

Easter Newsletter

April 2025

Helen writes:

It is a real privilege to write to you as the Warden of the Community. These first couple of months have been marked by the richness of the rhythm of the life, and the warmth of the welcome. I cannot express too much admiration and gratitude for the way the community has come together to weather a difficult time, and I have found place, people, and animals faithfully and steadily getting on with life. I'm also aware how much support has come from friends old and new: practically, emotionally, and spiritually. We are all very thankful for each and every one of you.

Moving into a new place at the beginning of the year has meant that as I discover and learn new things (for which more gratitude necessary for the patience shown me), at the same time the natural world is waking up and pushing forth and unfurling the shoots of new growth. It's a reminder at every turn that new life will come when it is time, and that sometimes we need to have a bit of patience waiting for the shoots and fruits of our labour to appear. The various rhythms are so helpful in this—the seasons, the household patterns, the Church year, they all work together to help us find our way through life together.



These rhythms hold us, as we spiral through the years, revisiting familiar times and seasons. But of course each time we journey through the year we do so with a slightly different perspective, we are never exactly the same person two days in a row, and the community is never quite the same two days in a row. People come, people move on, people stay, people pass away, but each soul that passes through Pilsdon adds a thread to its rich tapestry, and Pilsdon weaves itself into them too.

So where do we go from here?



Well, we carry on doing the doings that have been being done since 1958. I've been reading Percy's letters from those early years, and there is much that sounds very familiar. There are some inspiring thoughts, and some challenging ones too. It's clear that whilst Pilsdon has always striven to be a place of safety, that is not the same as being comfortable. We hold onto the things we know, and we make space for things to grow. We are moving into a season of opening up, welcoming in. This will bring challenges, but I hope it will also remind us of how much has been going on deep down in our roots, 'underground' as it were. The patience, the faithful tending, and even some of the 'muck' will have all have contributed to that. As new people come, and learn the Pilsdon life, it's a good reminder of all we have learnt, the growth we have experienced, both individually, and as a community.



I don't have a particular agenda, beyond wanting people to know they are loved. After that community and inclusivity motivate me. There are many, many opportunities and things Pilsdon could do and be, but ultimately that is shaped by those who are here today and tomorrow, and rooted in the work and vision of those were here yesterday.

LAMBING

James writes: Springtime offers lots of opportunities for interactions with nature as we get busy in the garden and on the farm. As I write this I'm watching a small flock of confident corvids strutting through our rhubarb patch in search of food and nesting material, extremely focused in their scavenging. One jackdaw looks very pleased with himself for discovering some wet cardboard, that we've been using for mulching. He's stuffed his beak with as much as he can carry and has reclaimed it for his own purposes.

I'm reminded of the pleasure that comes from stopping and observing nature just doing what it does and the delight of being there at the moment when wonderful natural encounters take place. Witnessing the arrival of a new born lamb, through all the stages and dangers of birth, is truly remarkable. The way the waters burst and you know it's imminent, the labour and the waiting, the pushing and first sighting of 2 small feet, then a nose and.... flop! The reaction of the mother and the instant connection through licking, nuzzling and gentle bleating. It all happens so quickly and never fails to amaze me how soon the lamb discovers how to stand, overcome the wobbles and then focus on its only objective of learning how to suckle so it can get the vital colostrum it needs to survive.

Usually we do very little but simply sit back and observe what's taking place in order to make sure everything is going smoothly. This year however was a bit different as several of our ewes needed significant assistance and quite invasive measures to secure their wellbeing and the wellbeing of their lambs. It can be a little daunting when you know you've got to intervene and you haven't got much time before it gets really serious. Fortunately, all worked out well in the end and we now have 9 new healthy lambs: 6 girls and 3 boys. A slight correction of the records was needed when Bonnie (sister of Clyde) surprised us all because on further inspection she was found to require a castration and was subsequently re-named 'Batman'! Disappointingly 'Trudi' the ewe escaped the ram and didn't get pregnant this year but we kept waiting and hoping just in case. Many of us were then startled when Helen announced, on the notice board at breakfast time, that 'Avril' had been born in the night at 1am on April 1st. The penny soon dropped and we realised we'd all been fooled. Even I fell for it and couldn't understand why no one had woken me up to let me know!



(Lambing, continued)

Lambing requires a lot from those involved and I'm very thankful to everyone who shared in the joys and challenges, with a willingness to be available, to stay up late or get up in the night to do checks on the sheep. There were many days of waiting when we thought 'surely that one's bound to give birth any minute'. We'd make all the preparations and then have to restate our predictions when still nothing happened for many days to follow.

It's a huge benefit living in community and being able to share the load and responsibilities together, but I do appreciate those who lost out on sleep in order to help so that I could pace myself too. I'm particularly grateful to Shep and Jonathan who helped to deliver 'Thelma and Louise' whilst I was away and it was wonderful to receive the photos and know they'd been born safely.

