MAYOR REWARDS GREEN-FINGERED RESIDENTS

Mayor of Towcester, Councillor Richard Duffin, was delighted to present certificates and garden vouchers to the winners of this year’s Best Kept Garden competition.

Several gardens across the town vied to catch the eye of the Mayor and the standards were extremely high, but it was Mr Terry Phillips of Cedar Close who bagged the top prize, having come third in last year’s competition. Terry clearly loves gardening and spends many hours tending to his prized plants.

Second place went to the beautifully manicured garden of Juliet Griffin and Mike Woodman of Waterhall.

Third place went to Diana Jones, also of Cedar Close, who was encouraged by Terry to enter this year’s competition. Clearly the friendly rivalry paid dividends!

If you would like to enter the Best Kept Garden 2021, look out for the entry form in the March 2021 issue of the Town Crier.

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- and more….
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A WORD FROM THE MAYOR

I write this in early autumn with the uncertainties of Covid-19 still very much with us.

It has been, and continues to be, a difficult time for individuals and local groups to stage community events. At the Town Council, as elsewhere, we have had to follow national guidelines that have precluded the Town Hall, The Sawpits Centre and Community Centre being open for meetings and activities.

But, as Mayor, I’m delighted that I have been able to attend some activities. For example, on August 15th I joined Mark Limbert of Towcester Studio Band when he sounded the Last Post at the top of Bury Mount to mark VJ Day. It was a poignant moment when all around town, and beyond, his bugle was heard. You can relive it and see the interview I did with Mark afterwards on the Town Mayor’s Facebook page.

Looking back on the summer: yes, the weather was mixed, but several of you took part in the Best Kept Garden competition. I was delighted to present first prize to Terry Phillips of Cedar Close for his colourful front garden display. Honourable mentions also to runners-up, Juliet Griffin and Mike Woodmason in Waterhall, and Diana Jones, another Cedar Close resident.

During September, I selected what I adjudged the most appropriate ‘lockdown photos’ to be included in a fundraising calendar, which is due to be available to buy very soon.

Finally, as Christmas gets that little bit nearer, I’m reminded of what was achieved to ensure that Midsummer Music still went ahead. The reason I write this is that I know many of you are starting to put together a programme of Christmas music which will be there to enjoy, and may, if circumstances don’t change, be something of a stand-by in the festive season if usual events are cancelled. Watch out for more news of this in the weeks ahead.

Meantime, as we hope more things will start happening in our community, please do tell us about your events, and as Mayor, I’d be delighted to open/and or support your event.

Richard
Cllr Richard Dallyn
Towcester Town Mayor

Fundraising for Macmillan Cancer Support

There were many pictures sent in to record what was, and to an extent still is, a unique time. Money raised from the sale of the calendar will go towards my Mayor’s charity for the year, Macmillan Cancer Support. The Covid crisis has meant cancer treatment has been severely affected, so the need for support is all the greater. Your donations will be very welcome. Please visit https://www.justgiving.com/towcester-town-mayor and thanks from me.

There’s also something else you can do: please nominate any unsung heroes whose actions you’d like to applaud. Who has made an outstanding contribution to the life of the town in these Covid times? Nominate them for the Towcester Town Mayor’s Citizen of the Year Award 2020/21. Visit page 36 or the Town Council website and you’ll find the details in the ‘Community’ section.

Towcester Town Crier is published by Towcester Town Council and is open to contributions from all organisations and individuals in the town. We operate strict deadlines for advertising / copy and submissions will not be accepted after these dates. Advertising and editorial copy should be sent to Lizzi Bucklow-Holt at the Town Council Offices, Town Hall (tel: 01327 350995; email: enquiries@towcester-tc.gov.uk). Articles appearing contain the views of the person submitting the item and are not necessarily the views of the Town Council. More details on the Council’s website www.towcester-tc.gov.uk
Coping with Lockdown!

The past few months have been extremely challenging for the whole of society and whilst TSB is a charitable amateur organisation, not being able to play music together has been enormously frustrating for everyone involved. The members of TSB were used to meeting every Monday and Wednesday in the Bandroom to prepare music for contests, concerts and fetes throughout the Spring and Summer season. Lockdown put a very sudden halt to all our plans and soon after came the cancellation notices for all the engagements that we had been booked for!

The Government guidelines have been followed precisely and at the time of writing this update TSB is still unsure of when it can rehearse again as a full Band of twenty-five players.

The committee and members are enormously grateful of the financial support received from The Arts Council and other Government schemes as the loss of the entire income stream for 2020 has proved quite challenging.

However, amongst all the daily challenges that everyone has been faced with, band members, both individually and collectively, have continued to practice at home and convert their efforts into several ‘virtual’ performances.

Several members participated in the regular Thursday night ‘clap the NHS’ initiative, through playing and recording nominated pieces of music outside their homes. This proved immensely popular throughout the country and social media carried many performances by individuals and small family groups. From these early online videos came the idea to create a full band virtual performance.

TSB, like many other Brass Bands and musical groups, seized the opportunity to encourage members to record/video their individual parts at home and send to the Band’s very own sound & video engineer, Mr Lyn Stoneman. Lyn used his new-found skills to integrate twenty-five playing contributions, plus that of our Musical Director, Peter Wain, waving his arms around, to produce a ‘virtual’ final performance video. The first effort was the well-known march, Colonel Bogey, and it received several thousand viewings on Facebook and similar platforms.

This reaction ignited enthusiasm to do more and an arrangement of The Beatles ‘Ticket to Ride’ song was second on the list. Both visual and audio effects were introduced in this piece with ‘station master’ Tom Stoneman giving a blinding performance on the train whistle!
In brass banding circles, Whit Friday holds a special place in the calendar. In normal times, around 100 bands from across the UK, and some from Europe converge on Saddleworth and Thameside areas, suburbs of Oldham, Manchester, to perform in the Whit Friday Marches contest. As the contest was cancelled due to Covid, the famous Foden’s Band decided to organise an online contest. For several weeks before Whit Friday, competing bands submitted their ‘virtual’ performances to the organising committee and, on the day, every contestant’s performance was streamed on YouTube. TSB’s entry was ‘When the Saints Go Marching In’, which we thought was quite apt as several of the Band’s members are also supporters of Northampton Saints rugby.

Our efforts were liked by the judges and TSB, sporting their away strip of Black, Green & Gold, came a very creditable 3rd in our section.

Following that notable achievement, we then produced a fourth virtual piece, ‘Clog Dance’, and also participated in Towcester’s Midsummer Music Festival which was brilliantly put together by the organising committee.

August is normally the month that St Lawrence Church is bedecked with wonderful flower arrangements: all part of the Flower Festival. The Band enjoys its annual commitment to play during the Sunday service but sadly that was another event that could not take place in 2020. However, the team at St Lawrence also planned a ‘virtual’ event and so TSB pre-recorded the hymns and ‘The Floral Dance’, and these were again delivered via social platforms over the festival weekend.

During Lockdown, the nation paid homage on VE and VJ Days, and several members of the band performed ‘The Last Post and Reveille’ in their local communities. The standout performance in Towcester was from Mark Limbert. Mark is the band’s Soprano Cornet player, but he also enjoys playing the Bugle. For both VE and VJ day Mark’s sonorous tone could be heard emanating from Bury Mount. Following his VJ Day performance he was interviewed by the Cllr Richard Dallyn, current Mayor of Towcester, and Mark unveiled some remarkably interesting history notes on the instrument that he played. Worth searching the Mayor’s Facebook page for a listen.

I am writing this piece at the end of August, the very week when the Tollervey family were completing a rather special challenge in the hills of Shropshire! Penelope Tollervey plays the cornet in TSB but is multi-talented when it comes to all things music. Penelope plays the Trumpet, Violin, Ukulele, and sings. Together with mum Mary, who is an accomplished Cellist, they decided to raise money for ‘Music for All’ charity by climbing seven Shropshire hills in seven days and playing a piece of music on the top of each hill. On some days, the weather was not kind! Their fundraising target was £777.77, and they absolutely smashed it! They are quite the musical family and again were regular supporters of the NHS and Key workers during the Thursday ‘clap’ nights. Penelope’s dad, Nick, has also played Tuba with TSB on many occasions. The sad footnote to this wonderful story is that TSB had to say farewell to Penelope in September as she headed off to start her first year at University. The Band looks forward to welcoming her back during holidays.

August Bank holiday was to have been the time that the Band embarked on its first overseas tour for several years. The tour was to be centred on Koblenz in the beautiful Rhineland area of Germany. With a touring party of forty people it was far too risky to go ahead with the itinerary this year and so after much consideration the tour was postponed and is now scheduled for the same time in 2021.

All of us at TSB are really missing being able to play together but the serious frustration is reserved for the fact that we cannot perform in public, and in particular, entertain our very loyal supporters. Hopefully our community will move back to near normal in the coming months and once it is safe to do so, please be assured that Towcester Studio Band will do all it can to help celebrate coming out of what has been a very dark and challenging period.

If you are interested in supporting the Band through its charitable arm, Friends of Towcester Studio Band, please don’t hesitate to get in touch via our website www.towcesterstudioband.co.uk. Your support and help to recover from the challenges posed by Covid-19 will be invaluable.

All our ‘virtual’ performances can also be accessed via the website, we hope that you enjoy TSB in Lockdown!

Many thanks
Kevin
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We are delighted that despite so many of our activities being curtailed and monthly meetings cancelled so many of our members have renewed their membership, and we are pleased that an ever-increasing number are meeting virtually.

Having said that, our ukulele group did organise a meeting for six of them in their Leader’s garden. They were so thorough with their planning, numbers, social-distancing, car travel, etc. even having a ‘Plan B’ in case it started to rain. The Guitar Group are trying to arrange something. In addition, our Walking Groups are striding out in select groups of six.

We continue to send out bulletins at least monthly and encourage our members to send me news, anecdotes, and photos, etc.

Our Facebook page has been so well supported too. There has been a theme each week for members to post memories, photographs, etc. and we are encouraged to think “outside the box”. Members have shared photos of their gardens and their morning walks. An increasing number have shared pictures of their crafts, including old favourites such as knitting, crochet and card making. However, some postings have given rise to ideas for new groups such as quilting and quilling. The feltmaking group recently met in their leader’s garden.

Our Music for Pleasure group have been sharing YouTube music by email, then meeting virtually to discuss the musical pieces. They recently shared “Once Upon a Time in Paris” by the composer Erik Satie, accompanied by impressionist paintings of Parisian Streets by Edouard Cortes.

The committee are meeting virtually and doing as much as we can to support our groups as we ease out of lockdown and they think about re-connecting face to face.

Anyone who is retired or semi-retired can join Towcester U3A. This can include people who work on a part-time basis. There is no lower age for membership. It may be best if applicants live within 10 miles of Towcester although some members live further afield.

