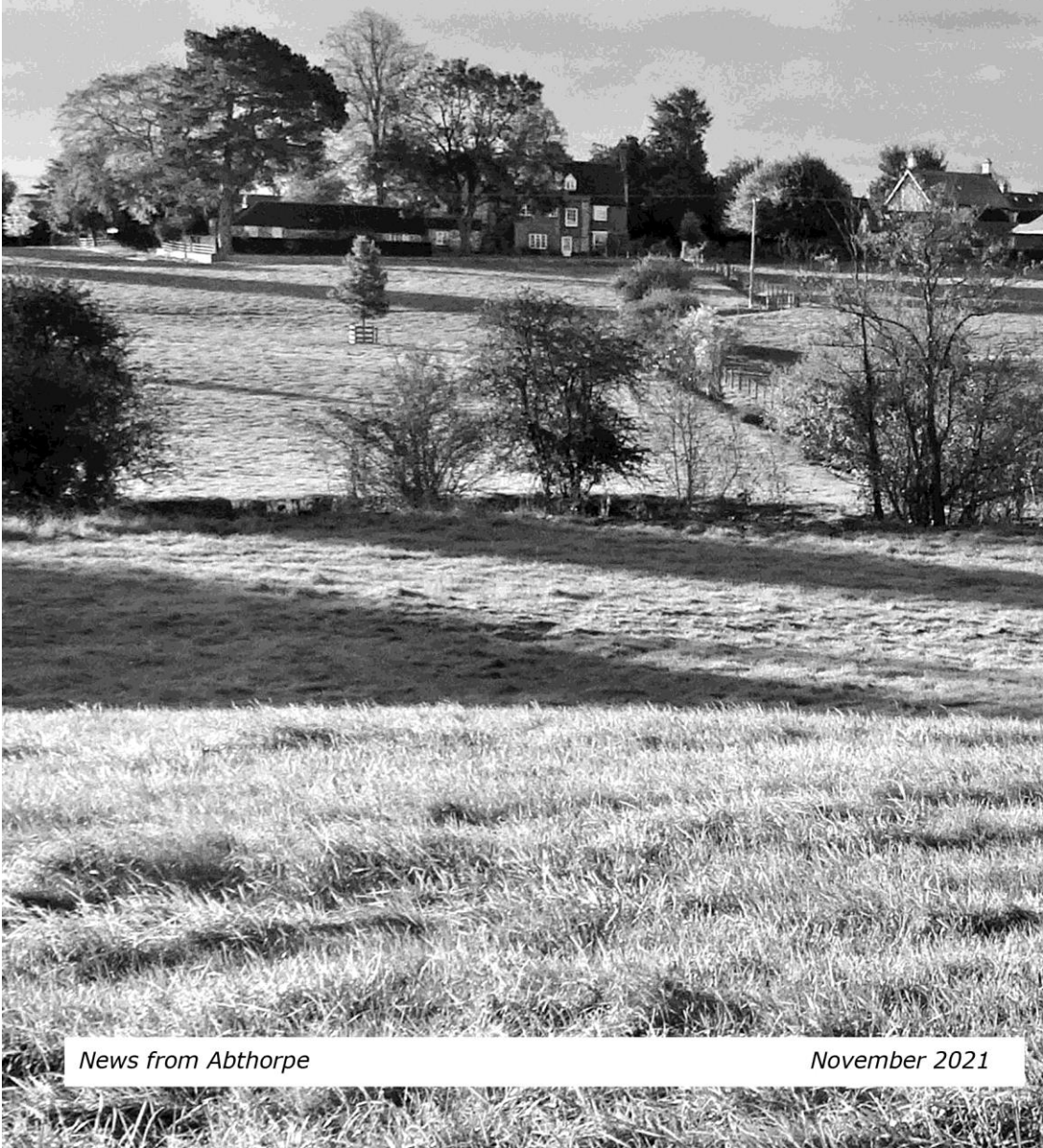


ABTALK



Parish Council News

Mike Greenhalgh, Chairman of Abthorpe Parish Council

Freedom of the Village of Abthorpe

This prestigious award has been introduced by the Parish Council this year. It is a way of the village thanking those who have put an extraordinary amount into the village of Abthorpe and the lives of its residents. The individuals awarded this honour will have made a special contribution to village life and in so doing enhanced the reputation of Abthorpe. This can be in any area or activity which affects the village (for further details please see the Parish Council website at abthorpe.ukparish.org).

At a very well attended and enjoyable Harvest Supper the first of these awards were presented. It was with great pleasure that Steve Andrews was awarded the 'Freedom of the Village of Abthorpe'. A framed certificate was presented to Steve by Mike Greenhalgh, chairman of the Parish Council.

Steve Andrews

In the Seventies, Steve was one of the principal driving forces behind a group that looked to renovate The Old School. Steve was on the committee for many years and also a Trustee right up until last year.

The first project was to build a toilet block to replace the single child-sized toilet in the outside shed. To fund this Steve, with others, organised many events including Country Fayres lasting 2-3 days (which were exhausting), BBQs, Bingo Nights and Race Nights - to name but a few.



It was also around this time that Steve introduced the village Tote which for many years was the main source of income for the Old School. This has proved to be a very important income stream for the Old School and then, since the Millennium, the church. After the toilet block was completed, attention turned to installing the first kitchen and then some desperately needed central heating for those cold winter evenings.

In the year 2000, following numerous fundraising events, the Millennium sign was provided on the village Green and the church clock was refurbished.

Subsequently in 2003 after the enjoyment of seeing both his sons married in the village church, Steve headed up the Abthorpe Church Fabric Appeal which raised an amazing, and much needed, £25,000 in just over 2 years, at a critical time for the church. The renovations to the building which were made possible have left the church in a good state of repair for all to use.

