

INSIDE:
New home photos

THE PILGRIMS' magazine

AUTUMN 2026

*From aircraft
mechanic to
zoologist*

The extraordinary
life of Cyril, 104

Your guide...
**PRAYER
WEEK
2026**
inside

Listen in...

Top tips on dementia and music

from Dr Fiona Costa

& In praise of hymns
with Pam Rhodes


**PILGRIMS'
FRIEND
SOCIETY**



Fulfilled living
in later life

Pilgrims' Friend Society exists to provide excellent care and support for older people, inspiring and encouraging them to live fulfilled lives. Rooted in the Christian faith, Pilgrims' Friend Society is committed to creating Christian communities in residential care homes and independent living housing schemes in England and Scotland.

Got a great story?

Email our editor Helen on

✉ helen.nathan@pilgrimsfriend.org.uk

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our magazine*



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Or contact us via the details below:

Pilgrims' Friend Society,
175 Tower Bridge Road, London SE1 2AL

☎ **0300 303 1403**

✉ info@pilgrimsfriend.org.uk

🌐 www.pilgrimsfriend.org.uk

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*"The grass withers and the
flowers fall, but the Word of
our God endures forever."*

Isaiah 40:8



NEWS round-up

All the latest news from across our organisation

A walk on the *wild* side...

Yes, you're right. There is a large gorilla lurking on the lawn behind the two ladies as they chat. And if you take a turn around the gardens at Villa Adastra, our care home in Hassocks, West Sussex, you'll also happen upon a lioness lounging near the fountain, a giraffe standing sentry by the wall, and a cow and a sheep hanging out near the hydrangeas. What's going on?

Prajaya Shukl, Business Manager at the home, explains that the fibreglass figures were acquired by a former manager, although he's not quite sure how. He says, "They were originally in the lounge, but we moved them to the garden where they've proved very popular. It's lovely when you go out and see them, and when children visit, they love them too."

Villa Adastra – which is Latin for 'House to the Stars' – is one of two homes that joined the Pilgrims' Friend Society family on 1st May 2026 from The Salvation Army, the other being Furze Hill House in North Walsham, Norfolk.

A 40-bed care home, Villa Adastra has recently undergone significant refurbishment to make sure that the building is best able to support the great care that the team provide.

Heading up the team of over 40 colleagues is Registered Care Manager Sharon Bacon.

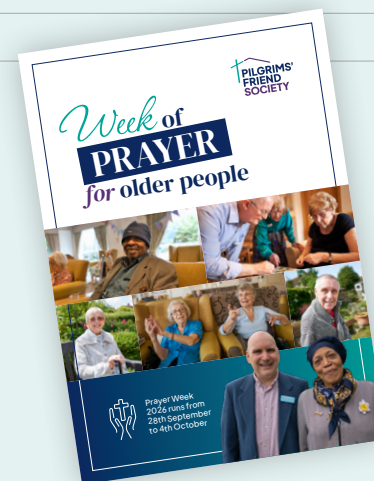
Like all our homes, Villa Adastra has its own character (and it's certainly the only one with



an ensemble of animals outside) but transcending it all is a commitment to providing relational care where older people are honoured as individuals made in the image of God.

If you're interested to see what life in a Christian care home in West Sussex is like, the team at Villa Adastra would love to show you around – turn to the Locations page overleaf for details.

We, and our slightly grumpy-looking gorilla, look forward to welcoming you soon!



Prayer Week 2026

Your guide A Week of Prayer for Older People contains all you need to join in with our Prayer Week 28th September – 4th October. If you'd like extra copies to share with friends, family, your church etc, please don't hesitate to get in touch via info@pilgrimsfriend.org.uk

Welcome to the team...

Zoe Morrissey joined us in August as our new Director of Operations. Zoe has worked in health and social care for over 28 years, most recently with the Care Quality Commission (CQC), and remains deeply committed to improving people's experience of care. Her journey began as a teenager, caring for her grandmother until she passed away. During that time, she saw how easily people can become lost within systems rather than recognised as individuals. That experience shaped her

determination to help create care that is compassionate, dignified and truly person-centred. Zoe says, "My Christian faith underpins both my life and my work, and I feel privileged to serve an organisation whose mission so closely reflects my own helping people flourish through compassionate leadership, excellent care and faithful stewardship."



Staff updates

Munyal Shallangwa is our new Business Manager at Furze Hill House, North Walsham and Abi Jessop is our Assistant Housing Manager at Royd Court. In our Finance Team, Florence Nasamu joins as Financial Accountant (Housing) and Anna Lindstorm is Accounts Receivable Specialist (maternity cover). In the HR Team, Grace Zuma joins as Senior Payroll Manager.

Follow us on social media:



Contact details

*Could you or a loved one
come to live with us?*

Here are the contact details for our homes and housing schemes. If you'd like to find out more, do get in touch. Each location also has its own page on our website:

