayer, hospitality and work



Christmas Newsletter December 2025

Helen writes:

Pilsdon time is a curious thing. It especially seems to come in play when you're cooking supper. You tumble into the kitchen at half past two with the afternoon rolling out luxuriantly of you. You plan a cool, calm, and collected cook. Then suddenly it's six o'clock and the grundy isn't in the aga yet!

And this year seems to have rolled out similarly, laying out with so many things to look forward to and put into the schedule, and suddenly here we are in December. Thankfully the Christmas puddings are done and the cake is made, so we are ready for the feast (thanks to Ellie and Dan!).

It has been a full year, and a positive one as we look to the future, to welcoming new folk to Pilsdon, and moving in to what the future holds for each one of us. We started the year with ten guests and two members, and are ending it with eleven guests (two in, one out), a residential volunteer, new local and occasional volunteers, and five members. See the comings and goings later in this newsletter for more details.

It's taken a little while to get the ball rolling, but now we are starting to build up some momentum to continue to grow and work together. The Community is always rooted in the past, living in the present, and growing into the future. I love reading 'A Christmas Carol' and Scrooge's thoughts at the end of the book after he has seen the ghosts of Christmas past, present, and future feel quite 'Pilsdon' to me:

The bed was his own, the room was his own. Best and happiest of all, the Time before him was his own, to make amends in!





CHRISTMAS AT PILSDON

Carol Service - Sunday 14th December

A service of readings and carols

6.30pm in the church with The Broadoak Choir

Barn Service - Christmas Day

A celebration service for Christmas morning in the Barn

11.00am. followed by mince pies!



'I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future.' Scrooge repeated, as he scrambled out of bed. 'The Spirits of all Three shall strive within me. Oh Jacob Marley! Heaven, and the Christmas Time be praised for this. I say it on my knees, old Jacob, on my knees.'

Scrooge takes this opportunity of a new beginning with both hands, looking forward with hope, learning how to let love into his heart after having been hurt, connecting with other people, and using his talents to benefit those around him as well as himself. Sound familiar?

We're so blessed to be a part of something, both here at Pilsdon and in the wider Pilsdon community, which sees the value of new beginnings, the value of connection, and a commitment to work together to find a brighter future. Maybe one that we might never have dreamed possible.

...it was always said of [Scrooge], that he knew how to keep Christmas well, if any man alive possessed the knowledge. May that be truly said of us, and all of us! And so, as Tiny Tim observed, God bless Us, Every One!





ANNIVERSARY

Many thanks to all who joined us to celebrate Pilsdon's 67th Anniversary. It was a lovely day with friends old and new, giving thanks for all that has been and looking forward to all that will be.

From Helen's sermon: What I'm looking forward to is a continued growing into the fullness of what God is calling this community to be ... [Our welcome is] there for each person who finds their way to this holy place, to assure them that they are loved, worthy, and welcome to be here. That nothing they have been or done is too awful for God's forgiveness, and that they are fully known and fully loved just as they are. YOU are fully known and loved just as you are!



RENOVATIONS

We've been busy over the summer and autumn on two projects – the garden shed and the hen house. The shed, originally built by Trevor, had become very leaky so Eddie and helpers had a good look at it and brought it back to its former glory. Those who came to the anniversary saw it in very luxe mode as the shop (see above). It's now back to its usual use as the place to be for garden meetings, home for tools and seeds.

The hen house was looking a bit sad, and the hens were also on their last legs, so we've taken the opportunity of no sitting tenants to have a look at things. Some concerted digging work has made a bit of space between the bank (from which rats came for a nibble!) and the house, and new concrete and boards have made it more secure for the new flock to come in soon.

Well done to all concerned, both have been good community jobs done well!



COMINGS AND GOINGS

We're delighted to have two new Members on the team – both are familiar faces! We are still actively seeking new Members, please do continue to spread the word to anyone you think might be interested and a good fit for Pilsdon.

Bob – Community Member

Cycling back through France this summer, my mind drifted, as it usually does when I am hours in the saddle, to what I might usefully do when I get back to flat 6 in Poundbury. Do I want to come out of retirement for a third time to go back into paid work? Do I want to loaf around flat 6 or mosey around Dorset wearing out my bus pass?

Rewind 18 years to September 2007 and I am cycling back from North Cape in Norway at the end of a three month cycle ride in the same situation - what to do when I get back. Thanks to Toby's book *Utopian Dreams*, I found out about the Pilsdon Community and so began my involvement here.



