



# ABTALK

## PARISH COUNCIL

*Keith Fenwick*

Much of our time at recent meetings has been taken up with administrative matters. The audit of the council's procedures and finances was passed with a few minor comments. Our policy documents have been reviewed and various bills paid, including the major one for the street lights. We have now received the grant for the street lights and reclaimed VAT so our coffers are once again healthy.

The new data protection laws have been considered. As a public body, we are now required to register with the Information Commissioner. Considering the only data we hold is that relating to the councillors together with anyone who gets in touch with us this does seem over the top.

At our meeting on 1st May Jamie Ford-Cordes tendered his resignation from the council due to personal commitments. Our thanks go to him for his hard work. The vacancy is

now being advertised but if nobody comes forward we will be able to co-opt. Marna Perrigo remains chairman and Keith Fenwick is now vice chairman.

The Annual Parish Meeting on 17th May was attended by about 20 parishioners. We also welcomed our district councillor, Peter Davies. The chairman's report outlined our activities over the past year and highlighted some of the challenges we face, such as lack of road maintenance. New street lighting has been installed and a new mower bought for the village green. A detailed breakdown of the council's expenditure was presented illustrating why the precept was raised this year.

Several local organisations presented their reports. For the church, Alison Robbins highlighted the work to keep the church in order and to develop the north side. Jan Miles described the fund raising events for the Old School.

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*The cover pictures show the road from Towcester to Wappenham just before the right turn to School Lane. The top picture was taken between 1900 and 1910. The cottage on the left was the last of the Grafton estate cottages which lined the road. It was demolished and the road widened considerably with a visibility splay created outside Thorpe End.*

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### *Editors*

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The new heating system is in place and improvements to the main hall should take place in the autumn. Path Warden David Robbins described the steady decline over the years in funding to maintain footpaths. He continues to observe and report on their condition as well as doing a limited amount of clearing.

County Councillor Ian Morris was unable to attend at the last minute but submitted a lengthy written report from which extracts were read. This dealt with the financial problems of the County Council and the move to unitary authorities. In the cutbacks a number of libraries will be retained. However, the report made no mention of the withdrawal of rural bus services (*see page 4*).

Peter Davies, our SNC councillor, also spoke of the impending change to a unitary authority which will mean the end of SNC. He pointed to the successful links with Cherwell council which are now in place but have taken several years to be fully implemented. Meanwhile, SNC continues to operate a balanced budget.

It is hoped that the Towcester relief road (aka the southern bypass) will be open by 2020.

There were no reports this year from either of the local schools or from the police. The minutes, including a very full report from the County Councillor, may be read on

the village website at [www.abthorpe.net/Documents/180514AnnualParishMeetingMinutes.pdf](http://www.abthorpe.net/Documents/180514AnnualParishMeetingMinutes.pdf)

## **CHERWELL AND SOUTH NORTHANTS COUNCILS**

At the end of May Cherwell District Council announced that they are regretfully ending their partnership with South Northants Council as “the problems with Northamptonshire County Council have completely changed the landscape”. South Northants is equally upset, having had an “excellent working relationship with CDC that has led to impressive savings over a number of years, and it is unfortunate that external events have led to this situation being forced upon us”.

A consultation has now been launched. All background information available, frequently asked questions (FAQs) and useful links are on the council’s website, [www.snc.gov.uk](http://www.snc.gov.uk). This information will be updated as more becomes known about the proposals. If you would like to participate in the consultation it is at [www.futurenorthants.co.uk](http://www.futurenorthants.co.uk), alongside a detailed explanatory document.

The Parish Council will take a keen interest in these proposals the move to a unitary authority is bound to mean changes to its responsibilities. Will a small parish such as Abthorpe be able to survive?

## **WITHDRAWAL OF BUS SERVICE**

As many of you will know, the County Connect dial-a-ride bus service is about to be withdrawn due to the County Council's financial problems. Several people rely on this service to get out of the village for shopping and socialising so its loss will mean much greater isolation. The Parish Council is considering what can be done to provide some sort of alternative. We have talked to those who currently use the bus and have contacted adjacent parish councils to see if we can benefit from co-operation. We are also looking at what other parishes are doing – Gayton and Tiffield, for instance, run a community bus operated by volunteers on a fixed schedule twice a week.

If you don't currently use it, think about the future. What would happen if for some reason you were not able to drive? Would you want to use communal transport?

NCC's problems do not mean any change to TADD (Towcester Area Door to Door) which takes people to health related appointments. But remember that TADD desperately needs drivers as well and already provides a service to several people in the village.

To put forward your views contact Marna Perrigo on 858251 or Keith Fenwick on 857083.

## **ROYAL GARDEN PARTY**

*Keith Fenwick*

Back in the depths of winter I was offered the chance to attend one of the Queen's garden parties at Buckingham Palace as a representative of the parish councils in Northamptonshire. Now you know what happens when you are a parish councillor for too long. Of course the answer was yes. Jenny Carter agreed to accompany me; she served on our parish council some years ago and her husband Bob was clerk for many years. Her only concern was that she would have to wear a hat.

On the day, despite a forecast for heavy and prolonged downpours right over London, the rain held off and in fact the sun shone and there was a welcome gentle breeze.

We entered the Palace gardens at the Hyde Park Corner entrance. The gardens were immaculately kept and quite extensive. Several families of geese and goslings added to the informality of the place. The large lawn at the rear of the Palace was set up with three marquees: two providing tea for the Royal party and diplomats while a very large one provided an excellent selection of sandwiches (including, of course, cucumber) and pastries for the 2,500 people attending. And the tea itself was very good.