www.pilgrimsfriend.org.uk/homes
www.pilgrimsfriend.org.uk/housing

Residential care homes

BETHANY HOUSE, PRESTON

☎ 0300 303 1724
✉ bethanypreston@pilgrimsfriend.org.uk

BRIDGEMEAD, BATH

☎ 0300 131 9115
✉ bridgemead@pilgrimsfriend.org.uk

EMMAUS HOUSE, HARROGATE

☎ 0300 303 8450
✉ emmaushouse@pilgrimsfriend.org.uk

EMMAUS HOUSE, WHITEHAVEN

☎ 0300 303 1440
✉ emmauscumbria@pilgrimsfriend.org.uk

EVINGTON HOME, LEICESTER

☎ 0300 303 1455
✉ evington@pilgrimsfriend.org.uk

FINBOROUGH COURT, GREAT FINBOROUGH

☎ 0300 303 1450
✉ finboroughcourt@pilgrimsfriend.org.uk

FRAMLAND, WANTAGE

☎ 0300 303 1470
✉ wantage@pilgrimsfriend.org.uk

FURZE HILL HOUSE, NORTH WALSHAM

☎ 0300 303 8434
✉ furzehill@pilgrimsfriend.org.uk

KOINONIA CHRISTIAN CARE HOME, WORTHING

☎ 0300 303 8480
✉ koinonia@pilgrimsfriend.org.uk

LUFF HOUSE, WALTON-ON-THE-NAZE

☎ 0300 303 1495
✉ luffhouse@pilgrimsfriend.org.uk

MIDDLEFIELDS HOUSE, CHIPPENHAM

☎ 0300 303 8470
✉ middlefieldshouse@pilgrimsfriend.org.uk

MILWARD HOUSE, TUNBRIDGE WELLS

☎ 0300 303 1460
✉ milward@pilgrimsfriend.org.uk

SHOTTERMILL HOUSE, HASLEMERE

☎ 0300 303 1475
✉ shottermill@pilgrimsfriend.org.uk

VILLA ADASTRA, HASSOCKS

☎ 0300 303 8440
✉ villa-adastra@pilgrimsfriend.org.uk

Independent living housing schemes

CAREY GARDENS, KIRBY MUXLOE

☎ 0300 303 8455
✉ carey.gardens@pilgrimsfriend.org.uk

DOROTHEA COURT, BEDFORD

☎ 0300 303 1490
✉ dorothea@pilgrimsfriend.org.uk

FINBOROUGH COURT HOUSING, GREAT FINBOROUGH

☎ 0300 303 1450
✉ housingmanager.finborough@pilgrimsfriend.org.uk

HOMESDALE, WANSTEAD, LONDON

☎ 0300 303 8485
✉ homesdale@pilgrimsfriend.org.uk

LUFF MEWS & SELHURST COURT, WALTON-ON-THE-NAZE

☎ 0300 303 1495
✉ luffhouse@pilgrimsfriend.org.uk

MILWARD HOUSE HOUSING, TUNBRIDGE WELLS

☎ 0300 303 1460
✉ milward@pilgrimsfriend.org.uk

PILGRIM GARDENS, LEICESTER

☎ 0300 303 8455
✉ andy.harrison@pilgrimsfriend.org.uk

ROYD COURT, MIRFIELD

☎ 0300 303 1480
✉ roydcourt@pilgrimsfriend.org.uk

STRATHCLYDE HOUSE, SKELMORLIE

☎ 0300 303 8465
✉ strathclyde@pilgrimsfriend.org.uk

STRATHCLYDE HOUSE

EMMAUS HOUSE

EMMAUS HOUSE

BETHANY HOUSE

ROYD COURT

EVINGTON HOME

PILGRIM GARDENS

FURZE HILL HOUSE

CAREY GARDENS

DOROTHEA COURT

FINBOROUGH COURT
FINBOROUGH COURT HOUSING

LUFF HOUSE
LUFF MEWS & SELHURST COURT

FRAMLAND

BRIDGEMEAD

MIDDLEFIELDS HOUSE

HOMESDALE

SHOTTERMILL HOUSE

MILWARD HOUSE
MILWARD HOUSE HOUSING

KOINONIA CHRISTIAN CARE HOME

VILLA ADASTRA

Striking a chord

Dr Fiona Costa explains how music can be transformational for people living with dementia and other conditions affecting cognition, and shares some simple ideas to try

The challenges experienced by older people as they face a decline in their physical and cognitive health are not easy to navigate. For those living with dementia and other neurodegenerative conditions, those challenges are magnified. As carers, family members or friends, how can we help? Is there anything we can do to alleviate some of the anxiety, sadness and challenging behaviours that so often

accompany these conditions? How can we bring some hope and joy into their lives?

Music can be part of the answer. Music touches all of us, it changes how we feel and how we act. As Martin Luther, the 16th century theologian, wrote: 'music alone produces what otherwise only theology can do, namely a calm and joyful disposition'. But for those living with dementia, music can be much more. Oliver Sacks (1933–2015), a neurologist, wrote, 'it can provide access, even when no medication can, to movement, to speech, to life'. Indeed, for those in the late stages of dementia, music may be their only means of engaging with the world.

The broadcaster Alexander Armstrong has written of his first-hand experience of the power of music: 'I've seen how dementia patients who are non-verbal suddenly are unlocked by music. You see faces that have almost collapsed and suddenly the spark comes on and the music brings them back into the room. Nothing else does that'. As Sacks believed, music for them is not a luxury but a necessity.

The big question that we therefore have to ask ourselves is this: **How can we use music so that the people we care for experience its benefits?**



That is the question that I have been trying to answer for several years.

Music has been something that I have loved all my life. I studied at the Royal College of Music and then, some time later, did a Masters in Music Psychology and then a PhD, where I explored how music could relieve symptoms of anxiety, depression and pain in care home residents. Since then, I have continued my research in care homes, working with Professor Adam Ockelford to find effective music strategies for people living with dementia.

As we developed our ideas and put them into effect, we wanted to broaden our reach so that anyone – whether fulltime carers, relatives, friends or volunteer visitors – could be equipped to use music effectively. To this end we produced a set of resources – Take Note: 100 everyday musical ideas for carers to use with older people. Published in 2024, some of the ideas are specifically for people with dementia whilst some are suitable for older people with other care needs. Some are for groups, some for one-to-one situations. They can all be found at: www.takenote.org.uk along with lots of 'how-to' videos.

I have selected some ideas that you can try. They are all suitable for one-to-one use in the home and none need any musical expertise. Some are for people with more advanced symptoms of dementia.

One way of engaging with music is to simply listen to it. That should be easy to

implement – but first, we need to ask the question, what music? What music will be most effective? The answer lies with the individual person. What music do they enjoy? What music holds particular meaning to them? What music have they listened to throughout their life? There is no point listening to Bach or Mozart, because you think it might be good for them, if they don't like it. So try and find out what music is important to them. Are they churchgoers? If so, what are their favourite hymns? If they can't communicate their preferences, try asking family members and friends. To make it easier, there are websites that can help: www.playlistforlife.org.uk or <https://app.musicformymind.com>

Some top tips for listening...

