



ABTALK

News from Abthorpe

March 2018

The cover pictures on the last issue, created for us by Mick Walsh of Duck Creations from the millennium disc, were well received. Thinking we were heading towards spring, two May pictures were selected for this issue. Mistake?.....

Although Christmas now seems well in the past, some of the village celebrations are worth recording:

CHRISTMAS FAYRE

Early in December the Old School was the setting for the start of the Christmas festivities with another successful fayre organised by Janet Dancer and her band of helpers. The beautiful wreaths made earlier in the week were a central attraction, but there was plenty more to draw even more people than last year, including a children's activity table to keep them interested while the adults shopped, chatted and drank

mulled wine.

Janet would like to thank everyone who supported the event in any way, but a special thanks to those who gave such generous raffle prizes. The total of £1,100 raised was split between Marie Curie, the Church and the Old School.

CHRISTMAS TREE LIGHTS SWITCH-ON

In the late afternoon on the snowiest day of the year the church was crowded with villagers who had



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Abtalk has a new email address: abtalk@abthorpe.net

gathered to fortify themselves with mulled wine, hot chocolate, mince pies and spiced muffins. To get people in carol singing mode Philip Berry ensured that everyone's vocal chords were well and truly activated by directing a rendition of *Little Jack Horner*. Then it was outside for a short trudge through deep freshly fallen snow to the Green where the Christmas tree stood dark and silent.

Darren and Tina Emerton led the count-down. 10 - 9 - 8 3 - 2 - 1 and suddenly the tree's lights blazed in the darkness to create a magical scene. In the bitter cold many of the old favourite carols were sung, some with a beautiful soprano descant. Everyone agreed that it really was a wonderful part of our celebration of the Christmas festival.

BEER AND CAROLS AT THE PUB

Following on from the popularity of the event in 2016, a repeat performance of our Rector leading revellers singing carols+ at the New Inn was eagerly anticipated.

The large marquee at the back of the pub was packed with drinkers one December

evening waiting for the Reverend Paul to begin proceedings, but as he started to speak all that was heard was a Geordie croak. Paul had lost his voice! Fortunately Paul's wife, the Reverend Sue Faulkner, attired like Paul in a suitably festive Christmas jumper, stepped nobly into the breach introducing the carols and cracking an impressive array of corny Christmas jokes. There was a welcome break halfway through the proceedings to allow drinkers to replenish their glasses and help themselves to a wonderful variety of nibbles generously supplied by Rob and his team. Once lubricated and replenished, more carols followed, now sung with even greater volume if a little less tunefully. It really was a hugely successful and enjoyable



evening and one that all present hope will now become a regular Christmas celebration. Next year though we hope Paul will be able to join in with the singing adding his voice to those of the rest of us. Many thanks must go to Sue for being such a sport at a busy time of year for both her and Paul.

PARISH COUNCIL

Has anyone noticed the new street lights? There have been few comments, favourable or otherwise, except that one particular light needs a shade fitted to stop it illuminating bedrooms nearby.

At our January meeting the budget for the next financial year was considered and it was decided to raise the precept from £4,000 to £4,300. This is to cover all normal expenditure. The cost of the new mower and the street lights has been met by other grants. The new lights should lead to reduced electricity and maintenance charges. We have had to remove one of the seats on the green as it was in an unsafe condition. It will be replaced in the Spring.

The report of the recent interim audit of the council was considered. As usual, some procedural matters need attention. It is often very difficult to be aware of all these requirements and keep

the paperwork in order.

The next meeting date has been altered to Thursday 5th April. This is followed on 14th May by the Annual Parish Meeting, your opportunity to hear a report of the year's activities in the parish from the Council and various local organisations.

VILLAGE GREEN MOWING

Philip Berry is once again organising the rota for mowing the Green and will be organising a short course on using the new mower. More volunteers are always wanted – contact philip.berry@abthorpe.net.

BIRD SIGHTINGS

The bird below was spotted by Sue Rookley on her drive in Brackley Lane recently, unperturbed when she approached it. It was appeared to be uninjured but was later found dead in the back garden of an adjacent house. An interesting sighting which was later identified as a female



sparrowhawk.