If you are still unsure you can come and try one of our monthly meetings as a guest. You will be required to pay a small fee of £2 but you will be made very welcome.

If you decide to join, download, and print our Membership Application Form, available from the ‘Documents’ page on our website www.towcesteru3a.co.uk. Instructions for submitting the form are included online.

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Community Wildflower Meadow Update

The Rotary E-Club’s wildflower meadow has recently been furnished with a three-story hotel – a bug hotel that is.

The bug hotel was designed and built by some of the pupils of Nicholas Hawksmoor Primary School and on Tuesday 14th July they assembled it in a nice quiet place.

The wildflower meadow is still flourishing with new flowers appearing all the time such as wild carrot.

The children also had a bug hotel design competition run by the E-Club. The designs were brilliant. The winning entry shown won a bird box to put up at home and all the others received a certificate.

If you want to donate to help with its upkeep, please use the QR code at the top of this article.

Now the wildflower meadow has passed its best, it has now been cut down to start the preparations for next year. As you can see from the pictures members of the local community got stuck in with the Rotary E-Club of District 1070.

In just two and a half hours the four quadrants were strimmed and the shrubbery trimmed back to make walking around the meadow easier.

On Sunday 6th September, the spoil was removed to prevent nutrients going into the soil – not good for wildflowers.

Another band of intrepid volunteers got a good upper body and aerobic workout! In so doing it will allow the seeds to drop to the surface of the soil. The ground needed a good rake so we could ascertain what additional maintenance required. We will need to remove some thuggish weeds and sow some yellow rattle that feed off the roots of unwanted grass. Some more seed will need to be sown but only to fill in gaps.

The meadow will need to be regularly cut through the autumn until it stops growing for the winter. We can then sit back waiting with anticipation for what we hope will be another glorious display next year.

In the meantime, a new permanent sign is being made that will be placed at the front of the wildflower meadow that will be at wheelchair height so everyone can see and read it.

The Rotary E-Club hopes people will still come to the wildflower meadow to see what wildlife enjoys it through the autumn and winter months.

Rotarian Steve Howe

PS. Here is an unusual caterpillar we saw, can you name it?

If you want to contact the Rotary E-Club about the wildflower meadow or want to find out more about Rotary and what it does please do email secretary@rotaryeclub1070.org or visit www.rotaryeclub1070.org
**Towcester Country Market** is a cooperative of local bakers, growers and crafters who come together each week to sell our wares under the Country Market label. No other logos are used.

Everything we sell is made in our own homes and gardens or, in the case of our free-range hens, in our field. It is all freshly produced and delicious. All our bakers have Food Hygiene Certification.

We are currently trading from A5 Rangers, off Islington Road, on Thursday mornings from 8.30 to 11.30. Lots of parking outside and a Covid-Safe system in place.

The demand for our home-baked and home-grown products has been growing over the last few years and we are looking to expand our range. Did you perfect a sour dough loaf during lockdown? Do your friends tell you your banana bread is the best they have ever tasted, and you should make them to sell? If so, we would love you to join us. We have lots of lovely customers who would like to try something new. We are a friendly bunch, have great fun and make a small profit too.

Call in for a chat or to buy edibles and crafts. Our crafts are all original and ideal for Christmas.

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**Towcester foodbank news**

The foodbank moved out of our usual premises at the beginning of the lockdown to allow us to continue to be able to deliver our service. We have now been able to move back to St John's Ambulance hall and are back to our normal opening hours of Tuesday 12-2 and Friday 10.30 – 12.30 for our clients to collect their food bags.

We are aware that several pop-up foodbanks have now closed, but we remain open and available to anyone struggling to make ends meet. To obtain a voucher you can contact any of the following: SNC money advice or Housing Options, Grand Union Housing Group, schools, nurseries, clergy, doctors, community nurses or come direct to the foodbank. More information is available on our website at [www.towcester.foodbank.org.uk](http://www.towcester.foodbank.org.uk) or on our Facebook page. You can also ring or text us on 07724 832043.

We have never been so well stocked with food at this time of year and we would like to say a big thank you to everyone who has donated. Your donations have kept us operating. We have put a list of items we require on our Facebook page and we will continue to update this.

Lastly the trustees would like to thank all the volunteers, without whose help we would have been unable to give so much help to those who needed it, at this most difficult time.

We are currently looking for more volunteers. If you are interested, please go to our website for more information. [www.facebook.com/towcesterfoodbank](http://www.facebook.com/towcesterfoodbank)
Not a thing of the past - Towcester Museum is Open

Towcester Museum reopened its doors once again on Tuesday, 15th September, and we are very excited to welcome back our hard-working volunteers and visitors, old and new.

The last few months have been a very difficult time for local businesses and small charities such as ourselves and we would like to assure all of our visitors that we are taking every precaution necessary to ensure that your visit is both safe and welcoming.

We have introduced a new one-way system around the exhibitions and museum shop, several sanitiser stations are accessible to visitors and PPE equipment will be available for all our volunteers. Although we have had to reduce the number of interactive activities available to visitors, our artefacts, dioramas, models, and re-enactment videos will remain key focal points in both of our exhibitions. Our children’s trail with Dorum the Rat is also a firm favourite with families and never fails to entertain children of all ages with fun and gruesome facts.

Museum Chairman, Rob Hamblin said:

“We are very proud of the role the museum plays in the local community and I’m delighted that we are opening our doors to the public once again. Our volunteers have been working hard behind the scenes to make sure the museum is ready for the re-opening and we couldn’t have done this without them.”

“In these extraordinary times, we’d like to thank you, our visitors, for your continued support. It is a privilege to share the rich history of a town like Towcester and its surrounding villages and we are honoured to continue our work alongside a strong community of schools, children’s groups and local societies. Towcester Museum is a place for everyone to enjoy and we look forward to welcoming you back soon.”

Here are just a few lovely comments we have received from previous visitors:

“Towcester museum is an absolute gem. Very informative, great exhibits and explanations given that are easy to understand. Staff are really friendly and helpful. Well worth a visit!”

“I visited with my 6-year-old son last week. Although it is quite small, I found this perfect for my son as he wasn’t overwhelmed and managed to keep engaged with all the exhibits. The trip really sparked his imagination and lovely memories were made.”

“This was my first visit and there was so much to absorb that I’ll definitely be returning. The volunteers working there were very approachable and extremely knowledgeable; the organisation and display of both the permanent collection and the temporary exhibition (WWI) were perfect. Well done indeed to everyone concerned.”

If you are interested in joining our volunteer scheme, please pop-in to the museum or give us a call on 01327 352662 to find out more.

Visit www.towcestermuseum.co.uk and follow us on Facebook or Instagram for opening times and the latest updates.
Part 1 in the Summer 2020 edition of the Town Crier covered the history of Watling Street from the Roman period through to Tudor times.

The Tudor reconquest of Ireland and the Irish rebellion of 1641 would have undoubtedly resulted in increased road traffic to Holyhead, which was one of the principal sea routes to Dublin. It is not surprising that the Ogilby road strip maps, published in 1675, show Towcester as being on the major route between London and Holyhead, going through St Albans, Lichfield and Chester. The demand for the Ogilby maps came from an increase in economic activity after the Restoration of Charles II which consequently increased the transport of goods around the country and resulted in the opening of the first coach service from London to Chester in 1657.

In the early eighteenth century there was the first private initiative to improve roads rather than leave it to the County Authorities. The driving forces behind this were the country gentry of Northamptonshire and Warwickshire who were discontented with the state of the London to Chester post road stating that the parishes which the road passed through, including Towcester, had no local materials to repair it and as a result it was dangerous to all persons passing along it. The resulting 1707 Act for repairing the highways from Old Stratford to Dunchurch, gave the trustees the right to erect three tollhouses along its twenty-miles length at Old Stratford, Plumb Park, Poulerspury and Dunchurch. It was later that toll gates were erected both north and south of Towcester near Caldecote and the Folly on London Road. In 1781, the Towcester toll gate obtained £602 from travellers along the road. This was £38 less than the income from the toll gate at Old Stratford and £58 less than obtained at Stowe Hill. This reduction in road traffic may have been the result of the coaches and wagons needing to hire additional horses to go up and down the steep sides of the valley at Cuttle Mill, which the local inn, the Windmill, would have been able to provide. This

**OLD TOWCESTER 36 : 43 ROMANS BUILT WATLING STREET!! (PART 2)**
would have caused inconvenience to some passengers and in 1775, a member of a House of Commons Committee said that he often travelled the turnpike and had found that travellers often went by way of Northampton, leaving Watling Street at Stony Stratford and re-joining at Dunchurch.

The heavy wagons using the road, made maintenance of the road surface a constant problem for both the Turnpike Trust and the parishes along the route, who had to pay for the work. For one local man this was a challenge and he set about devising methods of road construction to combat this problem; his name was Gilbert Flesher and he had his house on Watling Street (now Towcester Post Office). He was a man of some wealth and influence, being Deputy Lieutenant of the County, and on several turnpike committees. His experiments in road construction established that roads should be overlain with a compacted layer of small stones and pebbles to form a smooth surface. This technique he was able to get implemented in Towcester and Buckinghamshire with some success. Unfortunately, the civil engineer, John McAdam, published this process first and got national credit. Gilbert claimed, possibly with some justification, that McAdam had got the idea from him.

Civil engineering then became a significant aspect of road improvement to create speedier communications, especially for the mail coaches. The Act of Union in 1800 unified Great Britain and Ireland and in 1810 Thomas Telford was commissioned by the Government to improve the Holyhead Road to link the two capitals via a ferry at Holyhead. Improvements were made to the stretch of the road between Stony Stratford and Towcester in 1822. Cuttings and embankments were made to reduce some of the problematic inclines on the road. At Cuttle Mill there was a new embankment 44 feet high and the hill approaching Towcester had a new cutting 15 feet deep. His road construction methods improved on those of McAdam and Flesher, as he demanded greater care in the construction of the foundations. The approach to Towcester from the south, down London Road, was re-engineered to create a continuous slope, leaving the footpath to some of the houses on the west side of the road at a lower level.

Whilst these improvements were being made, George Stephenson was appointed as engineer for the proposed Stockton and Darlington Railway, which Stevenson designed to allow for steam haulage and the act for the railway was changed to allow passengers to be carried. By 1825, the railway was in operation and a prospectus for building a railway between London and Birmingham in circulation. The section from London to Denbigh Hall, Bletchley, and a section from Birmingham to Rugby were completed on the 9th April 1838, ready for the coronation of Queen Victoria on the 28th June. Between 9th April and 16th September, the hundreds of passengers using this new form of transport had to get off their carriages at Denbigh Hall and Rugby and get on coaches which went through Towcester, where many would have changed horses and got refreshments. This must have been a busy time for the town, but on the 17th September it all changed. Lord Southampton, in a speech made at the opening of the Town Hall in 1865, recalled that when he first came to Towcester “it was a most amusing town to come to. Thirty-six coaches came through it every day, and so many post horses and carriages that one might be amused a whole afternoon in seeing what occurred. Then came the railways, and poor Towcester went to the dogs, and if one went through the town of an afternoon then, it seemed as if the place had a plague, there was not a living soul to be seen”. The town and Watling Street went into decline and it took about 20 years for a recovery to take place. ......To be continued!
Unstable Connection: how Zoom impacts client meetings

Mere months ago, Zoom was just a humble video conferencing software beloved by the odd remote working team. Now, it’s as common in our daily lives as your morning cup of tea.