Following his retirement Steve took on the role of managing Crossroads Care in South Northants, an essential service to give carers spells of time off from their care commitment to enable them to go shopping, attend an appointment or just have a break. He was later to go on to undertake a similar role with the Alzheimer's Society.

Steve has therefore demonstrated innovation and entrepreneurship with fundraising, in particular the inauguration of the village Tote, and the renovation and maintenance of the Old School and the village church. He has also helped those in need and less able to help themselves by his work with Crossroads and the Alzheimer's Society.

For these reasons he has been awarded the Freedom of the Village of Abthorpe, as a thank you and token of appreciation from the village.

Following the first presentation, the Freedom of the Village of Abthorpe was then presented to another equally deserving villager, Janet Dancer.

Janet Dancer

Janet was also heavily involved with all the Old School renovations and fundraising in the 1970s, being on the committee and also a Trustee until last year. Alongside this work for the Old School Janet also worked hard on the Parish Council for many years. Other activities in which



Janet has been involved include village Fetes, Open Gardens, Liz Haycock's Macmillan coffee mornings, church flowers and also keeping the cemetery extension in good order with Glenda Holton until a few years ago.

One very important role that Janet has performed in the village is being the Poppy Appeal representative for over 40 years. Janet visits every house in the village to sell poppies and makes sure everyone knows about the Poppy Appeal and its significance.

Lastly, and probably her biggest contribution to village life, has been Janet's interest in and care for other people, especially those in need. Often the elderly but sometimes whole families have benefited from Janet's help. It can be practical help, a friendly chat or information about accessing help. The list of those who have benefitted is long, and for obvious reasons those concerned will not be identified here. In her quiet unassuming way Janet has been a lifeline to many villagers, and continues to be so.

Janet fulfils the criteria for this award having contributed hugely to the lives of those less able to help themselves, while demonstrating innovation with everything that has changed for the better in the Old School. Janet has also enhanced the reputation of the Parish by running the Poppy Appeal for the village.

We congratulate her and also thank her on behalf of the village.

Volunteers needed

Mowing and strimming Brackley Lane: The Parish Council is looking to organise a rota of volunteers to tidy and strim the verges at the bottom end of Brackley Lane and also parts of Wappenham Road from Main Street towards Wappenham. Equipment including a new electric strimmer and safety goggles can be provided for use. If you are able to help perhaps a couple of times a year with the job of strimming the above areas, then please put your name forward. This is a similar rota to the village green mowing but hopefully with different villagers from different parts of the village.

Speedwatch 30: The Parish Council is also looking for volunteers to engage with the Community Speedwatch programme. We need more residents to come forward to be trained to try and reduce the speed of cars travelling through the village. If we don't get more volunteers, we won't be able to get this scheme going in the village.

If you are able to engage with either of these initiatives, please contact our Clerk, Tina Emerton, by email: abthorpeparishclerk@gmail.com or on Facebook.

Musings on the theme of 'Harvest'

The Autumn Equinox, which occurred on September 22nd, marks an important turning point in the year. The hours of day and night are balanced, indicating that the light half of the year is drawing to a close, heralding the return of darkness. Neolithic structures were arranged to alert the ancients when this time of the year had arrived, so recognising this event has been observed for a long, long time.

Although no longer an essential activity to stave off hunger, this is the time of year for gathering berries, fruit and nuts - sometimes called 'the second harvest'. Any extra produce that can be gathered before the onset of winter is considered a bonus, and even today many of us living in the country enjoy making jam, chutneys and other preserves, as well as wine and liqueurs that can be stashed away for the cold months. However, most of the

celebrations linked to this period of the year are focused on the joy and relief at completion of the main crop harvest. Until not so very long ago (think Irish Potato famine of only 170 years ago) a poor harvest might mean an entire settlement suffering extreme hardship, tough choices, and possible starvation.

Curiously, the word 'harvest' comes from the Old English word 'hærfest' which referred to the period between August and November: it was simply one of the four seasons, which we now call autumn. Our current use of the word as a reference to gathering of crops only became commonplace around the 13th or 14th century.



Harvesters by Pieter Bruegel the Elder

Modern farming is a world away from what our ancestors had to endure. Hundreds of years ago when the harvest began every able-bodied man, woman and child would be pressed into service. Indeed, what most now refer to as a 'summer holiday' for school children was originally a harvest

holiday where schools closed purely because so many pupils were needed to help get the harvest in before the weather took a turn for the worse.

Completing the harvest was a joyous occasion and, up until the 20th century, it was normal for farmers to celebrate the end of the harvest with a 'harvest supper' in which the whole community took part.

Nowadays we have machinery to speed up the harvest, so we require far fewer people working in farming. Another modern boon is that we can easily transport food around the country, so a poor harvest in one area doesn't spell disaster for those locals. All our modern developments have allowed society to increasingly drift away from the realities and hardships of farming, leading to many of the traditional celebrations and practices to become symbolic at best, or even more tragically, simply forgotten.

In Britain, the church eventually adopted and adapted our older customs, with the Reverend Robert Hawker being the first to invite his parishioners to a thanksgiving service at his church in Morwenstow in Cornwall in 1843. They sang hymns to celebrate the harvest and decorated the church with home-grown produce. And a decade later, the Reverend Dr William Beal in Norfolk held a harvest festival in order to end what he considered were 'disgraceful scenes' at the end of the harvest, and he promoted 'Harvest Homes' in other nearby villages.

