



HRA NEWSLETTER

Highfield Residents' Association

oxfordhighfield.org

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Autumn 2025

HRA Events: Despite the weather and thanks to the hospitality of All Saints' Church, we held another successful Street Party and Film Night in September mostly indoors! Many thanks to everyone who helped set up and clear up.

We will have another film evening in November showing the screen classic *Local Hero*. Date to be confirmed shortly.

Our annual Street Carols will be on Saturday 13th December meeting at 6pm with Father Christmas and singing round our neighbourhood followed by refreshments in All Saints' Church. This is always a great start to the festive season so do join us.

In January, we are arranging a talk on wildlife photography, and later in the month a film evening - dates/details to be confirmed. In March we hope to hold another concert in aid of Asylum Welcome, details later.



We welcome suggestions for social events and volunteers to help us plan and manage events. Do keep an eye on our website for details of coming events.

Frank McKenna Patrick Coulter, photo Kate Bailey-Wilson

From our Webmaster: A brand-new website for HRA

An exciting new HRA website is in the final stages of completion having moved to a new address - oxfordhighfield.org - and has been built from scratch with a new structure which should make it easier for you to find what you're looking for.

Much of the content of the old website has been reviewed and moved across but some is fresh information and advice - so take a look around and feedback any comments or ideas to me at:

webmaster@oxfordhighfield.org The scrolling banners on the homepage not only welcome newcomers but also highlight upcoming events and information which you might find useful. We plan to keep the banners updated and fresh and, if you see something that interests you, just hover over the banner to stop the scrolling. If a  appears, you can click for more information.

Peter Leaver

From Our Treasurer: Thank you to all members who have paid this year's annual subscription. The system of paying membership subs straight into our bank account by BACS is working well with just under 200 payments being made this way. It's a good way to keep HRA bank charges down as we now have to pay these if we pay in cash!

If reading this newsletter prompts you to remember that you have yet to pay, don't worry, just contact me, treasurer@oxfordhighfield.org and I can let you know how payment can be made.

Chris Dinsdale

Landscaping Issues: Ten years ago, HRA was very active working with local councillors to make the best of the development of the plot of land on the corner of Latimer and London Roads. Where before there had been four houses, a new student accommodation block was planned. There were lots of inputs into planning and engagement with the developer on their construction plan. Promises were made and we had to be pretty active and remind them – they were keener to work at the weekends than you might have thought.

Beech House is there. It still looks like an office block, out of place in a residential neighbourhood, but there's a gentle need for some activism again. One of the promises made was for a landscaping plan. The developer produced a plan that maximised the biodiversity of the green space around the building. They never followed that through – the moment the building was open they planted ferns and put down bark chips. Nature pushed back – each spring some of the plants from the former gardens would appear.

But this summer Unite took a new step. Up came the bark chips to be replaced with a sterile gravel. The plants are suppressed. This is so far from the original plan that I will ask the City Council whether this is a breach of the planning permission. It's not a big patch of ground; but it could be what the developer promised us – an 'amenity' – not for us to have picnics on, but to contribute to the greening of our patch, a compensation for their office block aesthetic.



Mike Ratcliffe

Planning issues: One of the leading ideas behind establishing HRA was that it should provide a forum for residents to raise issues about planning and development within Highfield and adjacent areas of Headington. The planning department of Oxford City Council encourages individuals and groups to submit comments on plans for development, whether they be for housing, the repurposing of sites and buildings, the enlargement of blocks of flats, proposed new housing on sites currently used as recreational grounds for families and individuals, and the threatened loss of amenities such as the local post office.

Apart from buildings, issues to do with the volume of traffic, parking for vehicles, the provision and integration of public transport, and the strategic control of traffic are of major concern. Three of the current large projects on sites adjacent to Highfield are those on Oxford University's Old Road Campus and the Warneford Park project. For all, a major concern is the increased volumes of traffic that these projects will generate: increased use of private vehicles, commercial vehicles, and vehicles used in the construction industries. HRA, along with a number of local area organizations, has made submissions to Oxford City Council. It can be no coincidence that Issue 7 of the Warneford Park Newsletter (25/09/2025) devoted a

section to addressing issues of traffic:

"For our proposed development to be successful, we need a site that functions well – minimising traffic and enhancing access is in everyone's interests. We have paid careful attention to this as part of our planning application, with a detailed transport assessment and travel plan developed by a specialist transport planning consultancy. We know that traffic, transport and car parking remains an important issue for many people and so we would like to provide a bit more information about our proposals. Please take the opportunity to read a briefing we have prepared on traffic and transport [see website Warneford Park Project]. This outlines our approach to car parking and our plans to prioritise and support active travel and public transport, with cycle lane and junction upgrades to improve safety and significant investment to encourage public transport use."

