

A photograph of a church with a tall spire and a red brick building, surrounded by trees and a green field with sheep.

# ABTALK

*News from Abthorpe  
June 2025*

**PARISH COUNCIL NEWS – PHIL BERRY**

Since the last edition of Abtalk it has been a busy period for your Parish Council.

In February Sarah Jones stood down as a councillor. While her time with us was all too brief, she was an involved member of the team and a lively contributor. As we mentioned in the last edition of Abtalk, May 1st was Election Day. All six remaining councillors put their names in the frame. We advertised to see if anyone else in the parish was willing to add their name. Only one did, Allan Davidson. With just 7 of us up for election we were all returned unopposed.

So your councillors are now Tim Humphrey, Rachel Stevens, Fi Noble, Chris Zachar, Mike Greenhalgh, Allan Davidson and myself.

We had our Parish Council AGM on 13th May, followed by a scheduled PC meeting, and a week later we held our annual village meeting, and so this report combines information from those three events. I was elected as chair of the PC for another year. Mike Greenhalgh has finally let go of the reins after serving as chair for ages, and for the last year, as vice chair. Tim Humphrey has taken on the role of vice chair, for which we are all grateful.

The local elections of May 1st gave us a change of control at West Northants Council, with Reform taking overall control. We will watch with interest to see what they plan. Dermot Bambridge our WNC Councillor of many years has retired, but we are lucky to have Charles Manners as our new ward councillor, and we have already been talking with him about some of our issues. One of those is trying to find out from WNC what is happening on the land off Withymore Lane bought by Crown Events. We understand that there was a site visit by WNC officials at the end of March, but we have no knowledge of the outcome.

You may be aware that proposed developments at Shacks Barn have been revitalised and extended. We have objected in terms of size, height, light pollution and traffic. The Shacks Barn development sited on the Yardley Whittlewood Ridge will be very visible even from our parish. But in particular we have objected on the grounds of increased traffic flows along rural lane rat runs and through our village. More pot holes on narrow roads, broken road edges, traffic driving too fast forcing oncoming vehicles off the road. We are already experiencing that with the relief road works on the A43. We have also challenged the mistaken belief that all these warehouse developments will bring employment and economic benefits to the area.

The planning inspector said, when he granted the DHL appeal, that the new developments will provide much needed employment opportunities outweighing the “relatively limited harm it would cause”. In our view that is absolute rubbish. It seems to us that those with the deepest pockets always win the day, and that the value of community is downgraded to the level of irrelevant. There is virtually no demand for warehouse jobs from Towcester residents and its hinterland, and there is a real danger that all these developments will cut off Towcester from those that depend on it, and that it relies on for its prosperity.

At the village meeting we discussed having CCTV installed in the village. We concluded that in order to minimise any intrusion into all our personal spaces and yet still provide a recording that might help investigate any issued that arise, we would seek a solution the basically looked at what traffic entered and left the village. So with that in mind we asked Tim Newton if he could find a possible set up that could achieve that. Most importantly, we will need to ensure that all the necessary safeguards are in place. Other than to check that the system is working properly, no one would have access to the recorded data except law enforcement officers and any recorded data will have a limited life.

Speeding – if we can get some volunteers we would hope to get another couple of sessions of Speed Watch over the next 12 months.

Curbing – we have contracted to have curbing laid along the edge of the Green outside the Old School up to the diagonal road. With the increased parking around the Green the banking is being worn away quite quickly.

Path clearing – We have had some help from the Northamptonshire Immediate Justice Programme to clean some of the pathways and verges throughout the village. The path leading to the church gate has already been cut back and looks great. Next on our list is the footpath on the western end of Wappenham Road.

Village noticeboard – it’s in need of a little TLC which we have plans to do.

Plans are in hand to hold a defibrillator and CPR awareness course on 24th July. More details to follow. Please keep your eye on the village Facebook page and the village and Old School noticeboards.

Our next PC meeting will be on Thursday 26th June.

---

## **ABTHORPE BROADBAND ASSOCIATION LTD – ERIC MALCOMSON**

Yet again our well-attended AGM showed the level of support we get from the communities and I am sure I do not speak entirely for myself in saying that all the volunteers and contractors appreciate this recognition of what we do.

There are now 500+ members connected to fibre broadband which includes virtually all properties in our core area. This work was paid for using government grants specific for rural broadband and I can report that ABbA has received more than £700,000 to date. There are, today, more than 700 properties connected to our superfast circuits.