Since then I have visited several communities and, as Toby does in his book, I make comparisons and begin to wonder. What would it be like if I could draw all the elements together that I have most enjoyed? You would have the order and work ethic of the Bruderhof, the singing from Taize, the circle dancing of the farmer community in Burgundy that I visited this summer and the freedom of La Grande Tablee – Maude's community in Switzerland – to pursue outside interests.

What would I take from Pilsdon? The food, the house and grounds in their location, the church and services, the people? – not necessarily in that order. I come to the conclusion, which surprises me, that it would most likely be the people – but not in a different setting with different rules or elements of community. No, it would be the whole Pilsdon package as is – or maybe with one or two tweaks!!



Which is why you find me back here after several periods as a residential volunteer, three and a half years running Brook House with Richard Sturmey and last year for a period as a “responsible person” yes, yours truly. This time I’m back in a different iteration, this time as a member supporting Helen, the other members and volunteers as best I can for a year – hopefully by the time my sell-by date comes round I will have got the hang of it.

Another bike ride after that? God knows.....

Ellie – Community Member



I joined the Pilsdon community at the beginning of May this year, after being a community member at Hilfield Friary for nearly 3 years. Starting somewhere new is always a bit nerve-racking and scary - but the welcome I received from everyone here was amazing. Joining as a volunteer has allowed me to experience what Pilsdon is at its core and live out the heart and ethos of the place.

One of the many things I have enjoyed about being a volunteer is the variety of jobs I've been able to join in with. From milking to gardening, making butter to making chutney and cooking to leading prayers in the church - no two days have ever been the same! Whilst having all of these things to be involved with is exciting, having the rhythm of Pilsdon to ground you is incredibly important.

After six months the time felt right to explore becoming a Member, I’m looking forward to helping nurture the roots of Pilsdon, and getting involved with growing the community.

Here’s my favourite Christmas cracker joke for you:

How much does Santa pay for parking his sleigh?
Nothing, it’s on the house!

We’re also delighted to welcome some new Volunteers, and are delighted have two new Guests who call Pilsdon home.



Dan – Residential Volunteer

I arrived at Heathrow Airport on the 30th of June, enthused by what awaited me for the coming year. A two-month whirlwind trip around Europe and Egypt proved as exciting as I had expected. I then prepared myself to return to the classroom. A teacher for the past 5 years in New Zealand I had sought a year's unpaid leave to (among other things) see if the UK could provide a more sustainable and supportive environment for its educators. After three weeks in the job, it appeared not. So it was that I began the tiring grind of seeking new employment.



Application after application was sent out. Nothing seemed to stick. It was during this period of uncertainty that I found myself watching a television program about “working holidays” spent in communities around the UK. I was intrigued enough to run a quick Google search where I became aware of Pilsdon. To cut a long story short, I have now been volunteering at Pilsdon for a month and have found the experience to be more rewarding than I had anticipated. A much-welcomed change of pace.

The most significant change is of course the type of work. Coming from directly dealing with 300 teenagers every day, to a quiet, rural community, with less than 25 people at the peak of social engagements, is quite the contrast. This difference however is what gives the Pilsdon Community its charm, especially for an overstimulated educator. The work may at times be taxing, but it is rewarding and spiritually enriching, and the food is some of the best I have ever tasted! Being able to work with the livestock as well as the development of new skills has meant that this change of pace is just what the doctor ordered.

The welcome one receives upon arrival is warm and, it would seem, ever-present, perhaps alluding to the real foundation of the place - its people. I have felt quite at home, owing to the genuine nature of acceptance and patience. I look forward to the rest of my stay at Pilsdon and encourage anyone thinking of volunteering to apply – you won't regret it.





Julie – Local Volunteer

Hello all, I'm Julie and have just joined Pilsdon as a day volunteer. I've lived in the area, Lyme originally and now Bridport for about 14 years. I've been aware of Pilsdon for 9 yrs or so from friends who have been guests and volunteers. Most of my working life was in small communities and I'm really looking forward to getting to know Pilsdon, all who live here and all the animals and joining in all the rhythms here at Pilsdon

Becky – Local Volunteer

Pilsdon Pottery has a long and noble past, and I feel very privileged to have joined the team.

I have come to ceramics late in life having been more of a painter for most of my life. I fell in love with pottery when my husband gave me a lesson for Christmas, and the following year, a little wheel, and then I was off! I have a studio at home, with a (bigger) wheel and little kiln.

