

The Avening Community Coronavirus Team



Neighbourhood Network Newsletter #9



Hello – and Goodbye,

This is the last of our weekly Newsletters. For the past nine weeks, we have tried to capture everything that is going on in the village and get you trustworthy information as new rules were imposed and our lives changed. But although the virus has not gone away, the pandemic remains and many of the things we enjoy most are still prohibited, with so many restrictions now being eased there are better and easier ways of staying in touch – even a weekly newsletter can't keep up. It's the right time to bring it to a close.

For this last edition we're doing something a little bit different. We asked a number of people around the village to share reflections of their Lockdown Lives. Clearly, though we have many experiences in common, there wasn't a single 'Lockdown Life' but many different ones. People were ill; parents were home-schooling children; and many villagers were working for the NHS, in care homes or had other frontline jobs. Some volunteered, others gardened, some did both. We scrambled to set up home offices (or even new homes) and simply got on with a myriad of chores and challenges. People experienced the joy of birth and the pain of loss. Socially-distanced shoulders were leaned on and new friends made. These few pages can't possibly record everyone's experience but equally there was much we shared (and not just a quest for flour). Above all, reading contributions from over 25 people (especially those shared in confidence and trust) was a privilege and a pleasure.

In putting this final newsletter together, we hope we have done you all proud.

The Star of the Show

At the heart of all of this there was – and is – only one star of the show: **Avening** itself. The people who live here. Us. You.

'Anyone simply driving through wouldn't believe what an incredible community this little village conceals,' says **Chandy Rodgers**. 'Most of all...we just LOVE AVENING,' echoes **Alison Winkfield**. Others talked about the spirit of 'togetherness' of the 'lovely village we live in'. **Dominic and Frances Conway** reflected on the 'happy experience it has been to get to know more people...and to feel a part of a warm community.' All over the village, the same things were being said: 'We're all in the same boat, says **Marilyn Filis** in Old Hill; 'The one thing I'll remember from Lockdown is the community spirit,' says **Rev Gerald South**.

Within 48 hours of Lockdown being announced, most of the village was covered by a network of 'Covid Coordinators' and by the end of the first week the Parish Council had set up an email and telephone helpline for those who weren't. The first newsletter appeared soon afterwards, initially to support the volunteers but quickly morphing into something that could be passed on more widely. The Villager reflected the mood, its May edition capturing an enduring image from the Lockdown: **Jim Hill** sitting among the flowers in his garden, playing the trombone.

But there was so much more to it than publications and posts. A 10-minute walk around the village easily takes an hour as we all stop to chat or slow down to wave hello. 'I think communication is the best it's ever been,' says **Tony Slater**, 'both electronic and via the Covid Coordinators but also (surprisingly) face-to-face when out for walks seeing people who just want to chat. When you ask how someone is, you really want to know the answer!'

'We are lucky enough to live on a major walking route in the village, next to the Church so thanks to the amazing weather we saw and chatted to our friends and anyone that might pass by the garden wall,' says Alison. 'I'd definitely do all the walking and cycling again, as well as saying 'hello' to everyone,' says **Beverley Rymer**. 'Even cyclists in lycra have taken to responding!'

Mel Young sums it up perfectly: 'It felt like people were genuinely part of something together.'

'Even the darkest night will end and the sun will rise'

It's easy to forget that when the pandemic began none of this was a given, and no one knew how things would evolve (and are still evolving). We heard from one person who recalled the anxiety of these early days: 'My heart sank when lockdown was announced. I knew it was the right thing to do, but the selfish bit of me panicked...I have had my ups-and-downs mental health-wise and throwing this kind of spanner in the works worried me on all kinds of levels.'

All sorts of people stepped up to the mark in that first week. **Olga Scott** bravely shared the news that she was in hospital with Covid-19, allowing people to take any precautions that were necessary. Speaking personally, not only did **Marilyn Filis'** suggestion of a Powis Lane WhatsApp group and **Rhi Davies's** offer to take the lead as coordinator make me feel instantly calmer, but so did knowing that my 89-year old father was similarly supported by his own 'neighbour network' in Wiltshire. As **Jean Scotford** said: 'It just seemed to bring out the best in people.'

