

Steeple Aston

February 2025

Issue No. 618

Life



* Dinosaur footprints * Wartime tragedy * Blandford fly *

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Contributions are welcome. Please email editorialife@gmail.com

Cover: Frosty wheelbarrow (photo by Nigel Francis)

Steeple Aston *Life*

COPY

All articles and letters to the Editor
editorialife@gmail.com

COPY DEADLINES

The copy deadline is the 14th of the previous month. This means the copy deadline for the March 2025 issue is Friday 14th February.

READ STEEPLE ASTON LIFE ONLINE
<https://www.steepleaston.org.uk/sal-magazine>

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ADVERTISING RATES

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Badminton (Thursday evenings)		Alison Moran	01869 347033
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Cherwell District Councillors		Cllr Andrew McHugh	07515 120470
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	Out of Hours		111
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Parish Council	Clerk	Cathy Fleet	07989 398838
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Village Website	Editor	Jenny Bell - <i>steepleaston.org.uk</i>	01869 943573
Volunteer Connect - Community transport scheme			0300 3030125
WI	President	Julie Hillier	01869 349185



“...folly is not always folly.”
Jane Austen

Steeple Aston *Life*

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Issue No.618

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Editorial

February is one of the most misspelt words in the English language, the name being derived from the Latin word, *Februum* meaning ‘to cleanse’. It symbolises purification and atonement, with Shrove Tuesday (Pancake Day) being the final feasting day before the Christian tradition of Lent starts on Ash Wednesday. This year, we’ll have to wait a little longer for those tasty crepes, as it falls on Tuesday 4th March with Easter being late! February is also the shortest month of the year and often one of the coldest. Snow flurries and fierce storms have certainly given us all a stark reminder over recent months to be more prepared, and it was heartwarming to hear how villagers rallied round to help one another in the face of adversity.

This month welcomes one of the first signs of life in the shape of snowdrops, the pure white bells of these hardy flowers a clear indication that spring will follow before long. Snowdrop Sunday in the churchyard on the 9th is a great way to enjoy these little gems, followed by a cuppa and slice of homemade cake in the church.

February is the birth month of the vinyl record, and musicians born this month include Nina Simone, Rick Astley and Alice Cooper. Local musical talent is showcased in the village hall at the ‘Music for Pleasure’ concert on the 8th, or check out the numerous live events taking place across the region for a fun way to celebrate this Valentine’s Day.

Carol

‘There is always in February some one day, at least, when one smells the yet distant, but surely coming, summer’
(Gertrude Jekyll)

Photo: Snowdrops in the churchyard (C Neville)

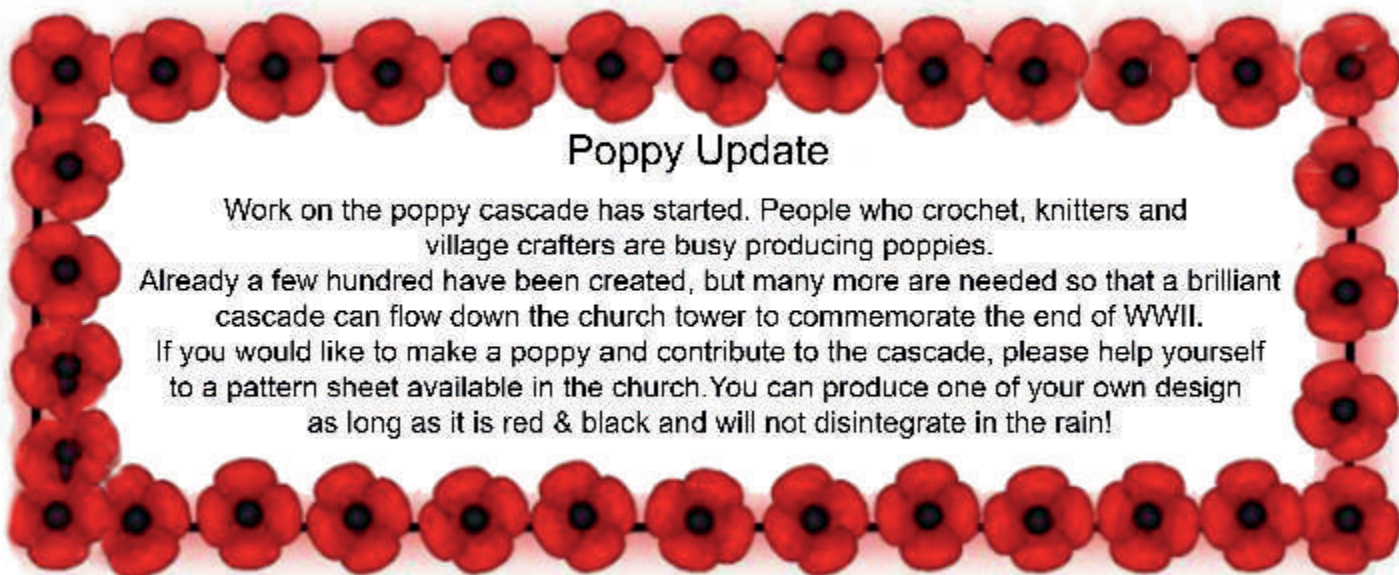




Handbell collection 2024

We are delighted to announce that, thanks to your generosity to our Christmas handbell collection, we raised £1,794.72. This will be split 50/50 between the British Heart Foundation and Steeple Aston Church roof appeal. Villagers donating via our JustGiving page also had the chance to gift aid their donation - this gave an extra £46.50 to the BHF, which is wonderful. Thank you for your continued support and warm welcome. Very much appreciated on a cold evening.

If you fancy having a go for next Christmas, please get in touch. You don't need to be able to read music, but being familiar with the carols is a benefit. With members from 10yrs to 80+ everyone is welcome. Thanks.
Vicky Clifton (Handbell Captain) vmstedman@btinternet.com



Looking for a Room to Rent

I am a fully qualified and registered physiotherapist who has lived in Steeple Aston for ten years. I work part-time for the NHS and part-time as a self-employed practitioner. I am happy to treat patients in their own homes, but I am also seeking somewhere local where I can establish my private practice. If there is anywhere in the village that might be suitable, I would be pleased to discuss renting premises where I could open a treatment room. To ensure the comfort of my patients, the space will require heating, water and access to a toilet, with parking if possible.

If you might be able to help, please contact me by email victorwikt73@gmail.com or phone 07868 421759.



Editor's Letterbox



Dear Editor

Regarding the power cut on the 7th and 8th of December. My power went off at 16.33 on the 7th and didn't come back on until 22.10 on the 8th. I am on Northside. How were residents supposed to know about the food truck if they didn't have the Internet? I certainly didn't. Plus, a lot of the elderly and vulnerable don't even have the Internet. Maybe next time, the Emergency Committee should have people knocking on doors informing residents about what is happening? I also believe that residents who had power used the food truck.

Regards

Rosina Woodrow

Dear Editor

I very much hope that February's SAL will include a reply to the Letter from John Coley about a Community Emergency Plan. Details of this Plan - if it still exists - would be well worth sharing. John poses some very important questions, and I for one would appreciate knowing more.

Anne Haymes

Dear Editor

We wanted to take the opportunity to acknowledge John Coley's letter in the January issue. Sadly, the copy deadline for the issue now in your hands fell before our next meeting. We will have met, discussed and had a chance to research the matter in time to respond in the March issue.

Yours

Steeple Aston Parish Council

SAL welcomes letters to the Editor, but it should be noted that the views expressed are not necessarily those of the Editor nor the SAL Committee



Photo: Nigel Francis

Steeple Aston Choral Society

Presents



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Steeple People



- **What do you like best about living here?**

I love being in the countryside in an area where I feel rooted.

- **Give a potted history of yourself – in 40 words or less.**

Born in Boston to British parents; moved to the UK at 10 and Lower Heyford at 12; studied English at Oxford; tried to forge a career as an actor; fell into farming; established a flock of Cotswold sheep.

- **How do you see yourself, in 5 words?**

Loyal, principled, caring, grounded, epicurean.

- **How do others see you, in 5 words?**

Patient, quietly hilarious, reserved, decadent.

- **What do your family (or friends) find the most endearing about you?**

Connection with the natural world and imaginative sensibility.

- **As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?**

Successively: plumber; fireman; cowboy; Olympic rower; English lit academic; actor; and finally, farmer.

- **What was your first job?**

The first time I was paid to act, I had to gallop up on a horse and deliver the line 'The Queen is dead!' to an assembly including Kate Winslet, Stanley Tucci and Matthias Schoenaerts.

- **What do you do for a living now?**

I keep rare breed sheep and do direct sales of mostly hogget meat to the local area.

- **What's your secret/guilty pleasure?**

I am in no way ashamed of it, but people are sometimes surprised to discover that I'm a big Boston Red Sox fan.

- **What is your all-time favourite book?**

Pride and Prejudice. The elegance of Austen's prose structure belies its intricacy, and her wit and social observation are incomparable.

- **What would you save from your house if it was on fire?**

A kitchen table made from an oak that fell at my parents' house about 20 years ago. It's very heavy, but at least it's near some doors.

- **If you could travel anywhere in the world, where would you go?**

I was once supposed to go on a trip sailing from the Falklands to South Georgia, then crossing it on skis in Shackleton's tracks. I foolishly decided to go to drama school instead, but would love to carry out that plan one day.