- Make listening to music a daily activity. Listen for about half an hour, making sure that the volume is at the right level. Listen together if possible – the music may evoke memories that you can then talk about. If the music triggers a negative response – perhaps it evokes a sad memory – replace it with something else



- See if there are suitable daytime concerts in your local area e.g. free mid-week church/community concerts or concerts specifically for people with dementia. Make sure the programme aligns with the person's musical preferences
- If there are times of the day that are particularly stressful – e.g. getting washed or dressed, eating or in the evenings – try playing a selection of calm music before and during those times
- Choose music to play at specific times during the day. You could have one song that you always play before lunch, another before a regular activity. They will begin to associate the music with the activity and will know what is happening next
- If they attend physiotherapy or exercise sessions, put music on in the background to increase motivation and make the session more enjoyable

Singing is another way for people living with dementia to engage with music. They will probably enjoy singing familiar songs and you may find they remember all the words. For those with more advanced dementia, being able to sing words that they no longer use in everyday conversation is a great confidence booster. Social interaction may also improve.



Some top tips for singing...

- Find songs that they know well and listen/sing along together. The quality of the singing is not important!
- See if there are any suitable choirs in your area – there may be one specifically for people with dementia. This is a great thing to do together. They may like to join in with hymns/worship songs at church
- Caregiver singing – this is when you sing instead of talking during personal care. Try singing a well-known song and improvise words that reflect the activity. One carer, who tried this approach, reported, 'Then it is a little easier to take her to and from the toilet. Because then she forgets that she was angry and grumpy'
- If there are young grandchildren who visit, encourage them to sing – on their own, or with a backing track. Everyone can join in

Some people love to dance, too. If mobility is an issue, encourage upper body movements

These are just a few ideas. Try them out, see what they enjoy and do lots of it – the benefits will accumulate over time. Push through any embarrassment you have about singing – no-one is going to criticise you. The more you do, the easier it gets.

I hope you will find that listening to music and singing together can transform some of the challenges associated with dementia care.



Putting music centre stage...

Dr Fiona Costa has done training on music in care homes with our staff. Simon, our Activities and Community Engagement (ACE) Facilitator at Finborough Court, Great Finborough, shares how he's been inspired to embrace music with even more gusto.

"One of the first things I did was move my piano out of the corner of the lounge. I used to sit facing the wall, which didn't make much sense as I couldn't see the 'family members' [those who live with us] and they couldn't see me. Looking out into the room makes it much more interactive.

"I'd realised that, aside from devotions, mornings in our care home can be quite quiet, and that music was an obvious way to engage people. Now, on a Thursday morning, we do an extended sing-along session. Emma, our Hummingbird,

calls it 'Making a joyful noise'. We'll offer our family members instruments – shakers, tambourines and bells – and hand out words to old favourite tunes.

"Some family members join in enthusiastically, doing actions, and even some of those living with advanced dementia join in. You see their lips moving along with the words which is very special. Quite a few relatives and staff also join us for this session, which is lovely. The music transcends the room and brings us all together."

Coming soon... Music at Finborough Court is set to feature in an upcoming film. Keep an eye on our website for details.



Music
for the soul

Broadcaster Pam Rhodes reflects on why hymns hold a special place in our hearts, providing strength and encouragement for every stage of life, including into our latter years

How things have changed since I was a youngster born in 1950 as what they call a “baby boomer”, that lucky generation of children who came into a world that was slowly recovering from the devastating damage of the Second World War. Communities had been broken apart by loss and bereavement, towns and cities recovering slowly from the obliteration caused by years of bombing attacks, and loving families who’d become strangers after long periods apart were gradually picking up the pieces of their

lives and futures. It was a time of pulling together and helping each other, both qualities that had been life-saving for communities during the war years – and that neighbourliness continued, as I remember well in our street in Plymouth where, in the school holidays, local kids of all ages played outside together knowing that all our mums were keeping an eye on us, and we could turn to any of them if we needed help.

And one of the strengths in communities up and down the country was our national faith, our Christian beliefs that were celebrated on Sundays by most families who enjoyed the fellowship of worshipping with their neighbours at their local church. During the war years, particularly with the leadership of King George VI, praying individually and together in church was encouraged as a positive way in which we could ask for God's blessing on everyone, from those fighting at the front, to those keeping the home fires burning. And like most families, a Christian way of life was always present in our home – with the saying of grace at the table before eating, reading a children's Bible together, and saying prayers and singing a hymn before

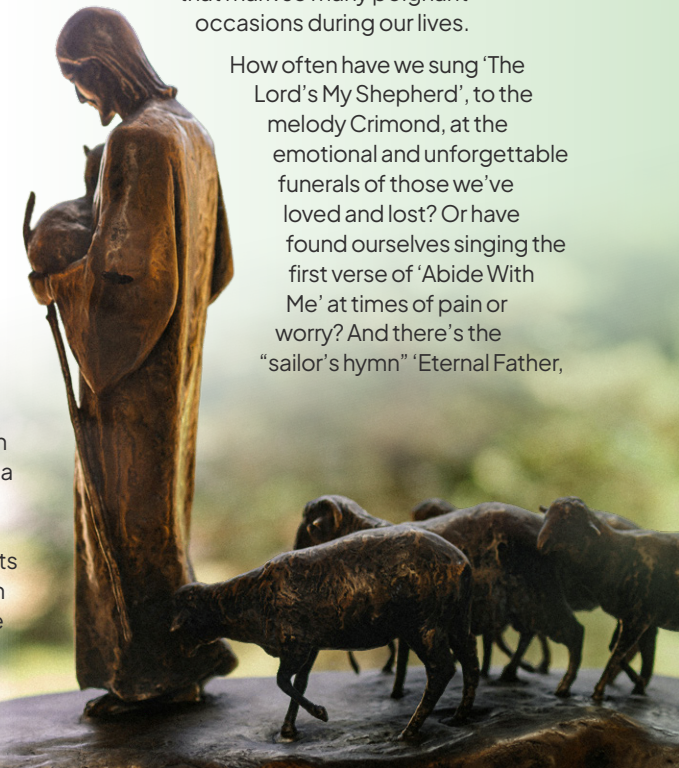
lights out at bedtime. And then, there was Sunday School, when I trotted off in my Sunday best to hear Bible stories, and sing children's hymns, many of them with actions that I still remember to this day. But even for families who didn't practise any faith at home, all children learned about the gospel and the stories of Jesus at school, where every day started with morning assembly at which we heard readings from the Bible, and sang together Christian hymns – like 'When A Knight Won His Spurs', 'Jesus Bids Us Shine', 'Jesus Friend Of Little Children', 'I Will Make You Fishers Of Men', – and so many more with verses I can still quote verbatim all these years later.