To keep things going, to stay connected with our friends, family, colleagues, and clients, we have joined the legions of people turning to video calls during the pandemic. But as wonderful and helpful as this technology is, we can’t help feeling that it leaves something to be desired. And that something is human connection.

Zoom fatigue
Gianpiero Petriglieri, an associate professor at Insead who explores sustainable learning and development in the workplace, says that being on a video call requires more focus than a face-to-face chat. We need to work harder to process non-verbal cues like facial expressions, the tone and pitch of the voice, and body language. And working harder to process those cues is tiring.

Having constantly to bridge this gap ourselves on video calls leaves all participants less focused and more exhausted. Usually, face-to-face meetings provide the space for deep and meaningful conversations. Typically, we allow two to three hours for these, and after about 90 minutes we realise we’ve simply been nattering and catching up and haven’t touched the agenda items. But that’s okay – in fact, it’s a crucial part of the whole process.

Getting on the same page and truly understanding how you feel, what’s changed, what’s happening in your life, is a central part of our work. That 90 minutes of chat isn’t just procrastination. It’s about digging into the emotions and connections that only face-to-face interaction allows.

Are you there? The connection is bad
A study from 2014 found that, on phone or conferencing systems, delays of as little as 1.2 seconds made people perceive the responder as less friendly or focused. We pride ourselves on our friendly, open demeanour with our clients and we cherish the relationships we have built with each of them. A mutual understanding and respect for each other forms the basis of a strong professional relationship together, and it’s sad to think that this can be subconsciously undermined by video lag and wobbly connections.

Our regular planning meetings provide the opportunity to think about the next 12 months without distraction and work out what you as a client want to do and achieve. When they’re face-to-face, they truly open up the thought process, trigger thoughts through conversations, and encourage tangents that often bring about the best outcomes. In person, meetings of this length fly by and you come away with a sense of achievement and satisfaction. On Zoom, they can feel like an eternity spent squinting at yourself in a small box on the screen.

Compressing a two to three-hour meeting into a Zoom-appropriate one-hour slot means missing out on that detail, those tangents, and that all-important human connection that informs the best work.

A time and a place
Now don’t get us wrong, we realise that the ability to video call is a blessing. It has allowed life to go on as close to normal as is humanly possible during a very strange moment in time. It also has its place outside of pandemic life, too – clients who can’t travel or who may need to change a meeting at short notice have benefitted from the ability to hop onto a video call from the comfort of their home. It’s a great tool. It truly is.

But in a world that is increasingly tech-heavy, and increasingly online, the value of authentic human connection is more apparent than ever. For the duration of this lockdown, we’ll continue to make Zoom calls to our clients and make the best of the situation. But rest assured, it will never – it can never – replace sitting in the same room together and putting the world to rights over a coffee.

Article submitted by Fortitude Financial Planning Ltd
www.fortitudfp.co.uk
TOWCESTER & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

The Covid-19 pandemic may have changed life for us all, but in times of crisis we must adapt. Towcester & District Local History Society is doing this in a way that is bringing in new members and providing an international audience for its monthly meetings.

Until further notice meetings are being held using the Zoom video conferencing app and members are advised by email how to join each meeting. These are held on the second Wednesday of each month – third Wednesday just for this October’s meeting – starting at 7.30pm.

Not only has the new format attracted new members but others living abroad can now enjoy the monthly talks. Members from Australia and the United States have become regulars in the audience and there may soon be more.

Our programme over the next few months is listed below and anyone interested should contact either secretary, David Wilcock (01327 351782) or chairman, Brian Giggins (01327 352444) for details and guidance on the use of Zoom.

**TIMES MAY CHANGE BUT THE QUALITY OF TALKS REMAINS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Talk</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Workhouses of Buckinghamshire &amp; Towcester with Julian Hunt</td>
<td>Wednesday 21st October</td>
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<tr>
<td>Julian will be telling stories about workhouses in neighbouring Buckinghamshire and bringing in Towcester. He will be illustrating with archive photographs and new ones showing the current use of the buildings.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lost Country Houses of Northamptonshire with Douglas Goddard</td>
<td>Wednesday 11th November</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nearly a third of the nation’s magnificent mansions have perished over the decades due to world wars, death duties and changing social landscapes. This talk focuses on four of them right here in the county.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Christmas “event”</td>
<td>Wednesday 9th December</td>
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<td>In the planning stage but sure to be fun!</td>
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<tr>
<td>The History of Northamptonshire Police Force with Andy Tennet</td>
<td>Wednesday 13th January</td>
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<tr>
<td>Retired DCI Andy will trace the history of the county force from an early understanding of the role of the Constable to the way the modern police operation works in so many ways.</td>
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We meet on Zoom every Sunday from 10.20am for TVBF Online, please join us!

For the Zoom meeting details, or if you have any questions at all, please email secretary@tvbf.co.uk, we would love to hear from you!

For more about our church, visit tvbf.co.uk, where you can access our recorded sermons, resources, and more!
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Telephone 01327 358321

Mobile / out of hours 07725811892 (Heather Rose)
07525900894 (Alina Schofield)
Tove Wetland Pocket Park

Did you know that the Pocket Park provides public services for the town? The storage of flood water is obvious, but it also stores carbon. The land was previously used for arable agriculture and would have leaked carbon. Healthy grassland soaks up and stores carbon in its deep roots. Also, when the land was used for agriculture, soil would have run-off into the river; indeed, this still happens now elsewhere. But we are now contributing to its restoration and retention. The soil in the Tove Wetlands will be available for future use if necessary.

So, we store floodwater, we store carbon and we also prevent soil erosion into the Tove. The Pocket Park is doing a great job in providing natural capital for the town. Grasslands that are undisturbed by agriculture and protected from soil erosion through sustainable management are important stores of carbon. Yet in the UK we have lost 97% of our lowland semi-natural grasslands and they continue to be at risk.

Did you see the latest species-rich grassland in Towcester? You could not miss it in June and July if you walked down the Silverstone Brook Open Space (SBOS), just past Nicholas Hawksmoor School, as it was a riot of colour in contrast to the other grass areas in the vicinity. The wildflower/grass area is the latest project of the Rotary e-Club of District 1070 and was officially opened by the Town Mayor at the beginning of June. Wildflower seed was purchased from a commercial seed grower and was scattered after the turf was removed and the area cultivated.

This year the flowers were almost all cornfield plants. That is flowers that would have grown with crops of barley and wheat before the methods for cleaning grain filtered out their seeds. The colourful display that you saw would have been common up until the Second World War when farmers improved their methods of cultivation. These flowers are annuals but hopefully next year the perennial seeds that were in the sown mix will sprout and produce a more permanent colourful display.

All these flowers would have come to this country from the dry hills of the Fertile Crescent in the Middle East where agriculture started. They would have grown in the dry bare soil and then moved into man’s crops when the soil was cultivated every year.

Do keep your eye on this area next year to see the perennials flower. You can also see a wildflower area in the Tove Wetland Pocket Park adjacent to the Tove where the weeping willow grows on the bank. Wildflowers were planted in this area some years ago and we are continuing to plant in this area, but we need to add more. The flowers we will be planting have been grown from seed collected locally. This is a different approach to establishing a flower rich area to that used in the SBOS. We are also intending to create another wildflower area on the other side of the Tove. Here, we will be cultivating the area and broadcasting seed collected locally but we also hope to include seeds of the annual flowers collected from the SBOS area.

All three of these wildflower areas will provide Towcester with the service of trapping carbon.

Peter Warden
(on behalf of the Pocket Park Committee)

If you are interested in helping out in the Tove Wetland Pocket Park, please contact:
Nick Holder – 01327 352647 / 07729 239810 Peter Warden – 01327 350489

Tove Quilters and Stitchers have had to stop meeting and sewing together over the past few months for obvious reasons, but we are all still busy stitching away within our own homes and making sure that we keep in touch one way or another!

But one of the things we were busy with together over the last two or three years was the planning, designing, and creating of a quilted wall-hanging all about Towcester. This was to show some of the historical and architectural features of our lovely town - artistic licence used of course! By the time it was finally completed we were coming into lockdown so the opportunity to find somewhere suitable within Towcester to hang it passed. However, we were able to enter it for the Festival of Quilts virtual competition in the Groups Category which was held at the end of July and we are immensely proud to say that it was shortlisted!

We are now actively seeking a suitable display venue for the wall-hanging so that one day soon it will be available to view in a public area in the town. Meanwhile, we thought the residents of Towcester might like to get a preview of it here.

Please do get in touch if you know of a suitable location for our wall-hanging or if you just want to find out more about our group.

Petra Giffen petragiffen@gmail.com 01327 831388
Jill Holden jillysh60@gmail.com 07875 248785
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Embracing New, and Normal, Beginnings at Towcester C of E Primary School

‘I wonder…’

I write this article on Thursday 3rd September (the Editor’s deadline – nothing like last minute!), I cannot contain my excitement as a Head Teacher to know that we are opening to all of our children today – including our full Foundation Stage of new pupils and 14 new families who have arrived in Towcester over the summer.

As I was getting ready for the first day back at school with children today, I did a bit of ‘wondering’…

As I put on my new dress, I wondered what our children would be feeling like as they put on their new pieces of school uniform.

As I put on my new shoes (unlikely to last any longer than 9.30am as is often the case with a new pair of high heels), I wondered too, if the children would be feeling the pressure of a new pair of leather shoes on their feet after weeks in trainers and slippers.

As I wondered about the prospect of teaching a class of 30 Year 1 children this afternoon, having only come out of shielding a month ago, I wondered how our children were going to feel today moving from a small family environment to a busy class of 30.

And finally, I wondered how our parents would be feeling today. Was it excitement like me? Or perhaps anxiety? Or relief?!

(As an aside I congratulate all parents in Towcester who have embraced the challenge of teaching their own children at home due to circumstances. If it is any consolation, give me a class of 30, over teaching my own child any day!)

So many times, I have heard and used the term ‘new normal’, but whilst there are many differences in school due to our Risk Assessment, actually, schooling is a very important ‘normal’ for children – old or new.

I rarely do a tour of our school when it is empty of pupils as I categorically state that a school is not a school without pupils in it. Add to that, I think myself and other members of staff feel that you do not feel like a whole teacher unless you have pupils in front of you.