- **Who is your hero? Which person do you most admire, and why?**

People writing about regenerative farming at the moment, like James Rebanks and John Lewis-Stempel, and pioneers in the field like Eve Balfour.

- **Who would you most like to have dinner with – dead or alive?**

Jane Austen, William Shakespeare, David Bowie, Robert Frost; cheffed by Rose Gray and Ruth Rogers; Jasper Morris as sommelier.

- **What do you get grumpy/mad about?**

Governments and the general public not caring about or screwing over farming and the countryside. The Big Food industry. Not being able to find things.

- **What makes you happiest in the world?**

As Shakespeare puts it in *As You Like It*: 'the greatest of my pride is to see my ewes graze and my lambs suck'.



William Spray

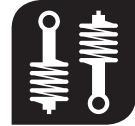
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Church Matters



February here in the UK is dominated by Valentine's Day. Supermarket aisles are dedicated to it with pink and red heart banners, advertising companies use it to tempt us and florists stock up with red roses. The world keeps telling us that love is fluffy pink cushions and red roses.

Over the Christmas period I have finished Miranda Hart's book 'I haven't been entirely honest with you', as she describes her health journey, complete collapse, eventual diagnosis of Lyme Disease and slow recovery. Currently, I am halfway through Chris Hoy's book 'All that Matters', chronicling his own journey over the last year beginning with his diagnosis with stage 4 prostate cancer. The day after his diagnosis, Chris talks about how he saw his death hurtling towards him, comparing and contrasting it with an out-of-control rollercoaster and a slow-motion car crash, which no one can save him from. Life is often compared to a rollercoaster, with its highs and lows, fun and scary moments, sometimes at the same time. Miranda, by contrast, had to battle for years with doctors who didn't think anything was wrong before finally getting her own diagnosis, which came with a sense of relief. Something was wrong, and now there was a way forward.

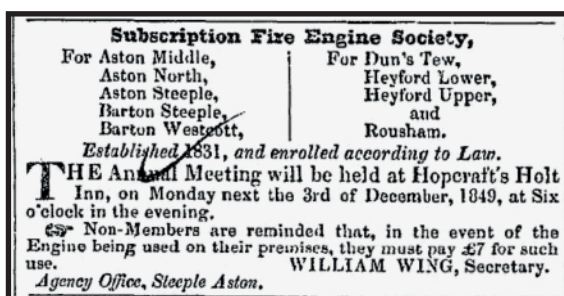
Both have, in vastly different ways, had to face and overcome challenges. Chris faced his chemotherapy treatment like a training camp, breaking it down into manageable small steps. Miranda writes about walking through a dark cave and picking up treasures, as she learnt things about herself, and how to care for herself, including letting the past be the past and loving ourselves. Along the way she learnt to let go of negative things which were holding her back, and to treat herself with gentleness and kindness.

Whilst their challenges and responses to them look very different, there are many similarities. Both built a team of people around them who supported and encouraged them onwards. Both refer back to previous experiences and encounters to help them navigate their way forward. Chris acknowledges that a cancer diagnosis is a mental challenge as well as a physical one. Recognising the precariousness of life has changed his perception and attitude to life, enriching him. It has increased his appreciation for the little things in life and that he 'loves like he'd never loved before'.

Miranda's final treasure is love, as through the course of her health journey she learnt to love 'her wild self', and that she is lovable. We all are. This Valentine's Day, I invite you to spend some time loving yourself. Look at yourself through God's eyes, and honour your gifts, then go out and share God's love with others.

Harriet

SAVA Snippets from the Archive



The Fire Engine Society was established in 1831. Subscriptions were paid for the fire engine to attend any premises and fire plaques showed the fire service that they had been paid.

This newspaper notice states that non-members had to pay £7 for using the fire engine in 1849. Fire insurance marks are metal plaques marked with the emblem of the insurance company which were fixed to the front of insured buildings as a guide to the insurance company's fire brigade. These identification marks were used in the eighteenth and nineteenth century in the days before municipal fire services were formed. UK marks are called 'fire insurance plaques'.

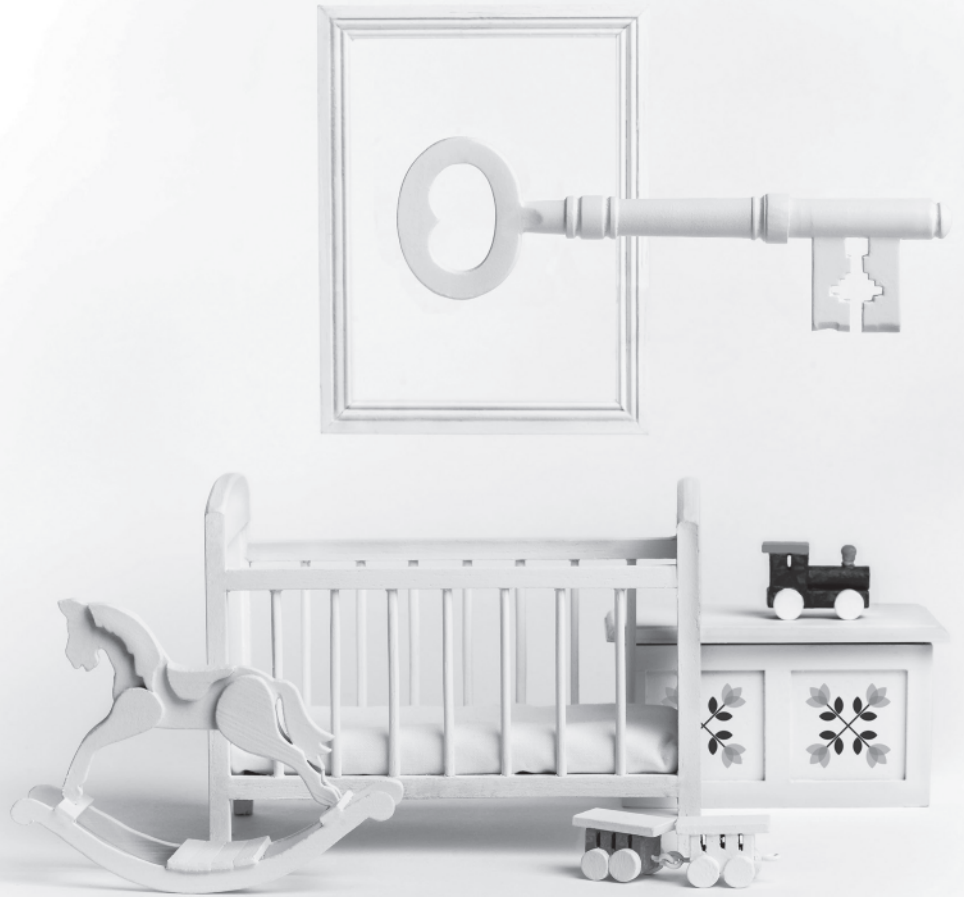
As you walk around Steeple Aston you can see some of these plaques on the walls of houses that previously subscribed.



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Councillors seeking support and funding to eradicate the Blandford Fly menace



The Blandford Fly (*Simulium posticatum*) is a small species of blackfly found in Europe that has commonly been prevalent in the Stour valley in Dorset. Or at least it used to be. It is now endemic along our stretch of the River Cherwell from Clifton (Deddington) as far south as Kidlington. It is most common during May and June, flying low to the ground and normally biting ankles and legs. The painful bites can lead to swelling, blistering, joint pain and occasionally a high temperature, as many villagers have found to their cost. In severe cases, the bite can cause ulceration and secondary infections. It is a public health nuisance.

Its larvae thrive and develop to maturity on the particularly accommodating, undulating, long river weed, ranunculus, that looks so beautiful as you walk across Heyford Bridge. The fly's name derives from a major outbreak of people being bitten around the town of Blandford Forum in Dorset in the 1960s and 70s. The town straddles the River Stour.

Researchers at Bournemouth University (BUG is the name of their commercial environmental programme team) developed a solution which, for over 30 years, has reduced the population of Blandford Fly by up to 98 per cent in affected areas along the River Stour. They spray the larvae in their breeding grounds amongst the weeds in the water course before they become flies and start to bite humans. Control is effected by targeting the filter-feeding larval stage with a specific larvicide, Vectobac AS, which is an aqueous solution of *Bacillus thuringiensis israelensis* (Bti) - a group of bacteria used as biological control agents for larval stages of certain dipterans. Bti produces toxins which are effective in killing various species of mosquito, fungus gnat and blackfly, while having almost no effect on other organisms. This is a link to their 2024 report on last year's treatment: buglobalenvironmentalsolutions.co.uk/post/blandford-fly-treatment-on-the-river-stour-completed-for-2024

The total cost of the first year's treatment is £23,000 with subsequent years costing around £18,000. These costs have been derived from an initial scoping project last year, with multiple visits and testing by BUG scientists during June 2024 in various locations along the River Cherwell. Thanks are due to local OCC councillor, Arash Fatemian, for sourcing the funds for these investigations. Full approval has already been gained from the Health and Safety Executive as a result of the longstanding evidence from the River Stour, and contact over the autumn with the Oxfordshire offices of the Environment Agency and Thames Water has secured their go-ahead approval as well. It had been hoped that Oxfordshire County Council would provide all, or part of, the £23,000 required for the first year of treatment and get the project underway in the spring of 2025. But, as this money has not been forthcoming, the council decided to approach local parishes to see if they would share the cost between them. Unfortunately, at this stage in parish budget cycles, gaining sufficient commitment has proved impossible. Dorset County Council funds the spraying programme on the River Stour.