In many communities today, the closest brush to be had with a harvest celebration will be a church or school harvest festival. Up and down the country children take tins, bottles or packets into their school or local church for a special service. This is a pale imitation of what a harvest celebration used to be, and it has drifted even further from its roots by being used today to promote quite different issues, often with the food supplied by the children being donated to a local food bank or similar, or the celebration is used to raise awareness of international issues chiefly in developing countries where people struggle to grow crops. Whilst this is no bad thing, it could be argued that what should be a time of simply appreciating the bounty of nature is becoming increasingly politicised.

Harvest time in Abthorpe

It has long been a tradition in our village to hold a Harvest Supper and 2021 saw the welcome return of this event. Over 40 villagers gathered in the Old School one Saturday evening in mid-October and enjoyed good food and much conviviality. The fare this year was simple but hearty - a variety of one-pot dishes accompanied by thick crusty bread followed by fruit crumbles (all using fruit gathered from hedgerows or neighbours' trees). A bar ensured that nobody went thirsty either. Curate George Frost was a welcome guest and set the tone for the evening with a gentle opening prayer reminding us all just how bountiful nature is in our part of the world. George also provided us, by means of a beautifully constructed map of our village, with the chance to find some (virtual) treasure hidden in the locality, the lucky winner being Ian Atkins. After the cancellation of so many planned village events over the last 20 months, it was wonderful to have the chance to celebrate something once more as a community.

Harvest Supper: A good opportunity to catch up on news



A 21st century Harvest

Those of us who like to tread the footpaths of Abthorpe cannot fail to have noticed that several fields around the village were growing a different crop this year. Instead of the usual green and golden expanses of barley or wheat to which we have been accustomed, suddenly we were picking our way through 2 metre high 'forests' of maize.

So, you want to know more about Biofuels?

Firstly, what exactly is Biomass energy? Put simply, it is the energy that is generated from burning raw organic waste or biomass feedstock (which is where those corn cobs come into the picture). Once the waste is burned it can be converted into clean products such as steam, biodiesel and biofuels. It can also be converted into gases such as ethanol and methane, and of course, electricity.

In recent years, the move towards 'green' power has seen the popularity of maize-growing rocketing not just in our local area but throughout the UK, with up to 450,000 acres now growing the crop countrywide. But despite the obvious demand for maize, it is a controversial choice for many people and its effect on the environment divides opinion.

Biofuels or Biomass energy provides an alternative fuel source to traditional gas, coal and oil solutions. The need to try and steer our dependency away from burning fossil fuels towards a cleaner, more environmentally-friendly source has never been more of a priority than it is now.



The reason biomass energy is considered to be a clean environmentally-friendly fuel is because it is carbon neutral - in other words, when the biomass (in this case, maize) is burned as part of the process of making biofuel, the carbon dioxide that it releases back into the atmosphere balances what it recently took in during the process of photosynthesis (which allowed the crop to absorb energy and grow). There is no net release of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere and so things remain in balance. In contrast, when fossil fuels are burned, huge quantities of carbon dioxide are released that have been trapped for millions of years so there is a carbon dioxide overload.

Of course, there are other sources of clean sustainable energy (think solar power, wind power, hydroelectric power, etc) but these all have disadvantages in terms of producing a constant source of energy in the right place without using up too much land. Biomass energy has far fewer problems, and, in addition, the products it makes are all cheap to use.

There are many ways biomass can be used and many sorts of biomass, but *Abtalk* understands that the local maize is headed for bioethanol production at one of several local production sites in South Northamptonshire.

There the maize will be chopped up and turned into a slurry (corn mash). Enzymes are added to break down the starch (maize has a high starch content which is why it is seen as so energy efficient) into sugars, and it is fermented, producing some 8-12% alcohol. The CO₂ generated may be captured and used for food storage. There is remarkably little waste; in the final residue (stillage) liquids can be separated from solids and the solids can be further processed into an animal feed whilst the liquids are fed back into the start of the cycle.

Many of you will have noticed the inclusion of more bioethanol in your petrol recently – that E10 symbol on the petrol pump reflects the amount of bioethanol in the petrol. But it should be pointed out that, at the present time, much of this comes from Brazil rather than the UK, and who knows what has been cut down in order to grow the biomass crop?

With the recent announcement of the 2030 phase-out date for sales of new internal combustion engine cars and light vans, the use of ethanol in petrol may have a limited lifespan but for now it is a good way of de-carbonising the country's transport fleet.

So next time you step into the green tunnels it creates for our local footpath system

Another new departure this year was the sight of sunflowers growing alongside the barley in the fields beyond Oxbridge.



Sunflowers: A sight to put a smile on one's face

Old School News

Fundraising is slowly beginning to take place again, albeit on a fairly small scale as we all try to come to terms with the 'new normal'. Fi Noble is hosting a coffee morning on Friday 10th December at her home (48 Wappenham Road) providing you with an ideal opportunity to take a break from Christmas shopping, Christmas cooking, writing Christmas cards, decorating the house, and pulling your hair out. To recover from the rigours of the Yuletide season there will be a soup lunch in the Old School on Saturday 15th January, and everyone's favourite, the Truckers Breakfast, will make a welcome reappearance sometime in February or March.

Although it seems an age away, it is hoped to have an all-village event, possibly spanning several days, at the time of the Queen's Platinum Jubilee over the extended Bank Holiday weekend at the beginning of June. This will be a combined effort by the Old School and the Church - and any other interested volunteers! Plans are at an early stage but watch out for details.

We have some regular classes now taking place in the Old School: Personal trainer, Charlie Green, puts people through their paces (aka circuit training) on Wednesday evenings (see www.cgpt.co.uk for more information), Vanessa runs Pilates and adult ballet on Thursday evenings from 5.30 until 8.00pm (for further details contact her at hello@theclubpilates.co.uk) and, as can be seen in the ad, yoga teacher Julia is starting a 4-week course on 8th November between 6.30 and 7.30pm with further courses to follow.