The Queen arrived at 4pm and



*Looking across the gardens as Her Majesty makes her way towards the Royal Tea Tent after chatting to some of the guests.*

made her way slowly through the crowds, a path having earlier been formed by the Beefeaters who were on duty. All we managed was a distant view of her as she emerged to head for the royal tea tent. We also spotted Princess Eugenie and the Dukes of Cambridge and Kent, but it was difficult to identify the men as they all wore top hats.

After another visit to the main tea tent for a second cup of tea and a few more eats we had a wander around the gardens and the Palace balcony for more photographs before making our way home. There may have been 2,500 people there, but all seemed to have had a good time and all made the effort to dress up for the occasion.

## **BLUETITS**

Sadly, for those of you following the webcam stream from the nesting box in the village, none of the chicks survived this year. They had been successful last season but nature is not always kind and fluffy; hopefully they will try another brood this year.

## **NEWS FROM THE NEW INN**

Congratulations to the whole team at the New Inn for being awarded a Trip Advisor Certificate of Excellence. This is only awarded to about 10% of all the businesses on Trip Advisor and is based on consistently great reviews posted over the last year.

The start of the extension has been put back a little until September.

The enlarged kitchen will surely make Chef Steve, Ben the starter chef, and Alfie who cleans up after everyone, very happy. They achieve wonders in the small area they currently operate in with a weekly change of specials and main courses often featuring the substantial range of fish that is now delivered fresh six days a week.

Apart from increased dining space the extension will include replacement ladies toilets and disabled facilities.

As ever, the quiz continues to be an enjoyable and successful Sunday evening's outing. The next will be on Sunday 22 July (*note: not the last Sunday this time*) and subsequent dates will be advertised on the boards coming into the village.

Recent winners and their choice of charity to donate the evening's spoils to are:

- 25 March: No Hoppers, £160 to Cynthia Spencer Hospice in Northampton
- 29 April: Tows on Tour, £125 to the British Heart Foundation
- 20 May: Bards from the Crown (at Weston), £152 towards funding a guide dog which will be named after a friend's 17 year old son who sadly died recently.
- 24 June: The Barflies, £147 to Towcester Food Bank.

## HELP WANTED

Northamptonshire Association for the Blind (NAB) is urgently seeking volunteers to spend a couple of hours once a fortnight visiting a visually impaired person. This small time commitment can make a huge difference to that person's life. You could just be popping in for a cup of tea and a chat, help with reading mail, going for a short walk or generally just being a friend.

To find out more contact Rachel Cave, the Volunteer Coordinator: [rachel@nab.co.uk](mailto:rachel@nab.co.uk); 07889 411274.



## **WHAT OUR NEIGHBOURS DO FOR A LIVING**

As part of an occasional series looking at some of the more unusual ways in which our Abthorpe neighbours earn their crust, Tim Pollock has shared his experiences with us which could be straight from the *Boys Own Paper*.

Having started his working life in the prison service, Tim decided a more active outdoor life would suit him better and joined Thames Valley Police in 1994. He opted for the armed response unit as it offered excellent training in firearms use, interception tactics, unarmed close quarter combat and advanced driving - all skills required for dealing with potentially dangerous situations.

But after five years of this excitement another avenue beckoned: retraining as a mounted police officer with the Thames Valley Police Mounted Section. Not having ridden a horse before, Tim embarked on four months of training in Merseyside.

Police horses are recruited from wherever suitable animals can be found: *Horse & Hound* and word of mouth are the usual sources. They are generally about five years old and a minimum of 16.3 hands. Favoured breeds are Irish Draught, Percheron and Shire-crosses. Their training includes learning to stand still and withstand loud noises, such as would be experienced with football crowds. Once they have joined a mounted unit they are allocated their police officer and form a close bond, but they do get used to other riders. Although they live in police stables, they have daily exercise and are also regularly turned out to grass. Their working life is as long as they are happy.

Thames Valley is one of 13 police forces in the country which has a mounted section. There are six mounted officers in Milton Keynes, three women and three men, supported by two grooms. However, the officers muck out and groom their own horses as part of their 10-hour shift.

The range of their duties is wide and unique. Sitting tall above people's heads gives a good viewpoint which is particularly useful for crowd control. As an Accredited National Mounted Commander Tim has the authority to request that foot police are moved to where they are needed. A mounted policeman can often establish rapport with members of the public diffusing situations and encouraging cooperation. Of course a large horse is invaluable as an aid to clearing a football pitch of aggressive fans! For six years Tim rode Titan who was the biggest police horse in the country, a Shire-cross standing at 18.3 hands and weighing just over a metric tonne – not to be argued with.



*Tim Pollock on his current horse at the royal wedding.*

regular appearances on estates which are experiencing crime or anti-social behaviour. Their aim is to disrupt, reinforce support for the community police and to also break down barriers: horses are a magnet as a conversation opener and the difference can be seen when residents engage with the police.

Although based in Milton Keynes, the mounted police support other forces by policing marches and demonstrations as far south as Brighton, travelling to coastal areas on immigration duties, in fact anywhere where crowds gather and a height advantage can gauge the dynamics of a situation. Another important service is searching open

country for missing or vulnerable people where sitting high can give a good viewpoint.