I sincerely hope that our school and the Towcester community will pull together to follow the guidelines to minimise risk of any further outbreaks in our town so that ‘normal’ can resume and allow all generations to move on safely and happily with our children in school being and learning together.

Mrs Jo Griffin, Head Teacher, Towcester C of E Primary School

Hockey Club Back On Home Turf

Towcester Hockey Club has finally got a brand-new Astroturf pitch at Towcestrians Sports Club where it’s members can train and play on home soil after more than 20 years.

With grants from South Northamptonshire Council and the London Marathon Charitable trust totalling £490,000, and other significant funding from Sport England and the National Hockey Foundation, a top-quality floodlit Astroturf hockey pitch and changing facilities has been built at the Greens Norton Road site.

The hockey club currently has over 100 members, including a mixed junior section (age 5 – 13) and four senior ladies’ teams (age 13 and over).

The main use for the pitch will be for the Hockey club with plans to expand its junior section and start a men’s section. However, the pitch will also be used for training by the other sporting sections of Towcestrians and the local community. Schools, the university and other sporting groups such as walking football, netball and disability sports will benefit.

Chairman Isabel McMillan said ‘Over 20 years ago when hockey officially moved from grass to Astroturf, Towcester Hockey Club, along with most hockey clubs in the country had to move to train and play away from their home premises. We have always remained part of Towcestrians, and especially those of us who played on the grass pitch all those years ago, are extremely grateful to those who have worked so tirelessly to bring us back. We will be one of the few clubs in the country to own their own pitch and clubhouse facilities and I couldn’t be prouder to be chairman of such a great club.’
At DW Roberts Opticians we are offering our full range of services, and we have introduced the following new protocols to keep our patients and staff safe:

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For eye care advice, or to make an appointment, please call us on 01327 350240

◆ We’re here when you need us! ◆

News from the Town Council

The past six months have been ‘interesting’ to say the least with the Town Council, like all other organisations, businesses and individuals, having to implement different ways of working.

At the beginning of the year, it could never have been imagined that meetings of the Council and its committees would be held virtually, including the election, in May, of our current Town Mayor, Cllr Richard Dallyn, with a socially-distanced transfer of the Chains of Office. That the annual Midsummer Music Festival could be recreated successfully online by harnessing the skills of Town Council staff member, Elizabeth Bucklow-Holt and her Brother, Ben. The Best Kept Garden Competition has been judged and prizes awarded in a socially-distanced manner (please see front cover). The Town Crier has continued to be produced, albeit in an online version, and we are happy to now be able to call upon our volunteer deliverers to return to a printed version from this edition.

The Town Council’s staff have continued to strive, with a combination of office-working and homeworking (whilst also juggling home schooling) to ensure the town’s open areas are mowed and litter picked, dog waste and litter bins are emptied, that play areas remained closed (and then re-opened in July) all alongside keeping residents signposted to the support systems set up at the very beginning of lockdown. It was truly uplifting to see how our lovely community pulled together to offer support to family, friends, and also complete strangers.

The Town Council had been gearing up to re-open its premises to hirers until the Government announced its implementation of ‘The Rule of Six’ with effect from 14th September. With this announcement and the rising number of new cases of coronavirus both locally and nationally, it was decided now is not an appropriate time. This decision will be reviewed on a monthly basis based on the rapidly changing situation.

In the meantime, rest assured the Town Council is still here to respond to your questions and concerns.
Midland Columbarian Society

Sadly, the Midland Columbarian Society has, like most hobbies, been inactive since March 2020, due to the Covid-19 virus. We have also had to cancel our annual show which would normally have been in the first week of October, at the Towcester Youth and Community Centre. So, to replace my normal entry at this time of year, I thought you may like the story of Mary, a famous and brave War Pigeon used on Secret Operations Executive (SOE) business during WW2.

The history of Mary of Exeter

Charlie Brewer was Mary’s owner; he was born in Church Lane, St Thomas, Exeter in 1895 and was apprenticed as a bootmaker at the age of 15. He and his wife Ena moved to West Street, Exeter in 1922, where Charlie set up his workshop and got involved in the popular working man’s hobby of pigeon racing.

In 1940 during the Second World War, Charlie placed his prize-winning pigeon, Mary, at the disposal of the National Pigeon Service (NPS) where she would be used for carrying secret (SOE) messages across the English Channel to her pigeon loft on the second floor above Charlie’s workshop. Charlie took up the role of Special Constable, with responsibility for the control of all war pigeons of the NPS in his designated area.

Mary was dropped behind enemy lines on several occasions. Despite being injured during one of her missions by enemy fire, on another trip suffering a hawk attack and another going missing for 10 days, she faithfully returned to West Street, Exeter, where Charlie would carefully nurse her back into action. On one particular occasion he used his skill as a craftsman to create a small leather neck support to help her overcome her injuries.

At the end of the war they both received recognition for their war efforts. Mary won the Dicken Medal often called the Animal VC, for her Gallantry and outstanding endurance and Charlie was decorated for his war service.

Mary died in 1950 and is buried with other animal heroes in the PDSA Pet Cemetery in Ilford Essex. She is also commemorated on the Animals War Memorial in Hyde Park. She is depicted in a mosaic under the Exeter St Thomas railway bridge and on the Plaque in Northerhay Gardens, where her bravery is registered for all to see.

This is a remarkable story of dedication to duty and a record of the roles humans have required animals and birds to undertake during the bad times our country has endured. To further remember these amazing achievements by Mary and Charlie, the Exeter Civic Society decided to place a Blue Plaque at the site of their home in West Street.

Ken Goodman MBE
What’s your purpose?

The question is neither meant to sound threatening nor nosey, but perhaps it does help us reflect on how we react to the strange times in which we are living.

According to the Town Council website: “The purpose of the Town Council is to make Towcester a better place to live, work and visit”.

I would hope that same goal or purpose goes for all of us who live in and around Towcester, but of course like all things, an individual’s purpose may depend on your past, present and recent experience of living here. It seems to me that there is no one method or manner of coping with the current Covid-19 crisis, but that each person reacts to the latest government guideline in their own particular way. It’s often said that people fall into the category of looking at a glass and seeing it half full or half empty, depending on their positive or negative outlook. Neither is necessarily correct; it is just that we are all made differently and react differently to crisis situations. Certainly, there is good evidence of the number of shops and businesses, even new ones, which have opened again for business when easing of Lockdown permitted them to do so. In this time of staycation and restrictions on travel, surely this is a golden opportunity to get behind our local shops and businesses and so contribute our bit in making Towcester a better place to live, work and visit. We may be having to wear masks, but they should not and do not hide the compassion and care which is about in plenty.

Churches Together in Towcester do what we can in running the Towcester foodbank, whose purpose is to end food poverty in NN12, and supporting Renew Wellbeing Café where it is OK to feel not OK, only because of the huge numbers of volunteers who have come forward to help, and give of their time so generously. During the Lockdown, for example, where 80% of our volunteers had to self-isolate on account of themselves or their family members, volunteers came forward to carry out the necessary work of packing and delivering to those in need. In addition, there is a massive amount of goodwill and generosity shown in donations of food and cash which have been overwhelming. We are in a good place to support anyone through the summer and autumn who needs nutritious food on the table.

That way we hope to make Towcester a better place to live and work and visit.

Revd Lulu

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The South Northants Art Trail is on!

From 3rd to 11th October, across the south of Northants - 37 artists, including many new ones, free exhibitions, and demos in 13 venues, plus the opportunity to buy original art directly from the artist!

Look out for the distinctive yellow banners and signs around the area from late September, and pick up your copy of the Trail Directory from Vitreus Art at Bell Plantation, or visit our website www.arts-sn.org.uk for details of all the venues and artists taking part.
South Northamptonshire Community Champion Award 2020

All awards are special, but as we are enduring these unusual times during Covid-19 this award is even more special.

We are absolutely delighted to share the news that a South Northamptonshire Community Champion Certificate has been awarded to Sue Hamilton, President of Towcester Evening WI, by our MP, Andrea Leadsom.

Sue was proud and honoured to accept the award on behalf of all our WI members who have supported the various projects that our WI have undertaken during this Pandemic.

The moment I heard of Sue’s award, my thoughts were “Well-deserved Sue!” It was this element that made the award so very special. Sue has worked tirelessly for the good of others within our community throughout Covid-19 and it’s still ongoing.

During these past months Towcester Evening WI has been approached by local health departments which have included Northampton General Hospital, Towcester Medical centres, and dental practices for help to make scrub bags and face masks. Sue has sent out the appeal and via her WI members, other local WIs and others known to her within the community, has delivered these essential items on time.

Also, the many planters around Towcester have been planted up and cared for by the WI Gardening Team which Sue heads up. These planters have brought colour to the town throughout lockdown when we most needed it.

As President of our WI, Sue has been keeping a close eye on all members to make sure they are managing the crisis, with food deliveries and human contact; be it down the phone or on the Zoom meetings she organises. Anyone needing help got it by the press of the buttons on the telephone. Sue’s interest in people’s wellbeing within WI members also reaches out to the wider community. It is called “Giving“ and Sue does it generously.

So, a huge congratulations to you, Sue, from all of us at Towcester Evening WI - we are proud of you. Your achievement of this award has been very well earned. Your hard work in organising so much for so many, along with inspiring others really has made a difference. May we also thank the person that nominated Sue for this award.

Margaret Walgate, Vice President, TEWI

TOWCESTER EVENING WI GARDEN CLUB

We have tried hard to keep our planters bright and colourful over the summer months, but our members have found it quite a struggle. The Town Council’s watering team has been very much missed, particularly in the very hot, dry conditions, but we are so appreciative of the help we have had from members of the public to keep the plants watered. Also, because of social distancing, some members have been unable to help in the actual physical work and those who could, had to work alone instead of with a companion.

We were delighted that our founder and team leader, Sue Hamilton, was presented with a Community Award by our local MP. When interviewed on BBC Radio Northampton, Sue was very much praised for the work done by the Garden Club in keeping the planters going in these difficult times and hopefully bringing a little cheer to the people of Towcester.

Of course, we could not carry on with the projects if it were not for the generous donations from our Sponsors. Thanks go to these businesses for their continued support:

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Margaret Knowlton, TEWI Gardening Team
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Could you volunteer to help the elderly and vulnerable in our parish? If you have been volunteering during lockdown or are now working from home, are you able to spare some time to help your neighbours?

As we emerge from lockdown, the NHS is now offering a wider range of hospital and GP appointments, and dentists, opticians, podiatrists, and other healthcare providers are back at work. We have seen a steady rise in the number of journeys requested and we expect this to continue, particularly when the Autumn flu vaccine programme begins.

This year, more than ever, our elderly and vulnerable neighbours need the support of a friendly, affordable, door-to-door service for their medical appointments.