For me, art is a way to express the inexpressible- something essential to all of us. Whatever we produce, the process of creating links us with our Creator – albeit with all our mistakes and failures accounted for (and there are always MANY when firing clay and glazes!!)

Anyone is most welcome to pop into the Pilsdon pottery and have fun there.



*We also have a new Chair of Trustees – **Chris Stoot**, we'll hear from him later!*



Goodbye James and Mary

As you will have read there are many fresh faces around in Pilsdon these days. We have longed to see the community grow to gather more people to its hospitable heart. With Helen at the helm Pilsdon is thriving, and we so look forward to seeing the welcome widen over the next few years. After collectively offering 15 years of our lives to this precious place it is now time for us to move on. Whilst this has been a difficult decision to take as we love this community, and the wonderful people it holds, we feel it is right. There is much more to say, but for now we would like to thank everyone who has been a part of our journey here at Pilsdon, for all that you have shared, and all that you have taught us.

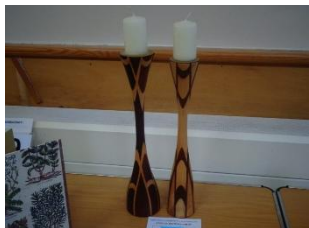
We will be having a leaving tea at 4.30pm on Sunday 18th January, followed by a service in the church. Do let us know if you'd like to come and eat some cake with us to send us on our way. Mary and James



We have been so blessed by all that Mary and James have been and done while they have been living here at Pilsdon. We look forward to seeing where God calls them next, and know that they will always be a part of the warp and weft of Pilsdon.



PRIZES FOR PILSDON



August seems a long time ago now, but fond memories of the Bank Holiday remain. As in previous years, the community came up trumps with entries for the Whitchurch Canonicorum and Morecombelake Annual Flower Show.



The schedule was studied, produce was gathered, baked and arranged, and taken down to be laid out for the judges' perusal. Then back home for the traditional Bank Holiday Brunch courtesy of Jack. An afternoon's walk ended up at the show to find out how 'Team Pilsdon' had done.



There were plenty of FIRST, SECOND, and THIRD prize stickers on our entries, and an almost just as cherished DISQUALIFIED for a rogue Audrey II in Ellie's 'flower arrangement in an egg cup'. Morgan and Henry won trophies, and we carried ourselves off very respectably.



Back home for steak cooked on the barbecue, fairy lights and music in the garden, and a game of kubb/viking chess to round off the day. As we cosy up in the dark winter months it's good to look back on the long summer days.



The Garden is now in winter mode, but we are still benefitting from the harvest with some particularly good parsnips and squashes. We've had some more time in the front garden and that is having a good tidy up over the colder months.

Now comes the fun of planning next year's plantings...



A WORD FROM OUR (NEW!) CHAIR OF TRUSTEES

As the new Chair of Trustees, may I extend a warm welcome to all readers of this newsletter. May I declare our heartfelt thanks to my predecessor, Amanda Streatfeild, for her unswerving work and complete dedication; I will strive to achieve the same. I have met many of you but, equally there are those who I have not yet met so a few words about myself.



Before retiring, my work as a doctor was centred around vocational mental health, helping and supporting those with mental health difficulties in the workplace as well as assisting employers in creating a healthy and safe place to work. I first came to Pilsdon when assisting the High Sheriff of Dorset in his charitable work. Having been welcomed with open arms, the Pilsdon way, I became more and more involved and now find myself as the Chair. It is a great honour to undertake this role and I look forward to holding the heart of Pilsdon into a future which meets the challenges of a changing world.

There is no doubting that Pilsdon has faced some real challenges over the last couple of years. Despite these challenges the unswerving dedication of members and volunteers alike has kept the community on an even keel. Earlier this year we welcomed Helen as our new Warden. Under her expert guidance and direction the community is now moving forwards in a healthy and organic way with new members and guests. This foundation will now be built on through careful recruitment to bring Pilsdon into what we might consider to be an optimal balance. The future is a positive one and as ever we remain committed to those who come into this nurturing environment, always maintaining the founding principles.

There is always a warm welcome here at Pilsdon and I look forward to meeting more of our wonderful supporters over the forthcoming year.



**Wishing you many Christmas
Blessings and Good Things for 2026
from all of us at Pilsdon.**



*Yet with the woes of sin and strife
The world has suffered long;
Beneath the heav'nly hymn have rolled
Two thousand years of wrong;
And warring humankind hears not
The love song which they bring:
O hush the noise and cease your strife
And hear the angels sing.*

Cartoon by Peter, words by Edward H. Sears



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