We don't forget the hymns that are dear to us, and it's that fondness and connection we feel for them that make hymns such a powerful and inspiring resource for us all. What's certainly true is that, whenever the words were written, whether by a psalmist 3000 years ago or by a modern worship songwriter today, what links us to that writer is the human experience we all share as we cope with challenge, grief, uncertainty, pain, pride, hope and joy throughout our lives. When a writer feels the need to pray for guidance, comfort or forgiveness which they express in beautifully-crafted words that eventually are partnered with the perfect melody, they create a hymn that conveys profound thoughts in a way we could never easily express them ourselves. And those words stay with us, embedded in our hearts and memories. How many of us can remember every word of hymns we learned as a child – or, when we struggle to recall a particular line

from the Bible, find that the same thought included in the verse of a dearly-loved hymn, pops into our minds, like prayers in our pockets that are always on hand to bring clarity and vision to our thoughts.

I often recall a famous story about the great reformer, Martin Luther who, more than 500 years ago, was ahead of his time in popularising congregational singing, when previously only choirs singing in Latin were allowed in church. He created a hymnbook of his own compositions – and one day in the pulpit, he held up the Bible, announcing that this was the Word of God. Then, in his other hand, he held up the hymnbook, saying, “And this is how we remember it.” How true. We do remember hymns – and learn about the teaching of Jesus and the story of his life, death and resurrection through hymns that mark so many poignant occasions during our lives.

How often have we sung 'The Lord's My Shepherd', to the melody Crimond, at the emotional and unforgettable funerals of those we've loved and lost? Or have found ourselves singing the first verse of 'Abide With Me' at times of pain or worry? And there's the "sailor's hymn" 'Eternal Father,





Strong To Save' that is regularly sung at Remembrance services because it's been adopted down the years by all our armed forces, as well as being the constant prayer of any seafarer who heads out on the ocean for work or pleasure – or even for us as we make our way through the choppy waters of the sea of life? I remember being very touched by a letter written by a young American soldier to Stuart Townend and Keith Getty when their worship song, 'In Christ Alone', became popular across the world. The soldier had written while serving during the Gulf War, when he was fearful and unable to keep his Bible with him – so he took a copy of the words of 'In Christ Alone' with him into action, because he felt that hymn encapsulated his complete belief and trust in Christ. He wrote, "We are losing soldiers here every day. The promise that I am His and knowing that He is mine brings Him incredibly close to me. As I drive with my

M-16 pointed out the window and my 9mm pistol tucked in my flak jacket pocket, I can tell you that I feel more secure in claiming the promise 'no power of hell, no scheme of man can ever pluck me from his hand' than I do with that rifle or pistol".

And now, looking back over a lifetime of hymn-singing, I thank God for these wise, familiar musical friends who provide us with the right words of prayer, and hope in times of worry, loneliness or despair. It brings back the innocence of childhood to remember how we sang about "the animals going in two by two" – and warm memories of Christmas when, down the years, we sang 'Away In A Manger' and 'Hark! The Herald Angels Sing' as the shape of our families changed, with beloved members passing on and new arrivals bringing fulfilment and joy. Hymns are a treasure trove in our lives – a true blessing from God's heart to ours.

Pam Rhodes will be speaking on the power of hymns at our conference Evergreen on 23rd September. For more details and tickets, visit: www.pilgrimsfriend.org.uk/evergreen

 **EVERGREEN**
A conference for Christians
serving older people

Home and dry

Words: Helen Nathan

The completion of an ambitious flood protection project at Bridgemoor in Bath means the future of the care home is now secure



The River Avon has previously burst its banks

On 22nd June 2026, Claire Walton, our Business Manager at Bridgemoor, left work at around 5pm as usual. Half an hour later, she found herself having to turn her car around and come back. Amid the heatwave, a fierce thunderstorm had struck the city, causing a flash flood. Water cascaded down the streets as drains were overwhelmed and pipes burst, with yet more water pouring from the skies. Across Bath, cars were partially submerged, with members of the fire service called in.

of everywhere in Bath, Bridgemoor would be safe," she says. "It was like coming to a house of refuge."

On returning to the home, Claire went from room to room, reassuring 'family members' (as we call those who live with us) alarmed by the loud rumbles of thunder. "I said to them, 'Don't worry. Here you are completely safe.'"

Claire's confidence stems from the recently completed flood protection works at the home. With Bridgemoor situated on the River Avon, managing the risk of flooding has long been a concern. When the home opened in 1992, the building met the required flood protection standards. However, since then, the flood risk rating issued by the Environment Agency has been raised due to increased rainfall caused by climate change, and increased surface run-off caused by

"I've never seen anything like it," says Claire. "It was like something out of the Bible."

For Claire, heading back to Bridgemoor signified returning to a place of safety and security. "I knew that

greater urban development. Better flood modelling technologies have also contributed to the raising of the risk.

In recent times, Bridgemean has had some near misses, with family members moved to a higher floor on one occasion when the river burst its banks, and an ingress of water to the lift shaft occurring on another. In winter especially, when the risk of flooding is highest, staff nervously monitored the measuring stick outside the home as the water level crept up and up.

When the increased risk first became apparent, Bridge Care, the charity set up by the local Widcombe Baptist Church to build and oversee Bridgemean, began exploring flood defence options. Trustees commissioned Bath-based firm SRA Architects to devise a Flood Resilience Project plan. Recognising their need for greater expertise and resources in managing the project, as well as more support generally, Bridge Care turned to us at Pilgrims' Friend Society to take on the running of the home. Bridgemean became part of our family in October 2024, on the understanding that we would invest in the flood works as part of our Growth and Renewal Programme.

With work starting in April 2025, the £1.4million project has now been implemented. The measures have included creating a 'cocoon' of protection around the home in the form of a glazed balustrade and the erection of a further flood defence wall. At the same time, we have replaced ageing windows.

Hugh Lambourne, Director of Property Services for Pilgrims'



Geoff Weekes from Widcombe Baptist Church, Councillor Dine Romero & Stephen Hammersley, our Chief Executive

Friend Society, has overseen the project. Hugh says, "It's a huge relief to know that our family members and staff are now protected from a potential flood event, and that our ability to provide much needed Christian care in Bath long into the future is secure."