Philip Berry took the photo on the opposite page last week. Winter makes shy birds a little less so, and hunger makes them braver. The Greater Spotted Woodpecker is often seen in his garden, but usually they go for the peanuts, not the sunflower seeds. And they are not usually seen in winter. There's a sparrow in flight caught in the picture as well.

The Fieldfare and the Redwing migrate here for the winter, and flock together. They spend it in farmland and hedgerows feeding on berries, fruit, worms, slugs and sometimes grain. They very rarely come into gardens, but bad weather like last week forces them into unfamiliar territory looking for food and water. They are both members of the thrush family, and clearly feeling the cold, fluffing themselves up to improve insulation.

NEW INN NEWS

On Rob's first night as landlord of the New Inn the bar was packed with villagers and visitors and some of the bar staff wore L plates on their backs to indicate that they were on a steep learning curve. That was a decade ago. Since then the pub has thrived. Rob has not only introduced high quality pub food but has himself bought the premises from the Hook Norton Brewery.

Unusually in these difficult times



for village pubs the current premises are simply not big enough to cater for all the customers who wish to enjoy its facilities. As a result Rob decided to apply for planning permission for a single storey extension at the back of the pub. At least half of the paved area will be retained to allow people to sit outside on balmy summer evenings. The extra space provided by the extension will increase the dining capacity. The current tiny kitchen can then be enlarged to make life a little easier for the hard working catering team. The good news is that at its meeting just before Christmas South Northamptonshire Council approved the application and building is

planned to commence in March. There will be as little interruption to food and drink service during this time; watch for signs in the pub or check the Facebook pages.

Speaking of the restaurant, Mothers Day is coming up on 11th March featuring a celebration Sunday roast menu. The next notable date is St Patrick's Day on Saturday 17th March, when a suitable menu will be on offer, but this year St George's Day falls on a Monday when the restaurant is closed so no celebration then. Easter Sunday, 1st April, will be another opportunity for Chef Steve to produce a special menu. Meanwhile Tuesday steak nights continue as usual.

A recent innovation at the pub is a monthly meat raffle drawn on the

third Friday. Half of the £1 tickets go into a charity draw with a lucky dip pick for the successful charity. Last month £48 was donated to MIND.

There have been four opportunities for quizzing since our last issue. At the end of November No Eye Deer sent their winnings of £165 to Willen Hospice. There was a full house for the Christmas version jointly prepared by the four quizmasters: Philip Berry, Robert Miles, Roger Tolson and Clive Wright. It was again won by No Eye Deer (although their membership is ever-changing), raising £180 for William Blake House in Blakesley which has three small care homes serving the developmental needs of residents with learning disabilities. Numbers were thinner on the ground in January as would be expected, but

PDSA benefitted by £120. Not ABBA were February's winners and chose Talbot Butler Ward, a cancer ward at Northampton General Hospital, to receive the £150 raised. The closeness of the final scores was remarkable as shown on the left.

	1	2	3	4	5	6
NO Holes	7	5	12	7/19	15/34	11/45
NO EYE Deer	12	8	20	28	13/41	8/49
NOT ABBA	13	8	21	25	4/40	14/48
MISLED	8	14	6	22	5/37	9/43
SALINE	7	9	15	23	15/38	9/47
BARTLES	11	7	18	24	14/38	8/46
AMNESIAS	10	9	16	21	5/35	10/45
COUNT ON US	12	12	21	26	13/39	11/49
						1/60

MINI FARM

Following objections from the Parish Council and Bradden and Slapton parish meetings, South Northants Council refused planning permission for a change of use of the land at Mini Farm from agricultural.

At the subsequent appeal the inspector, Mr David Murray, overturned the objection to allow two additional caravans, the erection of a replacement amenity building and the laying of hard standing.

In essence the Inspector concluded that there is an unmet need for a modest number of gypsy and traveller sites in South Northamptonshire District at the moment and he was persuaded that the site would not have a harmful effect on the countryside. Regarding highway safety he believed that the existing access to the site has reasonable visibility and would provide safe access. He was satisfied that the disposal of foul water by the use of a small treatment works or a septic tank would be adequate and satisfactory in principle.