It is hoped that a publicity drive involving a widely shared video podcast produced by Mat Watson (of Car Wow fame) demonstrating the treatment process and impact of the spraying, will create the level of interest and support needed to secure the required initial funding and ongoing spending in subsequent years. To that end, on 20th January Steeple Aston PC voted to release £5,000 from reserves to fund a pilot project on a single site close to the village. If you have views on the proposal, please email Cathy Fleet, Parish Clerk at parishclerk.steepleaston@gmail.com

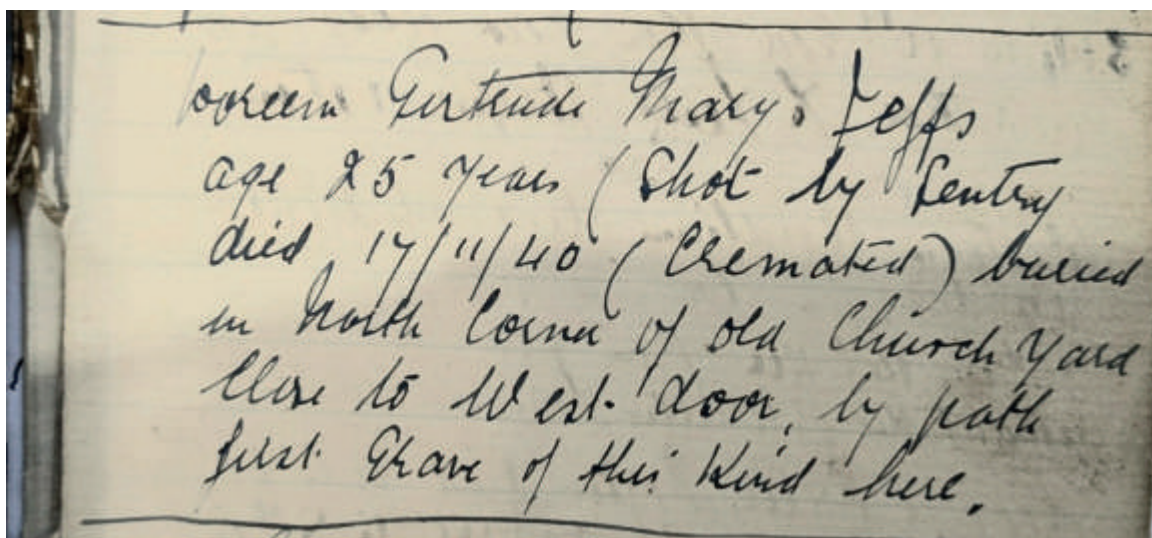
We have already received a handful of comments, some positive and some understandably seeking further reassurances over the potential impact on the wider ecology. These are being responded to by sharing the detailed academic follow-up study papers from which the project draws its high level of confidence.

Steeple Aston Parish Council

The wartime tragedy of Doreen Jeffs

In the SAL last month, mention was made of VE Day, the 80th anniversary of the cessation of hostilities in Europe. SAVA is keen to be involved in these events and a chance encounter with a recent addition to the archive has a particular poignancy.

Whilst copying the contents of the Steeple Aston Coal Fund box, I came across a fragile notebook described as the 'Burial Record 1900-1958'. In this I found the following entry:



In the SAVA publication 'Steeple Aston at War', there is a story about a young wife being shot by accident for not stopping for a checkpoint. The story suggests that it had happened at RAF Upper Heyford, but I had nothing else to go on, except that her baby in the car with her survived unharmed. An Internet search for 'Doreen Gertrude Mary Jeffs' provided the next piece of the jigsaw via an entry for Doreen on the Commonwealth War Graves Commission database. Apparently the CWGC have a 'cold cases' unit and, as a civilian, Doreen was only added in 2015. However, this stated that she had been injured in Megavissey in Cornwall and died a day later at St Austell hospital – not what I had expected at all!

So, now I had a date and location. Using these, I carried out a search on the British Newspaper Archive. This came up with an article from the 'West Briton and Cornwall Advertiser' from November 1940 titled 'Young Wife Killed'. Ignoring the poor punctuation, this goes on to say:

"A sentry after signalling for a car to halt without response fired at it fatally wounding one of its occupants...The victim was Mrs Doreen Gertrude Mary Rowley Jeffs, 26 year old wife of Flight Lieutenant Francis Russel Jeffs RAF and she normally resides at Sunny Bank, Stapleashton (sic) Oxford, but was spending a short holiday with her husband at a Cornish Village".

Going back to our burial record, this states: *"Cremated and buried in North corner of old churchyard close to west door by path, first grave of this kind here".*

Even if no memorial stone was ever placed, it is intriguing that Doreen was buried in Steeple Aston as they had only been living here for a year at most, so why here? They had been married in September 1939 in Twickenham. Doreen's maiden name was Rowley. The 1939 Register has Doreen living in Fringford prior to their move to Steeple Aston, presumably whilst Francis (an experienced pre-war pilot) was based at RAF Heyford.

Continued....

Continued from previous page

This would have only been a typical wartime short posting. Their marriage record suggests neither had local connections – Twickenham and South Wales are mentioned. Did either have family nearby? Hopefully, in time we will be able to add more to this sad, but intriguing story.

Now for the really coincidental and personal bit. My grandfather lost both his younger brothers in WWII. Both were in the RAF. Denis Worthington was a Wireless Operator in Lancasters in 207 Squadron. In May 1942, the now Wing Commander F R Jeffs AFC took over command of 207 Squadron. Hence he was Denis's Commanding Officer at the time that Denis was killed over Germany in July 1942 it really is a small world!

In these current turbulent times when the civilian casualties of conflict are front and centre of news broadcasts, it is perhaps opportune that a record of a young life taken in tragic circumstances should be remembered in May 2025 equally amongst the military fallen in her adopted home.

Stuart Cummins - SAVA



Pancake recipe

Ingredients

For the pancake mixture (makes about 8 pancakes)	220g/8oz plain flour, sifted pinch of salt	2 eggs 1 pint of milk 50g/2oz butter
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Method for making the batter

1. Sift the flour and salt into a large mixing bowl with a sieve held high above the bowl so the flour gets an airing.
2. Make a well in the centre of the flour and break the eggs into it.
3. Whisk the eggs making sure any bits of flour from around the edge of the bowl are mixed in with the egg.
4. Gradually add small quantities of the milk, still whisking.
5. Continue whisking until the batter is smooth, with the consistency of thin cream.
6. Melt the 50g/2oz of butter in a non-stick frying pan.
7. Spoon 2tbsp of the melted butter into the batter and whisk it in.
8. Let the pancake mix stand for at least 30 minutes before cooking.
9. Pour any left-over butter into a dish. This will be used later to grease the frying pan after each pancake has been made.
10. Make sure the non-stick frying pan is really hot before adding about 2tbsp of the batter mixture.
11. As soon as the batter hits the hot pan, tip the pan around from side to side to get the base evenly coated with batter.
12. Carefully lift the edge of the cooked pancake with a palette knife to see if it's tinged gold as it should be.
13. Flip the pancake over with a pan slice or palette knife to cook the other side.
14. Slide it out of the pan onto a plate.
15. Stack the pancakes as you make them between sheets of greaseproof paper on a plate.

To serve

Traditionally pancakes are sprinkled with caster sugar and freshly squeezed lemon juice. Other favourite toppings include: melted chocolate or chocolate spread, chocolate spread with slices of banana, strawberry jam, golden syrup, toffee sauce and whipped cream.

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The evening commenced with tea, coffee and biscuits as usual, but then we went straight to our speaker, Stuart Cummins, who gave us a lively talk on his time as a junior Civil Engineer and some of the huge contracts he had worked on – a rather large hangar for the Blackbird, a bridge, gantry, a motorway and the Croydon Tramlink.

We had sign-up sheets for dinner at the Red Lion in January and a lunch in February at The Bell in Lower Heyford. The WI were running a table at the Village Quiz.

Hildy thanked members for their donations to the wounded soldiers of Ukraine – shoe boxes of essentials and treats for the men and women had been sent out for Christmas. A thank you had been received by Hildy from the group who did the deliveries on behalf of organisations in Oxfordshire. At least seven WIs are being run in women's prisons and they are looking for 'crafting materials' such as colouring crayons, wool and paper, but excluding scissors. Also on the list were false eyelashes and false nails! Hildy is heading our WI to help these women to have interests and learn new skills in their own groups.

We then went on to discuss the four Resolutions: Incontinence and the need to improve services; By-standers save lives so need more CPR training; Recycling, repair and reuse of clothing etc; and Eliminate landfill of medical packaging like pill blister packs. Janice ran through each one before opening the discussion to members, who voiced their views on the following through of these resolutions. A ballot was taken, the result of which will be passed on to the Oxfordshire Federation.

Our February meeting will be all about 'Dogs for Good' and members were reminded to bring funds as the speaker will be bringing a selection of merchandise, which will go towards their fundraising.

The Poppy Cascade was discussed, and Hildy outlined how the planned flow of poppies from the Church tower would look. Many members raised their hands to say that they were in the throes of knitting and crafting poppies. There was a table of poppies already donated in a variety of mediums: fluffy knitted ones, plain knitted and all in a variety of sizes. There was a batch of felt ones – again in various themes of a poppy – red with a black centre. Those on display were ready to be taken to the poppy box at the back of the church. Don't forget, readers, this poppy-making surge is for anyone and everyone – it's just that the WI got started very promptly!