On the ground at Bridgemean, that sense of relief is palpable. "It used to be that staff were on edge every time it rained," says Claire. "Now that worry has gone."

During the works, there was some disruption to life at the home. At the rear of the building, scaffolding went up and machinery arrived. Access to the rear garden was closed. Some of the work involved loud drilling to remove existing concrete, with family members and staff supplied with ear defenders to help block out the noise.

James, 90, has lived at Bridgemean for the past nine years. James says, "I wasn't particularly bothered by the works taking place. As an architect by background, I quite like looking at building works anyway."

Thankfully, Bridgemean also has a roof garden where family members could sit and enjoy some fresh air, surrounded by potted plants. Staff also helped the home stay connected to the outdoors through a nest box camera monitoring a family of blue tits.



James with wife Gill

The bulk of the works was completed by winter 2025, with replanting and finishing touches to the garden taking place the following spring. Penny, our Activities Assistant, worked with family members to cultivate a selection of bedding plants in the rooftop garden, which have now been planted in the beds outside creating a rainbow of colour.

The garden was open again in time for summer and has been much enjoyed by family members and visitors alike, with shady trees an especial blessing in the recent hot weather. Family members and members of the Wednesday Day Club have also headed outside for some of their activities.

In July, there was a special garden party to mark the completion of the flood works and the reopening of the garden. The event began with speeches in the lounge, which was decked out in colourful bunting to mark the occasion.

Geoff Weekes, a member of Widcombe Baptist Church and a long-standing volunteer at Bridgemean, gave a brief history of the home. Stephen Hammersley, Chief Executive of Pilgrims' Friend Society, then paid tribute to all those who have been dedicated to Bridgemean over the years and outlined a vision for the home's future: continued care underpinned by biblical values; opportunities for family members to grow in their faith; strengthened links with the local community in partnership with churches.

Family members and guests then headed outside to enjoy afternoon tea and mocktails in the garden, with



Hazel, centre, with friends

tables and chairs set up on the patio and under the trees.

Hazel, 92, was one of our family members attending the garden party, along with friends Carole and Teresa, visiting from the village where Hazel used to live. Hazel said, "Having lived out in the country, I'm used to being surrounded by nature. It's lovely being able to come out in the garden and enjoy the trees and flowers."

A nice touch connecting the garden space with those who call Bridgemean home was a bush decorated with wooden birds painted by family members. On the back of the birds, family members have written a word or name that is important to them.

The event was also attended by local Councillor Dine Romero on behalf of the Mayor's Office in Bath. She said, "Bridgemean is a lovely facility and it's therefore fantastic that these flood measures are in place and that vulnerable people are protected. It's clear that the residents get a lot of joy from being here, including spending time in the beautiful garden space."

We'll raise a mocktail to that!



Please pray: Thank you God that the flood works are now finished



School memories

With autumn signalling the back-to-school season, those living with us share memories from both sides of the desk

Mary, 94, Emmaus House, Whitehaven

"I always wanted to be a teacher. When I left school, I went to study at Whitelands College in Putney. It was very expensive and just before I was about to go my father came in and said he'd been talking to my mother and his sister. They'd said, 'Why are you wasting money on education when she's going to get married?' So I had a sort of bout of hysterics and went upstairs and eventually they agreed that I could go.

"It was quite an experience going to London as a northern girl. The speech lady was horrified by my accent. She tried to get me to get rid of my flat e sound, but I couldn't do it. I said, 'It's just so natural for me.'

"They were very forward thinking at the college. There was a vice principal who encouraged us to go out to all the theatres and films and museums and lectures. He wanted us to have a rounded experience, and I had a tremendous time.

"After I finished my teacher training, I got married. My husband and I moved to Birmingham and then Bristol where I had my first child. After that, we moved back to Cumbria to be near my family and I taught at Montreal Church of England Primary School at Cleator Moor and then at Valley Primary School in Mirehouse, Whitehaven.

"At the Valley, the class sizes were huge, with 45 in a class. It was an experience. I remember this one little boy, Tom D, who was very tiny. He used to look at me and say, 'If you think I'm stuck here with you, I'm not!' Then he'd go to the door and fly off down a very long corridor. I used to have to chase him down. Eventually, I had to barricade the door. One day the head teacher came along and said I couldn't do that because it was a fire risk. I said, 'You either have the fire risk or we lose Tom D because I can't keep up with him.' I've no idea what became of him eventually."

Sylvia, 92, Bethany House, Preston

"I went to a convent grammar school. Lots of teachers were nuns but there were several lay people too. I did the School Certificate and got a distinction in French and Latin. I always liked languages. I left school at 16 and later in life I wished I'd stayed on but at the time I wanted to leave. I did admin work during my working life. When I was about 50, I saw this job advertised for a secretary in the Italian department at Lancaster University and applied. My husband didn't think I would get the job because of my age, but I did. As part of the job, I got free Italian lessons, so I started learning. Having done French and Latin at school really helped. I then enjoyed going on holiday to Italy and speaking the language – well, I did my best."



Bonjour!
Ciao!

Jean, 93, Finborough Court, Great Finborough

"My mum was an infant teacher and my older sister was an infant teacher, so I grew up thinking there wasn't any other job you could do. My sister was 18 years older than me and I used to go and watch her teaching, then I did just what she did.

"As an infant teacher, I taught the three Rs as well as music and dance, and I used to write little plays for the children to put on. I was in the local operatic society and every time I was in a show I used to dress up as my character and come in to show the children.

"Things were definitely different back then. On one occasion, there was a little boy who didn't get picked up at the end

of the school day, so I ended up taking him home with me and he helped me with the cleaning!

"My husband Bob was a primary school head teacher and was the first head teacher of the brand-new primary school that was built at Bildeston. The school was built just in time as, just as they changed over, the original school chimney fell in, which could have been a catastrophe.

"My husband never caned anyone, but if any of the boys misbehaved – stealing from the post office or other such antics – he would lay his cane on the top of his desk and give them a talking to. That seemed to do the trick.