The Old School is very pleased to welcome fresh blood on to the committee in the form of Sam Elwell. Anyone who has met Sam will know that she is enthusiastic, hardworking and full of energy - just what is needed!

And finally: early notice that this year's AGM is scheduled to take place on 2nd March. All are welcome to attend... and a reminder that the Old School has its own website where details of current and future events and activities are detailed. See <http://www.abthorpeoldschool.com>

Abthorpe Old School in days gone by

The fascinating life of Abthorpe school over more than 300 years is revealed in a book by villagers Alison Symmers and Jill Tolson. It documents the history of the school, all the teachers since 1642, personal recollections of children who attended between 1924 and 1959, and a photographic tour of the building.



At only £8 – the same as the annual salary of the first master – it would make an ideal Christmas present

Order from: oldschool@abthorpe.net

Update from the New Inn

Slowly things are also getting back to pre-Covid days at the New Inn. The new menu launched on 1st October is a reminder that the New Inn is so much more than 'just' a village pub. Superb meals are served each evening and lunchtime except Mondays. But the New Inn is also so much more than a village pub serving excellent food. It is a focal point for many social activities which are immensely popular with residents and local patrons alike. The Pub Quiz, held on the last Sunday of each month, made a welcome return in September. An attendee reported: 'So many people, full pub, all happy to be doing something social again - 70 quizzers, 12 teams and £260 raised for the Hope Centre'. The Open Mic session is another re-starter, taking place on the 2nd Sunday of each month and The Chef's Table continues to get excellent reviews, being held on the 1st Monday of each month.

The Christmas menu is now available as on the right. All the usual favourites with a few twists.

Then, on New Year's Eve, there will be live music and a Pig Roast, courtesy of Bunny Hutchings, to see out the Old and see in the New.

FESTIVE DINNER MENU

Caramelised Red Onion, Creamy Goats Cheese Bruschetta With Deep Fried Basil Leaf (V)

Roast Walnut, Fig & Roquefort Salad With Rocket & Honey Mustard Dressing (V)

Smoked Salmon, Asparagus Spear & Dill Tartelette Topped With Citrus Creme Fraiche & Citrus Dressed Leaves

Cream Of Tomato & Roast Pepper Soup Topped With Garlic Crouton (V)

Roast Norfolk Turkey Breast, Pigs In Blankets, Cumberland Stuffing, Candied Fresh Cranberries & Red Wine Roast Gravy

Slow Roast Lamb Shoulder With Apricot & Lemon Thyme Served With A Red Wine & Confit Garlic Sauce

Butter Baked Salmon On Saffron Potato Fondant With A Spinach & Pink Peppercorn Sauce

Glazed Pork Loin Topped With Spiced Apple And Cider & Sage Sauce

Honey Roasted Chestnut & Root Vegetable Filo Wellington Served With A Roasted Shallot Sauce (V)

Roast Carrots & Parsnips, Sauté Brussels With Bacon, Seasonal Greens & Roast Potatoes

Black Forest Brownie
Mince Pie Cheesecake
Lemon Meringue Roulade

Trio Of Festive Ice Cream - Christmas Pud, Cinnamon & Gingerbread

1 Course - £13.95 / 2 Courses - £19.95
3 Courses - £24.95

Latest News from Abthorpe Broadband Association

Tim Newton

ABbA continues to be supported and run by a very dedicated group of volunteers without whom it could not function.

The amount of data being used at peak times has doubled in the last year and because of this we have now upgraded the main feeds into Wappenham church but this time by a 5-fold increase from 2GB to 11GB. You may remember we increased our capacity at the beginning of 2020 from 1GB to 2GB. We anticipate that this latest increase will cover our requirements for the next 5 years.

We have been spending a lot of time this year putting down a further 15km of fibre infrastructure, although this is centred mainly around Wappenham. We have used the opportunity to add a new fibre link into Abthorpe from Wappenham which will give us a more secure network and allow further upgrades in the future.

We are aware that some of the radio services in the village have not been running as they should and hope to have fixed the problems by the time this appears in print.

Please continue to use the ticket system to feedback any problems and we will do our best to resolve them.

New regimes at St John the Baptist Church

As Covid restrictions have begun to be lifted we have been able to restore, return to or replace some of the elements of church life that have been in place over the past 20 months.

Church opening – since the beginning of September the church has been open during normal working hours for anyone who wishes to use the calm and quiet atmosphere for reflection, prayer or just a moment of stillness. Once British Summer Time ends, however, the church will not be opened daily until the return of BST in March. But if, during this time, someone wishes to go into church, they simply need to contact one of the following

PCC members and the church will be opened at a mutually agreed time - if at all possible, on that very day:

Jill Greenhalgh: 858102 Barbara Malcomson: 857066 Alison Robbins: 857795

Church services - a new schedule of services is now in place with Abthorpe normally having one service a month. This will take place at 10.00 am on the 2nd Sunday of the month. It will be a Holy Eucharist service led usually by our Rector, the Rev Paul McLeod, ably assisted by our new curate, the Rev George Frost. If there is a 5th Sunday in a month, Abthorpe will host a service on a rota with the other 4 churches in the Benefice - again at 10.00 am, and again a Holy Eucharist service.

For the foreseeable future, the services will be available on Zoom and will also be recorded for later viewing.

For information about all the other services held in the Benefice, please look at our Church notice board.