Merrill Bayley



Bird Photographer of the Year exhibition



Oxfordshire Museum, Fletcher's House, Park Street, Woodstock OX20 1SN
Open until Sunday 23rd February 2025, 10am-5pm Free Entry

An exhibition is taking place at the Oxfordshire Museum in Woodstock, showcasing the most beautiful and impactful images of birds from around the world in 2024. More than 23,000 images were submitted to the competition, which is the largest global bird photography competition, across eight categories, with the winners announced last September. These include Best Portrait, Birds in the Environment, Bird Behaviour, Birds in Flight, Urban Birds, Black & White and Comedy Bird. In addition, there is a Conservation Award, Portfolio Award and Video Award.

The winning images embark on an international tour, and this is its only appearance in Oxfordshire. The exhibition features 70-80 images with detailed captions, and last year donated £5,000 to partner charity, 'Birds on the Brink', which gives funds to bird conservation charities around the world. The 2025 competition is now open for entries online to photographers of all levels. During February half-term, the museum will offer a range of bird-inspired activities for families to get involved with, as well as exhibition-related items in the shop.

Photo above: 'Heavenly Elegant Flight' by Nicolas Groffal (*image: BPOTY competition*)



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Thugs in the Garden - Part 1: Shady Areas

Happy New Gardening Year 2025. What are your garden joys and challenges? The days are getting longer. Before urgency for action sets in, take a really hard and honest look into your borders. Try and remember what's planted there. Look for the good, the bad, the ugly and the pretty. Let's see what you can do even better.

Perhaps you are lucky enough to have a carpet of snowdrops, aconites and early crocus? In which case, make sure they can be seen. Have last year's autumn leaves been cleared? Perhaps there's a gay gathering of primroses. What else can you see right now in the shady areas? Some evergreens of course. Vinca – major or minor, depending on the size of the leaves. Are there buds forming already – white or mauve? Are the leaves variegated or plain? *Arum italicum* is already showing its attractive variegated, sculptural leaves. And what else is there? Perhaps ground elder – of this there is little cure. I'll discuss it often but don't ignore it otherwise, before too long, that is the only plant you will have! Other perennial weeds will be showing too. You are likely to see *Euphorbia robbiae*. Are these parts of the garden that you want to go, or just somewhere that doesn't demand too much of you? Is it working hard enough to entice you to visit, or have you allowed the thugs in? These, in my view, are the very strong-growing, successful plants which fill those difficult gaps. They do champion service, preventing a weed invasion, but are they pretty enough? Do they give you sufficient cover, balance, interest throughout the year, or is it just one corner that you don't have to think about?

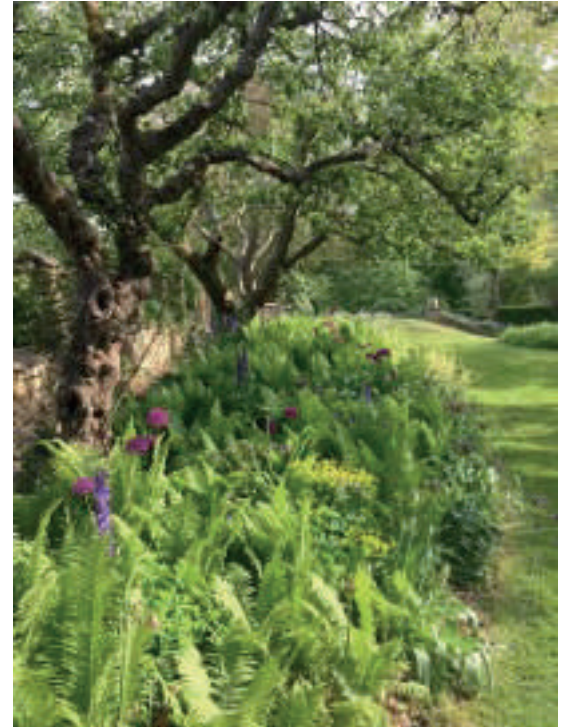


Photo: Caroline Edwards

Paynes Hill House boasts a line of old apple trees, which fruit in succession. The shady border underneath used to be carpeted with ivy... an out and out thug, which is very difficult to defeat. We had an invasion of Spanish bluebells, which do a fine job of harbouring every slug and snail under their generous sprawling leaves. We also had a yellow carpet of winter aconitum. With care to preserve these, and an extended campaign of digging and removal of the ivy and bluebell thugs, we planted a very attractive thug – the Shuttlecock fern – *Matteuccia struthiopteris*. It unfurls so slowly, with great promise. It's easy to control, so planting between is possible. We planted *Hydrangea Limelight*, and in the front of the border, we also planted *Tellima grandiflora* and *Viola cornuta*. The fireworks you can see in the photo (above) are alliums, which just made it above the understory of ferns. Later in the summer we saw Turks' cap lilies, which stayed until the apples started raining down from the trees.

A good friend in Lower Heyford has the most wonderful forest of wild garlic growing under very old yew trees. It is a thug which makes a carpet of pungent, edible leaves, followed by deliciously fry-able buds, then flowers to add punch to salads. But, after the garlic leaves and flowers have been plundered for pesto, omelettes, soups and risottos, then there is nothing. Succession planting suggests plants with a strong stem, to push up through the wild garlic and look good for a long time. A good clear planting space could be made for airy shrubs with spring interest, like *Magnolia stellata*. It is hard to beat hydrangeas for summer and autumn interest; for late autumn and into winter *Abelia grandiflora*; and for perennial planting, after the garlic, some tall ferns, such as *Osmunda regalis*, and *Actaea 'Brunette'*. Once the shrubs are well established, you could get bold and plant a clematis near the main stem, and train it into the woody structure of the shrub, making sure the flowering period is not the same as the shrub. This is called double-value planting.

My message is, don't let the thugs get away with stopping you from enjoying the shady parts of your garden. There are lots of solutions. Look at your friends' gardens. Could you help them make some divisions of successful perennials and share them? Small perennials planted in lovely clear soil now, will triple in size over the year. Make a comfy bed for them now, and you will enjoy them as the year moves on. And, for your gardening homework – look critically at your borders. Are they working hard enough to bring you joy?

Caroline Edwards



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THE VALENTINE CLUB

Here we are again with spring just around the corner and the snowdrops out in full bloom, as it seems are our members of The Valentine Club. Way back in December, we celebrated Christmas with a superb meal provided by S & J Cuisine and were entertained by a very professional couple from Aylesbury and thus, along with a few glasses of wine and some great company, we left 2024 and are now looking at all the possibilities that this year might bring.

Our meeting during January gave us an insight into the aspirations and organisation of Katharine House Hospice, which is such an amazing place for those in greatest need. Tim gave us a very interesting and comprehensive overview of the hospice and all the work they do. Long may Katharine House continue. Towards the end of last year, we lost a long-serving member of our club in Marie MacCutcheon who had reached the great age of 95 after many years of health problems. A collection was made in support of The Valentine Club and an amazing sum, just short of £900, was amassed, which will make an enormous difference to our funds for the club. Talking funds, the Co-op has granted us £200 toward the club's activities which again makes such a difference to the club and its abilities to support the slightly older members of our community.

For our February meeting, we welcome Graham Clifton who is going to tell us about 'The adventures of a church bellhanger'. During this year, the club will be going on six coach trips around the country, travelling along the River Thames, taking a steam train journey somewhere in the Midlands and throwing in a couple of holidays as well, so no time to sit back and relax! We have around 100 active members. I use the word 'active' very carefully as some members might not totally agree, and a waiting list of about 20 which makes us about the most successful seniors' group around. I know what all you youngsters are thinking, you can't wait to get to 60 years old. Don't be in too big a hurry as the waiting list has to reduce somewhat!

To find out more about The Valentine Club, then simply visit our website on valentineclub.wixsit.com/aston (easiest way to log on is go to the village website, go to 'clubs and societies', find The Valentine Club and click on the link), keep up to date by looking on the village website www.steepleaston.org.uk or use that old-fashioned thing called a telephone and call me on 01869 340512.

If you would like to support The Valentine Club and all the great things we do, why not have a go at the CherwellLottery.co.uk/support/the-valentine-club where you can participate in the Cherwell Lottery and hopefully, like many of our supporters, become a winner.

Richard Preston – Group organiser – Richard.preston5@btopenworld.com – Tel 340512

SAVA Snippets from the Archive



Formed in 1915, the Women's Institute was originally brought to life to revitalise rural communities and encourage women to become more involved in producing food during the First World War.

In 1965, marking the Institute's 50th anniversary, Mrs Rose Lilley, former President of Steeple Aston WI, is seen here cutting the celebratory cake. Since then, the organisation's aims have broadened and the WI is now the largest voluntary women's organisation in the UK.

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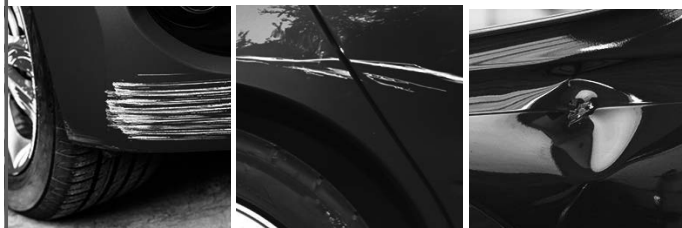
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Awards Dinner for 2024 Season...back in Steeple Aston!!