"I was an infant teacher at the primary school at Battisford until it closed and then I went to teach music at Bob's school. Benjamin Britten liked to visit one of the schools I taught in, and he asked my pupils to sing in one of his concerts. I think it was probably a performance of Noye's Fludde (Noah's Flood)."





Jean, 93, Bethany House, Preston

"I grew up in Ribchester, a little village in the Ribble Valley. There were two cotton mills in Ribchester and that's where nearly everyone worked, including my parents. After school, I used to go to my grandmother's and at half past five you could hear the clogs as everyone came out of the mills. I could be at one side of the village and hear the clogs coming two or three streets away and think, 'it must be half past five now, Mum and Dad are coming home.'

"I didn't pass the 11 Plus but when I was 13 I passed an exam to go to the technical college in Preston. My main subjects were shorthand, typewriting and bookkeeping, all the commercial subjects. I then got a job as a medical secretary with the NHS. I worked for the NHS from the day it started on 5th July 1948 for the next 67 years. I was supposed to finish school in the middle of July but they let me leave a week early so I could start my job."

Minnie, 95, Bethany House, Preston

"I grew up in Portmahomack, a small village in the Scottish Highlands. My mum was over 40 when she had me and my siblings were much older so I had no-one to play with at home. It was like I was an only child. I loved it when I started at the village school because then I was around children my own age. I loved my teachers, my friends, everything!

"I also went to Sunday School. To take us to church, my father rode his motorbike with my brother sitting behind. My mother sat in the sidecar with me on her knee and my sister sat behind her in the boot. At Sunday School, I remember the minister's son used to deliberately sit behind me and pull my long red hair. One day, the minister noticed me with tears running down my cheeks. He took his son to the side and then had him sitting right down the front, so he didn't bother me again."



Meet a SENIOR CARER Kia

Words: Tyler Sewell-Nicholas



From apprentice to supervisor, Kia's journey at Emmaus House, Whitehaven, reflects resilience, connection and belonging. Having grown up around the home, she has spent almost a decade building strong relationships with staff and those who live with us, while navigating life and work with dyslexia and showing how, with the right support, people with learning differences can thrive in rewarding careers

For Kia, Emmaus House, Whitehaven has always felt like home.

Long before she joined the team, she was a familiar face around the home. Her nana Mary worked in the kitchen, her older sister was part of the care team, and later her grandparents became 'family members' (those who live with us). As a child, Kia regularly visited the home, joining in activities and spending time with family members.

"I've always been in the home since I was very young," she says. "My sister used to take me and my younger sister in to perform for the family members. I was really close to my Nana Mary, so when she moved into Emmaus House, I always knew I wanted to help look after her."

Although she studied Health and Social Care at college with aspirations of working with children, the pull of

Emmaus House proved stronger. When her sister told her about an apprenticeship opportunity, Kia applied and was offered a position. In 2017, at just 17 years old, she began her career at Emmaus House as an apprentice.

Starting her first job was understandably nerve-racking. "I wasn't sure whether I'd enjoy it or not," she admits, "but everyone was really welcoming and supportive." Those early nerves quickly disappeared. What stood out most was the atmosphere within the home.

“It's more like a family than a workplace,” she says. “Everyone is close, and you always feel supported.”

After completing her apprenticeship, she moved into a bank care role in 2018 before securing a part-time position later that

year. By the end of 2019, she had progressed into a full-time care role and then into a supervisor position.

Today, Kia works as a Senior Carer and Supervisor, balancing hands-on care with leadership responsibilities.

No two days are ever quite the same.

Mornings usually involve helping family members get ready for the day, supporting personal care, breakfast routines and wellbeing. She also encourages participation in activities such as games, social events and outings, helping create moments of connection and enjoyment.

Kia also enjoys spending time with family members, helping with hair styling, nail care and makeup.

"I love helping family members get ready," she says. "Especially the ladies. I like doing their makeup, matching their jewellery and helping them choose outfits. Those little things can make a big difference."

Ask Kia what she enjoys most about her role and she is clear: "The family members."

Over time, she has built close relationships with many of the people she supports and says she has learned a great deal from their life stories and experiences.

“ You learn so much about life from older people,” she explains. “I’ve learned patience, kindness and not to take things for granted.”

One outing that stands out was a visit to a local fireworks display. At the time, Kia's Nana was still living at Emmaus House, making the occasion especially meaningful.

"We took the family members to watch the fireworks, and everyone was having such a lovely time," she recalls. "Being there with my Nana made it really special."

Emmaus House itself plays an important role in creating those experiences.

As a smaller home, family members benefit from highly personalised care and strong relationships with staff. It's a close-knit environment where everyone knows each other well.

One of the most important parts of Kia's journey has been learning to navigate her career while living with dyslexia.

Diagnosed in primary school, she has always found reading, writing and maths more challenging.



Fun facts about Kia:

- Her favourite way to enjoy a day off is going out for coffee, shopping, and enjoying quality time with her family
- She has recently purchased her first home
- She loves a nice cocktail in the morning during her summer holidays

"The supervisor role was probably the thing I was most frightened to do," she admits. "I worried about counting medication incorrectly or getting things wrong."

She developed strategies such as alarms, reminders and double-checking procedures, while also relying on teamwork and support from colleagues.

Looking back, Kia believes dyslexia has given her strengths as well as challenges. It has taught her perseverance, resilience and the confidence to keep moving forward even when things feel difficult.

"There have been times when I've thought I couldn't do something," she says. "But if you want to do it, you've just got to try."

Her experience reflects Pilgrims' Friend Society's commitment to creating workplaces where people of all abilities can succeed and feel valued.

Camilla Fitsum, HR Manager at Pilgrims' Friend Society, says: "At Pilgrims' Friend Society, we believe everyone deserves to feel valued and supported at work. We recognise that disability and learning differences such as dyslexia bring unique perspectives and strengths, and we're committed to making reasonable adjustments so that all colleagues can perform at their best."

"From the point of appointment, employees are given the opportunity to share any support needs with us, and their manager will follow up to put any agreed

adjustments in place in writing. All employees also complete the Oliver McGowan Mandatory Training on Learning Disability and Autism, helping us build a workplace that is informed, compassionate, and inclusive.

"For us, inclusivity isn't just a policy, it's part of how we live out our values as an organisation, treating every person with dignity and respect."