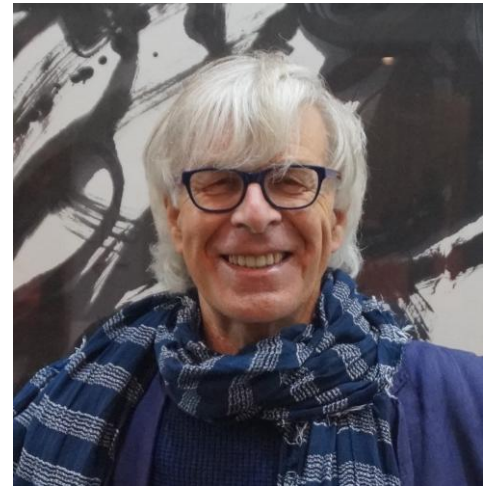
Our submissions have included suggestions for all these issues as well as for the provision of on-site or adjacent accommodation for early-career staff. There are obvious benefits from this policy.

William Marx

David Paskett, artist and musician, talks to Nicholas Rollin:

Tell us about your early life and where you were brought up. I was brought up in Potters Bar, leaving comprehensive school at 17 to study at Hornsey College of Art.

You were very involved in music. Tell us more about this. As well as drawing, I played the washboard as a 'Skiffler.' Aged sixteen, I started singing and playing guitar in a folk group called the *Folklanders*. In 1960 we started one of the first 'provincial' British folk clubs. As a *Folklander* I recorded and appeared on TV, and met many singers, including Ewan Mcoll, Peggy and Pete Seeger. An art student friend, Ray Davies, of The Kinks, sang at our club, as did my teenage mentor, Martin Carthy. I still sing songs he introduced me to!



When I moved to Exeter to study fine art I continued to sing and write. As a trainee teacher in Liverpool I met the Liverpool Poets at Everyman Theatre poetry readings. On leaving college, for three years I ran the art department in a Norwich comprehensive school. I exhibited with the Norwich Twenty Group. With my sister I sang British folk songs in local clubs and in a Greek restaurant where I fell in love with Greek music and bought my first bouzouki! Intending to ditch school teaching to concentrate on music and painting, I moved to Bristol. However, in need of an income, I became a schoolteacher again! Then, two years later, I went on the road as a member of a 'jug band' called *The Pigsty Hill Light Orchestra*, performing on stage in clubs, college balls and warm-ups for stars such as The Kinks, Billy Connolly, Lindisfarne, Status Quo, Steeleye Span, and others. Around 30 I left the band to go it alone. For 15 years I was an itinerant singer-songwriter based in Bristol, with regular slots on local radio and TV. I paired up with other instrumentalists, wrote songs and performed my own comedy scripts as a spoof art critic. One of my songs, "I Could Not Take My Eyes off Her," was widely sung by other singers. I recorded two albums of songs. Gradually I took on more work teaching adults in Bristol's Folk House. I ran painting holidays, continued to exhibit my paintings with the Royal West of England Academy, paint portraits and take on graphic projects such as record sleeve design. Primarily an oil painter, after a brief encounter with egg tempera, I embraced watercolours.

A major turning point came when in 1985, I met an attractive young Bristol dentist. I completed a series of still lifes for a Bristol exhibition, before visiting Sally in Hong Kong and staying until 1990. Whilst based in Hong Kong, and subsequently from England, I have continued to return to different parts of China to collect new inspirations. After our return to the UK in 1990, Sally and I married and moved from Bristol to Oxford, setting up home in Headington with our two daughters Ella and Zoe.

