

# ABTALK



**PARISH COUNCIL NEWS BY PHIL BERRY, CHAIRMAN**

Since my last report to you, we have had just one Parish Council meeting. Charles Manners, our local WNC ward councillor, was able to attend and updated us on matters at WNC. The two main items were both quite parochial. Firstly WNC's proposal to introduce parking charges in Towcester. It seemed that WNC believed parking charges increase footfall, and for the sake of fairness – "why should towns that have charges for parking subsidise free parking in Towcester". It does now appear that WNC has listened to the over 3,000 responses from local residents and the plan was reversed at a cabinet meeting to sign off the council's final budget for 2026-27.

**WNC NEW LOCAL PLAN:** The other item that Charles raised is the consultation on the new Local Plan for West Northamptonshire. Abthorpe is in a group of 'Other Villages' that may have a limited range of services and facilities, for example a pub/restaurant or a community hall, so "it is considered that development should be limited at these villages, to being small scale and within the confines". To that end, the new plan does not expect there to be any significant scale of new housing or other development here in Abthorpe. We will be discussing the new plan at our meeting on March 2nd – you are very welcome to attend if you wish. The consultation period ends on 27th March. If you want to read more for yourself, you can download the key document from the WNC website or use this link: <https://cms.westnorthants.gov.uk/media/27906/download>.

It details WNC's proposals for the settlements across their area, including more housing developments in Towcester and plans to develop the racecourse for leisure, recreation and tourism. How the plan impacts Abthorpe is shown on page 217, but if you want to see the impact on the larger villages around us, look at pages 216 and 223. If you wish to comment you can do so direct to WNC, or if you have any comments relating to Abthorpe Parish, you can bring them along to our meeting on March 2nd.

In other news....

- At our last PC meeting, we agreed our budget for the coming financial year. We've made a minor change to the precept, increasing it by 3% in line with inflation. The precept is the Parish Council's income source to fund community services and amenities, such as street lighting, green space maintenance and community projects. The precept is included in the council tax charge you receive from WNC.

- We are pleased that the work to put kerbing along the east side of

the village green took place in December. I hope you agree it looks like a job well done and should protect that part of the green from further erosion.

- Comments have been made to the Council about the safety of pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders crossing Oxbridge over the



River Tove. We met on site with WNC Highways and they have agreed to look at improving the signage and road markings to increase awareness for vehicle drivers. The photo shows Councillor Alan Davidson, Parish Path Warden David Robbins, Helen from WNC Highways and Council Chairman Phil Berry braving the rain, the rapidly rising river, and the risk of speeding traffic.

- Speed watch: in the past we have used the police speed camera to check on the speed of vehicles through the village. That facility is no longer available, but we have teamed up with Wappenham to buy a camera (our share was just £75). That will give us a lot more flexibility as to when and how often we can do our checks. If you want to volunteer to help, please contact Rachel Stevens ([Rachel.stevens@abthorpe.net](mailto:Rachel.stevens@abthorpe.net)) or Lynn Neasham ([clerk@abthorpeparish.gov.uk](mailto:clerk@abthorpeparish.gov.uk)).

- Keep an eye out for notice of the annual Abthorpe spring clean, coming soon. It would be great to see some new faces helping this year.

- AND FINALLY..... I'm very pleased to tell you that the county has granted us here in Abthorpe one of just eight Blue Plaques being put up across West Northants. Our plaque will honour the remarkable Jane Leeson, who at the age of 80, in 1642 built the free school in Abthorpe. It stayed as a school until 1959 and is now our 'Village Hall' and still at the centre of village life nearly 400 years later. The Charity she established is also still operating and uses its income to help education and people in need of help. The plaque is being installed on February 27th at 11.30am followed by a little celebration inside Jane Leeson's legacy to which all villagers are invited.

### OLD SCHOOL NEWS

It's been a quiet start to the year for the Old School following a very busy 2025. However, January 31st saw our Coffee Mornings make a welcome return to brighten these grey days. Jan Miles kindly opened the doors of Bank Cottage for Late Morning Coffee. Our local bakers had been busy preparing savoury bites and home baked cakes which all went down very well. We were well supported by villagers and raised over £300. We have two similar events planned during the year: Sarah Jones will be hosting on Saturday 11th April at Stable Cottage, the Green, and Emily and Tim Humphrey will be hosting a Pimm's Sundowner on the 11th July at 40 Wappenham Road.