For Kia, that support has helped transform uncertainty into confidence and enabled her to progress into a leadership role.

Kia's message to anyone with dyslexia or another learning difference considering a career in care is simple: "Don't let anything hold you back. If you want to do something, learn and grow. Just go for it."

Looking ahead, Kia has no plans to leave Emmaus House anytime soon. "I always say I'm going to be the next person who's been here for 30 years," she laughs. "I'm really happy here."



A daughter's invitation

Alex Huggins, Chief Executive of our partner charity Faith in Later Life, explores how adult children are bringing older relatives to church and shares guidance on helping older people explore faith

It was one of those weekends when my husband and I were staying with friends in another part of the country. We were in County Durham this time – a long way from our home in the South West. Apart from a beautiful walk, great food and special company, we were also looking forward to worshipping with our friends on the Sunday morning.

Full disclosure, nobody has ever actually asked me to be a 'secret shopper' in their church, but that has never stopped me. Ever since I gave my life to Jesus, it's been a thing – I can't help it. Having been saved at the age of 31, I've always been curious about what the Sunday experience is like for the not-yet-believer. Could a person walk in fresh from the street on a given Sunday

morning and find people resembling the Lord Jesus; a welcome that's in tune with God's heart for the lost; and a message that includes the simple gospel?

More recently, with encouraging reports of more people exploring Christian faith in the UK, there is an extra layer to my curiosity: are older people also being caught up in this renewed spiritual interest?

After a lovely warm welcome, we walked into the auditorium – the lights were super



low, no flowers, or hymn books were in sight, and there were young people everywhere. Not, at first glance, the setting for older faith explorers... or so I thought.

Within minutes we were introduced to an older couple, Trevor and Pat (not their real names) – it was their first time at the church too – and they briefly shared their story with us. Gesturing towards their middle-aged daughter, they explained how their home had been a place of chaos for a long time... until one day their daughter began attending an Alpha course at the church.

She came to a living faith in Jesus and was baptised – and ever since that time a peace had come over her, and over their home, in a way that her parents found inexplicable. The older man still marvelled, "There was a complete change".

They didn't fully understand it, but they must have made the connection that something good had happened to their daughter in this church. So today they were there because they wanted to see and experience this place – these people – this God – who had been at the heart of their daughter's transformation. Between us, we managed to get in a "Wow, that's amazing" and an assurance: "You can have that same change," before the service began.

Trevor and Pat's experience reflects a wider pattern. Supplemental findings from the Evangelical Alliance's Finding Jesus research showed that, among respondents aged 65 and over, nearly half said that someone speaking to them about faith had helped prompt their exploration. A third pointed to the actions of Christians, or to seeing the difference faith had made in someone they knew.

As it unfolded with modern worship songs I didn't know, action songs, and a young speaker in a baseball cap, my husband and I were loving it – but I couldn't help wondering what Trevor and Pat were making of it all.

One of the things I often find missing from Sunday services is the gospel clearly preached. How can a person say 'yes' to something that nobody explained, and how often do they need to come back before someone tells them what the Good News actually is.

The gospel wasn't missing on this visit though. He said it once, then in another way, and another way still. No newcomer – young or old – if they were listening, could be in any doubt that Jesus died for them; that there's nothing they could do to earn His favour; and that they could

leave church that morning forgiven and free, by faith in Jesus.

As the service drew to a close, people were invited to come forward for prayer – for any prayer really – but also to say yes to Jesus for the first time. A number of people went forward.

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Trevor in his wheelchair go forward too. I was so moved. I didn't even know then what he'd come forward for – it could have been anything – but I was just amazed at his courage. First time in church; and off he went to receive something from God.

A few hours later, as we were heading south on the motorway, we had a phone call from our friends who told us that Trevor had given his life to Jesus that morning – hallelujah!

That God is at work among older people is not a surprise to us at Faith in Later Life, but what a privilege to have been an eyewitness to God's amazing grace in this way. Drawn in by his daughter's testimony; welcomed by a friendly church family; lovingly confronted with the Good News of Jesus; and now an adopted son of God for all eternity.

As we continued our southbound journey, I pondered a few questions:

- Do we believe this can happen in our own churches?
- Are we equipping 'sons and daughters' to share their testimonies with older family members?
- Are we noticing older new arrivals in our gatherings and giving a warm welcome?
- For the sake of that one newcomer – is the gospel clearly preached on a Sunday?
- Are we offering an immediate way of responding to the stirring of the Holy Spirit?
- What is our plan to disciple new older believers as followers of Jesus?

Irrespective of what our Christian church expression is – modern, traditional or a mix – what will inevitably draw people of all ages towards Jesus is the witness of lives transformed by the love of Jesus.

Beyond that, our role is to help faith explorers have their own encounter of His love – to experience God's warm welcome, hear His outrageous love for them clearly preached, and receive His invitation to respond.

Helping older people explore faith

Invite them personally

Many older people are more likely to attend church, a faith-exploring course, a seniors' group or another event when someone they trust invites them and offers to go with them.

Share what Jesus has done

Talk naturally with parents, grandparents, older friends, and neighbours about the difference Jesus has made in your life.

Make the welcome clear

Notice older newcomers in church, introduce yourself and explain what will happen. Offer practical help with seating, accessibility, facilities and printed information.

Explain the gospel simply

Don't assume that age brings familiarity with the Christian faith. Explain clearly who Jesus is, what He has done and how someone can respond to Him.

Help people engage with the Bible

Offer a Bible in an accessible format and consider reading it together. Create spaces where older people can ask honest questions and explore Christian faith.



Offer a next step

Provide an immediate opportunity for prayer and how to continue exploring e.g. through Alpha, Hymns We Love (available on the Faith in Later Life website), Christianity Explored, a small group or one-to-one conversations.

Plan for discipleship

Older new believers need encouragement, teaching, Christian friendship, and purpose. Consider how they can become part of the church family and grow in their faith.



For more details about Faith in Later Life, including resources to use with older people, visit www.faithinlaterlife.org



A new season

As the leaves begin to turn and autumn arrives, our Marketing Officer Emmanuel Bolaji reflects on the changes that can come with later life

A verse to read

'See, I am doing a new thing!

Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?

I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.'