Yes, there were plenty of fundamental worries – about income, food and health. But as Beverley told us: 'Someone I know posted a quote on Facebook that stayed with me: 'worrying does not take away tomorrow's troubles. It takes away today's peace.' Many fears were unfounded. One or two were realised. 'But dealing with everything one day at a time has been really helpful,' says Beverley.

Did anyone else spot the quote from Victor Hugo, hanging on a gate in the High Street: *Even the darkest night will end and the sun will rise*? Let's face it, few of us avoided at least one 'wobble' during the past ten weeks – and talking to Olga about her slow path to recovery is a sober reminder of the toll that the virus takes. And there were regrets - not being able to see family or friends further away was perhaps the greatest, and **Chris Howell** was just one grandparent who desperately missed hugging her grand-daughter.

But for some, being able to connect (or reconnect) as a family has been a rich reward for all of the headaches: 'One thing for us that has come from living with our two children under one roof, is realising that we are very contented in our family unit and can busy ourselves, achieve things and create entertainment with the aid of Zoom and the internet, and do not rely too heavily on other providers for our needs,' says Alison.

For others the 'dark night' was the fact of Lockdown itself. 'I really don't like being told what to do, even if it's being told I can't do things that I don't really do in the first place,' admits **Richard King**. 'Then I realised that it wasn't all bad; working from home meant I didn't have to drive an hour-and-a-half to the office at 6am every day – which has been better for my wallet, my sanity and the environment'. For Richard the sun did rise – he just doesn't need to see it do so any more.

'I'd tell my pre-lockdown self not to worry so much about the future and try to take each day as it comes...to live in the moment,' says **Jane Maud**. 'That low-level panic isn't helpful or necessary!'

'However bad things seemed they had a way of working themselves out. So there were no eggs or flour in the shops. Did we go hungry? Did we really need 10 tins of tomatoes?' says Mel.

Share and Share We Like

'The most touching thing has been the stalls outside people's houses, with offerings of books, toys and games,' says **Julie Bowsher**. 'Seeing all the pop-up stalls and giveaways was amazing – as much as anything because of the honesty involved,' said another. **Atlanta Rayner** and **Stephanie Luff** were just two of the many people who put 'previously-loved' clothes and toys outside their homes. 'The local book exchanges have been fantastic,' says Beverley.

Elizabeth Buchanan's front wall became Avening's very own garden centre, 'open for business' when everything else was closed. In this month's Villager, Elizabeth wrote about the many people who are 'tumbling through our list of supporters: gardeners who have treasured plants to share with us and then chosen new plants to take home.' Tomato plants grown from seed and swapped as seedlings are now bearing fruit. 'Lockdown has given me a new interest....As well as my tomatoes (my 'Tommy Girls') I've now got runner beans, cucumbers and lettuces too!' says **Lisa Harwood**.

Beatrice Hatt melted hearts with her roadside stall giving away hand-made bracelets with the simple message: 'I made these for people I care about...and I care about you'. The VE Day cupcakes made by **Sandra Hetterley** and cheese scones (made by yours truly) were much appreciated too: 'Thank you so much for all your lovely ideas bringing in the village together,' posted Jean. 'The silver lining of the virus is that despite the Café being closed, it has opened doors to many more villagers,' said Chandy. But getting together in person has been missed. 'When can we all get together at the Café again' asked Brian Jones. And that was as early as week two!

Our neighbours became lifelines, helping out with shopping, prescriptions and all sorts of emergencies. And treats too: 'One of the things I'll remember is asking our Points Road/Pound Hill WhatsApp group if anyone would like to join me in buying a Blue Zucchini takeaway cake as a Lockdown treat. I ended up with a £100 of cake to pick up!' says **Leigh Abbosh**. 'And two weeks later, they all wanted it again. I've become a cake dealer.'