The Steeple Aston CC Awards dinner was held at the Red Lion for the first time in 15 years. We were well looked after by Omar and his team. Long may it continue! The awards were as follows:

2024 Batting 3rd John Drennan, 1st equal

Nick Foster & Phil Chesser

Our first ever tie, and only one a recognised batter!

2024 Bowling 3rd Nige Doggett, 2nd Josh Drennan, 1st

Paul Longman

Finally, after 14 years, Paul 'always the bridesmaid' Longman deservedly won best bowler.

Young (or Old) Player of the Year 2024

Josh Drennan

Josh is new to the club this year, but has made a stellar start. Let's hope he does not get second season 'Blues'!

Clubman of the Year 2024

Phil Chesser

Phil is the organisational dynamo behind the Club's success. His mission next year is to make all members reply to emails. I mean, how hard can it be? You'd be surprised....

The Curtly Ambrose (26 Test 'Ducks') Award for Batting

Jon Scotchbrook

Jon retains this coveted trophy for again scoring fewer runs than Phil Chesser, whose batting average was 8 times higher than his!

Best Fielder of 2024

Jack Higgins

Jack took 4 catches in 3 matches, dropping none. Imagine if England had done the same in India when Jaiswal was batting, we could have won the series.

With best wishes to all

Peter Higgins

Chairman SACC

Obituary for Jay Spires, formerly a member of Steeple Aston Cricket Club

On a tragic note, I write to announce the death of Jay Spires, who played for Steeple Aston Cricket Club from 2007 to 2012. Jay was a wonderful all-rounder, who brought an extra dimension to our cricket. They say you can measure an all-rounder's worth by the gap between his batting and bowling average – Jay's was plus 6, Ben Stokes is plus 3. More importantly than that, Jay fitted into the ethos of the team: to play hard, but to have fun along the way. We played some great games together and had many laughs. He will be sorely missed. Our thoughts and love go to Sophie, his children, Jay's parents and two sisters, Rachel and Sarah.

Parish Council Meeting *Notes*



I was the only member of the public at January's meeting, which our Parish Councillors seemed quite surprised by, given the level of correspondence they'd received this month. More on that later!

We started with the clerk updating us on various items: something has been dangling on the basket swing in the playground that shouldn't be; work to the table-tennis table is pending until warmer weather; and the bin by the Beeches is very full, but refuse collectors won't empty them if they're full of glass bottles. One councillor wondered what would happen if there were lots of poo bags on top of glass – would a rummage be necessary? Another felt it was 'just an excuse'. The general conclusion was that it was perhaps over-used during the Christmas break and, in any case, we do have a spare bin looking for a new home!

The Precept that had been discussed was formally ratified (£38,662).

Next onto a big playground decision, and our Chair had brought in two samples of recycled plastic that could be used in the retaining structures on the boundary. They looked pretty robust to me, but colour-wise, I was told, they contrasted with existing wood. The Chair had carried out a straw poll when she was last at the park, and 9 out of 10 were in favour of the more sustainable plastic option. One councillor also noted that it would give great longevity to the wall, and seemed rather hopeful that this would mean she wouldn't need to be involved in discussions on 'retaining structures' ever again - unless she was still in post in 20 years' time!

Onto highways & footpaths, and we have the Head of the Highways Community Engagement Team coming to visit Steeple Aston, when she will be shown our potholes (it was discussed as to whether the brood of rubber ducks were still available), our temporary signs and overflowing culverts. Anyone with any pressing issues might be interested to know she's due to meet at the school on 24th February at 10.30am. There was also a discussion on 'superusers' and some councillors did look a bit jealous when they heard how active Lower Heyford's 'superusers'

were. There was also chat around potholes and the 'sweep and fill' method, which I gathered was a job for local superusers, versus the 'cut and fill' which is a more specialist job.

Meanwhile the MCNP is even more complicated than usual as expectations have changed and they're now being asked to allocate sites for 100 new homes within the 11 parishes, which will then go out for consultation yet again, indeed, if these parishes all want to remain in the 'race' at all. Last spring, our Parish Council went through a pretty robust process identifying sites for up to 30 new dwellings, so they are minded to stick with those plans, given it was such a thorough process at the time. Hopefully all other parishes will come up with some sites because, as one councillor said, "if we don't get to 100 new houses, then Cherwell will just do it for us".

Next onto the hot topic of the Blandford Fly! I think councillors were expecting more public participation at this point, given the correspondence they'd received including some positive messages, and others expressing concern. Having attended most Parish Council meetings since May, I can vouch that the decision to embark on spraying these larvae hasn't been hasty. The PC have put information in SAL, the village website and even on telegraph poles to try and make people aware of the process.

Apparently, these larvae breed in fast-flowing water and lay in riverbanks, they then get washed out, get bigger, hatch, fly off, mate and bite (in that order!). Out of about 40 of this species, only a couple 'like a blood meal', and it seems we are victims of this vampire variety! The bacteria being used to cull these critters has been tested over 20 years with negligible impact on other invertebrates, which is due to the timing of the spray.



Continued...

Parish Council Meeting *Notes*



Boffins at Bournemouth University believe they have the method cracked, taking account of nature, volume, timing, duration and method of delivery. It sounds like they have the blessing of the Environment Agency and, in any case, continue to monitor and assess the effects. Steeple Aston will now spearhead a small-scale trial (with a spray in early March) to further assess impact ahead of hoping to persuade other councils (from Kidlington to Clifton) to join in next year.

We went from flies to satellites and a discussion on whether Starlink could be coming to the village! The idea is to provide useful coverage and improve the mobile phone signal here. One option included having a few hubs in the village, for example, at the SRC, shop and pub. Costs are being investigated and to what extent we want to give a certain Mr Musk any more money!

Next, we heard what I felt was a sincere and thoughtful discussion on our Emergency Plan. This agenda item was in response to a letter in SAL following on from a particularly lengthy power cut that some villagers endured in December. The general feeling was that our Emergency Plan was out of date in some elements, yet very similar to many other Parish Councils. It was also noted that landlines are all being made digital in the next year or so, so will fail in a power cut, unless you have a backup battery pack. The general feeling was that the Plan needs to be actionable, all Parish Councillors needed to know what their role was, and that we live in a wonderful community where it is hoped we'd all pull together if needed.

On the issue of the power outage, our Chair did contact SSE and apparently 75 buildings including SRC and some businesses were affected for 29 hours (Wow!). SSE notify households by text, but as we all know, that isn't the most effective way of communicating in Steeple Aston. And, as if such a lengthy power cut wasn't enough, some households then went without water on 12th January! The Parish Council have decided to connect with a local 'resilience team', organise some scenario training, update the Emergency Plan and ensure they're ready for any future outages.

Onto the less dramatic topic of village noticeboards, although perhaps they could come into play in an emergency?! The quote to mend the noticeboard by the village hall seems too high at more than £2,000!! I did wonder if they should drop the wood and replace with the sturdy option of recycled plastic?! The one by Harrisville also needs attention, and the question arose as to whether it was actually an official Parish Council noticeboard? The Clerk remembers being told she was only allowed to use the left-hand side and never to touch the right-hand side. That said, the consensus was that maybe the PC now has squatter's rights on the whole thing, and someone threw the notion that THREE DOOR notice boards are available. Imagine that!

Thanks were given to the kind villager who has been helping with our village website, and the idea was raised that maybe the Annual Parish Meeting could be used to showcase all the wonderful clubs and societies in our village, and perhaps use it as an occasion to encourage engagement. Even – dare I say it – an occasion to nobble our young people into some useful 'community action' towards any Duke of Edinburgh endeavours? It sounded like a fun idea, reminiscent of a kind of wholesome Freshers Week!

It was getting late by now, and onto some contentious planning applications, which perhaps weren't appropriate for me to report on, so I took my leave.

I'll be back for the next meeting.

All the best,

Mrs Miggins

This report is the personal view of the SAL reporter and is not intended to be a complete record of the Council meeting. The official record – once approved – will be available at www.steepleaston.org.uk



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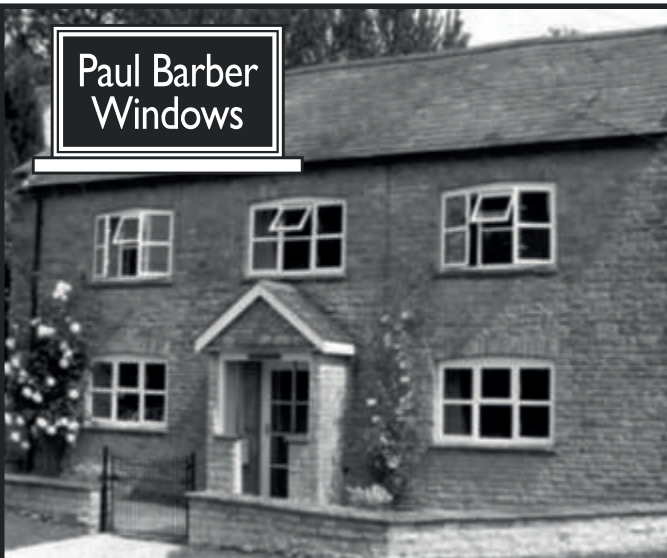
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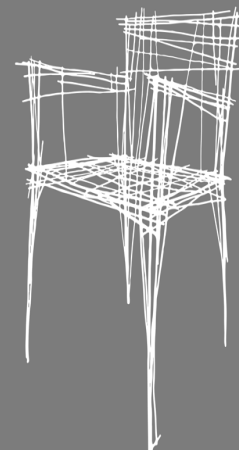
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Chairperson 2025

The Village Hall Trustees are still looking for someone to take over as Chairperson from May 2025. This could be an opportunity for two people to combine their skills as co-chairs. The function of the committee as a whole is to ensure the village hall is run and kept in good condition for the benefit of the village and indeed improved as funds allow. This is, therefore, a good opportunity for someone to network in the community and get involved. If you feel you are that person, you would be very welcome to come along to one of our monthly committee meetings and see what is involved. If you're interested, please call me on 340423 for more information.