Royal duties and state visits offer a complete contrast. On many occasions Tim has escorted the Queen up the course at Royal Ascot, and of course the latest royal outing was at the wedding of the Duke and Duchess of Sussex.

Working with the South Wales Mounted Section, Tim and his

Together they shared some pretty lively situations. Interviewed on Titan's retirement in 2011, Tim said: *"Titan is one of our top horses - he is very loyal and brave in all situations. People are always astounded by his size and often come up to say hello. Despite his large size, he is remarkably agile and incredibly sure-footed. It was like he was made to be a police horse!"*

'Directed patrols' is the phrase for



colleagues were in Windsor a week before the event, riding security patrols in and around the castle and getting a feel for the crowd. Naturally a high profile police presence was needed – in fact the largest Tim has ever seen – along with the vast interest of international media. He hit the spotlight broadcasting live on ABC to 52 states in the US, and also being interviewed on Basque TV.

Two mounted officers led the carriage procession after the ceremony with two immediately behind. That left Tim and his colleague to have the job of a final security sweep walking five minutes ahead of the procession to identify any risk factors. The patient crowd, some of whom had been there for two days, were excited by any spectacle and so the two horses and their riders slowly walking the cleared road with the crowd whooping and hollering gave them a chance for a little interaction. And they repeated their performance after the carriage had passed. The overwhelming memory of the day was the amazing party atmosphere and such happiness spilling over from the crowd.

So watch out for Tim on his patrols around the city centre of MK. And after such a high octane career, what could Tim possibly do in retirement? Sail around the world maybe?

## **NEWS FROM THE OLD SCHOOL**

Lynn Neasham, as treasurer of the Old School Management Committee, is delighted to announce that since 2011 an incredible £30,866 has been raised to renovate the Old School.

“Back in April 2011, the Old School held a quiz night which marked the start of the most recent refurbishment project. Lots of events were planned for that year and the funds raised were £4,881. This enabled us to update the electrics. Fundraising continued and in 2013 we had sufficient funds to completely renew the kitchen and refurbish the small room. We then moved onto our phase 3, the toilets, helped by Jill Tolson, who researched and applied for grants. Our fundraising activities became more varied and everyone enjoyed the events from coffee mornings to clay pigeon shoots, Women in Farming events, plant sales and the introduction of our truckers’ breakfasts. In 2015 the toilet refurbishment was completed.

Moving onto phase 4, the main hall: this is the largest space so the most expensive in our long term plan for the Old School. The installation of a new heating system has made an enormous difference and helped preserve the fabric of the building. Fundraising activities have continued with the Xmas fayre, race night



*Pebble painting in progress*

and most recently the book sale and bridge evening. And of course the GinFest on 9th June, set to become a highlight of Abthorpe's social calendar.

Over the years the relentless work of all committee members that has kept the building open and maintained must be applauded. If the village had not supported the Old School we would not have preserved this historic building and would not have this amazing amenity in the centre of our village.

Of course it is a vicious circle, for once the main room is done another phase will have to be considered, and then it's back to the beginning. But without the help of the villagers and volunteers this phenomenal amount would not have been raised. To put it quite simply – thank you."

If you would like to volunteer to help or even become a committee member, Lynn or Jan Miles would love to hear from you: [lynn.neasham@abthorpe.net](mailto:lynn.neasham@abthorpe.net); [jan.miles@abthorpe.net](mailto:jan.miles@abthorpe.net)

As mentioned above, the innovative idea of turning the Old School into a book shop and tea room on 28th April proved a success. Arranging all the



books library-style by author, and subject for the non-fiction, made it easy to browse. Of course refuelling with lunch or tea helped the process of return trips to the shelves to fill large bags with books to be hauled away for some avid reading. The day raised £552 and pleasingly locals were joined by lots of people from outside the village.



A great idea, which will be carried on when the Old School will be open on Monday 9th during July for 'Social Monday'. Coffee and biscuits will be on offer but this is not a fundraiser, just a chance to peruse the books (borrow or buy), catch up with friends and neighbours and enjoy the courtyard if the sun is shining. Pop in either between 10.30 and 12.00 or 3.00 to 4.30. And there will probably be another book sale in the future.

Hot on the heels of the book sale came another innovation: a Bridge Night, which started with a few rounds of bridge, a lasagne supper, cheese and grapes, more bridge and of course plenty of wine! There were 10 tables booked and it was pleasing to see some familiar faces from the time when Abthorpe Nursery School used the hall. A most enjoyable evening and financially successful adding £769 to the bank account.

The popular coffee mornings make a return on Saturday 21st July, 10.30 to 12.30 at 26 Wappenham Road.

Finally the Committee would like to express its gratitude to all the extra helpers and volunteers who have supported the recent activities.

To celebrate World Gin Day, the committee and friends organised the first of what is hoped to be an annual GinFest on the Green. During the previous month, Paula Le Baigue gathered a group of children and parents together to paint pebbles which were hidden around the Green..... now read on....

## ABTHORPE'S GINFEST – THE PREQUEL

The rise in popularity of gin in the last decade has been remarkable with sales of specialist varieties and brands rocketing. But whereas quaffing a decent G & T today is seen as rather a refined, if very pleasurable, activity, history tells us that this has not always been the case.

In the mid-eighteenth century the effects of gin-drinking on English society makes the use of drugs today seem almost benign! Gin started out as a medicine – it was thought it could be a cure for gout and indigestion – but because it was cheap it soon became the poor man's drink, and some workers were even given gin as part of their wages.