Drivers need to have access to a car, be available on a regular basis for a minimum of half a day a week and complete a DBS check. Mileage is reimbursed at the HMRC rate and insurance premiums are not affected. Journeys are agreed in accordance with weekly availability and can fit around the school run, working from home or part time employment.

To learn more visit www.towcesterareadoor2door.com or email volunteer@towcesterareadoor2door.co.uk

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**Towcester Area Door to Door urgently need to recruit additional volunteer drivers**

**Towcester Town Council Recognises Climate & Nature Emergency**

At its September meeting, Towcester Town Council formally recognised the Climate and Nature Emergency.

A small working group of Councillors has been formed to look at the actions the Town Council can take to “do our bit” in addressing the Climate and Nature Emergency and also to support our residents’ efforts.

We will report on our progress in future editions but meanwhile if you have any ideas to put forward, we would be incredibly pleased to hear from you.

Pictured is the Climate Change scarf: each stripe of 6 rows represents the average UK temperature for a year from 1919 to 2018 (right to left). Each temperature is assigned a different colour from dark blue (coldest) through to dark red (hottest), so clearly highlights the rise in temperatures. It was knitted by Cllr Carol Blake (pictured) who is also a member and Climate Ambassador at WI, who devised the pattern.
John Gravett’s visit follows our Summer Speaker Series, in which we welcomed four very varied and undeniably outstanding photographers to present their specialisms to club members and the wider public, all speakers being happy to share hints and tips alongside showing a wealth of high quality images.

Event 1 in Towcester Camera Club’s virtual Summer Speaker Series was the virtual visit from Belfast of Award-winning landscape photographer John Gravett AFIAP ARPS DPAGB BPE4* to Towcester Camera Club. He will visit us via Zoom on 16th September to present to us “A Lakeland Perspective”.

John both lives and teaches workshops in the Lake District (and abroad) and having lived in the Lakes for the best part of 20 years, he has a fabulous knowledge of the area. He started as a sports photographer in the 1980s before moving into photographing gigs, theatre, architecture, commercial and landscape.

John will present a pictorial journey through the four seasons in the Lake District. Stunning imagery is John’s stock-in-trade, but he will also cover the critical elements of composing and creating technically brilliant images. John’s compositions are a combination of a great eye for shapes and details but also his ability to pre-visualise a photo and to use the tools (camera, lens, filters) in the field to capture the best quality image data.

We are delighted to be able to welcome Award-winning landscape photographer John Gravett AFIAP ARPS DPAGB BPE4* to Towcester Camera Club. He will visit us via Zoom on 16th September to present to us “A Lakeland Perspective”.

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For John’s workshops, please visit www.johngravett.com. John was also a contributory photographer to the acclaimed Lee Filters book “Inspiring Professionals” and in 2017 published a book on “PhotoShop for Landscape Photographers” by Crowood Press.

This talk is open to non-members for a small fee of £5 via: www.towcestercameraclub.co.uk/pages/autumn-speakers.php. A dedicated link to the Zoom meeting will be provided to subscribers.

John Gravett’s visit follows our Summer Speaker Series, in which we welcomed four very varied and undeniably outstanding photographers to present their specialisms to club members and the wider public, all speakers being happy to share hints and tips alongside showing a wealth of high quality images.

Event 4 in Towcester Camera Club’s virtual Summer Speaker Series was the virtual visit from Belfast of Ross McKelvey MPAGB MFIAP FIFP EFIAP/p FBPE. In Ross’ own words: “Exhibition Photography has been my passion for several years.” Ross presented with humour, “A Selection of my Works”. Check Ross’s work, which includes some breath-taking portrait images, at www.rossmckelvey.co.uk

Event 3 saw Cherry Larcombe presenting to us on “Creative Flower Photography”. She provided her audience with a fantastic array of flower imagery, covering a broad sweep of different creative techniques, clearly describing how each image was created. To see what you might have missed, a snapshot of Cherry’s creative flower photography is at www.flickr.com/photos/146809620@N08

Event 2 was a lively and thoroughly engaging presentation from architecture master practitioner Martine Hamilton-Knight presenting to us on “30 Years of Shooting Architecture Commercially”. Martine’s market-leading commercial architecture portfolio may be found at www.builtvision.co.uk

Event 1 was an outstanding showcasing of sports imagery and technique by David Keep: take a look at David’s outstanding images covering sport and much more www.davidkeepphotography.co.uk or via his YouTube channel.

All four presentations were full of great images and have delivered loads of tips on a variety of techniques, with plenty of opportunity to ask questions of the expert speakers. They demonstrated the value of the Zoom platform in the current situation. Not only have we found that virtual meetings have enabled us to access speakers who would normally not be available to us, it has also given greater flexibility simply and clearly to review digital images on our dedicated sharing platform, it has given us the facility to share resources and to demonstrate techniques so that we can continue to learn together.

The updated club website details other summer activities and forward programme at www.towcestercameraclub.co.uk, with another master practitioner, wildlife photographer Danny Green, coming up in November.

Towcester Camera Club is a friendly, inclusive club with a focus on collaboration and learning, not on internal competitions. It participates in just two external competitions each year, although members who individually enter external competitions are encouraged to use the club for peer review of potential competition entries. Membership ranges from beginner to professional.

COVID-19 developments have necessitated Towcester Camera Club switching temporarily from bi-weekly physical meetings at St. Michael’s Church Room in Silverstone to bi-weekly virtual meetings. The club will resume physical meetings, only when advice suggests that it is safe to do so. In the meantime, members have continued to meet virtually and successfully, using the Zoom platform. In fact, it has provided a view of what is possible: it has allowed members to develop learning in ways that are not easy to deliver to a physical audience and has allowed us access to fantastic long-distance speakers we would not normally be able to attract. The club’s range has broadened, and members are actively sharing ideas and techniques via monthly set themes and image sharing.

From September the club has introduced a third (virtual) session per month following a rotating programme of “Monthly Challenge”, “Camera Club Surgery” and “Competition Readiness”.

The club is happy to answer enquiries via its website contact page www.towcestercameraclub.co.uk/pages/contact.php or its Facebook page www.facebook.com/groups/717208911681719/
Throughout February and March 2020, towns and cities across Europe began to shut down in an attempt to halt the coronavirus epidemic spreading from the Chinese city of Wuhan. On 11th March, the World Health Organisation named the virus COVID-19 and declared a pandemic. During the following weeks, the British government advised those over 70 years of age to shield themselves by staying indoors; commuters were asked not to travel, and people were encouraged to work from home. On 20th March, pubs, clubs and bars closed, and schools closed one week before the end of term.

On 23rd March, Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced lockdown and the closure of all non-essential businesses. Just days before, retailers along our high street had taken delivery of their spring stock ranging from greetings cards and balloons, casual clothes, and accessories to outfits for those special occasions. Pub landlords and managers had been organising VE Day celebrations; taking bookings for weddings and family parties; preparing for the town’s annual music festival and accommodating visitors attending the Silverstone Grand Prix. On the home front, estate agents had been arranging house purchases and rentals, and plans were underway for new businesses to open.

However, as businesses closed, staff were furloughed whilst others worked from home. Office telephones were redirected to mobile phones from where house purchases were put on hold; celebrations and hotel bookings were cancelled, and retail business owners embraced technology creating their virtual high street presence through social media and websites.

Figures from the Office of National Statistics reported that in the two weeks up until 5th April, 25% of businesses had temporarily closed or paused trading. Meanwhile, those essential businesses remained open. In early March, covid-compliant rules came into force. Notices appeared in shop windows indicating the number of customers allowed in the shop at any one time; shop fitters worked throughout the night constructing Perspex screens around counters; sticking yellow and black tape to floors at 2- metre intervals and installing hand sanitiser dispensers.

On our high street, staff members of the Co-op took it in turns to act as door monitors counting their customers in and out, and ensuring they did not become entangled with customers waiting outside the Post Office, where staff reported business was brisker than Christmas. Across the road, Hartwell’s and Towbury Court butchers and delicatessen reduced their opening hours as staff met the demands for deliveries. Further along the Court, Alfred recalled ‘feeling like a duck in a tsunami’, frantically paddling in order to keep afloat due to the increased demand for fresh fruit and vegetables and home deliveries.

On our high street, staff members of the Plough Inn brightened our high street with its colourful floral display in window boxes and hanging baskets.

Finally, on 14th June, restrictions were lifted and some of our high street businesses re-opened. Lesley from Coleman’s echoed the feeling of other businesses when she asked if this article could include ‘A huge thank you!’ to all our loyal customers, and Caroline from Molly & Co recalled: “When anyone asked, ‘How are you?’ They really meant it.”

After a period of enforced hibernation, the proprietors of Clarke and Dean resumed the transformation of their new café bar at 169 Watling Street, and at 185, the contractors started the delayed refurbishment of The Watling Street Village under its new owners.

As lockdown slowly lifted there is no doubt many businesses on our high street adapted to the challenges, not only serving residents from Towcester and the villages but also attracting customers from further afield. Some years ago, a retail analyst predicted a decline in footfall in city centre shopping malls and an increase in on-line shopping. On a positive note he also predicted a resurgence of what he called ‘specialist boutiques’ on our high streets.

Next time: Business on ‘Towcester High Street’ Post Lockdown.

Philomena Liggins
All change at Towcester Rotary Club

President Dawn Denton
(2020-2021)

Dawn, our second female president, took office at the beginning of July 2020 - with the ambition of promoting what Rotary do in Towcester, and the goal of inspiring more women to join the organisation.

Her experience gained over 25 years associated with the Club, initially as a volunteer, and now as a full member for the last six years, is from being involved in several committees focusing on community support and supporting one of our most prestigious annual fundraising events, which is providing guest transport at the F1 British Grand Prix in Silverstone.

This year, Dawn will promote the Rotary Club of Towcester in the local and business communities, and will support and collaborate with her committee leads in organising key fundraising events to sponsor our activities, whilst following the Rotary values of fun, friendship and fellowship.

Dawn works as an HR Business Partner in the UK for a Dutch manufacturing company in Corby. She has two children and two grandchildren and is a Northampton Saints season ticket holder.

Speaking to The Towcester Town Crier, Dawn adds, "I thoroughly enjoy my time with Rotary and have learned so much about what we do for and with the local community. I have also gained a huge amount of learning about me, and what I am capable of - without doubt, Rotary fits my values and has helped me grow. I want others to enjoy the same thrills and experiences as I have, since I joined as a member in 2014."

President Elect
Alex Cooke
(2020-2021)

Alex Cooke brings fundraising and event organising skills to Rotary, helping the Club to support the wide range of activities we undertake in the local community, and internationally.

Alex is a key player in organising a range of fundraising events, like Last Night at the Proms, held at Whittlebury Park every February; community-based events, such as the Father Christmas Sleigh in Towcester and surrounding villages, delighting adults and children alike; and International Themed Dinners and social nights for members and guests. Alex is a keen motorcyclist and enjoyed taking part in a Rotary organised motorcycle expedition in India to raise funds.