Volunteer Marketing Co-ordinator

Steeple Aston Village Hall Trustees need a volunteer to undertake active marketing duties. We have an opportunity for a Volunteer Marketing Co-ordinator who would work as part of a management team. This role will cover various areas of marketing with a focus on supporting the Trustees to achieve increased bookings for the Village Hall. Once set up, we anticipate that a couple of hours a week will be needed, depending on the enthusiasm of the volunteer, to undertake the duties. The main duties will be to:

- Attend monthly meetings of the Trustees to discuss and agree marketing ideas and progress.
- Create engaging and targeted copywriting for our websites.
- Plan, create and deploy marketing campaigns.
- Create and keep third party listing up to date.
- Take on any associated duties agreed with the Trustees.

The post will be an unpaid voluntary position, suitable for a trainee (particularly good for a CV) or a retiree with a marketing background or interest. Contact Richard Preston on 340512, or John Coley on 347882 for more information.

Date for your diary:

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The Night Sky this Winter

Looking East

Mars has moved from Cancer into Gemini and may be seen forming a triangle with Caster and Pollux, the principal stars in The Twins. This should look quite conspicuous with Mars appearing to be the brighter. On 9th February at 19:00, the nearly Full Moon passes just a fraction of a degree from Mars. Watching this from 18:30 to 19:30 will show the Moon's motion rather well.

Looking South/South West

Jupiter is the brightest object situated in Taurus the Bull. It is unmistakably brighter than the nearby stars of Orion, the best-known winter constellation, although it is a summer constellation from Australia where it will appear 'upside down'.

Venus is rivalling Jupiter for appearance in the South West but much the brighter. The planet is bright enough (it is said) to cast a shadow onto a white sheet in a dark room.

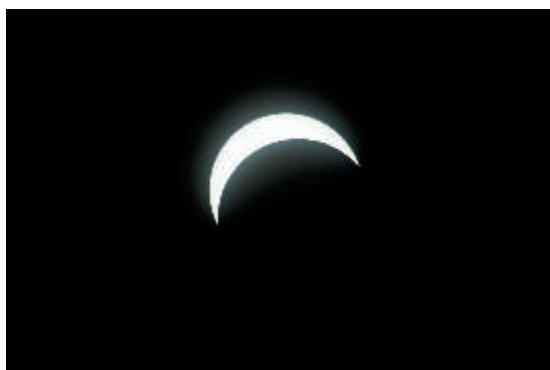
Saturn is gradually moving away to the west, setting at 19:00 in mid-February. During January there is alignment of planets along the ecliptic. From west to east, we have Saturn, Venus, Jupiter and Mars. Mercury is too close to the Sun to be seen.

Uranus is about a hand-span (15 degrees) west of Jupiter moving slowly from Pisces in Taurus. It's possible to find the planet using binoculars and a star map, although I guess an App would help here. The seventh planet is at the limit of naked-eye visibility. One would need acute vision in a dark sky for any chance to see it without optical aid. Uranus was discovered by William Herschel at 19 New King St, Bath, assisted by his sister Caroline in 1781. The discovery doubled the size of the solar system as it was then known. Our current knowledge makes us aware of material between the stars. In 2017 an extra-solar asteroid named Oumuamua passed through our solar system. It was the first discovery of its kind and surprised many astronomers when the orbit was found to originate outside our solar system.

Seven Sisters (Pleiades) is a cluster of seven (if you can count them) bright stars visible to the unaided eye. It is well placed in the south during the evenings, not far from the current position of Jupiter in the constellation of the Bull (Taurus). The stars are young, blue stars having condensed out of the same nebula and roughly the same age of about 100 million years. Greek mythology refers to the mother of the sisters, Pleione. Pleione itself is two stars (a binary), rotating around each other and almost in contact. Charles Messier (18thC French comet discover) catalogued the cluster as M45. There are 110 objects in his catalogue. To observe them all in one night is a challenge: the 'Messier Marathon', and web pages are devoted to the subject.

Eclipses: the Moon will pass into the Earth's shadow an hour before Moonset on Friday 14th March. Early risers and dog walkers might see the Moon taking on a dark appearance before Sunrise. A partial solar eclipse occurs on the morning of Saturday 29th March between 10:15 and 11:45.

Stargazer





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Steeple Aston *Golf Society*



Hello fellow golfers

We hope you are keeping well and looking forward to starting another SAGS season.

Meeting dates: We have put together another strong programme of fixtures for 2025 which includes a new venue, Olton in Solihull. By popular demand, we go back to the course we all enjoyed last year, Coventry Hearsall, and The Vale in Evesham/Pershore which we visited for the first time in 2023. Add to that two old favourites, The Springs in Wallingford and Wrag Barn near Swindon, and our fixture list is complete.

Please reserve these dates in your diaries:

The Vale: Tuesday 20th May – 12.00 meet for a 13.00 first tee

Hearsall Coventry: Tuesday 17th June – 10.00 meet for an 11.00 first tee

The Springs: Friday 18th July – 12.00 meet for a 13.00 first tee

Wrag Barn: Friday 12th September – 12.00 meet for a 13.00 first tee

Olton: Friday 10th October – tee time awaited

If you have any questions or maybe wish to join us, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Alan: 01869 340423, Chris: 01869 347173

Mike, Chris & Alan
Steeple Aston Golf Society

Steeple Aston *Garden Club*



In December members of the Garden Club enjoyed a Christmas lunch at The Holt.

No meeting in January, but on Wednesday 12th February we have a Snowdrop visit to Evenley Wood Garden with a tour of the snowdrops by Dan Winter, the Head Gardener. There will also be the chance to purchase named varieties of snowdrops. Lunch can be taken at the cafe on site.

Please contact myself, Chris Clarke Tel: 01869 347192, if you would like details of the visit or indeed how to join the Garden Club.

Chris Clarke

Secretary

The ARTS Page



We are adding an extra page this month, as a result of discussions about the Arts Page. I have curated it for some years now, very happily, but have always said that there should be more representation of the Arts scene, beyond the areas I cover, and hopefully more input on everything artistic in the area - reviews, previews etc.

Nick Cleobury

The photos below are from the 'Remembrance, Respect and Reconciliation' concert on the eve of Remembrance Sunday, when the church was packed for a performance in words and music from the Aston Singers and friends, devised by Nicholas Cleobury. The full report of this event can be found in the December issue of SAL. The concert included young singers from Dr Radcliffe's School, poetry recitals, choral and musical performers, and raised an amazing £1,174 for the Royal British Legion and the Church Roof Appeal. Congratulations to all!

Editor



Photos by Nigel Francis

The ARTS Page



Live music: open mic nights, folk clubs and more ...

• To listen to some amateur musicians perform, or if you would like to perform yourself, why not pop along to one of the open mic nights listed below. These are held in a public room and performers are miked up.

The Red Lion, Gloucester Green, Oxford (every Tuesday 8.00pm)
Royal Blenheim, Oxford (every Sunday 7.00pm)
Grapes and Tomatoes, Carterton (every Tuesday 7.30pm)
The Talbot, Stow-on-the-Wold (every Wednesday 8.00pm)
The Bell, Ducklington (1st Friday of every month 8.00pm)

For more information on the above go to James Morgan's facebook page:

[facebook.com/jamomusicagency?locale=en_GB](https://www.facebook.com/jamomusicagency?locale=en_GB)

James Morgan is a local promoter. His facebook page is also an excellent guide to gigs in the local area by professional and semi-professional musicians.

• The events below are similar, but held in a private room set aside just for musicians. They are acoustic only. Non-participants are very welcome.

The Sun, Hook Norton (1st Wednesday of every month 7.30pm)
[facebook.com/events/454534140390713?locale=en_GB](https://www.facebook.com/events/454534140390713?locale=en_GB)

Acoustic Room, The Plough, Witney (3rd Thursday of every month 8.00pm)
[facebook.com/AcousticRoomWitney/?locale=en_GB](https://www.facebook.com/AcousticRoomWitney/?locale=en_GB)

Chipping Norton Folk Club, The Chequers, Chipping Norton (2nd Monday of every month 7.45pm)
chippingnortonfolk.org.uk

• Another local promoter, particularly for lovers of Americana, is Empty Rooms: empty-rooms.com

• Also worth keeping an eye on is Oxford Folk Festival which embraces more than just traditional folk music. This year's festival will be held at various venues around Oxford from 11th-13th April. More information here: folkinoxford.co.uk/off.html

• **Steeple Aston Village Hall: Saturday 29th March 7.30pm: An evening of Americana:**

Ben Whitaker, Colin Greenway, Josie Slade and Richard MacAndrew with Michael Green (*harmonica*) and Alan Stubbersfield (*bass*).