Much of the gin was drunk by women; consequently the children were neglected, daughters were sold into prostitution, and wet nurses gave gin to babies to quieten them. This worked provided they were given a large enough dose! People would do anything to get gin...a cattle drover sold his eleven-year-old daughter to a trader for a gallon of gin, and a coachman pawned his wife for a quart bottle. The thirst for gin appeared insatiable. People sold their furnishings and even their homes to get money to buy their favourite tipple. Gin was the opium of the people – it led them to the debtors' prison or the gallows, ruined them, drove them to madness, suicide and death, but it kept them warm in winter and allayed the terrible hunger pangs of the poorest.



The government of the day became alarmed when it was found that the average Londoner drank 14 gallons of spirit each year. In 1736 a Gin Act was passed forbidding the sale of gin without first taking out a licence costing £50 – a huge sum in those days. On the last night before the Act came into force the last gallons of gin were sold off cheaply by the retailers who could not afford the duty, and more alcohol was drunk than ever before or since. The authorities believed there would be

*William Hogarth's Gin Lane (1751)*

trouble the following day but nothing happened. The mob lay insensible in the streets, too drunk to know or care.

When, some years later, the duty on the spirit was raised and its sales regulated, the consumption of gin fell dramatically and it was never again quite so much of the scourge that it had been. Gin is still a popular drink, but happily not as popular as it was in history.

### **ABTHORPE GINFEST – THE SEQUEL**

Weeks, nay months, of preparation paid off on Saturday June 9th when Abthorpe held a GinFest day. The Green thronged with villagers and visitors who, on a glorious summer afternoon, came to see what this very 21st century celebration held in store. What they were treated to was a wonderful mixture of the traditional and the modern. There were cream teas, a cake stall, raffles and a tombola – all perennially popular and well received. But there was so much more. A gin bar provided taster shots of 12 different flavoured gins and a produce stall allowed villagers to enter their gin-based products into a competition. Rhubarb gin sat alongside a plate of delicious cup cakes decorated with gin-infused summer fruit, whilst sloe gin did battle with blueberry gin jelly. There were children's games, including a gin can ally, and a talented face painter ensured that soon the Green was full of super heroes, wild animals and magical fairies.

A bar supplied lubrication in the form of our local Hooky beer and a good variety of other beverages whilst a wonderful aroma of roast pig enticed us to partake of Robbie George's hog roast burgers, declared by many to be the best they had ever tasted.



*Liz Haycock and Sheila Andrews with their tombola*



Throughout the afternoon, Terry Green entertained us with a popular selection of well-known 'oldies' which even persuaded some enthusiasts to get up and boogie.

The overwhelming ethos of the event was one of generosity. So many people gave willingly and with great good humour of their time, money, skills, and more. Raffle prizes poured in from individuals and local businesses



*Photos by Simon Collett*

including bottles of gin from Honesberrie Shooting School and Sipsmiths, and vouchers from the New Inn and Janie George, to name but a few. Simon Mackay, with help from Richard Jones from the Banbury wine merchants, judged the produce competition, declaring that Fi Noble's sloe gin was so good it would



*Darcey Collett being made to look even prettier*

see off competition from commercial producers. Fi won a bottle of Two Birds gin as her prize. Darren Emerton became an impromptu auctioneer persuading many to purchase some of the wonderful cakes donated so generously – Sotherby's may yet snap him up. Several villagers contributed before the day by helping to put up the marquees and others helped with the clearing up. The main organisers, Lynn Neasham and Jan Miles, were ably assisted by Lucy Jones, Alison Symmers, Claire Zachar, Paula le Baigue, Emily Hayward-Humphrey and Fi Noble, and deserve our thanks. It was a wonderful day and also raised £2,041 for the Old School (this is not included in the total mentioned above).

## **ART CLASSES**

Spawned from the successful pebble painting mentioned above, Paula Le Baigue is planning to hold regular art classes in the Old School from September. She's working on the details, so more to follow.....

## **MURDER AT PRIORSWELL**

Weston and Lois Weedon Drama Group are presenting their latest play *Murder at Priorswell* on Friday and Saturday, 21st and 22nd July, at Lois Weedon Village Hall starting at 7.30. This group puts on excellent productions which are enjoyed by many. Tickets £6; [jonathan.carpenter@berrys.uk.com](mailto:jonathan.carpenter@berrys.uk.com)

## **TOWCESTER HIGH STREET CLOSURE**

Major road works are planned for the A5 from the River Tove south to Marlow Road on the A5 in Towcester starting in late July. They are scheduled to run for an 18-week period until the end of November with shifts on 7-day working. The scheme includes repairs to drains, kerbs, footpaths, a collapsed gas pipe trench, and carriageway resurfacing.

All the details are on the Towcester Town Council website at [www.towcester-tc.gov.uk](http://www.towcester-tc.gov.uk); scroll down on Latest News for links to attachments.

## **ST JOHN THE BAPTIST CHURCH NEWS**

*Barbara Malcomson  
malcomson@abthorpe.net*

April seemed to have been a busy but happy month in the church. As well as our usual two services we celebrated Easter with a lovely Eucharist service and hosted a benefice service. We also held the first of our monthly Tea and Piece events in church.