The Old School will be opening its doors to **Fiori Musicali** on Sunday 8th March at 6.00pm. The concert is entitled Women, Wine and Song and marks International Womens Day with performances by, among others, some less well known baroque women composers. Please see their website for further information: <https://fiori-musicali.com>. The programme consists of :

- Hildegard antiphons
- Cozzolani O dulcis Jesu
- Leonarda Sonata Duodecima
- JC Bach Mein Freund ist mein
- JS Bach Suite for unaccompanied cello

Our next **weekday lunch** is planned for Thursday 19th March. This will be a soup lunch, starting a little later at 12.30pm.

The **AGM** for the Old School is on Monday 9th March, in the little room at the Old School. We would love to see you there. We are always open to new ideas for events in the village and welcome any interest in joining our committee.

Thank you for your support.

Abthorpe Old School Management Committee.

**Fiori Musicali**

**Women, Wine & Song**

*The hidden feminine - marking International Women's Day*

Sun 8 March  
6.00pm  
Old School, Abthorpe  
NN12 8QT

Inspired works by little known baroque women composers, plus music by medieval minstrel Hildegard of Bingen. A fascinating journey from the 10th to the 17th century to Italy, including one of his cello suites, as notated by his wife Anna Magdalena.

**Programme:**  
Hildegard antiphons  
Cozzolani O dulcis Jesu  
Leonarda Sonata Duodecima  
JC Bach Mein Freund ist mein  
JS Bach Suite for unaccompanied cello

**Performers:**  
Judie Deburghy soprano  
Kerstin Linden-Dewas violin  
Kath Sharman cello  
Penelope Ragnon harpsichord/director

Tickets **£25** Main price  
**£15** Restricted view

Organised by Abthorpe, Abthorpe and the village. All proceeds go to the Old School.

Full details & booking at [www.fiori-musicali.com](https://www.fiori-musicali.com) or 01832 700000

## CHURCH NEWS

Christmas now seems a distant memory but of course was a hugely significant event for many of us in the village and was celebrated appropriately. The Lighting of the Christmas Tree on the Green was rapidly followed by the imbibing of mulled wine and warm muffins in the Old School – a jolly affair with the lubrication of our vocal chords helping some lusty and almost tuneful singing of carols and festive songs. A good time was had by all.

We were delighted that so many children turned up with their Mums to help us make Christingles on the afternoon before Christmas Eve. In record time, we were transporting 50 beautifully decorated oranges up to the church in readiness for the Carol and Christingle service the following day. The church, as we have become accustomed, was packed with families full of anticipation for the traditional and heart-warming service that followed and they were not disappointed. Many stayed afterwards to chat and relax with neighbours and friends with mince pies and mulled wine adding to the general feeling of goodwill.

**Fund-raising:** We are grateful to all those who support the Church Tote. It surprises people to hear that we get NO money from any sources to maintain our lovely building. It is solely the responsibility of the Church Warden and Parochial Church Council (PCC) to keep this Grade II listed building in good shape. For this reason we run the monthly Tote which raises money purely to look after the building. If you would like more information, please contact Richard Tomalin (01327 858316 [richard.tomalin@abthorpe.net](mailto:richard.tomalin@abthorpe.net)).

So, what's in it for you? Well, half of the money raised each month is shared between two winners and recent winners have been: In October, Gail Coombs and Peter Newcombe each won £117.50. In November, Peter Newcombe won the same again as did Jan Vanson. In December, it was the



turn of Bridget Burnet and Liz & Barry Haycock to win £117.50 each and the first winners of 2026 were Chris Scrivener and Sian & Arthur Young who each won £116.25 with Monica Plant and Alun & Rachel Stevens each winning £117.50 in February.

**Tea & Pancakes:** To celebrate the arrival of Shrove Tuesday 2 days later, on the afternoon of Sunday February 15th we held a Pancake event in the Old School. A good number of villagers braved the rain and sleet and lowering clouds to sample Traditional (lemon and sugar), Indulgent (nutella and banana) or Healthy (Greek yogurt, honey and blueberry) crepes of their choice. It was a very congenial afternoon enjoyed by all who came. It would be even better with more families!

**Tea & Piece:** Our monthly Tea & Piece afternoons will re-start on Sunday 22nd March to be followed on every third Sunday of the month until BST ends and the afternoons draw in. So the dates are 19th April, 17th May, 21st June, 19th July, 16th August, 20th September and 18th October. These are held in the church café area and run from 3pm until 4.30pm. Home-made cake and hot and cold drinks are on offer and, of course, all are welcome, including visitors. We are also happy for you to take slices of cake away – please bring a container.