ABbA is entering a more stable existence than ever before and provision for the next few years means we can all enjoy, without reservation, the service we have come to rely on for entertainment, news, appointments, banking and social media.

This year will see the completion of the infrastructure to a few out-lying properties and we are taking this opportunity to adjust our administration into a more professional organisation in order to future-proof even further the Association.

This year is also significant because of the changes taking place in land-line technology meaning anyone with an old-fashioned telephone connection will have to change and, with a lot of experience in the field, ABbA can help suggest ways forward from the demise of PSTN to VOIP. Look in the library on [tovevalley.com](http://tovevalley.com) for a couple of documents relating to this subject and a lot of other topics as well.

Keep surfing!

## **OLD SCHOOL NEWS**

The Old School has had a busy Spring, with our regular hirers, private parties and fundraising events. The latter would not be possible without our small band of volunteers so we are very grateful for their help – but there is always room for more!

There have been two fundraising events in the last couple of months, both joint ventures with the Church. The Race Night was as popular as ever with villagers tempted as much by the promise of a Chilli supper as by the opportunity for a convivial evening, even if the majority did not walk home at the end of the evening having made their fortune. We made just over £1,400, which was split between the Old School and the Church.

We then hosted a Bridge Evening: the Old School was packed to capacity

with 16 tables together seating 64 players. A Chicken and Leek Pie supper was provided from home cooks in the village which was very well received. It was an excellent evening and the total proceeds from this were £1,268, again split between the Church and the Old School.

We are planning on having a couple of alfresco lunches over the summer months – presuming that the warm sunny weather returns! We do need to get the courtyard spruced up so would welcome offers of help. We are also planning a Mexican dominoes afternoon. Intrigued by these suggestions? Dates will be posted on Facebook and the noticeboard just as soon as they are confirmed.

The Old School will be turned into an Art gallery once again on 19th and 20th July so do come along and view the work of our talented village (and other) artists. (See later feature).

On 6th September there will be a village event on the Green. We would like to bring the village together, and welcome old and new faces. Details are still under discussion but we would like to have a band or ceilidh, a face painter, perhaps a bouncy castle, and some sort of food option. We are thinking that we may bring out the shot trays and have a mini 'fest'. Anyone that would like to be involved in the organising of this, please do get in touch: new ideas are always welcome. Email [oldschool@abthorpe.net](mailto:oldschool@abthorpe.net)

Keep checking the village Facebook page for dates and further details of all these events or see [www.abthorpeoldschool.com](http://www.abthorpeoldschool.com).



*Bridge at the Old School*

## **CHURCH NEWS**

**Services:** We have one service a month in St John the Baptist Church. It is held on the third Sunday at 10.00am and is a Holy Eucharist service. If you do not wish to take communion (i.e. go up for bread and wine) that is absolutely not a problem – just enjoy sitting in church and partaking of coffee and biscuits after the service!

**Tea & Piece:** This friendly and informal event takes place on the same Sunday as the church service but in the afternoon from 3 pm to 4.30 pm. Come along to the café area of the church, sample the home-made cake and a cup of tea, and meet others from the village.

**Reverend Paul McCloud:** Rev. Paul was taken ill over Easter when his diabetes took a sudden and fairly drastic turn for the worse and he was rushed to hospital. Thankfully, Paul is making a steady recovery but is having to take things at a rather more gentle pace for several weeks. We all wish him well and look forward to him regaining full strength over the coming months.

**Food Bank:** Don't forget there is a box at the back of the church (which is open every day during normal working hours) for you to donate items for Towcester foodbank. Currently needed items are tinned meat (curry, pies, stew, chilli, ham, sausages etc), laundry detergent, carrier bags/bags for life, shampoo and conditioner, washing up liquid, men's deodorant, small packets of rice/pasta (microwaveable), toilet rolls, tea, and feminine hygiene products. All donations are gratefully received but at present they have plenty of tinned tomatoes, tinned soup and cereals.

**Churchyard wall:** We are aware that the churchyard wall is bulging outwards in a number of places and are seeking advice on the way forward, including means to finance any repairs that are needed.