Although not queried by SNC, some of the representations made by the local settled community questioned the family's status as gypsies and disputed their nomadic lifestyle. The inspector concluded that on the basis of oral and written evidence he was satisfied that the appellant and his extended family have a nomadic lifestyle. Further the best interests of the family's children are served by having a settled base from which they can continue their education locally and this was a factor to which he applied significant weight.

INTERESTED IN VOLUNTEERING?

Towcester Area Door to Door is the local voluntary transport service taking local people to and from their health-related appointments. Several people in the village make use of the service but there are no volunteer drivers from the village, so drivers have to come further to provide.

Additional volunteer drivers are required for both regular and ad hoc bookings in order to maintain TADD's current level of service. Whether you can spare an hour or so once a week, once a fortnight or a couple of times a month, there are always bookings to suit your availability.

Volunteers use their own cars and are paid mileage costs. No extra insurance is required. For more information contact TADD: 01327 810300; tadd@btconnect.com

NEWS FROM ST JOHN THE BAPTIST

Barbara Malcomson

malcomson@abthorpe.net 01327 857066

As I write this we are in Lent leading up to the festival of Easter. It seems quite a while ago now but we are still talking about our Christmas celebrations.

Christingle Service

The church was packed for our Christingle Service on Christmas Eve with hardly a seat to spare. It was a beautiful service culminating in all the children holding their Christingle oranges, candles lit and the church lights put out. Nobody could have been unmoved as the children's voices joined the rest of the congregation in singing *Away in a Manger*. Our Christmas morning service was also well attended.



Coming much more up to date on the Sunday afternoon before Shrove Tuesday (better known perhaps as Pancake Day) we held a Tea and Pancakes event in the Old School. Villagers had the unenviable choice of whether to opt for traditional sugar and lemon pancakes or go for something a little more exotic such as banana and Nutella with ice cream, mixed summer berries with raspberry syrup and whipped cream, or spiced apple, cream and toffee sauce. It was a very pleasant way to spend a cold, wet and windy February afternoon.

Future services:

Sunday 11th March	11am	Mothering Sunday Holy Eucharist
Sunday 18th March	9.15am	Holy Eucharist
Sunday 1st April	9.30am	Easter Sunday Holy Eucharist
Sunday 8th April	11am	Holy Eucharist
Sunday 15th April	9.15am	Holy Eucharist
Sunday 29th April	10am	Benefice Holy Eucharist
Sunday 13th May	11am	Holy Eucharist
Sunday 20th May	9.15am	Holy Eucharist

This year the Palm Sunday service on 25th March will be a benefice

event in Silverstone, held jointly with all five churches in the benefice as well as the Methodist Chapel in Silverstone. We will start at the Chapel at 10am and process to St Michael's Church where the Eucharist service will be held. Several people will be involved in readings which will take the form of a play and we are hoping that palm fronds and a donkey will be involved in the procession. It looks as if it will be a very powerful and meaningful occasion.

We just have one service in June in our church, on 24th. This is our Patronal Festival, celebrating the birth of John the Baptist to whom our church is dedicated. Everyone is very welcome to any of our services.

What is a church PCC? The letters in the name stand for Parochial Church Council and this is the executive committee of a Church of England parish. It consists of the rector and churchwardens of the parish together with representatives of laity. Our church is part of the Whittlewood Benefice which also consists of the churches St Michael's Silverstone, St Boltoph's Slapton, St Mary's Whittlebury and St James the Great in Paulerspury.

In Abthorpe we at present have a very small PCC with just two churchwardens and three other members. Together we are responsible for the financial affairs of the church and the maintenance of the building and churchyard, as well as promoting the mission of the church. Our PCC works really hard to raise money for the upkeep and maintenance of the church and grounds, and prepare the church for regular services and other forms of worship and celebration. We hugely appreciate all the help we get from the village in such ways as participating in the tote, mowing the churchyard and unlocking the church, and also supporting our fundraising events. We would dearly love to have more people on the PCC. We also need a new Electoral Roll Officer and you do not have to be on the PCC to take on this role. If you think you would be interested in helping us in any way, please contact me.