**Church Services:** A Holy Eucharist service is held on the third Sunday of each month starting at 10.00am. The service lasts an hour, includes prayers, hymns and taking the sacrament (voluntary) and is followed by tea and coffee. All are welcome of any age or faith. Our next service will be on March 15th which is Mothering Sunday, when we will be joined by people from the other churches in the Benefice. There will be an extra service on Easter Sunday on April 5th at 9.15am.

**Food bank:** Please remember that there are tubs in the church porch for your contributions to Towcester Foodbank. Although all non-perishable food and household items are welcome, currently, the most needed items are: tinned custard, tinned meat, tinned rice pudding, washing up liquid, laundry detergent, nappies sizes 6 and 7, and carrier bags/bags for life.

**Church Opening:** Once British Summer Time begins on Sunday 29th March, the church will be open during normal working hours and anyone is welcome to go into the church for a moment of peace or quiet reflection.

**Parents and Early Learners Coffee Mornings:** These are held every few months in the church café area on a Saturday morning from 10.00am until 11.30am with the aim of introducing parents and young children to others of the same ilk in the village. These mornings are very informal –

there are toys to play with and pictures to colour or children can bring something of their own to do or share with others. Biscuits and hot or cold drinks are provided free of charge. The next session is planned for Saturday 18th April.

### **P.S. Following Harvest**

**Supper:** Those of you who came to our Harvest Supper in October may remember that the winner of the 'Squares Board' was Anne Baldwin, Carol Cummins' mother, who was visiting at the time. Anne has links with missionary work in Sri Lanka, and decided to send her winnings out to the Mission there to provide school books for children from very low income families. Rev. Asanka was thrilled with the donation which helped fund Christmas gifts of books for over 70 children.

### **TOVE VALLEY BROADBAND**

The central team plan to complete all their commitments to lay fibre broadband services to premises in Spring 2026 – the last few are at Falcutt and Plumpton.

Behind the scenes, a lot of effort has gone into updating our management and support software. Our new accounting system sends out invoices on your renewal date, not one month before. You still have 30 days to pay.

Please use our "support ticket" system, which works very well for both our volunteers and members, to contact us as there is always someone monitoring it. Phone 08432 898 350 or open a ticket on our website. Better this way than personal phone calls or emails to someone who might well be in Australia, Africa or Azerbaijan!

The AGM this year takes place on 14th May. Details will be emailed to members nearer the time.

Attention all Parents & Early Learners!

You are invited to an  
informal coffee-and-play  
morning on

Saturday 18th April  
from 10.00 – 11.30

In the Church café area

Do come and take the opportunity to  
meet  
other parents in the village with babies  
and  
toddlers and young children

Drinks and biscuits provided free of  
charge



## NEW INN NEWS

**Quiz Nights:** On the last Sunday of each month a Quiz Evening is held in the pub with local teams from Abthorpe and further afield competing against each other with refreshments, both liquid and edible, available to keep the brain cells jogging along. Winners traditionally hand over their winnings to a charity of their choice. The winners of the October Pub Quiz were 'Tows on Tour', led by Steve Clews, who decided that a donation to the Alzheimer's Society might be judicious. 'Tows on Tour' did particularly well beating ten other teams, which made it a record evening for the number of people taking part. The November Quiz was jointly won by the Barflies and the Hopefuls. It was decided that the Barflies would donate the money raised to the Northampton based Lewis Foundation which seeks to support adults undergoing cancer treatment. The winners of the December Pub Quiz were O U R Awful who donated the money raised to the Northampton Branch of Maggie's Cancer Care which is based at NGH. The Pub Quiz for January was won jointly by Quizzy Rascals & Know Hopers with the money collected being donated to Renew 169 Wellbeing Cafe in Towcester.

**Old favourites and new ideas: Pie Night** – every Monday for a mere £14 (which includes a drink) you get to select your pie of choice (beef and ale, chicken/gammon & leek, vegan, pork in cider), add some veggies (roasted roots, steamed greens, cauli cheese) and then decide on your mash (buttery mash, champ, horseradish mash, wholegrain mash). All smothered in gravy and washed down with a pint, small glass of wine or a soft drink. What's not to like?