To access our worship via Zoom please use the following link or the Meeting & Passcode below:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84207775477?pwd=SjBPYlhhQ0NrSVlrb2VZQmYzTm51dz09>

Meeting ID: 842 0777 5477 Passcode: 407786

If you are without internet, you can telephone in to join the service by ringing one of the following numbers, and keying in the Meeting ID and then the password (see above):

0203 481 5240 0131 460 1196 0203 051 2874 0203 481 5237

Special Services and Events during November and December

Remembrance Sunday, 14th November: As this falls on the 2nd Sunday of the month, there will be a normal Holy Eucharist service in church at 10.00 am, but this will be followed by **an Act of Remembrance at the War Memorial from 10.50 am**, which will be led by Alison Robbins and will include elements of previous Acts of Remembrance in which various villagers take part.

Christmas Tree Lighting and Singing: As has now become a village tradition, everyone is invited to meet on the Green at **4.30 pm on Sunday 5th December** for the lighting up of the Christmas Tree, some festive songs and carols, with warm drinks and snacks to follow.

Beer and Carols: This popular annual event is planned for **Wednesday 22nd December, starting at 7.00 pm** in the outside marquee at the New Inn. Rev Paul will lead the singing, awful Christmas cracker jokes will abound, and Rob and the team will generously supply nibbles - but you buy your own drinks!

Carol Service and Christingles: Christmas Eve, 4.00 pm in church. There truly is no better way to start Christmas. Bring your friends and family. The church will be packed so come in plenty of time!

Christmas Day: The Christmas Day Eucharist will be held at **9.15 am** - a very special service.

Other News

Church Tote - this goes from strength to strength, providing extremely valuable funds for the upkeep of the church which, with the dearth of fund-raising activities because of the pandemic, are truly desperately needed. But, in addition, with every new member, the prize money also goes up! Win-win! Recent winners have been: in July, Sylvia Coombes; in August, Rev. George Frost; in September, Patricia Saunders; and in October Maisie Holland.

All of these winners received over £280 each.

Churchyard Mowing - many thanks to everyone who has played their part in keeping the grass cut and the churchyard looking neat and tidy. If you would like to add your name to the rota, please email Barbara Malcomson (malcomson@abthorpe.net). A special thank you to Steve Noble for his sterling efforts in the churchyard extension too - great job, Steve!

Tea & Piece - these popular monthly events which take place on Sunday afternoons restarted in July but, after 4 well-attended sessions, are now

suspended until the warmer weather appears next Spring. Sincere thanks to all those who volunteer to make and donate cakes, and to the villagers who attend and make the afternoons so successful.

Food Bank box - we have again started collecting food to take down to Towcester Food Bank. As the church will not be opened on a daily basis over the winter months, the box for collection of non-perishable foodstuffs will be kept in the church porch (north side).

A Thatcher's Story

If you have walked through the centre of the village in recent weeks you will have noticed that the roof of the Old Bakehouse is being given a serious makeover. The house was last fully re-thatched fifty years ago when Reg Chapman was in residence. The length of time that the previous thatch has lasted is testament to the craftsmanship of a previous thatcher, so Mary and Roger Brennan, the current occupiers, were keen to find someone of a similar calibre to hopefully make the roof of their home fully weather proof and beautifully crafted for another half century. And in Nick Mackay they have certainly found their man!

Interview with Nick Mackay, Master Thatcher, by Alison Robbins

Are you a local man?

Yes, we are based in Deanshanger in South Northamptonshire. Our operating area lies mostly within a 35-mile radius of base so, as well as Northamptonshire, we also operate in the counties of Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire and Oxfordshire. Occasionally though we have also worked on a number of interesting projects much further afield.

Has thatching been a tradition in your family?

Oh no - quite the opposite. No-one in the family has ever been a thatcher. But my son Callum works with me now, so maybe we are the start of a long line of thatchers for the future!



The Old Bakehouse waiting for a new thatch

What got you into thatching as a career?

My introduction to thatching happened purely by chance. One bright summer's day in 1971 - I was 13 years old at the time - I was out on a bike ride when I came across a thatcher re-thatching in straw the roof of an old village Post Office. I stopped and watched him work for a while transfixed by what I was seeing. That chance encounter changed the course of my life. I learnt later the thatcher working on that Post Office roof was Cecil Purser, and that his brother Frank, also a thatcher, lived in our village. The next two summer holidays were spent helping Frank Purser and confirmed my desire to learn to become a thatcher myself.

Have you ever had another job?

No. It was a huge commitment to become a master thatcher and one that took years to accomplish, but I have never regretted it.

So, what was the first step along the road?

Once I left school in 1974, I got taken on as an apprentice with Norfolk Reed Thatchers Ltd of Henley-on-Thames. Four years were spent working across

the country and gaining experience in all aspects of reed thatching. We were expected to work in all but the very worst of weather; protective clothing consisted of a donkey jacket, plastic mac and leggings. If the weather was too rough to be on a roof, we found somewhere undercover to prepare hazel for ridging. My starting pay was £6.00 per week, with a small travel allowance to return home once a month for a weekend.

Having gained some experience, were you then able to start out on your own?

Oh no. I still had so much to learn. In the new year of 1979, with enough experience to be useful, I persuaded Frank (Purser) to take me on as an assistant and the next five years were some of the most memorable of my life. It was such a privilege to work alongside a master craftsman. Frank was to be the last in a long line of family thatchers and a real countryman. He was an unbroken link to the past, with memories of a way of life that had essentially remained unchanged for generations.

Do you remember the first thatch you did on your own?

Of course! After 8 years as an apprentice and journeyman, Frank felt I was ready to face the prospect of making my own way as a thatcher. One morning in the winter of 1983 I drove alone towards a large Norfolk reed re-thatch Frank had put my way, and the first job I could put my own name to. It was a job that also required extensive repairs to the roof structure. It was a daunting first project to handle alone, but also a good start and a real boost to the confidence.

What are some of the changes you have noticed in the craft of thatching since then?