Alex joined Rotary on the Isle of Wight where he lived when he was not travelling around the UK, Russia or America, and transferred to Towcester when he moved to Silverstone on his retirement eight years ago. His working career started in the motor racing world, being part of Ford, Porsche and other racing teams. He eventually moved on to run his own company in the emerging mobile telephone industry. In his fifties, he took up the challenge to become CEO and International Director of a charity specialising in supporting orphaned and disabled children and marginalised people in Russia.

Alex has been married to Jacqui for 40 years; and Jacqui uses her fundraising and catering experience to help with events. They have four grown up children.

As Alex explains to The Towcester Town Crier, "I have great fun in Rotary, getting involved with the local community and giving something back to society, whilst enjoying the friendship and fellowship of the Club."

You can find out more about Rotary by visiting our website www.towcester-rotary.org.uk or by emailing secretary@towcester-rotary.org.uk
Neighbourhood Watch has seen a virtual shutdown, particularly locally, as meetings were banned, events cancelled and progress with plans put on hold. Autumn is on its way, after the most trying and challenging Spring and Summer for everyone, and everything!!

We are a very small band of local people, who would like to be a support to the residents of Towcester and the local Police force, who are over stretched and undermanned for much of the time.

We can’t manage much if we don’t have a presence, and in order to make this presence felt, we would love some more volunteers to join us and to help keep Towcester a safe and pleasant place to work, live in and bring up our families.

Sadly, we have seen crime and anti-social behaviour and some irresponsible unwillingness to follow the guidelines, however difficult and sometimes confusing, they may seem.

We do have to try and understand the difficulties of controlling the spread of the virus, the continuing changes in understanding how it spreads, how it appears to affect some people and not others and how the whole world is still trying to understand the best way to deal with it, and the current circumstances it has thrown up.

We need to seek out the best information and use our common sense, in order to best protect ourselves, our families and others, and to try and make it possible to return to some kind of normality after so many months of fear and uncertainty.

As the town gets bigger, this will become more important, and in order to make a difference, we NEED your help! If you would like to know a bit more about this and what it entails, please contact us on nhwt2020@gmail.com

Remember it’s no good complaining on Facebook or Twitter, you must report incidents to www.northants.police.uk/ro/report/ or call 101 or and get a crime reference number. Our Facebook Page is www.facebook.com/safetowcester/ or if you feel it’s necessary, send us an email.

It would be wonderful if we could get some new blood, with some creative ideas on how to go forward into Winter, with a strong sense of community and a determination to make Towcester the best place to live, in our county.

On behalf of my fellow volunteers in the Towcester Neighbourhood Watch group, I wish everyone a better end to 2020 and a healthy and productive year ahead.

Keep Safe
Carole Rohan. - Secretary
Towcester Neighbourhood Watch.
www.safetowcester.com

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BRANCH ACTIVITIES

COVID-19 has affected our activities like everyone else. Blakesley Show was cancelled, and we were unable to hold our Summer BBQ and fundraiser this year. The extensive plans to commemorate VE Day 75 had to be cancelled. However, a few of us were able, together with Rev Lulu, to commemorate VJ Day 75 at the War Memorial in Brackley Rd Cemetery and we laid a special wreath.

We normally (and hopefully will, in the not too distant future) meet once a month on the second Tuesday of the month at the Sports & Social Club on Swinneyford Road for a 7.30pm start and all are welcome. We usually have a speaker talking about some aspect of the military or military history. You do not have to have served in the Armed Services to become a member of the RBL. Some of the services provided by the RBL can only be offered to ex- or current serving personnel or their dependants, but that stipulation does not apply to anyone wanting to become a member. So, pop along to our next meeting and see for yourself: you’ll be made very welcome.

POPPY APPEAL

This year, the Poppy Appeal will happen but will not bear any resemblance to previous Poppy Appeals. Poppies and other merchandise will almost certainly not be available in shops, pubs, etc and there will be no one standing in the high street or at the entrances to the supermarkets. The only things that I have been able to order this year are the wreaths and wooden crosses.

Discussions are currently taking place with supermarkets to allow the paper poppies to be made available to shoppers but everything else must be purchased online via www.poppyshop.org.uk

The Poppy Appeal normally only collects about 40% of the money which is necessary to fund the RBL’s work which runs to well over £2 million every week. This year will probably be a lot less than normal so please do try and make the small effort to order your Poppy requirements online as every donation means an awful lot.

REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY

Like everything else, Remembrance Sunday will happen but will be different to the normally-packed St. Lawrence Church.

Discussions are still underway at the time of writing but the intention is to run a rolling programme of a shorter videoed service every hour on the hour throughout the day and people who want to participate will have to book a place (or places) via the Benefice Office because there will be strict limits on the numbers allowed in Church. The video version will include the procession and laying up of Standards at the main Altar, the Last Post, 2-minute silence and Reveille and the RBL Exhortation and Kohima Address. The music will be recorded. There will be space made available in each session for representatives of organisations to lay a wreath as they would normally, but again those who do want to lay a wreath must book their seat with the Benefice Office.

There will also be a short Service at 11am at the War Memorial in Brackley Rd Cemetery where people can lay their wreaths there as well as in Church. Most organisations that lay wreaths tend to do both, so there will be the opportunity to do so again.

I have now got sufficient wreaths to cover all the usual requirements so please contact me to arrange to collect yours. Similarly, I have lots of wooden crosses, so please contact me to get them if you need them.

David Reed, Poppy Appeal Organiser
dreedsfm@sky.com - 07970 597044 - 01327 352414

What is this Victorian pink marker on the steps of 177 Watling Street?
Which Towcester person was fired by Boris Johnson?
To find the answers buy:

“50 Things You May Not Know About Towcester”
by Margaret Webb

Written while housebound by Coronavirus, it is available from:
Colemans Stationers, 193 Watling Street

All money from sales will go to our local Air Ambulance.
Minimum donations of £3.00 please
Great progress has been made on the building over the Summer.

If you have travelled along Northampton Road in Towcester recently, you will have seen how quickly the building is progressing! The photograph shown was taken towards the end of August when more scaffolding was being erected in preparation for adding the roof. We are still anticipating a completion date of January 2021.

Once the building is complete, we are determined to make it a comfortable and welcoming place for all users. For example, the commercial kitchen will need to be kitted out, audio-visual equipment must be installed and the whole building will need to be furnished.

This is important because the TVC will not only be a place of worship, it will also be available to the community to hire on a one-off, occasional, or ongoing basis. The venue might be hired for a family event, school production or to display artwork. We have also been in contact with several charitable, professional, health-promoting and interest groups that have expressed an interest in hiring the premises to provide their groups and services to the Towcester community. It is our expectation that COVID-19 will have dramatically increased the need for support of this nature.

Of course, the Tove Valley Centre will enable us at Tove Valley Baptist Fellowship to better serve our local community through our existing groups such as Wednesday Tots and Youth Club. Melanie, our Youth, Children and Families Team Leader and some of her team are doing everything that they can to remain in touch with members of these groups during these challenging times, and to provide fun meetings and activities, largely on Zoom. Once the building is up and running and such activities are permitted, we expect to start providing new groups such as a Luncheon Club and ‘Coffee & Chat’ to help people to build and rebuild relationships and to access support. For more information about the Tove Valley Centre, please visit www.tovevalleycentre.co.uk

CANCELLED – Music of the 60’s and 70’s with Fynnius Fogg planned for Saturday, 24th October.

Due to COVID-19, we have been forced to cancel all our fundraising events since March. In common with most other charitable organisations, this has resulted in a reduction in our anticipated income.

Donations welcome!

We would welcome any donations large or small that can be made via: https://localgiving.org/tovevalleycentre
You can “Gift Aid” your donation too. Your gift will help us to achieve the above aims and to make the TVC somewhere that the residents of Towcester can find support and friendship.

If you are a local business owner and would like to support this important project by helping with the fit out of the building or landscaping of the grounds, please contact us via contact@tovevalleycentre.co.uk We will be pleased to explain what we require and what we can offer you in return for your support.

Can we support you now?

At Tove Valley Baptist Fellowship we regularly pray for our local community. If you would like a prayer, we would love to hear from you. Please send us a message via social media:

Facebook https://facebook.com/TVBFTowcester/
Twitter https://twitter.com/TVBFTOWCESTER
Instagram https://www.instagram.com/tvbf.towcester/

You can also send an email to comms@tvbf.co.uk
We regularly post bible verses and events on social media, please follow us to stay informed.

We hold our Sunday Services on Zoom each week. If you would like to join us, please contact us by one of the above means for details of how you can do so.

For more information about how your family can access activities provided by our Youth, Children and Families Team Leader, please contact Melanie by email on youth@tvbf.co.uk
Oh Good It’s Daylight
By Bridget Arregger

5 a.m.

Oh good it’s daylight. I think I’ll just get up and potter round. Have a good stretch. Don’t need a pee but I think I’ll go out in the garden. I scratch at the garden door. Ah, door won’t open. I’ll growl at it; that sometimes works. No, won’t work. Few good barks. No, nothing. She’s upstairs; can’t hear me. I think I’ll howl. That usually makes the door open.

Come on Loki, time for a good howl. Better when it’s both of us. Ah yes, bed creaking. She’s coming downstairs. Oh oh! That’s the grumpy stomp. That doesn’t usually mean that the door will open. Better start wagging my tail now. That usually helps. Just finish the howling and look all innocent when she comes in. Here she comes. I’ll just prance about a bit on my hind legs. Mustn’t touch her; she won’t like that and I’ll get the command voice “Off!” I do my best dance without touching. She doesn’t take any notice but I know she likes it. Uh oh! Here comes the cross voice “Go to bed!” Then something else I don’t understand but sounds familiar. Then again “Go to bed!”. Ok Ok, tail between my legs now. Get into bed, or try to, only Loki is over in my bed now in my warm patch. Stand and Wait. Put on my pathetic helpless look. She bends down and feels that Loki is inside my blanket. She lifts the other blanket so I can climb in Loki’s bed. I walk away. Uh oh! Very cross voice, “Arianna! Go to bed, now!” Ok Ok, I’m going. I slide under the stinky blanket. I shut my eyes.

Sound of kitchen door closing. Grumpy footsteps going upstairs. I hear the bed creak. If I bark she’ll come back down. I’d like her to come back. But I don’t like the cross voice. Anyway, I’m sleepy now. I keep my eyes closed.

8 a.m.

Oh good it’s daylight. I think I’ll just get up and potter round. Have a good stretch. I don’t need a pee but there’s a pigeon on the fence. The garden door won’t open. Loki is standing by the door, waiting. OK, I’ll wait with him. I hear water splashing upstairs. She’ll come down soon.