And that's not all because Tuesday Night is **Steak Night**. For £40, you get two 8oz British Rumps and a Bottle of Wine .

**Fish Boxes:** Don't forget that these are available for £35 a box – containing mouth-watering supplies of fresh fish bought that morning at Billingsgate.



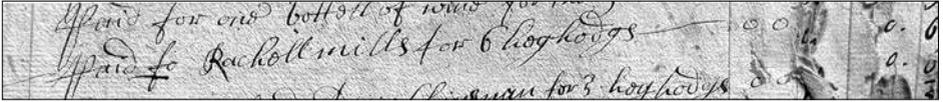


*Allan Davidson addressing the haggis between the pumps.*

**Special Events** – Whether it’s Burns Night in January, Valentine’s Day in February, or Mothers Day in March, you can be sure that the New Inn will come up trumps with a special menu at a very reasonable price. (That’s true Scotsman, Allan Davidson, murdering the Haggis at the Burns Night evening in the photo above).

**Competition Time** – Be In to Win: To celebrate Mothers Day on March 15th, the New Inn are giving away four main course meals, four desserts and Far Reaches Botanical Gin & Tonics for Mum. To enter, simply ‘like’ and ‘share’ the post which you will find on their facebook page.

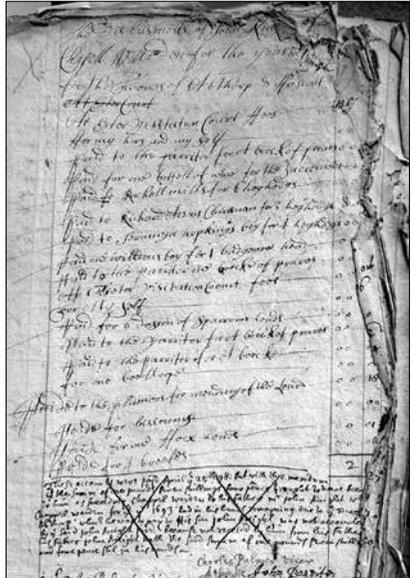
For more information on any of the above or to book a table call the New Inn on 01327 857306.



**ABTHORPE HISTORICAL ARCHIVE – BY ALISON SYMMERS**

The Archive Group has categorised over 400 documents and photographs with more donations arriving regularly. The group now meets in the Old School small room on the first Thursday afternoon of every month from 2pm. Villagers are very welcome to drop in and have a look at what there is.

To whet your appetite here’s a couple of photographs from the Archive. The first comes from the Parish Record book of 1698 and is amusing to today’s eyes. It shows that Rachel Mills was paid 6d for six hedgehogs (enlargement above). Slightly extraordinary but in those days there was a superstition that hedgehogs stole and drank the milk from the cows so children were encouraged to catch hedgehogs and were paid by the parish for any they caught.



And the second is a new photo given to the collection by the sister of Anne Lewis who used to own and live in Church View, Middle Cottage and Primrose Cottage. The photo, taken around 1900, shows John Tanner, a farmer and coal merchant, with some of his family and farm workers in the orchard of Yew Tree House feeding calves.



## A BIT MORE OF ABTHORPE'S HISTORY

### Centenary of the Chapel

*Nothampton Chronicle & Echo, Friday 4th December 1925*

Generous Congregation at Chapel Opening.

The opening of the Abthorpe Primitive Methodist Chapel and School, which took place on Thursday, was accompanied by great enthusiasm and generous giving. Practically £230 was raised during the six hours the meetings were held. Crowded congregations, representing all denominations, were present at all the services.

The little chapel, which stands in the middle of the village on the Wappenham road, has been erected to the plans of Mr F. H. Allen, or Northampton, by Mr. H. J. Newport, of Towcester, at a cost of approximately £1,200. Such material which was useable from the original chapel, now demolished, was included in the building, and chief amongst these was the tablet erected in the old chapel in 1904 to the memory of Mrs Fanny Stevens who, for 42 years, was a member and devoted worker. The building, which is finished in red brick, has seating accommodation for 120 people, the furniture being in pitch pine. The rostrum, which is in the same wood, was



*The Methodist Chapel in the 1990s not long before it closed.*

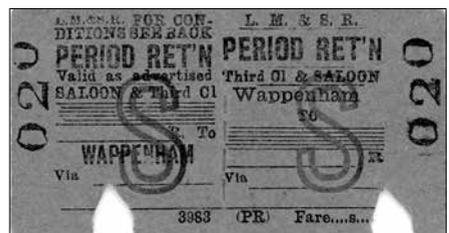
the generous gift of Mrs E Blake, a grand-daughter of one the first local preachers to visit Abthorpe, the late Mr T Singlehurst. A brass plate on the rostrum reads: "To the glory of God, and in loving memory of Thomas Singlehurst, presented by his grand-daughter, Mrs E. Blake." The carpet on the rostrum was the gift of Mr A. Walker, C.C. of Woodford Halse, and another generous gift was that of the chairs by a lady friend who remains anonymous.