Richard MacAndrew

Album Review

***Time Machine* by Cats in Space**

Available on Cherry Red Records

From the opening title track the intention is clear, we're travelling back in time to the 1970s with nods to artists such as The Who, Queen, ELO, Sweet, Elton John, Supertramp and John Miles. This rock album has a real 70's vibe, with lyrically themes both nostalgic and current with a few cynical observations thrown in for good measure, whilst the catchy choruses make the songs memorable. All this is captured using 21st century production techniques which should satisfy the youthful ears of today. If you like 70's rock, this album could be the cat's whiskers. Standout tracks are: 'Time Machine', 'My Father's Eyes' and 'Yesterday's Sensation'. The bonus tracks include covers of The Walker Brothers' 'No Regrets' and John Miles' 'Music', sprinkled with catnip!

Chris Neville

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## Valentine's Day traditions and superstitions

Valentine's Day (or Saint Valentine's Day) is celebrated on 14<sup>th</sup> February, when many people express their affection for one another by sending cards, flowers, chocolates and other gifts or celebrate with a tasty meal. It has become rather commercialised now, and perhaps a simple gesture is best.

There have been many Saint Valentines throughout history, but the one believed to be remembered on Valentine's Day was a Roman martyred for refusing to give up Christianity. It is also rumoured to have origins in the Roman festival of *Lupercalia*, celebrating the coming of spring and fertility rites. Over time, many traditions and superstitions have sprung up associated with this day:

- *In the Middle Ages, young men and women drew a name from a bowl to pick their valentine, then wore the name on their sleeve for a week.*
- *The first man an unmarried woman saw on 14<sup>th</sup> February would become her future husband.*
- *If a young woman saw a robin fly overhead on Valentine's Day, she would marry a sailor; if it was a sparrow, she would marry a poor man and be very happy; if she saw a goldfinch, she would marry a rich man.*
- *If the names of a girl's suitors were written on paper, wrapped in clay and placed in water, the piece that rose to the surface first would contain the name of her betrothed.*
- *Wooden love spoons carved in Wales have long been given as Valentine's Day gifts, with hearts, keys and keyholes especially popular meaning 'You unlock my heart!'*

### Declaration

the simple truths just sometimes are not said  
the words get stuck and thus remain inside  
they come to mind yet stay inside my head

confessions are a thing that I do dread  
yet truth will out especially once I'm plied  
the simple truths just sometimes are not said

and feelings that are hid to stop the red  
of blushing as my thoughts get somewhat fried  
they come to mind yet stay inside my head

what must I do to stop these feet of lead  
I said it when you then became my bride  
the simple truths just sometimes are not said

those open vows to share our daily bread  
a promise made as love's knot it was tied  
they come to mind yet stay inside my head

for many, many years we have been wed  
I love you still and think it with some pride  
the simple truths just sometimes are not said  
they come to mind yet stay inside my head

**Peter Wild**

*Photo: C Neville*



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## **BEAT**

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## In the footsteps of giants

An exciting new discovery was made at a recent dig at Dewars Farm Quarry near Bicester, that uncovered almost 200 dinosaur footprints dating from the Middle Jurassic period around 166 million years ago. The dig, carried out by teams from the Universities of Oxford and Birmingham, found five extensive trackways forming a 'dinosaur highway', the longest measuring over 150 metres in length. Four tracks were made by long-necked herbivorous sauropods, likely to be Cetiosaurus, up to 18 metres in length and related to the Diplodocus. The fifth trackway was made by the nine-metre long carnivorous Megalosaurus, with its distinctive large, three-toed feet with claws. Part of the trackway shows the tracks crossing over one another, suggesting possible interaction between the species.

The initial finding was made when Quarry worker, Gary Johnson, came across some 'unusual bumps' whilst stripping the clay back with a digger, and the experts were called in. Quarry Manager, Mark Stanway, and his team at Smiths Bletchington worked with the universities and their team of over 100 on a week-long excavation in June 2024, when they took 20,000 photographs and built detailed 3D models of the site using aerial drone technology. The tracks connect to earlier discoveries in 1997 when limestone quarrying found over 40 footprints. These exciting new finds will help provide fresh insight into how the dinosaurs walked, how fast they moved, their size and any interactions between them. Dr Duncan Murdock, earth scientist at the Oxford University Museum of Natural History (OUMNH) stated "the preservation is so detailed that we can see how the mud was deformed as the dinosaurs' feet squashed in and out. Along with other fossils like burrows, shells and plants, we can bring to life the muddy lagoon environment the dinosaurs walked through."

The story of the excavation featured in a recent BBC2 'Digging for Britain' programme hosted by Professor Alice Roberts and features in a new public exhibition 'Breaking Ground' at OUMNH. This exhibition looks at how fossils and the development of new methods and techniques have transformed our understanding of Earth's history. It explores themes through the work of William Buckland, geologist and palaeontologist, and Mary Buckland (née Morland), scientific illustrator, key names in the field of new discoveries including the first ever dinosaur named to science in 1824 – Megalosaurus, the original fossils of which can be viewed, along with photos and videos from the recently discovered Jurassic highway. As well as those powerful people associated with major institutions and publications, 'Breaking Ground' seeks to showcase the more hidden contributions of workers in colonised countries who dug for specimens, lower-status miners and quarriers in the UK and women regardless of class or wealth. They too played a significant role in shaping our understanding of the history of life on Earth.

The exhibition at the Oxford University Museum of Natural History will run until 29<sup>th</sup> September 2025 and includes a family trail and Dino discoveries.

### Carol Neville



*Photo courtesy of OUMNH*



*Photo courtesy of University of Birmingham*

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# Letter from *Westminster*

*SAL's regular epistle from our MP, Sean Woodcock*



## On the future of local government

As a councillor for 13 years, I know just how hard those involved in local government work for their residents. But local government is not working. For 14 years, councils were starved of the funds that they need to provide the services that their communities rely on. The result is libraries and youth centres closed, buses no longer running and crises in homelessness and social care.

When offers of funding came, there were either strings attached or it involved competing with your neighbouring authority in expensive bids. England is one of the most centralised countries in the developed world. The Institute for Government found that local government accounts for little over 20% of total spending in the UK, compared with around 40% or more in Germany, Belgium and other countries. England also has some of the highest levels of geographic inequality in disposable income and productivity, higher than between West Germany and the former communist East Germany.

London and the South East attract 72% of new R&D-intensive jobs, and 45% of all private investment. We must stop leaving half of the country out of our economy, and we must stop flying on only one wing. If English cities outside of the capital met their potential compared to similar cities in other countries, the national economy could be £34bn-£55bn larger per year.

By a majority of two to one, millions today think that their local economies are held back by Westminster. The English Devolution Bill White Paper is the Labour Government's plan to give those with skin in the game the tools they need to make a difference. The White Paper lays out the government's plans to rebuild local government after 14 years of mismanagement and decline. This means providing multi-year financial settlements, shifting to a fairer system which matches funding with need, and a proper partnership between central and local government. It also announces a programme of local government reorganisation, working with councils to create simpler and more stable structures capable of delivering sustainable, high-quality public services.

In Oxfordshire this means fundamental change with no more split between the services provided by the county and district councils. Instead, it will just be 'the Council' and I welcome it. The landmark English Devolution Bill will deliver changes to the law to make the devolution framework a reality and ensure local leaders across the country have the levers they need to make a difference. It's about raising living standards, improving public services and building the homes we so desperately need – all key aspects of our Plan for Change.

Best Wishes

**Sean Woodcock**

### **Sean Woodcock MP**

Member of Parliament for Banbury (Including Chipping Norton, Charlbury and the North Oxfordshire Villages)

House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA

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## The Show Must Go On!

We were tipped off by an eagle-eyed villager who spotted Steeple Aston featured in *The Oxford Mail* in January. The story surrounded the former Steeple Aston Players' bid to put on their Christmas pantomime in 1979, a production of 'Cinderella'. When a nasty car accident affected two key players, threatening to scupper the event, fellow villagers came to the rescue.

The photo shows three of the cast members rehearsing – Peter Roberts (left) who stepped in as the new Buttons, Claire McKinley played Cinderella, and Peter's father, Ron, performed as Baron Hardup. Steeple Aston rector, Canon Michael Hayter, wrote and directed the production, which was organised by the village hall committee to raise funds for the building. Dick East, who was to have played Buttons, was treated at the Horton Hospital in Banbury suffering from broken bones, and his wife, Lorna, from the chorus, was also injured in the Oxford-Banbury Road crash. In spite of these unfortunate circumstances, everyone stepped up and the show was a roaring success.



Steeple Aston Players production of *Cinderella* with (l to r): Peter Roberts (Buttons), Claire McKinley (Cinderella) and Peter's father, Ron (Baron Hardup). (Photo: *The Oxford Mail*, 11 January 2025)

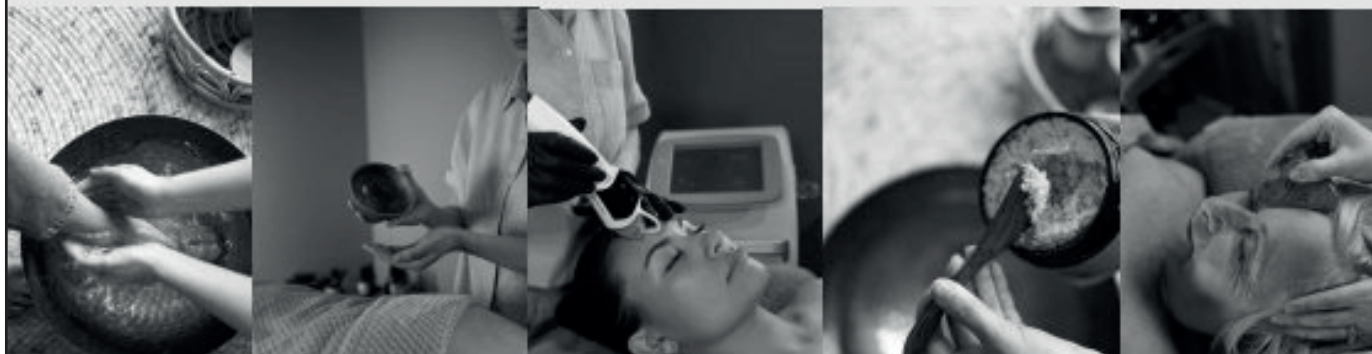
If you are interested in stories and photographs of our local community in times gone by, we have plans for a regular feature of '*Pictures from the Past*' in forthcoming issues of SAL, in addition to the existing series of articles and snippets, courtesy of Steeple Aston Village Archive (SAVA).