Here she is. Smiley face. I do my best dance on my hind legs without touching. She pats my head. “Hello doggies”. Happy voice. I make a friendly hello growl sound. I scratch at the door. She taps me on the nose then makes command voice “Wait!” So I wait. Loki is sitting down. Ok I can sit too. That usually works.

The door opens and I rush out to say hello to the pigeons, and the voles and the moles, and the neighbours and the trains and the flowers, and everybody and …. Uh oh! Cross voice “No barking!” Ok ok.

Hello world!
It is a sunny Wednesday, the tranquil interval after the bustle of market day; it is the sleepiest afternoon of the week. Marie Dumont sits on a high stool behind the bar of the Restaurant Lamartine. Once, this place was famous and it still boasts white linen tablecloths, but its dark wall panels and sombre lighting make it gloomy, even when the sun shines. Marie sighs. How she would like to have the money to transform it, to bring it back to its former glory.

She is a widow, but finds it easy to run the bar, with its traditional menu, helped in the evenings by her daughter Annette and one or two extra staff. Hers is a modest but thriving enterprise.

More than two hours ago she served Henri and Paul Leclerc steaming plates of her famous cassoulet, then cheese, with tarte Tatin to follow. They are staying on for their weekly chat. They also play dominoes, as they have done every Wednesday for almost twenty years — and they are the only customers. The brothers are sitting in the corner at their usual table. Marie carries over a tray with their coffee, their Pernods and their cognacs.

With her woollen shawl draped around her bony shoulders, Marie knits while she keeps one eye on her customers and the square outside. A fly buzzes insistently, knitting needles click, dominoes clack and the clock on the wall ticks and tocks. There are no other sounds.

After a while Marie lays her knitting aside and glances at the mirror. The casual observer would see an ageing woman without much insight on life or the world. Nothing could be further from the truth. Behind horn-rimmed glasses, the shawl, a pair of nondescript shoes, the dowdy apron and the tired, shapeless clothes, Marie has a sharp mind; she is a keen observer of people and things. Few people would have guessed that before she married into the restaurant business, she had been a military aircraft designer with Aerospatiale in nearby Toulouse.

She takes a sip of red wine and looks at the clock. It is exactly three o’clock. Through the window she sees the local train from Toulouse pulling into the railway station across the square. Yes, it is right on time as usual. In precisely four minutes, the bar will come alive as the girl comes in and takes one of the red banquettes to the side of the bar, as she’s done for many weeks. She arrives, taking off her sunglasses and setting her small handbag on the white tablecloth. As soon as she sits down, Marie brings her a Dubonnet and goes back to her perch.

On her previous visits to the bar every Wednesday the girl was usually watchful. She always met a man, a blond giant, who would park his car, an impressive white Peugeot 508, on the square outside. Then he strode into the Restaurant at almost exactly twenty minutes past three. But their behaviour was strange. As they talked the girl’s eyes were everywhere. At some point she would surreptitiously pass him a thin envelope; he handed back a bulkier one. This unusual behaviour suggested to Marie that there could be some blackmail going on. But as they seemed to be on good terms; so, blackmail just didn’t make sense. Nor could they be lovers because they didn’t stay long, the man barely having time to finish his drink — he always had a Jack Daniels on the rocks, ordered in an accent that Marie couldn’t place — before leaving. Then he drove off, while the girl returned to the station. It was all very strange. Just thinking about it was difficult for Marie Dupont. She admitted to herself that she was baffled.

But today the girl’s behaviour is different. Although she wears a jaunty red beret, she seems on edge. She keeps looking at the reflections in the ornate mirrors. Soon she starts to twirl the stem of her empty glass. She grows more jittery as the minutes go by, twisting in her seat and looking towards the square. Then, almost fifteen minutes later than usual, she hears the distant car, then the squeal of tyres. Standing abruptly, she rummages in her bag, Marie sees her wedge a slim envelope behind the cushions of the banquette and drop a ten euro note on the table before moving quickly to the door. As she opens it she pauses, looks straight into Marie’s eyes, then rushes outside towards the white Peugeot as it skids to a stop with three police cars in pursuit. Men in riot gear leap out and grab the girl as she struggles and screams, losing her beret as she tries to break free, but she is dragged to one of the police Citroens. The blond man has jumped out of the Peugeot. He is shot in the leg as he tries to make a run for it. He shouts in a foreign language as he is dragged into another police car. The two captives are driven off.

Back in the Restaurant the Leclerc brothers are staring out of the window. Soon Marie joins them, but not before she has retrieved the sunglasses and the slim envelope, printed with the Aerospatiale logo, from the banquette. Slipping it open, she sees that it contains nothing but a data disk. She smiles furtively, understanding everything clearly now. With an effort she composes herself and slips the envelope into the pocket of her shapeless apron.

A tall, silver-haired man steps out of the third car. His piercing grey eyes take in the square and the faces at the window of the restaurant. He pushes open the door and wrinkles his aquiline nose. He asks if anyone has seen that young woman or her companion before. The Leclercs look at each other and answer with an indifferent shrug. When he turns to Marie Dumont, her response is equally unhelpful. ‘No, Monsieur, I’ve never seen that young woman in here before today.’ The policeman frowns, swears under his breath, storms out of the Restaurant Lamartine, gets into the waiting car and slams the door. After he is driven away, the square becomes somnolent again.

Marie maintains a poker face, caressing the prize in the pocket of her apron. She can see it all now. She has just got hold of a very valuable data disk. It seems certain that the blond man had been buying technical secrets — obviously from Aerospatiale — on behalf of a foreign observer of people and things. Nothing could be further from the truth. Behind horn-rimmed glasses, the shawl, a pair of nondescript shoes, the dowdy apron and the tired, shapeless clothes, Marie has a sharp mind; she is a keen observer of people and things. Few people would have guessed that before she married into the restaurant business, she had been a military aircraft designer with Aerospatiale in nearby Toulouse.

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Rendezvous©
By Geoffrey Iley

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Coming Soon to

The Plough Inn
Towcester

Our delicious range of homemade pies,
to eat in or take away.

Join the Pie Society. Soon.
Well, 2020 hasn’t gone exactly as any of us planned. As we draw towards the end of the year there are a lot of things which constantly remind us that things still aren’t back to normal. This edition of the Town Crier is usually the one where I’d be telling you about what a wonderful Christmas Menu and events we’ve been working on, and why you should all get together in large groups of friends or colleagues, and book into The Plough as soon as possible to avoid disappointment!

As it stands, the idea of getting together with a large group of friends or colleagues seems almost alien to us now. There’s no denying that a trip out to the local just isn’t what it was before. From our side of the bar, it hasn’t been a huge amount of fun. Nobody decides to take on a pub to act like a nanny/teacher/police officer, but at times it felt like that’s how it has become. During the first weeks after reopening, whilst we all found our feet in the “new normal” we were constantly having to tell people to sit down, obey the one-way system, and move away from each other. But over time people began to learn and adapt, moderate their behaviour and “just crack on with it”.

As a pub, it feels like we’re faced with two clear choices at the moment. Do we hunker down and wait for everything to go back to normal? Or do we do everything that we can to learn and adapt, and find a way of making something work?

We’re the smallest pub in town, and social distancing measures have therefore hit us the hardest. We’ve been blessed with good weather and great customers who are determined to make things work, but as the weather turns our two choices are made starker still.

Hunkering down means hoping for the best and accepting that our future isn’t in our own hands. Or do we take a step into the unknown, invest into what we believe is a unique little pub, and try something different?

The businesses that will come out of this year (and maybe next year too) stronger, are the ones who are prepared to work hardest, think laterally, and throw caution to the wind. And we’ve always been a bit unusual here...

So we’re delighted to announce that we will soon be unleashing an exciting new food offering that’ll make us unique, not just in Towcester but the surrounding area, and it links in so naturally with what we’re all about, good humour, good nature, wholesomeness, and a sense of tradition.

We’ve always felt that it was the right direction for us, we just had to wait for a worldwide pandemic to make it a reality...

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Future of Towcester Wildlife Trust Local Group Hangs in the Balance

Our monthly meetings have been severely disrupted for even longer than the effect of the COVID-19 outbreak. The 2019 Autumn Programme was cancelled for a variety of reasons and when we tried to re-launch in January 2020, unfortunately The Mill Brewery was unable to accommodate us.

We had a particularly good presentation in February from a long-time Warden of Pitsford Reservoir’s WT Reserve.

Then the lockdown put paid to the rest of the planned Spring/Early Summer Programme.

At the time of writing, the current situation still remains somewhat uncertain as we still don’t know when venues like The Mill will be allowed to open for events, such as our monthly meetings, when we usually have upwards of 30 people, and sometimes a lot more, in one room. Social distancing would be difficult. One option could be to research other venues in the Town to see if they would be a more viable option.

By cancelling the April meeting, we also had to postpone the AGM – which I’m sure was a tremendous disappointment to you all. I had indicated previously that at that time I would not be standing for re-election as Chair of the Group.

Because we are not planning to meet until probably early 2021, I will be available to contact to discuss any matter relating to the local Group, but I have effectively stood down now.

I have enjoyed, for the most part, my role as Chair of the local Group. What was not quite so enjoyable were the early, somewhat fraught, meetings of the Watermeadows Management meetings. It was in early 2009, when I phoned a few people to ask them if they would be interested in joining me to form a local environmental group in the Town. The first public meeting in April 2009 had 50+ people turn up and we have had a good attendance at our meetings ever since, thanks mainly to the excellent work of Linda Lofts, who was the Speaker Finder for the vast majority of the time.

Linda moved away in 2019 and I have been unable to find anyone to take her place, so in addition to a new Chair, we need a Speaker Finder or at the very least more people on the Committee (currently Nick, Jenny and myself) in order to spread the load.

We bought quite a lot of equipment at the start of the group and for a couple of years we undertook a lot of work parties around the Town but gradually they fizzled out through lack of volunteers. Therefore, the equipment has been taken over by the work parties in the Tove Wetland Pocket Park.

Watermeadows Management Group

There was a meeting in July but unfortunately the invitation to our Group obviously got lost in the post, so I can’t tell you what happened.

I have emailed the person who Chaired that meeting asking why we did not get an invitation, but they are obviously so busy that it has not even been acknowledged.

Equipment for Youth Groups

Obviously, no sessions will take place this year and we will review the situation in 2021. Early discussions have taken place with the Scouts Regional Organiser with a view to continue working with their Groups. A similar arrangement could happen with the local Girl Guides.

I was able to give lots of presentations of the local wildlife (thanks to Nick Holder’s excellent photography) to various groups in Towcester and around the local villages which helped to spread the word of the Group.

I want to thank Nick and Jenny for their sterling work over the years and to everyone who attended our meetings.

If anyone is interested in joining the group or better still, the committee, then please contact me. If I get no offers of help by Christmas, then the Group will be formally closed down and the remaining funds will be handed over to our Head Office at Cambourne.