So it's with much relief and pleasure that we can now watch all the lambs zooming round and round the paddock at high speed, playing chase with each other and thoroughly enjoying the sunshine. A great sign of spring.



DIGGERS AND DREAMERS PODCAST

We were really pleased to welcome a group from Diggers & Dreamers, a not-for-profit collective whose aims are "to dispel the myth that communes came and went with the 1960's, and to bring the idea of communal living to the attention of more people." Their core team visits a different community each time they meet, and this time Pilsdon was their venue. Diggers and Dreamers publish a guide to communities around the UK in book format and online, and were really interested in the life we share here at Pilsdon. They invited James, Mary, and Helen to take part in their monthly podcast, which you can have a listen to via their website: diggersanddreamers.org.uk, or on Apple podcasts, Amazon music, Spotify or YouTube Music- just search 'diggers and dreamers'.



Diggers & Dreamers
INTENTIONAL COMMUNITY IN BRITAIN

THE AMAZING FLYING PANCAKES

Shrove Tuesday was, of course, as usual, pancake—filled, as were we with both savoury and sweet pancakes at lunch. But before that we gathered in the yard for a three-legged pancake race, with an obstacle course taking us through gates, over bales, round fences, and finally over the finish line through a bunting and balloon-decked tunnel. Then it was on to the pancake tossing, there was some flipping good flipping. Most pancakes went up roofwards, some further than others, a few went sideways, and the odd one backwards. Our visiting IT tech was taken a little by surprise when his pancake flew off still in the pan, and he was left holding just the handle! The pancakes were pretty robust, and further attempts were made more in the style of discus throwing, which gave much more height and distance, landing right up near the ridge, Shep gave a final valiant effort, and none of us could quite believe our eyes as it soared up and kept going, and going, and going, flying right over the top of the house, and landing right over the other side in the front garden. Flipping fantastic.



LENT

We've been journeying through Lent with a weekly reflection group, and a rotating drop in activity in the church. Both have given space to pause and reflect. A different 'word of the week' has given rise to some really interesting discussions on the themes of imperfection, mystery, uncertainty, waiting, and transformation.

The church has been transformed into the wilderness, with each word being written in sand, and footprints marking our journey through these weeks. Hopefully these reflections will feed into our Holy Week and Easter worship and activities.

Themes of new life and new ways of being seem very pertinent to the community. We are an Easter people, and Alleluia is our song!

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY– 2025

Holy Week Services:

Maundy Thursday, 17th April:

The Washing of Feet at 8pm in the Church

Good Friday, 18th April: Stations of The Cross

12 noon, meditations in the church from 1-3pm

Dawn Service Easter Sunday, 20th April 5.30am

(With no public evening service)

Pilsdon's 67th Anniversary

Sunday 19th October



BUSY BEES

Caroline Dilke writes: On Wednesday, 26th March, Fiona and I at last had a warm enough day so we could get into the hives after a long, wet winter and check on the bees. We were helped by Morgan (you can see him in the picture). James – not in a bee suit – took photos from a safe distance.

In the first hive, nearest the church, we were delighted to spot the queen, and lots of new baby bees and bee eggs. The workers were busy bringing in yellow pollen – probably from the willow trees – to feed the larvae with protein. There was also a bit of new honey in there. We removed the dirty old frames from the lower box, which will be replaced with fresh foundation wax next time. All good!

The next hive also had a laying queen – though we didn't spot her. We knew she must be in there because again we found lots of baby bees. There was also new honey. We just replaced a couple of old honey frames with clean, fresh wax foundation and closed up the hive. Good news again!

The third hive, next to the field gate, we thought was dead. Over the winter Fiona and I had peered in at the top and seen no bees, so we assumed the poor things had succumbed to the cold. We had, however, left them some fondant sugar just in case. Amazingly, when we opened up the hive this time we found a laying queen and a few worker bees tending the larvae. So our plan for the next visit is to bring a smaller box to put them in, to keep them a bit warmer and cosier. In the meantime we took away a huge amount of old honey from last year, which these few bees will not need.

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When I get round to it (it's a messy job) I will harvest that honey and bring some for the Pilsdon Community to spread on their toast.



FAREWELL

Adam Dickens writes:

John Schnadhorst—Farmer John

Friday 28th February was a beautiful day in Dorset, St Mary's Church Pilsdon was full to bursting with John's family and friends, and it was my privilege to be able to lead the Service of Celebration for John's life. John had helpfully left very clear instructions about the content of the service which gave a strongly personal element and meant that throughout his presence was all but tangible. It certainly felt like an uplifting occasion and a fitting tribute to John, who, I think, would have loved it.