Annual Church Meeting This will be held on Tuesday March 20th at 7pm in the Old School. Come and find out what has happened in the past year and what will be happening this coming year. Everyone is welcome.

Church Spring Clean This will be held on Saturday 24th March from 10am until noon. It is a very friendly occasion – a bit of exercise, lots of chat, lovely refreshments and a beautiful church at the end of it. Hopefully the weather will be kind to us and we can get some jobs done outside too. Just come along for all or part of the time. We have some cleaning equipment but you are welcome to bring your favourite bit of kit.

North Aisle Improvements We are making progress with the improvements inside the north side of the church. We have given instructions to our architects to draw up plans for this which will include levelling and renewing the floor, bringing water into the church, improving the lighting and heating of that area and putting in a servery which will be in keeping with the interior of the church. At the moment there is a lot of information passing between the PCC and the architects to ensure that we have thought of everything.

Tote Recent tote winners are Graham Foster who won £202.50 in December the same amount as Tina and Darren Emerton in January. Renee Balderson was the lucky winner in February to the tune of £200. Thank you to everyone who is supporting the tote this year.

We were delighted to hear that we have received £60 from January's meat raffle at the New Inn. Thank you to everyone who supported this raffle and to Michelle at the pub who organises it.

Tea and Piece These have been popular over the last two years and we are continuing our monthly afternoon teas in church this spring and summer. The first will be held on Sunday March 18th and the following dates will be: 15th April, 20th May, 24th June, 15th July, and 19th

August. All from 3pm to 4.30pm. Come and join us in church for a cup of tea, some lovely homemade cake and lots of chat.

Food Box The support for the food box in the back of church continues to be amazing. John and Joyce Riches took it into Towcester Food Bank at the end of January and it weighed in at 18.1kg, making our total 1251.5kg. In January, the foodbank fed 116 people and distributed 1013.2 kg of food. At the moment they need rice pudding, ketchup, custard and powdered milk. Their Facebook page is regularly updated, so if you want to donate check this out before you go shopping to find out what is needed. Thank you to John and Joyce for regularly taking the box in and to everyone who has contributed.

DIGITAL LIBRARY BOOKS

An interesting new service from the Library, BorrowBox, allows you to borrow eBooks and eAudiobooks online. It is accessed through your library membership and the BorrowBox app, through which you can download your selected title on to a computer or e-book reader. Log on to your library membership to see more or pop in to the library in Towcester if you are not yet a member.

ART CLASSES IN ABTHORPE?

Paula Le Baigue held a very successful morning of creativity by children in the Old School in December and this spawned the idea that there may be interest in a regular art class.

Paula herself is an experienced artist with a BA in Fine Art. The classes would cater for all ages, from beginners to those with more experience, and cover painting with oil paint on canvas, watercolour



The children's finished creation

paint, acrylics and mixed media, as well as drawing with pencils, pastels and oil pastels.

If you are interested or have any questions please email Paula: paulalebaigue@gmail.com

BIG THINGS

This is the title of a programme being developed by Banijay UK for a major UK broadcaster which is aimed at small villages and communities. Established artists will work with local people to create large pieces of public art that have specific meaning to their community. The organisers want to contact residents of small towns and villages to say what makes their hometown so special. Banijay have initially made contact with the Parish Council but if you are interested in getting involved contact them direct at bigthings@banijayuk.com.

X91

Did you know that there is a new express bus service from Brackley via Silverstone and Towcester to Milton Keynes? It runs hourly directly from Towcester to MK in about 30 minutes. Search Stagecoach timetables for service X91.

Meanwhile it is still not clear from Northants County Council whether the County Connect on-demand service will continue.

PEOPLE

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF IAN WILLSHER

1947 - 2017

Many in the village will have fond memories of Ian, his humour and resilience. He died peacefully on 7th November. His wife, June, has sent us this remembrance of him.

Ian's parents were married very young just before the Second World War broke out. Ian's father was posted to Africa for the duration of the war but on his return home he and Ian's mother set up home together again, and

Ian was born on 13th June 1947.