We would love to welcome more enthusiastic people to join our local group. You do not need to be a fully paid up member of the WT to be eligible: someone with an interest in the environment, who can spare a little time each month, would be very warmly welcomed to our team.

If you think you can help, please contact me.

David Reed
01327 352414  dreedsfm@sky.com
**Towcester Town Mayor’s Citizens Award 2020/21 Nomination Form**

Do you know any unsung heroes whose praises you’d like to sing? The Mayor would like your help in finding people who have given up their own time to make an **outstanding contribution to the life of Towcester** and who add significantly to the quality of life of those they help. They may deserve recognition for their supreme effort, strength, bravery or achievement.

For example, perhaps they’ve made their mark working with a voluntary organisation or through some other community activity, paid or unpaid. Have they achieved something particularly noteworthy within the town or enhanced the reputation of the town? Maybe they’ve made a significant contribution to the conservation or protection of the natural environment or dedicated to providing a loving and supportive family life to a child or children who do not live with their birth family. All achievements will be considered.

If this sounds like someone you know, then now’s the time to put them forward for a Mayor’s Award.

**Get nominating!**

**Name & address of person submitting the nomination**

**Name of person being nominated**

- [ ] Junior 17 and under as of 31/12/20
- [ ] Adult 18 and over as of 31/12/20

**Address of Nominee**

(We require this information so we can contact the nominee to request their attendance at the Annual Meeting of the Town Council should they be lucky enough to win.)

**Nominee’s telephone number**

For Junior entries, this should be a parent or carer’s telephone number

**Description of why you are nominating the person named above**

Please tell us clearly what your nominee has done that makes them stand out against others. Provide as much information as possible. Too little information makes it hard to judge. We are looking for outstanding service to others, paid or unpaid or significant achievements. You should include details of what the person you are nominating does, why you think that they should receive an award, how you know them and the work they do.

*Continue overleaf...*
Continued….

Please continue on a separate sheet if necessary.

Signed: [signature]
By nominator
Date: [date]

Closing date for entries is Sunday 28th February 2021.

Please return completed nomination form to Towcester Town Mayor’s Citizens Award, Towcester Town Council, Town Hall, 86 Watling Street, Towcester NN12 6BS.

Those who are short-listed will be contacted by 26th March 2021 and will be asked if they wish to attend the Annual Meeting of the Town Council on 10th May 2021 at which successful nominees will be presented with their award.

Please note: The person you nominate does not have to live in Towcester. It may be that they work here, come to the town to do voluntary work, or have lived here in the past and are nominated for the contribution they made to town life at that time. There will be no posthumous awards.

It is regretted that individual nominations cannot be discussed. The Mayor will review all nominations and will carefully consider who should receive awards. The Mayor, the Council or representatives of the Council will not enter into discussions on the Mayor’s decisions. The Mayor’s decision is final.

Data Protection: The information given on this form will be held in accordance with data protection legislation currently in force including the General Data Protection Regulations. Information contained on the form will be anonymised before being judged by the Mayor. We may read out statements written by the nominator when presenting the Award. Find out more about how we control and process data by reading the Privacy Statements at: https://www.towcester-tc.gov.uk/local-council-privacy-and-cookie.html/

Contact details of Award winner(s) will be shared with The Town Council’s Office. The information you give will be treated as confidential, but parts may be included in the citation and certificate presented to successful nominees.

For further copies of this form please email enquiries@towcester-tc.gov.uk or telephone 01327 350995.

Visit www.towcester-tc.gov.uk for more information or call 01327 350995.
Have You Embraced Your Wellbeing More Since Covid-19?

There is no doubting, for many 2020 has been the most horrendous year ever and certainly the worst on record since the last World War, but as we begin to find our new normal, the kids go back to school and many find themselves thinking about unemployment, with the end of the furlough scheme, I wonder: has this whole experience made you more aware of your own wellbeing, to the point you have made changes?

There is a lot of talk on social media, of how we should be thinking more of our wellbeing and there are many examples of people certainly being more aware of their health, experiencing something so life changing like Covid-19, will do this to you. But there is a big difference between being more aware and identifying the specific changes you need to enhance your overall wellbeing, then physically making these changes!

Only you will know whether things need to change. It would take you being completely honest with yourself and not simply thinking things are all fine, as it is certainly easier to lie to ourselves than to anyone else. Though I know there are courageous individuals coming forward, who have been truthful to themselves, identified there is a problem and/or recognised some signs and symptoms, so took the all-important first step and asked for help.

How do I know? Because they are the guys who attend our Men’s Mental Health support group, which I launched two months ago and already has over 30 members, with many in Northampton and the surrounding areas asking for help and the local NHS Mental Health teams wanting to signpost guys our way. I’ve also been speaking to the partners and family members of those who are struggling, to arrange meetups for them too, as all too often these individuals are forgotten about, with little support available.

So, how is YOUR wellbeing? Be honest with yourself now! World Mental Health Day is on Saturday, 10th October and then men’s health awareness month “Movember” throughout November. We are offering a prize for the best moustache, coming up over the next two months and if you ever wanted to give your partner THE best Christmas present, then be honest with yourself and take the time to embrace your wellbeing: look inwards and see; what can you do to become a better version of you?

With the theme for World Mental Health Day being: Mental Health For All, we at Talk Mental Health are encouraging everyone to stop and look inwards, reflect on what you have experienced this year, the past few years, then be honest with yourself. Are there things you could manage better, changes you should make, or would you benefit from some help, to default reset and identify your new baseline?

You have the courage, you have the strength, you have the right to be happy and you are NOT alone, “it ISNT ok not to be ok” as you deserve to BE ok and you have everything it takes to do so, to become a better version of you, but, the first step does have to come from you. Once the step is taken, Talk Mental Health will Inspire, Educate and Empower you to better manage your own mental wellbeing, giving you back control, so you CAN manage and you CAN then “be ok”!

Take care of those around you, but most importantly, take care of yourselves.
Our aim is to Inspire, Educate and Empower individuals to better manage their own Mental Wellbeing. This in turn reduces the requirement for expensive interventions and support strategies, acting as an effective preventative measure, against loss of productivity, sickness days and poor mental health within the workplace generally.

At the core of what we provide is our successful Men’s Mental Health support groups. We have drawn on our experience and knowledge, to assist you in setting up your own in-house wellbeing support group, advising on policies and procedures and training Peer Support Facilitators, to oversee the running of your group.

without the right training from knowledgeable and experienced professionals, regardless the size of your investment, any mental wellbeing strategy will be ineffective.

We provide a three tiered approach which includes the Mental Health First Aid course, along with bespoke workshops to meet your specific needs and requirements.

sometimes it can take more than making people attend training, you need people to want to be engaged, to learn and participate. This is where Nick Wilson provides a variety of talks on his own truly inspirational journey, ensuring the right message is shared and there is value for all attendees.

GET IN TOUCH WITH US:
WWW.TALKMENTALHEALTH.ORG.UK   07434 006110   NICK@TALKMENTALHEALTH.ORG.UK
NEW online language classes in Northamptonshire see huge spike in demand!

It took just 48 hours for local business owner and teacher, Francesca Fleming, to react to the news of the Coronavirus epidemic and devise a way to continue her language classes for young children – and the outcome has been astonishing…

Francesca is the owner of award winning Kidslingo Fran Fleming; with her fun and engaging classes she inspires hundreds of young children to love languages every week. Through interactive learning – via songs, games, Makaton, active storytelling and let’s pretend – children from birth to the age of 11 are learning French and building their confidence and communication skills.

As well as the live classes, educational packs and music were emailed out weekly. Children could continue to enjoy their fun French classes from homes and gardens across the county and even in the car or on holiday! Younger (and sometimes older!) siblings, parents and grandparents were able to join in too! Feedback was incredible from parents who were relieved to know that their children were still able to participate in an activity that brings so much joy. Here’s what Bex had to say about the online classes for her 5-year-old son:

“Learning French with Frannie has been the best thing to come out of lock-down! [My son] loves the classes and usually starts asking “is it French day yet?” the day after class! Thank you so much for your hard work and for keeping my boy happy and engaged in learning!”

The success of the online offering has been through the quality of teaching Kidslingo’s Fran Fleming offers and the support she has received from her customers. Due to the ongoing uncertainty surrounding Coronavirus, Fran’s classes will be remaining online for the time being so that children may continue to enjoy her Kidslingo Frenchtastic classes to the full from the safety of home.

“Overnight I changed the model from face-to-face classes to doing everything online via the interactive web platform, Zoom,” Francesca says. “The impact the Coronavirus was having on children and young families was unprecedented. But I knew that keeping the classes open would be one of the ways in which to offer some stability and normality in this very confusing time. Where I was able to, I kept children in their friendship groups so they could continue to virtually see their best friends, which was really, really important.”

What is more, the success of Fran’s online children’s classes inspired her to set up online French classes for adults this summer. Her Speech Bubble Northants and Milton Keynes business is proving extremely popular and she is now running classes for beginners and Level 2 learners three nights a week. Adults can join her 90-minute classes from the comfort of their own homes to develop their language skills and confidence in a relaxed and fun way.

If you would like to know more about Fran’s fun French online classes for children aged 0-11 years or adults, please contact her on fran.fleming@kidslingo.co.uk (children’s classes) or frannie@speechbubble.co.uk (adult classes).
Northamptonshire offers a surprising variety of landscapes from the rolling hills in the north to the scenic vistas and amazing woodlands in the south. If you add the Grand Union Canal with its many towpaths, quaint little villages that are secreted in history it is no wonder that they call this county the “Hidden Cotswolds”.

### Distance: 5.3 miles
### 11,750 steps
### Surface: Varied
### Difficulty: Moderate
### Dog Friendly: Yes (2 stiles)
### Approx time: 2h 10m

There is so much to see and do in the Stoke Bruerne area. It has that ‘holiday’ feel as you explore the little boutique shops and perhaps indulge in a visit to the canal museum. If you have the time then please support the local businesses and enjoy a drink or something to eat at one of the public houses, Indian restaurant, or the canal side café.

The Adventure Geek Walking Club is a Northamptonshire based organisation providing guided and self-guided walks in the area.

Get Outside, Get Inspired and Go Take A Hike!

The rest of the trail follows the main footpaths over open fields and loops back to Stoke Bruerne where you a warm pub or cafe will be waiting for you!

Visit [https://www.adventuregeek.co.uk/product/ag40/Full](https://www.adventuregeek.co.uk/product/ag40/Full) for the full in-depth instructions for this walk.

### PHOTO CHALLENGE

For each Adventure Geek walk we will challenge you to take a photo and upload to Facebook, Twitter or Instagram using the hashtag #AGPhotoChallenge

Your challenge, should you choose to accept it, is to take a photo of a witch and see if you can spot some thatch art.
To book a personal visit please contact our Admissions Officer, Alice Ho on 01280 820410 or email admissions@thorntoncollege.com

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