Standing outside the building, the large congregation, led the Rev. J. M. Gunson, heartily sang the hymn, "Behold Thy temple, God of Grace, the house that we have reared for Thee." The architect, Mr Allen, then presented a silver key to Mrs T. Singlehurst, who, in unlocking the door of the chapel, expressed the hope that the chapel would be a great blessing. With a similar key, Mrs Moore unlocked the schoolroom door in the presence of the scholars. "It is great pleasure," said Mrs Moore, "and a great honour, to open the door for the children, for it is the children who have a great place in our hearts and have a place in the sanctuary." The children then filed into the schoolroom, which is an adjunct of the chapel, and the adults passed through the chapel doors.

The service of dedication was continued indoors followed by a service and after the service tea was served in the Schoolroom.

### TICKET FOR A HOLIDAY

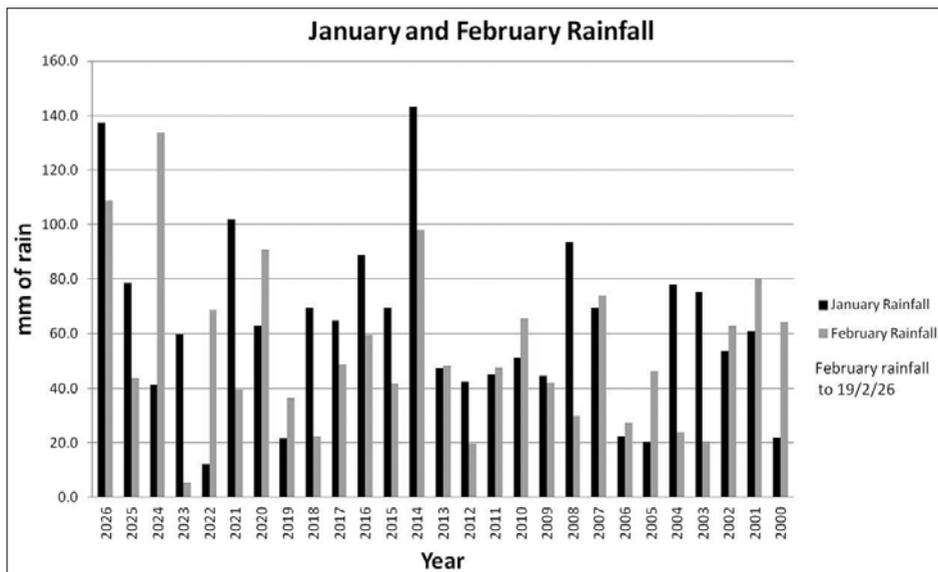
Recently obtained via e-Bay was this ticket from Wappenham station which was issued by the London, Midland & Scottish Railway. It could have been printed any time from 1923 until 1948. The ticket has not been issued but has been 'clipped' – the missing pieces are at the bottom and ensured that the ticket could not be used. It is a Third Class Period Return. These were issued at less than the cost of a normal Return ticket, usually for return within a month, and were the usual ticket for holidaymakers. The destination is not printed on the ticket so that would be entered by hand when the ticket was issued, as would be the fare. Notice that it is marked 'Third Cl & Steerage' meaning that a boat trip was included. Inclusive return tickets were issued to places such as Dublin and the Isle of Man. Ireland was not a common holiday destination in the 1920s or 1930s but the Isle of Man was very popular, so that is quite a likely



destination. In 1938, the LMS advertised in the *Northampton Mercury* its main holiday destinations and that included the Isle of Man. The return fare from Northampton was 36/9d at a time when average annual earnings were about £160.