At our Annual church meeting on March 20th sadly Darren Emerton resigned as churchwarden. We appreciated the work he did during the time he was in post. Richard Tomalin told this meeting that, after many years as churchwarden and quite a few of those working as the sole churchwarden, he will resign at our annual meeting next year. Richard does so much for the church above and beyond his role as churchwarden and we are not sure what the situation will be this time next year. Alison Robbins is continuing as Treasurer, Barbara Malcomson as Secretary and Jill Greenhalgh as PCC member. Steve Andrews has resigned as Electoral Roll Officer, a job he has been doing for the past few years. Thank you to Steve for doing this job so efficiently. If anyone is interested in finding out more about this post, please contact me.

The re-ordering of the north side of the church has moved on a little. Our architect has produced designs for a new servery, stone flooring, heating and lighting. This will include a new water supply with provision for a possible toilet in the future. These plans have been submitted to the diocese as part of the first stage in gaining consent. We are currently waiting to hear the result so that we can start thinking about the next stage.

Our Patronal Festival, celebrating the birth of John the Baptist, was on 24th June. Future services are:

15th July	9.15	Holy Eucharist Service
12th August	11.00	Holy Eucharist Service



16th September	10.00	Holy Eucharist Service
14th October	11.00	Harvest Holy Eucharist Service
21st October	9.15	Holy Eucharist Service

Everyone is welcome to any of our services.

Tea and Piece dates are planned for 24th June, 15th July and 19th August, 3.00 to 4.30pm. Please come and join us in church for a cup of tea, piece of cake and chance to catch up with people.

The Harvest Supper will take place on Friday 12th October at the Old School. Put the date in your diary – more details later.

Recent tote winners have been Rene Balderson in February, Lucy Jones in March, Tony and Peta Travis in April and Jill and Mike Greenhalgh in May who each won £200. Tricia Holmes was the June winner when the winnings were £195. Congratulations to all of them and thank you to everyone who supports the tote.

The Food Bank box in the back of the church continues to be well supported. Our recent contribution to Towcester Food Bank has been 11.8kg and our total since we started is 1,330.9kg. There is wonderful support from people in Abthorpe. Thank you to everyone for their donations.

Pledge 2 Pray is the Archbishops of Canterbury and York's initiative, now in its third year. This year it took place internationally between 10th and 20th May. Last year people from the five villages in our benefice took part in a Prayer Walk stopping in each village church for a short service. This year, a Prayer Trail was organised on 20th May at St Mary's church in Whittlebury as this is the highest point in the benefice. Over 30 people came, including six from Abthorpe. The weather was lovely and everyone was given a set of clues to follow in their own time around the church grounds which led them to 10 prayer stations. Each station had a theme to encourage people to participate in different aspects of prayer. These included thinking of others, being thankful, asking for forgiveness and so on and involved a simple activity. At the end of the afternoon fish and chips were enjoyed in the sunshine; there was an overall fish theme. A beacon was lit on the spot representing the highest point in the benefice and the afternoon ended with a service in the church. There was a really good atmosphere and any doubts about the event were soon dispelled. The number of people attending was very rewarding. It is planned to hold a Prayer Walk on the weekend of September 16th/17th. Everyone, including dogs, is welcome.

## HONEY BEES AND THEIR YEAR

*Part 2 of David Robbins' account of beekeeping*

Spring and it's swarming up.....

What a winter. The 'Beast from the East' along with other cold snaps certainly made for a long and difficult winter and a short spring, testing the metal of my colonies to the limit. Two didn't make it, and most missed out on the crucial oil seed rape flowering and spring honey flow this year because they were not strong enough. Through April and May colonies build rapidly, the largest reaching 40,000 bees, and the end of the rape usually signals the onset of the swarming season. The hard work now starts for the beekeeper with weekly inspections and various manipulations designed to prevent swarming as well as checking for diseases. As a first line of defence

the beekeeper must mark queens to make finding her easy later on, and one wing is clipped to stop flying.

In May the phone begins to ring as members of the public contact beekeepers to ask for advice and help with unexpected swarms. Wasps, bumblebees, and in recent years particularly tree bumblebees (a new resident in the UK) are often mistaken for honeybees so there is always plenty to talk about. Although a swarm of honey bees can look rather alarming when it is on the wing, when clustered they are generally quite docile, although there are exceptions. Beekeepers are always happy to collect a swarm that has appeared in the wrong place; indeed sometimes risking life and limb in the process if the swarm is at the end of a wobbly ladder. In Northamptonshire we are well organised\*\* and collected swarms are usually passed on to beginners to get them started.

A colony of bees is a 'super-organism' like ants and termites. Reproduction is slow with one colony generally producing one viable swarm a year. A swarm contains the queen and most of the older (foraging) bees and a swarm clustering on a branch is about the size of a rugby ball,



*A well clustered swarm*

perhaps 10-20,000 individuals. A typical swarm, if there is such a thing, will emerge at the end of the morning, hang about in a low tree or bush until evening and then move on to their chosen new home.

Decision making, in this case where to set up home, in honeybees is an interesting process: 40-50 scout bees bring their ideas and suggestions back to the swarm where the best ideas attract new scouts to make their own assessment. By these means the best ideas are promoted and the worst dropped. Maybe their new home will be a hole in a tree, or a cosy chimney, or in the roof of your garage. All they need is a well enclosed cavity of about 50 litres.

*\*\*Swarm liaison officers locally this year are 01604 858933 and 01788 890908. Or go to [www.northantsbees.org.uk](http://www.northantsbees.org.uk) for additional information.*

## **ANGLIAN WATER AND PLUM PUDDING**

"A water leak has been reported in your area. We'll be investigating shortly and will then schedule any necessary repair works." That was the message in an e-mail sent to some Abthorpe residents by Anglian Water. Attached was a map showing that the suspected leak was just before the village sign on the road from Towcester.