**Tote:** With the above in mind, we would urge everyone who can afford to do so, to join the Church Tote which raises money specifically to keep the church building and grounds in good repair. For just £5 a month, you get the chance of winning a half share in the monthly draw. The winners in recent months have been:

February: Jenny Carter and Arthur & Sian Young who received £108.50 each

March: Tina & Steve Clews and David & Alison Robbins both couples winning £110

April: Tricia Holmes and Phil & Merrilyn Berry who won £112.50

May: Nick Greenhalgh and Eric & Barbara Malcomson who won £115

**Fundraising events:** In addition to the Race Night and Bridge Evening already mentioned, we recently held a Saturday Breakfast jointly with the Old School. A steady stream of residents, some accompanied by visiting guests, partook of Breakfast Baps filled with local eggs, sausages and bacon, Danish pastries and Croissants, Fruit salad or Granola with Yogurt - and

toast and marmalade to fill any gaps! Church funds benefitted to the tune of nearly £400 as a result.

We will be joining with the Old School for the September Village event which we hope will attract villagers of all ages.

**Ride & Stride:** This event began in Suffolk in 1982 and is now held annually in virtually every county in England on the second Saturday in September (which this year falls on 13th September). Any mode of transport can be used to get from church to church – most people walk, jog or cycle but it has been known to go by vintage car! Some participants challenge themselves to visit as many churches as they can while others adopt a more leisurely approach, visiting fewer churches and taking more time at each. You can plan your own route and churches are normally open from 10.00am until 5 or 6 pm although some do close earlier. Half of the money raised by participants goes to the church of their choice and half to the Historic Churches Trust which uses it to give grants for preserving, restoring or improving churches (Abthorpe received a grant of £4000 from the Northamptonshire Historic Churches Trust towards the recent refurbishment of the North Aisle). If you are interested in joining a group of us planning to walk between the five churches that make up our Benefice, then please let me know (Alison Robbins [robbins@abthorpe.net](mailto:robbins@abthorpe.net)) – I can give you more details of the starting time and location and a sponsor form (or you may prefer just to give a donation). In previous years, we have contrived to end this walk in Abthorpe for a late lunch and liquid refreshment at the New Inn which makes a splendid finish!

## **NEW INN NEWS**

We may be a small village with very few amenities but what we do have is an excellent pub which has gained itself quite a reputation for its friendly atmosphere and delicious food, not to mention its beer!

It has been a busy few weeks for Stuart who continues to find innovative ways to attract customers to come in and dine. There was the Monday May Bank Holiday Pizza Party where guests enjoyed a stone baked artisan sourdough pizza of their choice, followed a week later by the 70s themed Bernie Inn night on 6th June which included a Fancy Dress competition, an original Bernie Inn menu plus disco lights and music. Over Father's Day weekend a Fillet Steak Treat was on offer on the Saturday evening, followed by a very tempting Alfresco Father's Day Breakfast the following morning.

In addition to these special events, every week there is Tapas Tuesday from 5 pm when you can sample your choice of tasty Tapas all washed down with a jug of Sangria; and every other Wednesday and Thursday the gastronomic delight on



offer is a Gourmet Sharing Board when for £60 per couple you can indulge in a 16oz Chateaubriand Fillet Steak, King Prawn Crevettes and a whole Lobster accompanied by a selection of delicious sides.

And there's more! Regulars love Sunday Lunch at the New Inn, "featuring Classic Starters, Best of British Roast Dinners, Something Sweet or A Classic Cheese Board, and Fresh Barista Coffee, all delivered with a warm welcome and service with a smile".

To book a table phone 01327 857306.

## **ABTHORPE HISTORICAL ARCHIVE - ALISON SYMMERS**

What started off as a vague idea that there were probably old documents around that should be kept in the village has turned into reality with several boxes of items being donated as well as lots of photographs and other bits and pieces. Some go as far back as the 1650s and disbursement of money from Jane Leeson's Trust; others shed light on events and village controversies in the 1970s. The idea is to preserve the unique and irreplaceable heritage of the village and make it accessible to everyone. It's still early days but the Archive group has so far recorded more than 500 documents and photographs with more to go and small donations arriving regularly.

A 'What's in the Archive?' talk with supper is planned for the autumn (Saturday 1st November) which will give everyone the opportunity to hear about and see some of the donated material. The aim is to have the catalogue on-line before too long.

The Archive Group meets on a Thursday evening – if anyone would be interested in joining, contact Alison Symmers (07973 192920).