Over 30 years have passed since that first job, and during that time I have seen many changes in the world of thatching. For example, the transportation and handling of materials has been transformed by bulk packaging and mechanisation. Unloading and stacking a 40ft trailer containing over two thousand bundles of water reed used to be a very long and hard day's work. It can now be done within an hour by one man in a machine. Essentially a different process, the same result.



Well underway at the back!

Since time is money, efficiency has become the name of the game. Now, more than ever before, it is possible to remove a great deal of the craft element from roof thatching. The more craft you can eliminate from the process, the faster the job. Sadly, speed and profit all too often take priority over traditional craftsmanship.

Do thatchers still use the same materials to thatch a house as they used to?

No, there have been significant changes in the last seventy years. With the widespread use of the combine harvester, the availability of straw suitable for thatching has dwindled away. Combed wheat reed was introduced into central counties from the West Country as a replacement for threshed straw, needing a different style and method of thatching.

Imported water reed now dominates the market, moving into the gap left by dwindling supplies of Norfolk reed. These days hardly any native reed is

used outside the eastern counties. Reed is now imported from as far away as China.

What reed do you personally favour?

By choice I use Russian reed. It is a first-class material with a good colour and is very strong but not brittle. The Azov area of Russia from where it comes has a good growing season followed by a cold winter - ideal for growing thatching reed.

How do you fix the reeds to the roof?

Traditionally, hazel sways have always been used to secure reed and straw to roof timbers, although in some cases these have been replaced by steel rods. Even so, vast amounts of pre-twisted hazel spars made in Eastern Europe are now imported into the UK, replacing hazel spars made in Britain by highly skilled spar makers. Hand split hazel rods used for ridging have been widely replaced by timber-yard quadrant and sawn ash rods.

For better or worse, thatching has entered the twenty-first century in an industrial way.

Finally, Nick, what would you say are the guiding principles of a thatcher like yourself?

Quite simply, to be faithful to the traditions of the craft. The three key elements are Form-Function-Longevity, each one in turn affecting the other.

To consistently create something of beauty that functions to maximum efficiency, and lasts as long as it's possible for it to last, is no easy task. For the conscientious craftsman this aim provides the basis for a whole lifetime's working experience.

Thatching in its highest form is a craft with a touch of art. All the skills necessary to prepare and apply the various materials to the best effect must be mastered, with a personal style and an eye for line and level developed.

Well, Nick, anyone who cares to look at the Old Bakehouse will be of no doubt that that is what you have achieved!

Abthorpe in 1841

Alison Symmers

Completing the 2021 census earlier this year made me wonder about the first census in Abthorpe and what the population would have been like. Investigation showed that the first national census took place on 6th June 1841 in the early years of Queen Victoria's reign. It was much shorter then - only recording name, age, sex, occupation and whether the person had been born in the same county or elsewhere. Surprisingly in today's world, it didn't record addresses as people didn't really have them at that time.

A look at the results for Abthorpe shows that the population was 449 people from a total of 94 households - 201 being males and 248 females - an average of nearly five people per house. The oldest person was 89 and the youngest was one month old and everybody had been born in the county. There were far more children than today - 177 (79 boys and 98 girls) under the age of 15, which is when childhood seemed to end with most boys over the age of 14 having employment.

More interesting, perhaps, is the glimpse into the social side of village life that the census showed. By and large, Abthorpe appears to have been a relatively poor community still mainly centred on agriculture: there were 14 farmers and 63 agricultural workers listed. Many others were employed in low-paid homeworking: six lacemakers, five seamstresses, two embroiderers, one staysmaker and five frameworkers/knitters were living in the village. Despite their relatively poor circumstances, though, many still made time and money for a drink as three of the farmers were also innkeepers! And only 20% of the women were recorded as having an occupation - housework didn't count!

It was a much more self-contained community than we have today - the village had two butchers, two grocers, a baker, a barber, a tailor, a blacksmith, a schoolmaster and schoolmistress, an ironmonger, a midwife, and a shoemaker. Unlike today where we travel to our places of work, all these would probably have worked in the village. People started working at a much younger age and continued to an older age; two 12-year-olds are

recorded as being agricultural workers and occupations are listed for three octogenarians - one as clerk to the parish, one as a frameworker and one as an agricultural labourer!

There is also an indication of the morality of the time - both those who completed the forms and the enumerator who transcribed them into the schedule, despite the fact that it was not a requested piece of data in the census, noted in the schedule for Abthorpe seven children as illegitimate, a stigma that appears to have continued into adulthood as a 17-year-old male and a 20-year-old female were also given the same label.

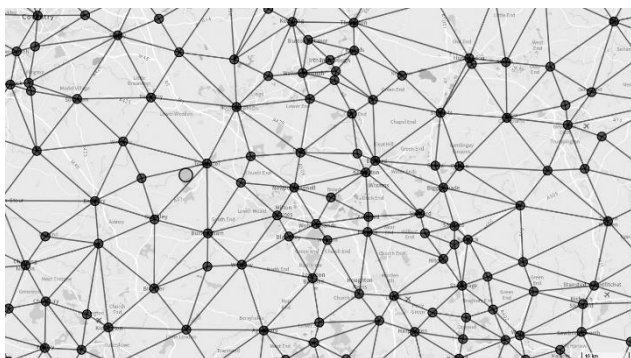
Slow Ways – a free resource for walkers

Parish Path Warden, David Robbins

<https://Beta.slowways.org>

For keen walkers Slow Ways is a project worth keeping an eye on, and the organisation now has National Lottery funding to the tune of £7m over the next seven years, ensuring consistency of development in the short to medium term.

Their goal is to create a network of walking routes, verified by walkers themselves, which connects all of Great Britain's towns and cities as well as thousands



of villages. Using existing footpaths, people will be able to use the Slow Ways routes to walk between neighbouring settlements or combine routes for long distance journeys.