History has taught us that many soldiers came home from war and found difficulty in settling down to normal life and Harry Willsher was no exception to this. Ian was only two years old when his mother left home leaving Ian to be brought up by his "rather strict father".

Without the softer presence of his mother Ian became a rather naughty little boy and the final straw came for his father when Ian was 5 years old and he set the school piano alight by poking lighted



PEOPLE (CONTINUED)

matches through the green material backing of the piano until it finally went up in flames. So, Ian was sent off to a high church boarding school in Reigate, Surrey, where he stayed for the rest of his school life.

Although Ian did well at school academically, the rebellious side to his nature frequently got him into trouble and he was the recipient of regular punishments with the cane ('6 of the best'). But to his schoolmates Ian was a hero because of his resilience and determination to speak up for himself and any other chum, if he felt that he or they were being mistreated in any way.

After leaving school Ian joined the Royal Marines and worked his way up to Colour Sergeant, undertaking jungle warfare in Borneo and serving in the desert of Aden where he was shot in the leg and was flown home to UK for surgery. The situations he witnessed, the memories of friends he made and lost remained with him until the end. He also carried out duties guarding our Royal Family both here at home and abroad. His lips were always tightly closed apart from some funny innocent stories.

Fast forward to 1985. Ian had left the Marines, and, now divorced, moved to Northamptonshire to start afresh. June, similarly divorced, but the two having not yet met, moved in the same year to the same place and so their paths crossed. "Our children went to the same school, maybe we brushed shoulders on parents' evenings or at the school gates. But it was at a housewarming party of a mutual acquaintance that things became serious. Midway through the evening Ian came over and asked me to dance. The music was *Lady in Red*: there was something special going on, and we both felt it! From that point on we became soul mates – and remained so right to the end of Ian's life.

"We married a year later in September 1986 and settled down to family life. Jez, my son was just 10 years old and in much need of a father figure. Ian was very good at filling that role and Jez looked up to him. My girls were older and Andrew, Ian's son,

PEOPLE (CONTINUED)

spent weekends with us. It worked out well. In 1996 tragedy struck when we lost my daughter Ellie to leukaemia. Ian propped the family up during those months: he was kind, caring and carried the responsibility of the family on his shoulders while spending hours reading to and caring for Ellie.

"We moved to Abthorpe in 1998 when I became housekeeper to Angela and David Darling in Leeson House. Unfortunately the household duties became too much for me following an operation in 2000. We were very happy to be able to stay living in Abthorpe as 1 Cadogan Place was empty. I got very involved with village life through The Abthorpe Fund Group, which I enjoyed. And Ian helped whenever he could.

"Ian loved living in Abthorpe – we both did. Many happy memories were made there, many friends and acquaintances never forgotten. We would happily have spent the rest of our lives here but three years ago with Ian deteriorating fast and in desperate need of help to look after him we moved to Wales to be with Jez and his family. The close bond between Ian and Jez came to the fore again, only this time the tables were turned and it was Jez who had the broad shoulders for Ian and me. Ian died very peacefully with Jez and me by his side. Ian was a kind, caring generous and loving man and a good husband, but that strong rebellious streak was still there, right to the very end. Bless him."

Congratulations to Gemma Briggs and Alex Whitworth from Wappenham Road who recently married in a small ceremony for family and close friends at the Five Arrows Hotel close to the National Trust's Waddesdon Manor. During the ceremony Sonny, Gemma's 7 year old son, read a poem that he had composed especially for the occasion. Nell (4) her little girl was supposed to have been a flower girl but went on strike. Alex's best man, Frankie, flew over from New York especially for the occasion.

PEOPLE (CONTINUED)

Gemma and Alex featured in our April edition last year when they worked together on an exhibition at Bletchley Park showcasing the Off Duty activities of staff during the war. Gemma is the Media and Publications Manager at the museum and Alex had been commissioned to provide the exhibition illustrations. We wish them many happy years together.