## THE LONDON MARATHON – A VERY DIFFERENT EXPERIENCE – CHRISTINE NEWTON

Some weeks ago, a student where I was working asked if I would do the London Marathon with her. She is 95% blind and had never run further than 5km. As we didn't live close to each other, she did all her training on a treadmill. I had set her weekly programmes and she never missed a session.

Three weeks before the marathon I unfortunately fell while out running and managed to put a stick through the palm of my hand. I was so lucky to be close to the Brinklow Coventry Road aid station where I was looked after by Rugby Tri Club friends and particularly nurse Alice. I was in theatre the next day and banned from running, cycling, swimming and driving for at least 3 weeks. I don't know how I would have got through those weeks without Tim – thank you! (The next sentence has been intentionally moved from here to the end of Christine's account – Ed.) Still, I was confident that I had enough training in the legs to be able to support my blind runner, who was looking for a finish time of between 5.44 to 6.00 hours.

I would never advocate going against medical advice but, on being told I absolutely shouldn't run the marathon, I countered this by putting a compression bandage on.

London Marathon day was amazing and we couldn't have been better looked after by the



*Christine Newton on the right and Deepika at the end of the gruelling race.*

staff. We were live on the BBC at the *Cutty Sark*, we had random people shouting out that they'd seen us on the television during the week and gone online to donate. The crowds were fantastic: as soon as they spotted that Deepika was blind, they lifted their voices to a crescendo – it was incredibly moving.

Guiding a blind runner on an event of that size is not to be taken lightly. Navigating around people, the thousands of bottles, gels and cups was mentally exhausting. I'll leave the challenges of guiding a blind person to use the Portaloos to your imagination.....

Despite her dedication and training, my runner struggled from London Bridge and we ended up walking the second half with lots of stops. But we'd said at the start of the day that the only goal was to get to the finish line – and we achieved that. I never expected that we would be on the course for 8 hours – definitely harder than a 4 hour marathon, but my runner went to bed with her medal and hasn't stopped smiling since.

The missing sentence: "We also managed to get married between the accident and the marathon." Congratulations to you both!!

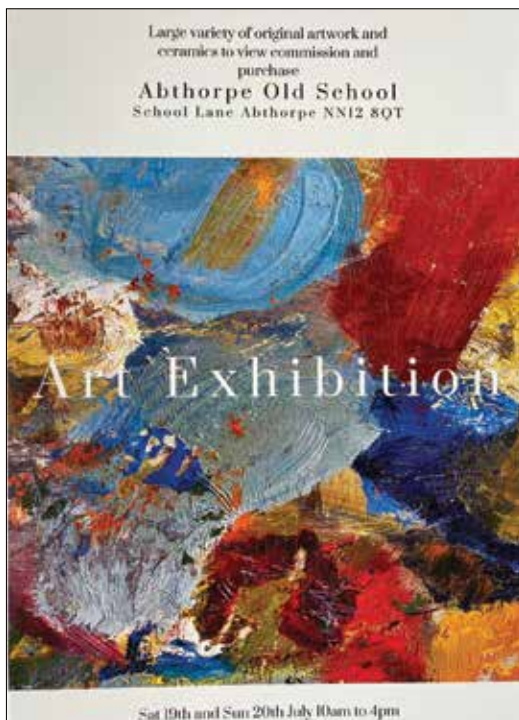
Tim and Christine wanted to add that they got married at Slapton Manor Farm and were delighted by the service offered by Barbara and co. and also that Stuart from the New Inn did the catering which again they would highly recommend.

### **ABTHORPE ART SHOW**

Don't miss the Art exhibition at the Abthorpe Old School on 19th and 20th July, 10am to 4pm.

Presenting a professional array of paintings and ceramics to view and purchase, brought together by six local artists.

Featuring a diverse selection of styles, materials and subject



including wildlife, landscape, seascape and abstract art. The range of wheel thrown ceramics includes beautiful vases, freestanding lighting and wall features.

All artists will be there on both days.

### RECOMMENDATION FROM ANOTHER ABTHORPE ARTIST – MARNA PERRIGO

I thought some of you might be interested in the very attractive photo gravure illustrated at the bottom of the page made by local artist/printmaker Iain Hodgkinson. Iain has made an edition of this attractive etching of Abthorpe in winter and I feel it would make a memorable gift or memento of our lovely village.

For those who are interested, the image size is: width 21.5cm x 15cm height on Somerset Velvet Paper. Prices start at £160 unframed, unmounted. An original can be seen currently at his gallery L'Atelier 11, 11 Brackley Road, Towcester NN12 6DH.