During lockdown 700 volunteers from across the country collaborated to produce a first draft of the Slow Ways network map. This initial effort has

led to the creation of 7,500 routes that collectively stretch for over 110,000km.

Coverage in South Northampton-shire is, as yet, quite sparse. So far, Abthorpe features in the route from Sulgrave to Towcester, and the Brackley to Towcester route passes nearby.

High quality mapping is provided in collaboration with Ordnance Survey, but beware, Slow Ways is not a navigation tool; you will need to use other resources to plan walks in detail.

It is certainly to be hoped that in future the Slow Ways network will become sufficiently developed to fully encompass Abthorpe and the surrounded villages.

A Message from Towcester Food Bank: Please Donate

Our food bank relies on your goodwill and support. Over 90% of the food distributed by banks in The Trussell Trust (trusselltrust.org) network is donated by the public - that's why your food donations are absolutely vital to our ability to give everyone referred to us a balanced and nutritious three-day supply of food.

We always welcome donations and promise to use them to provide help to people in crisis. Occasionally we send food to other nearby food banks to support their work, particularly if they experience shortages. This ensures your donations go to help people wherever in the UK they are.

Currently needed food items:

UHT Fruit juice litre or mini packs

Jam

Rice (small packs 500g)

Coffee (Instant only)

Sponge puddings (twin packs)

Tinned Carrots

Pasta 'n' Sauce packets

Mug shot packets

Cup-a-soup (boxes of 4)

Small packs of instant noodles
(not pot noodles)

Laundry powder

Razors and shower gel

We've got plenty of Soup, Vegetables, Pasta and Baked Beans

Considerably Faster Ways (Cycling from Land's End to John O'Groats)

Simon Collett (Abthorpe resident)

I wasn't supposed to be a participant on this Land's End to John O'Groats (LEJOG) attempt. I was just training alongside a friend who was doing it. I can't remember exactly when the decision was made to enter for real. 970 miles over 9 days. I could do that. What could possibly go wrong?

I had no idea at the outset just how much time and energy this event would consume. It seemed like every spare minute was filled with fundraising, training, buying stuff or working on my bike. I even SORNed (took off road) my motorbike as I didn't have time to ride it.

The 4th September deadline seemed to arrive from nowhere. One minute it was June, the next we were on our way to Land's End. The ride itself was a fully supported event run by a company called Threshold, with Deloitte as title sponsor in their tenth and final year.

Nothing could have prepared me for the mind-blowing job Threshold did in supporting 950 riders attempting to cycle the length of the country. They moved a festival-sized basecamp to our new location every single day. This included around 1000 two-man tents (one each), hundreds of feet of barriers, cycle racks and roadways, toilets, showers, generators, lighting, sound system, water bowzers, marquees for dining, catering equipment, laundry apparatus, a drying room, a physio, medics, mechanics and even a tent where you collected your freshly laundered white towel. Transforming empty fields into festival sites every day!

So how was it for me personally? In summary, it was a roller coaster. Highs and lows, ups and downs, exhaustion, injuries, fatigue and euphoria. I'll try to summarise:

Day 1 - Cornwall: If I say hilly, please believe me when I say this is an understatement! The height gain was ridiculous, almost double what you can expect on a local ride around Northants. Not good for a 14.5 stone rider. Especially chasing mates of 10-12 stone! Went off too fast and suffered later

on. Went to see the site physio afterwards for knee and hamstring issues (see if you can spot a pattern emerge here!).

Day 2 - Through Devon to Bath: Almost as hilly as Cornwall but a slightly more flowing, enjoyable route. Loved Cheddar Gorge.

Day 3 - Bath to Ludlow: Should have been an easier ride but ended up going too fast and suffered later. Really struggled to get back to basecamp with a hamstring injury in my right leg. Starting to become a significant worry now.

Day 4 - Through Cheshire into Lancashire: Almost didn't start due to the hamstring... excruciating. Started the day in thick fog and in incredible pain. For the first 20 miles or so I had serious doubts if I'd make it to the end of the day. I took it super steady and arrived at the first feed station with the hamstring slightly looser. Met up with Maisy, a friend who was happy to go at my pace. She saved my day! By the end of the day, the hamstring, whilst painful, felt like something I could potentially manage.

Day 5 - To Carlisle through the Lake District: Beautiful weather, slowed down, lifted my head up and actually enjoyed the views, chatting to other riders and generally enjoying a nice bike ride. I even enjoyed notorious Shap Hill which everyone was so anxious about.

Day 6 - Scotland the Wet: Heading up through the Borders to Edinburgh. The weather turned wet almost as we crossed the border! A bit of a drag of a day. Long straight roads with very few villages, towns or other points of interest to break up the day. Company and pace setting coming into real effect here as it would be very tempting to speed up just to get the day done.

Day 7 - Disaster strikes. Throughout the week a stomach bug had been going around camp with riders dropping like flies. I had a bit of a fragile stomach in the morning just before we left (not unexpected on an endurance event) so I popped into the medical tent to ask for a couple of precautionary Imodium. I felt fine but it's definitely not the situation you want to get caught out in! The medic looked at me almost apologetically and asked me to wait. I waited and waited. The medic returned and said that the bosses

had just made the decision that due to the bug getting out of hand, anyone showing symptoms would be sent home to protect the other riders.

Distraught, I protested like crazy saying that I only came to them as a precaution and that I didn't actually feel ill. After almost two hours, I got to speak to one of the bosses who admitted I didn't look sick like the others so he was prepared to transport me on the broom wagon to the next basecamp for reassessment in the morning. Gutted to miss day 7, but relieved my ride wasn't totally over, I had no option but to accept this compromise.