I'd first met John in 2004 when he and Gill had first started to volunteer at Pilsdon, shortly after Teresa and I had arrived as Community Members, taking me under his wing around the husbandry of the Pilsdon livestock. John loved his engagement with the animals, unsurprisingly as he'd spent a lifetime living in close relationship with the land, and I was glad to learn a huge amount from being in his company. I also have an image of John with pocketknife in hand, a very useful tool which, I think, he attached to his trousers with a piece of baler twine. It was not uncommon for him to have used it in the morning for trimming and cleaning up a sheep's foot and then, perhaps with a wipe on an old rag, to then use it to slice his apple at lunchtime. I'm sure it was a contributory factor in giving him a strong constitution!

John was a formal person on one level and liked things to be done properly but he cared about people and loved being in the thick of the often messy, unpredictable nature of Pilsdon life. I think his involvement here, stretching over twenty years, gave him the chance to re-connect with a vision, inspired by his connection with Percy Smith, that had led him to set up his own community much earlier in his life but which hadn't worked out in the way he'd hoped. John requested that the hymns at his Service of Celebration be sung 'con brio', with vigour. It seems true to say that John lived 'con brio'; he walked around the yard at Pilsdon 'con brio' and as I learnt from his daughter Arabella, his spirit was still strong right up until just before his death.

AND HELLO

We're looking forward to welcoming two new volunteers after Easter. Ellie and Stephen...



Hi there I'm Ellie, I'm Non-Binary and go by they/them pronouns. I've been a community member at Hilfield Friary, where I got stuck in with building, maintenance, cooking, and caring for the land and animals. I love making art, playing board games, and baking. I can't wait to come to Pilsdon and share in the life and prayer of the place!

Ellie will be accompanied by their hamster—Jaws.

Stephen writes: *I am hugely looking forward to being part of Pilsdon, albeit volunteering for just two days a month. I came across this special place whilst carrying out, with my wife's support, my main volunteer role, which is connecting people with additional needs to rural sites that can help to improve their quality of life - perhaps you have heard of care farming? Other interests are Nature conservation, 70's music on vinyl and staying healthy! For light amusement, there is little that can touch our 4 grandchildren that we have been blessed with. I look forward to meeting you all.*



YOU ARE WELCOME HERE

(from our church noticeboard, with thanks to Coventry Cathedral for inspiration)

We extend a special welcome to those who are single, married, divorced, widowed, straight, gay, confused, well-heeled or down-at-heel. We welcome wailing babies and excited toddlers. We welcome those who need space to cry, to laugh, or just to be.

We welcome you whether you can sing like Pavarotti or just growl quietly to yourself. You're welcome here if you're just passing, just woken up or just got out of prison. We don't care if you're more Christian than the Archbishop of Canterbury or haven't been to church since Christmas 20 years ago.

We extend a special welcome to those who are over 60 but not grown up yet and to teenagers who are growing up too fast. We welcome fitness enthusiasts, doom scrollers, starving artists, tree huggers, latte sippers, vegetarians, junk food eaters. We welcome those who are in recovery or still addicted. We welcome you if you're having problems, are down in the dumps or don't like organised religion. We're not that keen on it either.

We offer welcome to those who think the Earth is flat, work too hard, don't work, can't spell, or don't quite know why you're here. We welcome those who are inked, pierced, both or neither. We offer a special welcome to those who could use a prayer right now, had religion shoved down their throats as kids or took a wrong turn down a country lane.

We welcome pilgrims, tourists, seekers, doubters, and YOU.

ODE TO A NEW BLENDER

Soups and sauces and batters of various kinds
 Your blades make short work of them all
 850 watts of pure blending power
 quietly delivered
 and a mixer attachment too
 We welcome you, we will take care of you
 Blend away new friend

(It's the little things!)

SILLY SOCKS

April Fools day saw some pretty special footwear on display, as Salena suggested we dug out our silliest socks. Some quite eye popping designs were spotted, (and striped!). It was a good reminder that being silly is a bit of a gift, and that in amongst the jobs to be done, the mundanities of life, it is important to make room for a bit of fun.



A WORD FROM OUR CHAIR OF TRUSTEES...

Amanda Streatfeild, Chair of Trustees, writes:

This newsletter goes out as a time of great joy with some warmth in the air, lambs in the paddock and our new Warden, Helen, taking her place with James, Mary and Jane. The trustees have been joined with a new member in the shape of Kathy Pinsent whom I am sure most of you will know. It is wonderful to have that extra knowledge from someone who knows the Community so well as a past member. This is a period of consolidation and reflection before Helen leads us into a time of rejuvenation, allowing the Community to welcome more people who can benefit from the special place that is Pilsdon. And we are so grateful to the guests who have been at Pilsdon during the past year and who have helped keep the Community running, alongside all the fantastic volunteers who give of their time and care. We are all very blessed to share this journey together.