Who or what was the greatest influence on you as you grew up? Great uncle, Alex R Cattley, a Fleet Street photojournalist, had a renowned collection of Napoleonic militaria. We bonded over my boyhood fascination with soldiers' uniforms and armour. As well as a series of military images painted for a Canadian museum I am still discovering, online, his comic wartime postcards. I wish I had known him better and how nice it would be for him to know what I have done. Musically, I absorbed influences from fellow folk club singers and others tracked down on vinyl!

What made you decide on art, rather than music, as a career? I did both and life made the decision for me! I gradually tired of performing in public when it became more about ego than music. Now I value the less emotional, contemplative, quiet observation and routine of a visual artist. I still enjoy playing guitar and bouzouki in live Rebetiko and Klezmer jams.

How would you describe your style? Having a STYLE was never on my agenda. What my paintings look like is a reflection of what I am doing rather than superficial effects. A 'Paskett' is often identifiable through the choice of subject, its arrangement with busy flat patterned compositions, repeated shapes and attention to detail.

Tell us about the exhibiting of your works. Since 1986 I have exhibited mainly in Hong Kong, China, in Italy as a juror in The Fabriano Paper Museum Watercolour Biennale and in the UK as a member and Past President of The Royal Watercolour Society.

See: www.davidpaskett.co.uk Book: *A Vision of China. The Paintings of David Paskett*

Lye Valley Volunteer: I first started work in the Lye Valley about fifteen years ago, not long after I'd moved to Headington. It was a surprise to find such a strange place, in effect, and at bottom, an ancient peat-bog, just a few minutes' walk from the end of Stapleton Road. The 'work' was simple, repetitive, physical labour: shifting cuttings off the fen either with long hay-rakes or by loading armfuls of reeds onto tarpaulins which we then hauled away. The aim was twofold: to knock back the dominant reed-bed, and to prevent as much cut vegetation as possible from decomposing into the fen itself. Both outcomes would help, over the years, to move the fen habitat back more in favour of the range of indigenous flora that is peculiar to the site. Since then, largely thanks to the supervision of Judy Webb and the regular, dedicated work of the Friends of Lye Valley, the site has become a text-book example of a restored urban wildlife environment, despite the more or less unintended consequences of urban planning, climate change, and local vandalism. You'll find out much more about the Lye Valley, including details of the regular Wednesday work-parties, at the Friends' website: <https://www.friendsoflyevalley.org.uk>.

Phil Hunter

Lime Walk Planter Boxes: Despite the very hot and dry summer, the flowers in the planter boxes put on a splendid display. Thanks to the dedicated team of HRA



waterers who made sure the boxes never dried out, the two-tone yellow *rudbeckias* were particularly good, blending well with the dark orange *tagetes*. The white *cosmos* plants were slow to flower (one reverted to pink) but most got there by September – following the pattern many of us in our own gardens who found this year that plants took their time to flower. And as for *erigeron karvinskianus*, aka Mexican fleabane daisies, haven't they been splendid with their non-stop display. Phil and I will probably aim to grow from seed a similar combination of plants next year as these seem to be long-flowering and remain disease free.

Gill Beeston

Book Group: The HRA book group is thriving. Discussion is always enjoyable. Last time we read *Till We Have Faces* by CS Lewis, and Nicola Rayner's *The Paris Dancer*. At our next meeting we will discuss *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* - as preparation for reading *James* by Percival Everett (in which Jim, in Mark Twain's original, is given a very different incarnation) - and *The Bass Rock* by Evie Wylde.

Jim Pye

Incident Log: External rear-view mirror smashed by a passing vehicle? Garden shed broken into? Late-night revellers causing a disturbance? Don't just moan about it on Street WhatsApp! Let HRA know so it can be recorded in the HRA Incident Log. This enables us to assess whether this is an isolated incident or part of a cluster of petty crimes or ASB (anti-social behaviour) and draw this to the attention of the relevant authority accordingly. Please also report such incidents yourself to the relevant authority, and send us details of date, time, location and event, and if it was reported to the Police, the Crime Reference Number. Our new address for reporting issues is: IncidentLog@oxfordhighfield.org Many thanks.

Hilary Rollin

Useful contacts: oxfordhighfield.org/contacts will give you most local contacts you need:

- **HRA Contacts** for Committee Members and Street Reps
- **Other Contacts** for Local Politicians, Councils, Police and Oxford Brookes
- **Local Links** for other useful organisations in the Headington area