Iain lives locally in Blakesly. He is known to a number of Abthorpe residents who attend his regular art/printmaking sessions and workshops at L'Atelier11, Towcester.



'Snowy Rooftops' - Towards Abthorpe

## GOODBYE TO OLD FRIENDS

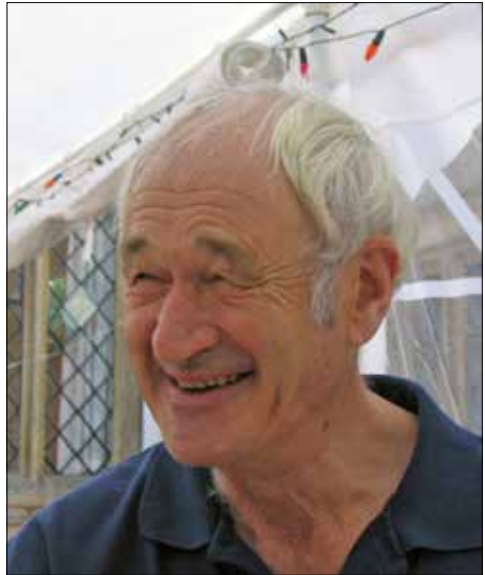
Sadly we have lost three true Abthorpians this Spring. In March, we heard that John Riches (Big John), who lived in Abthorpe for many years with his lovely wife Joyce, had passed away. Then just before Easter, Abthorpe's oldest resident, Bett Rush died just days before her 103rd birthday, and the very next week Keith Plant also passed away. All three of these people played an active part in village life in their time and in their own way and we are grateful for the contributions they made. They are sadly missed.

### John (Darrell Charles) Riches – Big John, 1935 – 2025 :

#### Thoughts from Eric Malcomson

It is with great sadness that I report John's death earlier this year. The fond memories of him from his time in Abthorpe will linger long into the future.

John's last days were spent near his family in St Albans and there was a good contingent of Abthorpe people attending his memorial service. John would have delighted in the technology that allowed the proceedings to be sent out over the internet for his family and friends to take part. The congregation dutifully turned round to face the camera and waved a greeting to them.



Big John (he was well over 6 foot tall) and his wife Joyce were part of Abthorpe and were involved in all social organisations. John was perhaps a larger-than-life character with a strong community conscience and almost daily rode his bike around the local villages stopping and chatting to anyone and everyone who would lend him an ear. His observations were chronicled on village websites and about-my-area media. He had a regular spot in the 'village' section of the *Chronicle & Echo* which was followed as avidly as The Archers by county-wide readers.

This is perhaps why ABbA adopted him as their quidnunc (in a nice way)

and his efforts were instrumental in coalescing local support in the early stages of Tove Valley Broadband. It is alleged that John attended the first meeting of ABbA and walked away muttering "it'll never work". Through his efforts and others, it did work. Meetings were held in The New Inn and I mention this because I know, when in the care home in St Albans, he ordered a case of Hooky to share with the residents.

To someone who influenced the very fabric of the Abthorpe community, I say thanks and Rest in Peace.

### **Barbara Rush, 1922 - 2025**

Barbara Rush, known to everyone as Bet, died in April just short of her 103rd birthday.

Bet was born in Northampton and lived there until 1937 when her parents moved to Abthorpe. She did well at school and won a scholarship to the grammar school, but her parents were unable to afford the school uniform so she had to leave school at the age of 14 and earn her living working locally.

During the Second World War she went to Leicester to train as a toolmaker to help the war effort. Later she returned to Abthorpe to work in the shoe factory.

Bet married Ron, an Abthorpe man, on her 21st birthday in 1943. The couple were lucky enough to get the first of the Council houses to be completed in Brackley Lane after the war and here brought up their two children, Christopher and Heather. In due course they were able to purchase the house. Bet worked in the canteen of the former Towcester Secondary Modern School, travelling there on her moped. Bet was involved in various forms of voluntary work. Chris became a cub scout in Towcester and Bet supported him by becoming a member of the committee for 29 years and





treasurer for 19.

Bet played an active part in the life of the village. The church was important and she served on the Parochial Church Council for many years. At events in the Old School, she did door duty; nobody got in without their ticket.