Day 8 - The Highlands of Scotland: windy and hilly - great to be back in the game. Started the day in heavy rain and heading for the biggest climb of the event - The Lecht. Almost three miles uphill with gradients reaching 20%, this was a toughie. I mean, there's a ski resort at the top!



A great route, very scenic, but also seemed very long with huge expanses between landmarks. The last 20 miles headed over some big old rolling Scottish hills totally exposed to the wind and rain coming straight at us which was getting worse and worse. Still feeling guilty from having a bonus rest day, I got out front and tried to tow as many people as possible to basecamp; such fatigue in our legs.

Day 9 - To John O'Groats! A bittersweet feeling for me on this final leg. I'd made it but there was a link missing. Not a failure, not a mistake, just a victim of unfortunate timing I suppose. I know within myself that I had been more than capable of completing day 7 so it leaves a slightly hollow feeling. Very happy to have completed what I have though.

Obligatory photo with medal, collect bag, quick shower, pack bike into lorry and catch the bus to the Caledonian Sleeper train for a welcome sleep in a real bed. Next stop Euston, and then home!

Lessons learnt

I'm pretty sure that we all know what lesson number one is! Find a comfortable pace and then take one or two mph off it. Failing that, find yourself a 'Maisy'!

By paying for the event myself, I ensured that every penny raised went to my chosen charity, Cancer Research. £2,200 was the target and with amazing support from family and friends, the fund total currently stands at around £3000 once Gift Aid is included. I'm so grateful to everyone who donated or helped raise this money.

An Introduction to Bridge

Lynn Neasham is offering a taster game of bridge on Tuesday 23rd November at the Old School. Tea, coffee and biscuits will be provided. If you enjoy it, there will be the chance to sign up for a six-week starter course beginning in January 2022.

Numbers are limited so please book your place with Lynn – lynn.neasham@abthorpe.net; 07767 082594; 01327 857083.

Introducing PC 911 Mel Carter



Back in August the *Abtalk* editorial team received a very nice email from Mel Carter introducing herself as one of the neighbourhood police officers covering Abthorpe amongst other villages in the locality. Other members of the team are shown in the photos below. These officers are your point of contact for Abthorpe, which forms part of the Silverstone Beat.

Mel has been a frontline Police officer for twenty-one years, having spent most of her career on the response teams, responding to emergency calls. She joined the Neighbourhood Policing Team (NPT) at Brackley in May of this year and is looking forward to a new challenge and to many years of hopefully tackling issues which affect our community.



From the left, Sgt Micki Simons, PC Mark Mitchell and PCSO Danni Morgan

A recent development for the NPT has been the launch of two Beat Buses, one for use in the north of the county and one for our locality. The Beat Bus will be taken out into the villages and more rural areas and local residents will be invited to come and speak to one of their local Neighbourhood PCs or PCSOs, where they can raise concerns or provide information. It is hoped that the buses will be valuable assets that will help officers get close to the

communities they serve and make it easy for people to engage with their local police teams.

Mel had these further words of advice: If you are unable to attend one of the Beat Bus sessions you can still contact us by email, telephone or via our website. NT-SouthNorthantsBrackley@northants.police.uk

SGT 581 SIMONS - 07557 779041 - micki.simons@northants.police.uk

PC 911 CARTER - 07557 778579 - mel.carter@northants.police.uk

PC 801 MITCHELL - 07557 778536 - mark.mitchell@northants.police.uk

PCSO 7182 MORGAN - 07973 872805 - danni.morgan@northants.police.uk

Twitter: @SthNorthantsNPT

Facebook: 'Daventry and South Northants Neighbourhood Policing Team'

TO REPORT AN INCIDENT OR CRIME PLEASE USE THE 101 NON EMERGENCY NUMBER OR 999 IN AN EMERGENCY, do not contact the team directly. All reports must go via the Force Control Room

Newcomers

Ed and Beano would like to introduce themselves as the new occupants of Janet Abbot's house. They moved with their owners, Carol and John Baldwin and their daughter Millie, to Abthorpe in August and have settled in very comfortably. They have not had to move far as they previously lived in Towcester and they, along with Carol, John and Millie, would like to record that, with the exception of a few dogs that they treat with the disdain they deserve, they have been made to feel extremely welcome and already feel very much at home here.



A proud day for the Jones family

Nigel and Fleur Jones of Silverthorpe feel justly proud of their son William who was commissioned as an Officer at Sandhurst on 7th August. Prime Minister Boris Johnson carried out the inspections and congratulated the Cadets on their achievements.

After the main event of the day, the whole family celebrated in style on a gorgeous summer's evening.

(Right) The new officer with his proud brother and parents



(Left) The Jones family, from left to right, Nigel, William with girlfriend Molly, Fleur, brother Callum and sister-in-law Hannah

Awww!

Who doesn't love a baby animal? This little chap is rather special. Some of you may recall the article in the last edition of *Abtalk* about Caroline and Martin Kellner's passion for Guernsey cattle and their efforts to reintroduce the original population (OP) breed back into the UK. Well, in August they were delighted to hear of the safe arrival of Kelsmor Mays Valentine (and they say modern parents give their children unusual names!) Now the birth of a calf is not that an unusual event, especially on a dairy or beef farm, but this calf is the



result of using the semen taken from one of Caroline's father's OP Guernsey bulls (who went by the snappy name of Menmarsh Moss Rose Dilly Valentine II) several decades ago, which had been frozen to preserve it. What is more, little Valentine will soon have a half-brother or sister, so the first steps have now been taken to ensure that in the not-too-distant future there will be OP Guernseys in our fields once more.

If you would like to contribute to Abtalk or comment on any articles in it, please contact Alison Robbins: robbins@abthorpe.net; 01327 857795