However, locally it's suspected that Plum Pudding, a spring that has been causing problems for many years is the culprit. See <http://www.aboutmyarea.co.uk/Northamptonshire/Towcester/NN12/Villages/Abthorpe/314738-You-can%E2%80%99t-keep-a-good-spring-down-Plum-Pudding-strikes-again> for an interesting article on its history.

## **SAFARI SUPPER**

Inhabitants of our village who happen to be fluent in Swahili will know that 'safari' is a term for an overland journey. Nowadays the purpose of such journeys is generally to try and spot interesting wildlife. Abthorpe may be, as the crow flies, 4294 miles from the great plains of the Serengeti, and our wildlife tends to be rather smaller and generally less fierce than that found in the African savannah, but that did not daunt 56 intrepid travellers from recently undertaking micro-safaris of their own.

On a glorious May evening villagers could be seen stealthily making their way to the watering hole of Stone Cottage. If they were hoping to catch sight of wallowing hippos, they would have been disappointed – instead they were treated to a glass of Pimms and some delicious appetisers by

the hosts, Sian and Arthur Young in their lovely manyatta. Then news went out that sightings of great interest were being reported at various sites in the village. So the crowd split into smaller groups and set off in search of their prize. What fun it was! But it seemed that no sooner did each party settle on a good place to hunker down to enjoy a feast than it was time to move off again to a new location and a fresh opportunity for engaging with locals in their natural environment.

Thankfully, everyone returned at the end of the evening to the Old School, all unscathed from their safaris and with no reported accounts of anyone being charged by a stampeding elephant or mauled by a disgruntled lion. The air was filled with excited chatter and much good humour as we regaled each other with what we had seen and done. In fact, there was so much noise that all wildlife had long since made itself scarce, but no-one seemed to mind too much. It was a highly successful evening and all participants would like to say a big "Asante" to Waandaaji Tina, Emily, Maz, Lynn, Keith and Alison.

## **WOMEN'S CYCLE TOUR**

The route of this international event passed through Abthorpe during its second stage on 14th June from Rushden to Daventry. Blink and you would have missed the peloton but the police and support vehicles were an



elongated pageant. One lone cyclist came through about four minutes ahead of the peloton causing onlookers to wonder if she was an interloper enjoying the clear roads. But, no, at that point Maaïke Boogaard from Slovenia had a healthy lead. But it was swallowed up before the finish with the stage being won by the American rider, Coryn Rivera. Louise Gough managed to capture the cyclists leaving the village in the photograph opposite.

## **ABTHORPE FOOTPATHS**

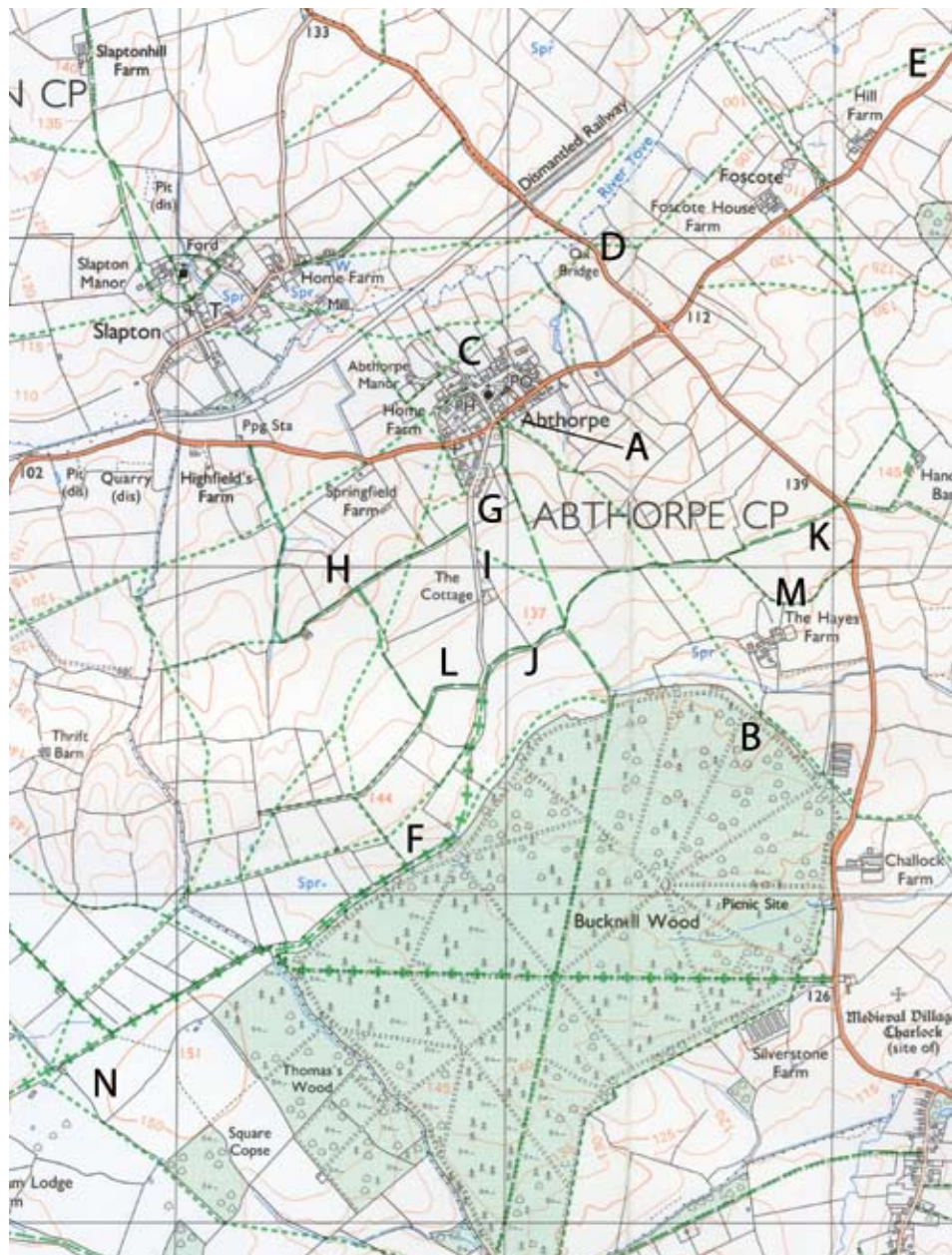
*This article is based on one published in Abtalk, February 2013*

