

Neighbourhood News

from the Bell Tower Community Association

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Dancing in the street



A FUN DAY (clockwise from top left): the party in full swing, Splat the Rat, DJ Buda Nova on decks, and dancing to the ceilidh band (Photos: David Neale, Jonathan Dart)

The Newport Road Street Party came roaring back on Saturday 4 September, seemingly refreshed and full of beans after over a year's break.

Most of the familiar favourites reappeared such as free food from The Moderation, face painting and the post-lunch quiz, "Splat the Rat", and the colouring competition, in which adults were allowed to take part this year as well.

New to the scene this time were local resident Burt, aka DJ Buda Nova, providing a lively soundtrack to the afternoon, a cake stall organised by New Hope, the Coffee Cube van providing something to wash down the food with, and ceilidh band "Left Foot Forwards" to whom a few brave souls had a go at dancing.

Many new arrivals to the area came to get to know their neighbours and had the opportunity to become more familiar with Bell Tower and what it

does. We were also glad to see familiar faces at the party, including one lady well into her 90s who has attended all of our street parties and insisted her family take her to the party from her nursing home. The party also gave Bell Tower committee members an opportunity to re-start face-to-face engagement with residents.

The party was as ever a joint effort and we're very grateful to Andy, Bee and the team from the Mod for the catering, New Hope for organising the children's activities and cake stall as well as Richfields for providing the prize for the quiz.

We are already starting to think about next year's street party, which we hope will be held on the Queen's Platinum Jubilee weekend, probably on Saturday 4 June, so it's time to start practising your ceilidh dancing!

Jonathan Dart

News in brief

- We know that parking is difficult in many parts of the area, and with the development of the new Printworks estate we will be talking to councillors about getting some additional spaces in Addison, Meadow and Cardiff Roads. If you have any other suggestions to improve parking please let us know.

- We expect to be meeting with the organisers of the Reading Festival and the council later this year. If you have any suggestions or feedback on this year's festival please contact us in advance.

- We are restarting our lunches aimed at older people, with our first meal at the River Spice in October. If you are interested please contact Barbara on 0118 950 7685.

- Along with the Caversham & District Residents' Association and other local organisations we are expecting to meet the developers of the former Post Office site in Caversham Road in the near future. Please contact us if you have any feedback – the current plans can be viewed at planning.reading.gov.uk/fastweb_PL/detail.asp?AltRef=182252.

- Have you lived in the area for a long time? We are still looking for residents that are interested in sharing their memories with us in a short interview for our next local history documentary. Please contact David on 07890 118167 or at david@bell-tower.org.uk if you are interested.

- Would you like to get more involved in your community? We are always looking for more committee members, and would also welcome your suggestions for activities and events. Please contact us if you can help or have any suggestions.

A fond farewell



MOVING ON: The Rev Joy Atkins

The Rev Joy Atkins has left our area after eight years as vicar at New Hope to become chaplain at St. Edmund's Church of England School in Canterbury. *Neighbourhood News* caught up with her for an interview about her time here.

The job description made Joy want to take up the post at New Hope as she was excited about the prospect of an active church in the community and wanted to become part of it.

She told *Neighbourhood News* that when she arrived good links between the church and people in the area were already in place and she wanted to invest in strengthening them.

Joy said the pandemic had highlighted the close ties within the community as well as the links with the church. For her the early stages of the crisis meant a complete shift from a variety of tasks to 90% pastoral visits to help those who were elderly, isolated or in medical need.

"When we've done door-to-door knocking, especially during the pandemic...the response of people has always been on the whole really positive and grateful," she said, adding: "People have repeatedly said that neighbours have looked after them or that they've seen and observed things that have been really encouraging about the care and concern that there is in this neighbourhood for people."

She said it consolidated what it meant to be a community church, doing whatever it could to help individuals even in a pandemic including small things such as sending cards, chocolates and candles. It also meant being able to react and respond together such as having Bell Tower

using the entry arch to the car park for food bank collections.

Joy picked out two highlights of her time at New Hope. She said she loved being a school governor and was really sad to give up because it gave her an insider perspective on the school as well as enabling her to see how the church and local community could support it.

Joy's absolute highlight, however, was the nativity pantomime in the EP Collier School playground. She relished doing something really fun out in the community, especially as it was a little bit different, not what people expected, particularly a pantomime Angel Gabriel.

"I've been given a lot of latitude to be creative while I've been here and for the most part that has been a positive thing, from my perspective maybe not from others!" she said with her characteristic laugh.

In the interview creativity and trying things outside of the box were a motif. Joy said her job as chaplain to the fire station had meant her experiencing firefighters' banter.

"Just very different things in each and every circumstance which bring a kind of unpredictability, which I quite enjoy, to life and ministry", she said.

She also mentioned the Newport Road street parties as part of the fun element in the area, saying they embodied enjoyment of the fact that this is a community which really cares about each other.

Joy said that if she were to go back and see herself eight years ago before she arrived at New Hope she would tell that person "Enjoy it! Because this is a wonderful place to live, it's a fantastic community to be a part of, and I've really enjoyed all my eight years of being here."

Joy described her new job as being in some ways quite different in that she would be dealing with a school rather than a residential community.

However, "the things I will take with me are looking for opportunities to draw lots of people together, and taking time with individuals, which is just as important as the collaborative events," she said.

Joy said she would hope to have the freedom to be "out of the box" and use her creativity to help reach people in a way in which traditional forms of church or chaplaincy might not.

Asked what her message for her successor would be, she replied: "I would just plead for whoever that person is to come in and to love people. I think that care and humour and friendship and getting alongside each other are the best part of this type of ministry and this type of church. And to enjoy it!"

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