Some things will change after Lockdown, but those Corona Curves will be hard to shift!

Simples, yes?

Ten weeks at home has given plenty of us time to reflect on our frenetic lives. 'It has really changed the way we want to live,' says Jane Maud. She is not alone. More than one person spoke of the feeling of being more 'grounded' and no longer feeling guilty about staying at home quietly rather than ricocheting around doing that indefinable thing of 'being busy'. 'Having spent the past 30 years using many of my evenings

productively away from home, I have gloried in spending every night in,' says Elizabeth. 'In my 'future life' I will guard this special time of the day.'

At first this was a strange experience for Lisa, but one she grew to treasure: 'At the start of lockdown I'd never ever stayed in for a day unless I was poorly. I've learnt to be more patient take each day as it comes'.

Being thoughtful about shopping is one big lesson learned by people across the village, and not driving further (or more often) than necessary by still more. 'Not going to the shops very often suits us anyway but being economical with trips to the supermarket, limited food in the house and living a 'simple life' has been a good experience for our children who have been brought up in a world of instant gratification and far more choices that they really need,' says Alison.

'We have also reflected about how little the kids need to have and need to do. Aimless time in the garden, the fields and streams fills itself very well,' says **Naomi Tudor**. 'We feel so appreciative of this corner of the world and all the life and beauty in it – the people, the plants and animals.'

'I'll remember the way Lockdown peeled away the inessentials...the travel, the shopping, the frenetic activity...and revealed who we all are individually,' says Beverley. Perhaps that is why Frances and Derek say that 'in a curious way, leaving Lockdown could be a little sad too. Please don't let us lose what has been a special connection. Just going back to 'normal' is perhaps not altogether perfect.'

Derek and Frances are not alone in thinking that.

It's a Wonderful World

We may not be able to hold on to all the things we've valued in the past weeks. With a serious recession forecast there will be dark clouds on the horizon for some. But whatever else changes, this glorious weather is set to continue for the next few days at least. In our Lockdown world, if Avening is the star, the show was the sunshine. 'I suspect the thing I'll remember most about Lockdown is the fantastic weather (and probably having the coronavirus, but let's stick to the positive!),' says **Jane Archer**. 'And the silence and the birdsong - that will remain with me and I hope encourage lots of us to appreciate our surroundings more.'

'I would like to continue breathing more deeply, not rushing, leaving time to idle, looking up at the sky, enjoying our family walks every weekend, being kind and thoughtful, having less and giving more,' says **Atlanta Rayner**. 'I stopped. I noticed and I now know the beautiful world that we all live in.'

'I really hope we continue with some of these new-found values and we can live life at a slower pace and that more limited choices will make life simpler, our priorities will be less self-centric and do more to save our beautiful world,' agrees Alison.

No wonder that one of the most inspiring events of Lockdown was **Phoebe Carter's** launch of the Facebook site Wild About Avening and the Big Avening Wildlife Watch last weekend. 'I hope we'll be kind to ourselves, each other and the environment, including the creatures we share it with,' says Beverley. It's been wonderful to see creatures adapting to the quiet and to be able to see spring developing day by day.'

The future may be uncertain. The quiet may be fragile.

But the sun *will* rise.

I hope you've enjoyed this little snapshot of our lives during Lockdown. It would be great to hear from more people, especially if you've been working or if your lockdown experience had more downs than ups. I hope eventually that together we'll create a history of this little village during this extraordinary time. Contact Clare Bebbington, ccbebbbs@gmail.com or on 07403006106 if you'd like to contribute.

Around Avening

And finally, for the last time, here's some of the things going on in Avening.