Her husband died about 20 years ago but Bet continued her active life. At the age of 90 she was presented with a cartoon showing her on a skateboard. But in the last few years her health declined. She was badly injured in a tragic accident at the Silverstone cross roads and sadly lost her son Chris a few years ago, but she wanted to end her days at home, and that she did with the carers visiting daily and the help of neighbours, particularly Tricia Jones.

## **Keith Plant**

Keith Plant, who has died at the age of 91, was born in Wolverhampton. He did well at school during the War years and then trained to be an accountant, interrupted of course by National Service in the Air Force. His career progressed into general management. He lived for several years on Teeside, now with his wife Monica and children Sally and Mark, working for an international company. Promotion to chairman resulted in a move to London and much international travel. At that time they lived in Beaconsfield.



Keith and Monica Plant came to the village in the 1997 when Keith retired and purchased Stone Barn in School Lane. Once a real barn converted into a dwelling, it still needed work to rectify building deficiencies. But it did have room for Monica's pottery kiln. In time, Keith recognised that they had to downsize and they moved to Wappenham Road. Again, building work was needed and Keith enjoyed himself project managing the work.

Keith played a part in many village activities, including the Millennium Appeal and ABbA where he put his accountancy skills to good effect. In recent years, despite ill health, he enjoyed pottering around the house and garden and he still enjoyed communal village events.

## OTHER NEWS OF INTEREST

We have all heard, of course, of the Great Fire of London, but there was another great conflagration much nearer home and 2025 marks its 350th anniversary. In 1675 flames ripped through the streets of Northampton and to observe this anniversary of our county town, a series of events have been organised to showcase the story of the fire and the rebuild that followed.

The blaze is believed to have been caused by sparks from an open fire in a home on St. Mary's Street, near the former castle site. The fire quickly spread and engulfed the surrounding buildings. As the flames raged, residents sought refuge in the Market Square but the situation grew increasingly dire, and the authorities ordered the evacuation of the area, with terrified residents forced to flee.

While the Great Fire of Northampton caused immense destruction, it also marked a turning



*Artist's impression of the Great Fire*

point in the town's architectural development. Following the fire, efforts were made to rebuild and revitalise Northampton, leading to the construction of new buildings and a renewed focus on urban planning.

If you would like to know more about the many activities that have been arranged you will find out by clicking on the link below and then selecting the Great Fire page <https://discover-northamptonshire.co.uk/online/>.

## DIARY OF FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Tuesday June 17th	New Inn	5.00pm	Tapas Night
Tuesday June 24th	New Inn	5.00pm	Tapas Night
Wednesday June 25th	New Inn	5.00pm	Gourmet Sharing Board
Thursday June 26th	New Inn	9.00pm	Gourmet Sharing Board
Thursday June 26th	Old School	7.00pm	Parish Council Meeting
Sunday June 29th	New Inn	7.00pm	Quiz Night
Tuesday July 1st	New Inn	5.00pm	Tapas Night
Saturday July 5th	New Inn	12.00pm	Smoke, Clay & Fire (Moroccan style menu)
Sunday July 6th	New Inn	6.00pm	Smoke, Clay & Fire menu
Tuesday 8th July	New Inn	5.00pm	Tapas Night
Saturday 19th July	Old School	10.00-4pm	Art Show
Sunday 20th July	Old School	10.00-4pm	Art Show
Sunday 20th July	Church	10.00am	Holy Eucharist
Sunday 20th July	Church	3.00-4.30pm	Tea & Piece
Tuesday 22nd July	New Inn	5.00pm	Tapas Night
Thursday 24th July	Old School	tbc	Defibrillator & CPR Awareness course
Sunday 27th July	New Inn	7.00pm	Quiz Night
Tuesday 29th July	New Inn	5.00pm	Tapas Night
Tuesday 5th August	New Inn	5.00pm	Tapas Night
Tuesday 12th August	New Inn	5.00pm	Tapas Night
Sunday 17th August	Church	10.00am	Holy Eucharist
Sunday 17th August	Church	3.00-4.30pm	Tea & Piece
Tuesday 19th August	New Inn	5.00pm	Tapas Night
Tuesday 26th August	New Inn	5.00pm	Tapas Night
Sunday 31st August	New Inn	7.00pm	Quiz Night

*Abtalk Editors*

*Alison Robbins*

*robbins@abthorpe.net; 857795*

*Keith Fenwick*

*keith.fenwick@abthorpe.net; 857083*