Welcome to Stephanie Moss and William Kewley who moved to 26a Wappenham Road in December. Abthorpe came up as being a commutable distance for each of them: Stephanie to Sywell where she works as a children's book editor and William to Warwickshire to his work on IT in the motor industry. As relaxation they both enjoy skiing, with William also being a keen cyclist and tennis player. With such strenuous activity, maybe relaxation is probably not quite the right phrase. We hope they enjoy living in Abthorpe, and look forward to seeing them at a pub quiz evening soon - another social event Stephanie enjoys.

We are sorry to learn that Melania Giuliani has been unwell and is presently in hospital. We are all thinking of her.

BE SAFE ONLINE

Some useful advice has come our way from the police about using apps safely and securely. All the details are at: www.getsafeonline.org/safeapps/.

COMMUNITY MINIBUS AND DRIVER

SNVB is offering a one-time discount on hiring their 16-seat minibus and driver with £25 off a full day trip or £10 off a half day if booking a new trip by the end of March. More information: minibushire@snvb.org.uk or call 01327 358264.

SAFARI SUPPER

Having set the date as 19th May, it was then found that the cup final is on the same date and a certain wedding was taking place. While not many people from Abthorpe will be invited to the wedding, some may want to watch the match. However, after a bit of discussion it was decided to stick to the date. You should all have had a flyer about the event by now.

For those unfamiliar with the concept of the Abthorpe version of a safari supper, the evening starts with a drinks reception for all diners during which you are told where to go for your first course. The mystery of your main course venue is revealed at the end of the starter, and likewise

for dessert. The party is split into tables of 8 and at each course you will be at a different house with a different set of dining companions. Everyone gathers again at the end of the evening at one venue for coffee (and maybe a little left over wine). It is a great social evening with an opportunity to get to know neighbours in the village you may not have come across before.

The organisers will try to visit everyone but if you want to make sure of your participation email safari@abthorpe.net.

NEWS FROM THE OLD SCHOOL

The Committee is being very active at the moment, having cooked 65 breakfasts for 'Truckers' on 3rd February. Several diners came from outside the village so the word is getting round about how good these Saturday mornings are.

They then pressed on with plans for some interesting new events this year, the most ambitious being a GinFest on the 9th June to coincide with World Gin Day. Sounds like a great idea. See opposite for details.

The coffee morning on 24th February hosted by Sarah Jones at Stable Cottage on the Green welcomed old and new faces, with some delicious cakes and savouries prepared by the ladies from the village - a very enjoyable morning



JUNE 9TH

ABTHORPE

ON THE GREEN

In celebration of World Gin Day, Abthorpe Old School invites you to the 1st Annual #AbthorpeGinFest....

Join us for a relaxed afternoon on the village green, sampling a few regional Gins or a drink from the bar whilst the children play.

Are you a local company that would like to sponsor an element of this event or donate to the raffle?

Donations welcome for the children's and adult's tombola, the cake stall and of course the Gin competition...

Time to be imaginative with flavours, what can you come up with? Gin Jam, Gin Jelly? The options are endless...

Further details to follow and regular updates on Abthorpe Old School Facebook page.

If you can help with any of the above please contact oldschool@abthorpe.net, we'd love to hear from you.



TESCO Bags of Help

Gin Tasting

Fancy yourself as a Master Gin Maker?!

Enter your Homemade Gin into a Tasting Competition

Games for the Children

Face Painting

Pebble Treasure Hunt

Splat the Rat

Tea and Cakes

Sweet Stall

Sponsored Raffle

Bar

Abthorpe Old School

Charity No. 309804

oldschool@abthorpe.net



which raised £285.

A more relaxed day is planned for 28th April. The Old School will be turned into a library-cum-bookshop with a good range of books on offer for sale. Or just sit comfortably and read while partaking of a soup lunch or afternoon tea - or both if you really get engrossed in a book. More books would always be welcome, just email oldschool@abthorpe.net and arrangements can be made to collect them.

Also in the planning is a bridge evening on 3rd May, to include supper and a glass of wine. Please email Fanny Gladdle at oldshool@abthorpe.net for more details. Also if anyone is interested in learning how to play bridge, email Lynn Neasham at oldschool@abthorpe.net to show your interest. If there are enough people to run a beginners course, Lynn will be in touch. Looking further ahead there are plans for a quiz in September.