Gill Adams, Avening's Greatest Showman, compered the first *Sundowners and Sound* Zoom concerts, which turned out to be a delightful evening of music and chat. It was an eclectic mix: included on the bill were **Tom Fryer** playing Edith Piaf, **Jane Archer** playing traditional Irish folk music, an old-fashioned singalong with **Jennie South** or the truly unforgettable **Cas Boddam-Whetham** (and feather boa) singing 'Quarantina' to the tune of Mama Mia. There's a Spotify playlist of the songs that inspired these performances as well as the music chosen by Marilyn Filis and Pete Barton for their Desert Island Discs. <https://open.spotify.com/playlist/4dh5pyKpRCLUrEMTOZAMfa?si=O0WJpO0IToeNlfs36bybgg>

The Avening Cinema Club is helping film buffs enjoy the best of Hollywood from home, with a DVD stall set up outside Cinema Club supremo **Katy Upton's** home at 9 Old Hill, with donations going to the Avening Playgroup. Thanks to **Mel** and **Richard Young** for donating their collection – other swapsies welcome!

A bit late in the day, we discovered the Facebook page Artisan Avening, 'a place where the talented people of Avening can show off their wares' founded by **Estelle St-John Smith**. **Sue Mochrie**, **Amanda Sanders** and **Katie Turner** are just a few of the artisans promoting their crafts via the page – beautiful face- and sleep-masks, cards, jewellery and even charcoal! Sharing the page with friends is a great way of boosting Avening's cottage industries or, better still, buy something! Get sharing - it's only a click away: <https://www.facebook.com/Artisan-Avening-102534471470408/>

Were you one of the 30 or so people who took part in the Big Avening Wildlife Watch last weekend? It was a bit blustery on the Saturday but by Sunday the weather had settled down and was just about perfect for chasing bees round the garden trying to see the colour of their bumble-bums. **Phoebe Carter** is working her way through everybody's lists and will share results in the July Villager.

Avening School, which opens its doors to more children this week, has a new feature in its playground thanks to the fundraising efforts of **Friends of Avening School**. The ELSA (Emotional Literacy Support Assistance) pod will provide the facility for interventions for children.

The Villager is published this week with glorious colour centre pages full of photos from VE Day and other June happenings, sponsored by the Community Café. 'One thing about Lockdown is that more people are communicating with us and offering articles and photos, which is wonderful,' says editor **Jane Archer**.

Chandy Rodgers is keen to find out where her much-loved cuddly toys ended up. 'If anyone re-homed one of the teddies it would be lovely to see and hear how they are settling in with their new families,' she asks. One has already been traced: the zebra has certainly found a good home with **Corey Young** and is happy with his new human and stuffed companions!

The Community Café has a bright, new cover picture on its Facebook Page, which we've shared at the start of this newsletter. Created by **Katy Upton**, it's a commitment to stay together even though the doors of the Social Club will remain closed for another month at least. The Café Zooms are continuing and the committee meets on Monday to chat about what else we might do. If you have any ideas, please contact Jennie South on jennie.south@btopenworld.com. The Libraries and Seed Swaps will continue too, so please visit 44 High Street and 6 Old Hill to pick up a good read, or 14 High Street to swap, share or simply takeaway seeds and plants.

Gerald South has just completed the final kilometre in his 100k in May challenge, raising money for The Door charity. Gerald completed 54 miles walking, 42 cycling and just over four running – sadly the running had to be curtailed after a pulled calf muscle. Gerald says 'Thank you very much to all those who have sponsored

me – and The Door are very grateful too’. The Door is the organisation that staff Avening’s Youth Club and do much more by way of supporting young people and families in the area. They are much in need of funds at present as their shop is closed. If you would like to sponsor Gerald please go to the #KeepTheDoorOpen page which is: <https://uk.virginmoneygiving.com/fund/thedoorstroud>. You’ll need to be quick though, as the sponsorship closes on Sunday.

The Newsletter may be ending, but the Parish Council remains committed to keeping in touch with everyone in Avening and providing help and support where needed. If you have any thoughts about what might be needed as we move to the next phase of the pandemic, please contact **Tony Slater** on chair@avening-pc.gov.uk and if you need any assistance, you can still use the special Covid19@avening-pc.gov.uk hotline.

Thank you for reading, for being such great neighbours and for that community spirit that makes us all proud to call Avening our home.

With best wishes and thanks for everything you’re doing,
Avening Parish Council