For those of us who enjoy walking through the gentle rolling countryside amidst which the village of Abthorpe is set, it is good to know that the parish is very well endowed with footpaths – 43 in total. Some of these have names, the meaning of which tells us something of activities of a bygone era for these paths have been used by Abthorpe villagers for centuries. In the past of course walking along footpaths was not a leisure activity, but was simply a means of getting from A to B by the shortest possible route. Villagers would walk from their homes out to the surrounding fields, or from their outlying homes into the village – the spire of the church would be their guide and there is a clear pattern of paths radiating into the village all lining up with the church spire. Other paths linked Abthorpe with surrounding villages and hamlets – Foscoate, Slapton, Greens Norton, Wappenham, Silverstone.

Most of the tracks were just wide enough for one or two people to walk along. However, a few were wider, and some wider still and these reflect their original purpose. Two 6 foot wide paths were village tracks able to be used by a horse and cart. One leads from the Stocking Frame on Wappenham Road (A) to Bucknell Wood (B) where it joined a track to Silverstone, there being no other road to Silverstone until the early 1800s. The other led from the end of Main Street (C) to Oxbridge (D) and then on to Foscoate (E) – again this was the main route east out of the village at that time.

Wild Lane (F) was, and indeed still is, a much wider track as it was used by drovers to drive their livestock. Wild Lane passes alongside the north-eastern edge of Bucknell Wood eventually to meet up with the main drovers' road, the Welsh Lane, near Syresham. (The Welsh Lane is so called because it was the local section of a route crossing the country from Wales to London.) Although the origins of the name are unclear, it is interesting that Wild Lane is now a designated SSSI.

Probably the most used footpaths in Abthorpe today are the ones leading



The map is extracted from OS Pathfinder 1023. You can see it and all the photos in full colour in the pdf version of Abtalk on the village website [www.abthorpe.net](http://www.abthorpe.net).

away from Brackley Lane (G). As the houses give way to fields, the lane becomes a rough track. Soon Potland Lane bears off to the right (H) heading towards Wappenham. The origins of the name Potland are open to debate. Some think it was because villagers deposited the contents of their chamber pots (and other household rubbish) beside the lane before the days of rubbish collection! However, it is more likely that the lane was named after the large field through which it passed – Great Potlands Close, which may have links with the production of Potterspurty ware. The production of this local pottery ceased in the early 1700s but a fragment of a large bowl has been discovered off Potland Lane.

Continuing up Brackley Lane past Grafton View (I), a green lane leads off to the left. This is Hog Lane (J), which led to the open field Green Hedge next to the Silverstone Road (K). This lane and its name obviously date back a long time until well before the land was enclosed into the fields we know today. Instead of turning left into Hog Lane, however, you may choose to turn right at the top of Brackley Lane into another green lane known as Withymore Lane (L). Withies were willow stems which could be used for thatching and the lane led to a large boggy area, presumably full of willows, known as Widymore.

One footpath on the eastern side of the parish with rather a blood curdling name is Cut Throat Lane (M). This is not related to any grisly occurrence that took place in the past, but because it resembles the shape of an early cut throat razor. Again, this is an old lane which allowed access to an osier bed providing the raw materials for basket making, a craft industry in Towcester.

Finally, on the other side of the parish close to the boundary with Wappenham, is an area called the Potash (N). A look at the map shows a number of paths leading away from this area (and a similar number leading away towards neighbouring parishes). This is where a local woodsman burnt wood to make ash. Ashes made a good fertiliser, and farm workers would walk here to collect the ashes for spreading on the fields.

So, next time you decide to follow the way markers across the fields following one or more of Abthorpe's many footpaths, take time to think of the steps that have gone before you and imagine how different life must have been for those earlier residents of our village. But perhaps, too, they might have paused and looked across the fields and taken in the same lovely views.

## PEOPLE

### MELANINA GIULIANI

Melanina died in Duncote Hall on 11th June following a stroke at the beginning of March. She was very well cared for by the nurses at Duncote and Dr Akram from Greens Norton had been seeing her regularly.