### THE NATION'S FAVOURITE TOPIC

I don't think anyone would disagree that the start of 2026 has been very grey and very, very wet. But do our memories fail us? Isn't it always wet in January and February? After all, they don't call it 'February Fill Dyke' for nothing. To ascertain whether this really has been one of the wettest starts to the year for a very long time, statistical proof was required – and where better to get such data than from Abthorpe farmer Barry Haycock who has meticulously kept rainfall records since 1985! Below is what Barry's figures tell us. So, yes, it was indeed one of the wettest Januaries for many years, but actually 2014 was even worse (just). However, if we consider the combined total of January and February together 2026 definitely gets the Gold Medal (even with a week to go!).



*And it was still raining as this issue went to press.*



## **GOODBYES**

**Gareth Davies:** The funeral took place in November of Dr Gareth Frank Davies, aged 67, who had lived in Abthorpe for over 30 years. Gareth was born to Welsh parents who moved to this area to farm near Blakesley. Gareth maintained a strong connection to Wales throughout his life although his career took him to various locations in the UK and even abroad.



Gareth gained a PhD and was a highly respected scientist and researcher. He held a number of positions at prestigious institutions.

He is remembered for being an “authentic” and “grounded” person—a “gentleman” who balanced his high-level scientific expertise with a supportive and kind nature toward his peers and family.

Gareth had a quiet, humble demeanour, and was most comfortable with friends and family he knew well. He could often be seen walking from his bungalow, usually clad in wellies, in a circuit up Brackley Lane and down through the fields back home. He would be courteous to all he met on his walks, but was essentially a private person content with his own company.

**Rachel Charles:** We heard the sad news in the New Year that Rachel, who lived at the bottom of Main Street, had died suddenly. She was a good friend of her neighbour Sian Young who has kindly provided us with this tribute with help from Rachel's daughter Hattie.

"Rachel moved to Abthorpe in 2000 with her husband, Mike, children, Owen and Harriet, and her mother, Ruth. Rachel was born and raised in the Church of England. Her father, Edward, was a vicar and she remembered being brought up in an assortment of draughty vicarages. She was an academic child with a keenness for growing things. In later life this would translate into a passion for gardening. She combined an impressive knowledge of plants, including their Latin names, with a more prosaic determination to grow her own organic produce for her vegetarian table. Sowing seed, potting on and taking cuttings were part of the rhythm of her life and she was never happier than when she was working in the garden with Mike.

Rachel also loved music and she was an exceptional harpsichord player. At fourteen she won first prize in harpsichord in the Ealing Music Festival. The adjudicator commented on her promise, suggesting she take up the instrument professionally. She preferred the idea of studying medicine. This, however, she never did, going on to take a first degree and masters in psychology, a subject she spent most of her life teaching.

Rachel was not limited by her intelligence as she was also extremely competent and could turn her hand to many things. If she did not know how to do something she bought a book, studied it and had a go. This was exemplified when she re-wired her whole house. Similarly, when Owen married Antje, a German speaker, Rachel set about learning a new language so that she could write to Antje's parents in their native language. No translation apps for Rachel!

Mike sadly died in 2024. Rachel died on 2nd January 2026 and is survived by her son, Owen, daughter, Hattie, and grandson, Jonny".



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**DIARY OF FORTHCOMING EVENTS**

Friday February 27th	11.30am	Old School	Unveiling of Blue Plaque
Monday March 2nd	7.00pm	Old School	Parish Council meeting
		New Inn	Pie Night
Tuesday March 3rd		New Inn	Steak Night
Sunday March 8th	6.00pm	Old School	Fiori Musicali Women, Wine and Song concert
Monday March 9th	7.00pm	Old School	Old School AGM
Sunday March 15th	10.00am	Church	Mothering Sunday
			Service
Thursday March 19th	12.30pm	Old School	Soup Lunch
Sunday March 22nd	3.00-4.30pm	Church	Tea & Piece
Sunday March 29th	7.00pm	New Inn	Quiz Night
Sunday April 5th	9.15am	Church	Easter Sunday service
Saturday April 11th	time tbc	Stable Cottage, The Green	Coffee Morning
Saturday April 18th	10.00-11.30am	Church	Parent & Early Learners Coffee Morning
Sunday April 19th	10.00am	Church	Holy Eucharist
	3.00-4.30pm	Church	Tea & Piece
Sunday April 26th	7.00m	New Inn	Quiz Night
Thursday May 14th	7.30pm	Old School	ABbA AGM

**Weekly Events** - each week in March and April

Monday	New Inn	Pie Night
Tuesday	New Inn	Steak Night

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