Isaiah 43:19



The end of summer brings with it significant changes in nature around us. The sun goes down a bit quicker and the air outside begins to cool. Soon, the trees will be clothed in russets and golds, and shiny conkers will burst from their cases. These signs remind us that while change always comes, there is hope and joy to be found in all seasons.

In Isaiah, the Israelites were in a season of exile. It looked like God had forgotten them and that their prayers were being left unanswered. God speaks through the prophet Isaiah to encourage His beloved people and let them know He is still with them and that even in the driest of circumstances He can bring newness.

You may be going through a change of season in your life that feels difficult but be encouraged that God can still do wonderful things in and through you. Change can be hard but in every transition we can lean on the faithfulness of the One who is the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8).

A song to listen to

Wonderful Wonder by Nathaniel Bassey. Available on YouTube, this song tells of the sovereignty of God in all seasons.

My Story Cyril

Words: Helen Nathan

A lover of nature with a keen sense of fun, former teacher Cyril, 104, is part of the family at Bethany House in Preston. We chatted to him about his long and interesting life, from the enthusiasm for birds that began in childhood, to his wartime adventures with the RAF, and his career as the first ever biology teacher at Reading School



It's hard not to smile when you're around Cyril. I ask if I can record our interview on my phone and he immediately rejoins, "Well, does it work? Then by all means. Not that you'll get anything sensible to record..."

To begin, I can't resist asking the question often asked of centenarians – what's the secret to such a long life? The response is matter of fact and comes with a twinkle in the eye: "Not dying. Just kept going. Don't give up. When the Great Man calls you, you don't go."

Cyril is renowned at Bethany House for his sense of humour, as well as his academic prowess – he holds a degree in zoology, specialising in ornithology.

His love of birds stems from childhood and

a father who was himself keen on birds. The oldest of five, Cyril grew up on the outskirts of Reading. The family home had a large back garden, including an aviary his father had built. "We'd get birds from the pet shop – finches and waxbills and so on – and let them go in there," he recalls. "They'd fly off, twittering away with excitement at the space they'd got to fly in."

Cyril trained the birds to fly to him. "I used to say, 'Come on!', and they'd settle on my arm because they knew the other hand had a meal worm."

There was also a bird table frequented by a host of visitors – chaffinches, thrushes, blackbirds and "the local robin who ruled the roost". Indoors, there was a parrot,





Nelson, so named because he had one eye. The parrot wreaked havoc by expertly mimicking his mother’s voice. “Ern!” the parrot would shout, sending his father running in.

After leaving school, Cyril got the chance to spread his own wings through serving in the Second World War. “I wanted to avoid being called up and put in the army so I joined the RAF,” he says with his usual frankness. “I got a free trip to India, not only free they paid me to go.”

Cyril trained as an air mechanic and was posted north of Calcutta with the 101 RSU (Repair and Salvage Unit). “I didn’t know there was a war on,” he says.

As an airframe fitter, it was his job to inspect the aircraft that came in, servicing them and patching up any that were damaged. “I’d say to the pilots ‘you break them and I fix them’,” he recalls. “They didn’t always like that.”

Mostly, he’d find the bullets had passed clean through, but occasionally there’d be one rattling around inside. If an aircraft had broken down, he and other members of the unit would travel to the location to get it going again. “It’s nice when you do that and eventually see them fly out,” he says with obvious satisfaction.

While he was out there, he bought a book of 400 Indian birds, ticking them off as he spotted them. I ask if there’s a connection between his love of birds and flying things in



general. “Well, maybe,” Cyril muses. “Except insects. Not so keen on insects – only as a zoology specimen.”

On returning to England, Cyril married Kathleen. He and the wider family bought a field on the outskirts of the Reading and built five houses where different members of the family could live.

Cyril got a job at the Reading Corporation in the electricity department while also studying for his degree in zoology in the evenings at Birkbeck College, travelling to London after work. Together, Cyril and Kathleen had a daughter, Veronica. Cyril went on to qualify as a teacher and took up the post as the first ever biology teacher at Reading School.

With his precise mind and love of the natural world, it was a role that suited him to a tee. “To teach others, it puts the stress on you,” he explains. “You’ve got to understand it to start with, and then clearly put it over to them. I never had any trouble with discipline, and the reason for that is interest. You have pupils who are interested in what you’re doing.”

Under Cyril’s tutelage, students did a lot of practical work, including dissection. Live specimens



also came his way. One day, some boys brought him a tawny owl chick they had found by the roadside. The owl came home with Cyril and became part of the household, christened Wol after the owl in Winnie-the-Pooh. The owl had to be hand-reared with meat wrapped in cotton wool to mimic animal fur so the non-digestible parts could later be regurgitated as pellets. Over the years, the family gained two further owls, two parrots and a rescued starling chick that was given the name Joe as a nod to the former Soviet leader.

After sadly losing his wife Kathleen in 1977 to cancer, Cyril went on to marry Nancy. In her later years, he nursed her through Alzheimer’s disease before she too sadly passed away.

In 2004, Cyril made the move from Reading to Preston (or “the Arctic Circle” as he calls it) to be near his daughter Veronica, living in sheltered accommodation. At the age of 100, he fell seriously ill with sepsis. He recovered, and some time after moved into Bethany House in March 2023. Shortly before his 104th birthday, he developed sepsis for a second time, and again managed to beat it – a testament to his grit and determination.

After meeting Cyril, I chat to his daughter Veronica. She remembers looking at a number of care homes and knowing immediately that Bethany House was right. “When we walked in, it was light and airy. The residents in the lounge were chatting to one another and the tea trolley was going round. It felt like a home.”



On the day Cyril moved in, three of the ‘family members’ [those who live with us] dropped by to say, “Welcome to Bethany House”.

For his part, Cyril has embraced life at the home. More often than not, he can be found in his usual chair next to Sylvia, a lady he gets on well with. As well as being up for a chat, he will gamely take part in activities – provided they exercise his brain power. Recently, to his family’s amazement, he joined in with bingo, something he was never interested in before. The difference? It was in French.

“I sometimes forget Dad is inspiring to so many people,” Veronica reflects. “He has such amazing knowledge, and he can make a joke out of anything. And of course, he’s very charming.”

Having spent a morning in Cyril’s company, I can certainly attest to that.



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