An update on the Tesco Bags of Help blue token scheme mentioned in the last issue: the Old School came second out of the three charities selected in the autumn and consequently received £2,000. Thank you to everyone who gave their support when shopping.

This added to the funds towards the refurbishment of the main hall, which is planned to start in the autumn. Ahead of that, a grant from the Big Lottery Awards for All scheme has enabled a new heating system to be

installed in the hall and the small room. It is an air source system which provides low level heating all the time in the building and can be increased when the hall is in use, controlled remotely through the wifi link that's now throughout the building.

The main driver for updating the hall is to make it a more pleasant environment for everyone in the village to use, but it is important that more use is made of it to support its running costs and maintenance. For instance, the insurance alone is £1,300 a year, a substantial amount when the only income is from hirings and fundraising.

A round up of what the Committee has been up to this year and plans for the future were presented at the AGM on 6th March. If anyone feels they would like to help with individual events, offers would be very welcome (oldschool@abthorpe.net).

HONEY BEES AND THEIR YEAR

David Robbins has been keeping bees for about 35 years. He started with two hives in his back garden but over the years the number has gradually increased and at this time of year he has 15 hives on two sites outside the village. At the height of the summer there will probably be 20 hives but he amalgamates weaker colonies before the winter. He has written this fascinating account of beekeeping for Abtalk.

Despite what many believe honey bees do not hibernate over winter, but rather cluster in a tight ball to keep warm in the dry, sheltered environment of their nest, which may be in your unused chimney, your roof, a tree trunk or, for managed colonies, in a beehive. Even in winter any time the temperature is over 10°C, and sometimes at lower temperatures than that, you might see them out and about making the risky dash for some water with which to dilute their winter stores ready to eat.

Spring bulbs such as snowdrops and crocus are sources of food for honey bees, and on a warm day in late winter or early spring you will



Honey bee on oil seed rape.
(Photo by Ivar Leidus)

see them gathering pollen to feed their growing brood nest. This is the start of the honey bees' year, and sets the scene for the challenges that lie ahead of them. Yet many colonies die in March/April. It is the time of year when they are at their fewest in numbers, maybe only 5,000 bees per colony (which is a hive). This sounds like a lot but at their height in mid summer a colony can reach 30 – 40,000. They are now at their most vulnerable with the older winter bees dying and replacements are needed rapidly. This is when they are most likely to succumb to the rigours of dwindling honey stores or the challenges of extended periods of harsh weather, and when they are most susceptible to disease.

We know from media reports that recent decades have been hard for all pollinators (which include butterflies, moths, solitary bees and hover flies as well as honey bees) and alarm bells have been ringing across

Europe, indeed globally. The same issues affect them all: habitat loss, pesticide usage and greater volatility in the weather. It is estimated that 84% of EU crops (valued at £12.6 billion) and 80% of wild flowers rely on insect pollination, so this is important for all of us.

So as winter moves into spring we hope the colonies will indeed begin to thrive rather than simply survive. What can we all do to help things along? These days government is trying to help by shifting away from simply funding food production towards 'countryside stewardship'. Funding is available for farmers, woodland owners, foresters and land managers to make environmental improvements, increasing habitats and the diversity of forage through planting schemes. Such schemes are complex and take years to get going, but you can see some modest signs in the arable fields around the village, in conservation headlands (the uncultivated margins of fields) and newly managed field boundaries and hedgerows.

What can you do? Loss of habitat is a crucial factor in pollinator decline yet anyone with even a small garden can easily include a range of pollinator friendly plants; lawns are no good for bees, but a well stocked border can offer many riches.

One of the garden hives



BUT have you ever wondered how the plants you buy from the garden centre come to look so healthy? Try to avoid buying plants saturated in pesticides. What is safe for people is definitely not safe for our bees. Perhaps grow from seed? As a general rule look for plants with clusters of small flowers such as heather, verbena and lavenders, or pick from a whole range of herbs: mints, nepeta, oregano, hyssop or the sages. Eryngium (sea holly) is also broadly attractive in the garden and to pollinators.