Melanina has been an integral part of Abthorpe village for decades and her death represents the end of an era. Her connection with Abthorpe began with Alberto Giuliani from Modena in northern Italy, close to the

Ferrari factory. He was called up into the Italian Army and served in the North African desert campaign fighting against General Montgomery and the British Eighth Army. Alberto was captured and ended up at a prisoner-of-war camp at Slapton. When hostilities ceased Alberto decided to remain in England and settled in a cottage overlooking the village green. It wasn't long before he met Melanina, a fellow Italian from Avellino a small town in the shadow of Mount Vesuvius. She came from a big family and as a teenager worked hard with her father in the fields. Several of her siblings emigrated





to Brazil, South Africa and the USA. Melanina chose to come to England and worked as a domestic at Bloxham School. Nora Hinds met her and was instrumental in bringing her to Abthorpe almost 70 years ago.

She met Alberto and started working for Reg Chapman who ran the post office from the thatched cottage on the village green (now the Old Bakehouse). She did most of the counter serving at the post office for many years and also delivered the mail to parts of the village.

Alberto died in 1997 and is buried in the cemetery. He had never been able to afford a car – just a three-wheeler. But Melanina was determined that his love of Ferraris would never be forgotten and a picture of his favourite car adorns his gravestone.

Having a conversation with her was fraught with difficulties and misunderstandings as she never did master the English language despite living amongst us for over 70 years. But Melanina was a wonderful character with a lovely sense of humour who will indeed be missed from the community.

Melanina's funeral will be at St Thomas More Church, Towcester at 12.30 on Monday 2nd July. After the Mass her body will be brought for burial to the graveyard in Abthorpe, where she will lie close to Alberto.

Dr Charles Fox has said, "it would be wonderful if some of her old friends from Abthorpe could come to the service in the Towcester Catholic Church". If anyone would like a lift, John Riches has offered space in his car: 01327 857703.

*The picture shows Melanina with portraits of her sister Anna and great nephew Giovanni who live in Brazil. Anna's son, Antonino, has written to thank everyone who helped 'Dona Melanina' either directly or indirectly.*

A warm welcome to Hilary and Clive Estall who have moved to School Lane from Haddenham near Aylesbury to find a little more space, peace and quiet. While Hilary runs her own business continuity consultancy, Clive is taking a break from his life in

financial services and project management while he considers other avenues to explore.

Clive has a passionate interest in motor sport of all kinds, so living within striking distance of Silverstone would seem a good move. Hilary is also keen on cars but probably not quite so dedicated as Clive. Both are looking forward to meeting other villagers and getting involved in village events; indeed they have already sampled the safari supper, the pub quiz and the GinFest.

Welcome also to David Bowen-Jones who has recently moved in to Brackley Lane with his daughters Hannah and Megan, plus dog Betty. David is a local agricultural engineer.



Congratulations to Barbara and Eric Malcomson and also to Carolyn and Richard Tomalin, each couple celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary this year.

If you know of any other significant celebrations to share, please do let us know.

Barbara and Eric were married on 1st June 1968 and Barbara has sent us her recollections of that day:

“Our wedding fifty years ago took place in the very modern suburban church of St Andrew’s in South Harrow, quite a different setting from Abthorpe where we have lived for most of our married life.

The day itself was extremely hot. Crimplene was the ‘in’ fabric at the time and some of the ladies must have been quite uncomfortable. As both sets of parents were ‘Yorkshire through and through’ the

reception had to be a proper 'sit down' meal. Then it was off to Heathrow to catch a flight to Dublin for our honeymoon. It was the first ever flight for both of us.

Once in Dublin we phoned home to let the family know we had arrived safely. My 3 year old sister innocently asked if we were going to bed now resulting in shrieks of hilarity down the phone. A train trip the following day across Ireland to Carrick on the river Shannon was the start of two gloriously hot weeks in our hired boat."

And Richard remembers his wedding: "Carolynn and I met as teenagers at our local church youth club in Wolverton. Our wedding in March 1968 took place at the local church in Wolverton with the reception being held at the Working Men's Club. It was very much a family affair with my twin brother as best man and Carolynn's two younger sisters as bridesmaids. Unusually for those times we do have a video of our wedding because a friend had a cine camera. No sound though. It was very windy and it poured with rain later as we went off on our honeymoon.



We were young and funds were short so we went away for just a few days to the Cotswolds. Demonstrating how things have changed so much, although we were pretty well skint, we had bought a house in Wolverton (it cost £3,000). So it was very exciting to be moving straight into that when we returned. We had two old Pullman chairs from the Wolverton Railway works to sit on, a gas cooker on hire purchase and no carpet on the stairs!

**DIARY**

*Monday 9 July*

Social Monday at the Old School, 10.30 – 12.00, and 3.00 – 4.30,  
coffee, biscuits and books

*Sunday 15 July*

Holy Eucharist Service, St John the Baptist, 9.15

Tea and Piece, St John the Baptist, 3.00 – 4.30

*Saturday 21 July*

Coffee morning, 26 Wappenham Road, 10.30 - 12.30

*Sunday 22 July*

Charity Quiz, the New Inn, 7.30

*Monday 30 July*

Social Monday at the Old School, 10.30 – 12.00, and 3.00 – 4.30,  
coffee, biscuits and books

*Saturday 4 August*

Blakesley Show, Blakesley Heath Farm, Maidford

*Sunday 12 August*

Holy Eucharist Service, St John the Baptist, 11.00

Tea and Piece, St John the Baptist, 3.00 – 4.30

*Sunday 16 September*

Holy Eucharist Service, St John the Baptist, 10.00

*Friday 12 October*

Harvest Supper, the Old School

*Sunday 14 October*

Harvest Holy Eucharist Service, St John the Baptist, 11.00