Lastly what does the bee keeper do? This year just like every other for the past 30 years I, like all beekeepers, am looking forward eagerly to a better year than the last. For managed colonies the hard work to achieve this is in the previous autumn, preparing the bees for the coming winter, weeding out the weak and making sure they have enough reserves to last. There is little that can be done during the winter months. Spring inspections have to wait for the first warm sunny afternoon of the season which usually means mid to late March, and then the beekeeper is looking out for diseases and parasites, and is ready to feed the bees if necessary. Not just sugar but also pollen or a pollen substitute to keep the colonies in good shape until the fields turn yellow with oil seed rape and the

spring honey flow is upon us.

And will this year be a bumper year? For that you will have to wait for the next instalment of the beekeeper's year.

TOVE VALLEY BROADBAND

The AGM of Abthorpe Broadband Association, which is the company name of TVB, was held on 23rd January with another good attendance. An informal drop-in session starting at 5pm proved popular. Several members of the team were on hand to answer a wide variety of questions.

The meeting itself started at 7.30pm and heard an encouraging report from the chairman, Eric Malcomson. There are now over 600 members. New members were welcomed to the Company board to represent some of the other villages we serve.

WORK PLACEMENT OPPORTUNITY

Andrea Leadsom, our MP, offers a week's work experience in her offices for 16-18 year olds in education locally. The week is split between the Towcester and Westminster offices, and is an opportunity to see how the parliamentary system works. All the details are on her website at: www.andrealeadsom.com/work-experience.

On 3rd March, winter clings on and lambs enter a white world

FREE HOME REPAIRS

South Northants Council has just announced a Home Repairs Project for private homeowners and tenants who are over 65 and need help to tackle jobs around the house. Generally works up to £1,000 will be supported. There are conditions around who can apply: all clients must be on low income to access this service and either have a disability or long term physical or mental health condition, or be at risk of ill health or injury without support measures



or repairs being carried out, or need work carrying out to enable safe discharge from hospital. For more information contact Care and Repair Ltd on 01604 782250, email: office@careandrepairnorthamptonshire.org.uk.



POLICE DOG MAC

PD Mac is the newest recruit to the Northamptonshire Police dog section. On his first operational day he detained three suspects in the County following a report of a dwelling burglary.

Bursting with pride

DIARY

Sunday 11 March

Mothering Sunday Holy Eucharist, St John the Baptist, 11.00

Mothers Day lunch, the New Inn

Saturday 17 March

St Patrick's Day menu, the New Inn

Sunday 18 March

Holy Eucharist, St John the Baptist, 9.15

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

Tuesday 20 March

Annual Church Meeting, St John the Baptist, 7.00, The Old School

Saturday 24 March

Church spring clean, St John the Baptist, 10.00 - 12.00

Sunday 1 April

Easter Sunday Holy Eucharist, St John the Baptist, 9.30

Easter menu, the New Inn

Thursday 5 April (Note change of date)

Parish Council meeting, The Old School, 7.45

Sunday 8 April

Holy Eucharist, St John the Baptist, 11.00

Sunday 15 April

Holy Eucharist, St John the Baptist, 9.15

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

Saturday 28 April

Book sale, refreshments, lunch and afternoon tea, The Old School, 10.30 - 4.30

DIARY

CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

Sunday 29 April

Benefice Holy Eucharist, St John the Baptist, 10.00

Thursday 3 May

Bridge evening, supper and wine, The Old School, 7.00 for 7.30

Sunday 13 May

Holy Eucharist, St John the Baptist, 11.00

Monday 14 May

Annual Parish Meeting, The Old School, 7.45

Saturday 19 May

Safari Supper, village-wide, 6.30

Sunday 20 May

Holy Eucharist, St John the Baptist, 9.15

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

Monday 14 May

Parish Council Meeting, including AGM, The Old School, 7.45

Sunday 25 May

Palm Sunday service, St John the Baptist

Saturday 9 June

GinFest family day on the Green

Sunday 24 June

Patronal Festival, St John the Baptist

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