***Editor***

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# Church Services



## February 2025

|                                       | North Aston                                                     | Steeple Aston                                                    | Tackley                                                  |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Sunday<br/>2<sup>nd</sup> Feb</b>  | <b>9.30am</b><br>Holy Communion<br><i>Book of Common Prayer</i> | <b>11.00am</b><br>Holy Communion<br><i>Book of Common Prayer</i> | <b>5.30pm</b><br>Evensong                                |
|                                       |                                                                 |                                                                  |                                                          |
| <b>Sunday<br/>9<sup>th</sup> Feb</b>  | <b>9.30am</b><br>Morning Prayer                                 | <b>11.00am</b><br>Family Worship                                 | <b>5.30pm</b><br>Evensong                                |
|                                       |                                                                 |                                                                  |                                                          |
| <b>Sunday<br/>16<sup>th</sup> Feb</b> | <b>9.30am</b><br>Holy Communion                                 | <b>11.00am</b><br>Holy Communion                                 | <b>5.30pm</b><br>Evensong                                |
|                                       |                                                                 |                                                                  |                                                          |
| <b>Sunday<br/>23<sup>rd</sup> Feb</b> | <b>9.30am</b><br>Morning Prayer                                 | <b>11.00am</b><br>Morning Prayer                                 | <b>9.30am</b><br>Family Communion                        |
|                                       |                                                                 |                                                                  | <a href="http://www.sntchurch.com">www.sntchurch.com</a> |

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0703 0817 0920 1020 1620 1737 1840 1932 2022 2147 2253

##### Saturdays

0721 0821 0931 then hourly to 1531 1641 1746 1849 1937 2037 2216  
0809 0909 1019 1619 1729 1834 1932 2022 2147 2253

##### Sundays and most public holidays

0907 1037 1207 1337 1507 1637 1806  
0953 1123 1253 1423 1553 1723 1852

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0837 0947 1045 1545 1703 1809 1909 2006 2053 2142 2242 0009

##### Saturdays

0758 0908 1008 then hourly to 1608 1718 1828 1927 2025 2113 2213 2341  
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| Plus Refundable Deposit | £200                        |

### Hall Only

|                         |                   |
|-------------------------|-------------------|
| Represented Clubs       | £9 (up to 3 hrs)  |
| Others                  | £17 (up to 3 hrs) |
| plus Refundable Deposit | £200              |

### Committee Room

|                   |                                    |
|-------------------|------------------------------------|
| Represented Clubs | £6 (up to 3 hrs)                   |
| Others            | £12 (up to 3 hrs)                  |
| Letting Agent     | Angela Smith (07734 112967)        |
| Chairperson       | Barbara Brewer (01869 340423)      |
| Secretary         | Margaret Bulleyment (01869 347346) |

Represented Clubs must nominate a trustee to attend Village Hall committee meetings.

Discounted rate for represented clubs – 15% for six block bookings.

## Steeple and Middle Aston rubbish bin collection day Is Thursday.

### February 2025

|                  |                |
|------------------|----------------|
| 6 <sup>th</sup>  | Blue and Brown |
| 13 <sup>th</sup> | Green          |
| 20 <sup>th</sup> | Blue and Brown |
| 27 <sup>th</sup> | Green          |



### March 2025

|                  |                |
|------------------|----------------|
| 6 <sup>th</sup>  | Blue and Brown |
| 13 <sup>th</sup> | Green          |
| 20 <sup>th</sup> | Blue and Brown |
| 27 <sup>th</sup> | Green          |

## Food caddy is collected weekly

Batteries and small electrical items packed in clear plastic bags and placed on the top of any bin lid are collected weekly.

## Steeple Aston Sport & Recreation Centre and Field

| Letting charges                                                                                        |              |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| Social Function peak times<br>(Daily up to 6 hours from 6pm)                                           | £55.00       |
| Social Function off-peak times<br>(Daily up to 5 hours before 6pm)                                     | £27.50       |
| Meeting of represented clubs<br>(Daily per session up to 2 hours)                                      | £11.00       |
| Caution money for private lettings                                                                     | £100.00      |
| Block bookings for social events<br>15% discount for 6 or more bookings in advance                     |              |
| Contact us if you wish to hire the field or use the changing facilities                                |              |
| Letting Agent – Angela Smith<br><a href="mailto:rec.trust@googlemail.com">rec.trust@googlemail.com</a> | 07734 112967 |
| Chair – Torquil McLusky                                                                                | 01869 347914 |
| Treasurer – Chris Cooper                                                                               | 01869 347173 |

- The Sport & Rec is available to hire
- The "Friendly" space - the ideal venue for smaller parties, children's parties and get togethers
- Need more space? Hire the Sport & Rec and Village Hall together
- Fantastic playground just outside
- Internet
- Full disabled access, toilets, showers and changing rooms
- High quality grass playing field with power supply for football, marquees, events etc. (contact us for details and availability)
- Small kitchen and separate bar
- Room for around 50 seated
- Brand-new projector with retractable screen
- Car Parking
- Regular events include Home Education, Babies & Toddlers, Brownies, After School Club, Bridge and of course the Football Club (it's been going since 1898!)
- Next event Quiz & Chilli Night March 22<sup>nd</sup> – more details to follow!





# Steeple Aston Calendar

Check the village website at [steepleaston.org.uk/home/calendar](http://steepleaston.org.uk/home/calendar) for any changes.

Please send details of events for March and April to [editorsalife@gmail.com](mailto:editorsalife@gmail.com)

|                             |                                               |                |                         |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|----------------|-------------------------|
| <b>February</b>             |                                               |                |                         |
| Saturday 8th February       | Music for Pleasure                            | Village Hall   | 7.30pm                  |
| Sunday 9th February         | Snowdrop Sunday                               | Churchyard     | 2.30-4.30pm             |
| Tuesday 11th February       | WI: Dogs for Good                             | Village Hall   | 7.00pm                  |
| <b>Friday 14th February</b> | <b>SAL March copy &amp; advert deadlines</b>  |                |                         |
| Tuesday 18th February       | Valentines: Adventures of a Church Bellhanger | Village Hall   | 2.30pm                  |
| Saturday 22nd February      | Farmers Market                                | Deddington     | 9.00-12.30              |
| Monday 24th February        | Parish Council Meeting                        | S & R Building | 7.30pm                  |
| <b>March</b>                |                                               |                |                         |
| Tuesday 11th March          | WI: Sugar and Spice                           | Village Hall   | 7.00pm                  |
| <b>Friday 14th March</b>    | <b>SAL April copy &amp; advert deadlines</b>  |                |                         |
| Monday 17th March           | Parish Council Meeting                        | S & R Building | 7.30pm                  |
| Tuesday 18th March          | Valentines: Lee Wilkinson entertains          | Village Hall   | 2.30pm                  |
| Saturday 22nd March         | Farmers Market                                | Deddington     | 9.00-12.30              |
| Saturday 22nd March         | Quiz & Chilli Night                           | S & R Building | TBC                     |
| Sunday 23rd March           | Spring Show                                   | Village Hall   | 2.30-4.30pm             |
| Sunday 30th March           | SACS: Nautical Spring Concert                 | Village Hall   | 6.30pm for 7.00pm start |
| <b>SAVE THE DATE!</b>       |                                               |                |                         |
| Tuesday 8th April           | WI: History of Science                        | Village Hall   | 7.00pm                  |
| <b>Saturday 12th April</b>  | <b>SAL May copy &amp; advert deadlines</b>    |                |                         |
| Tuesday 15th April          | Valentines: Chrissie's Owls                   | Village Hall   | 2.30pm                  |
| Saturday 26th April         | Farmers Market                                | Deddington     | 9.00-12.30              |
| Monday 28th April           | Parish Council Meeting                        | S & R Building | 7.30pm                  |
| Monday 5th - 9th May        | Valentines: Holiday                           | Hayling Island |                         |
| Saturday 10th May           | 'We'll Meet Again': VE Day-80th               | Village Hall   | 6.30pm for 7.00pm start |
| Saturday 21st June          | SACS: Summer Party Concert                    | Village Hall   | 6.30pm for 7.00pm start |

**Choral Society Rehearsals.** Village Hall - 7.45pm - Mondays  
**Badminton.** Village Hall - 10am -12.30pm - Tuesdays  
**Bell Ringing practice.** Church Tower - 7.30pm - Tuesdays  
**Walking Netball.** Village Hall - 10.15am - Wednesdays  
**Brownies.** Sport & Rec Centre - 6pm - 7.30pm - Wednesdays  
**Toddler Group.** Sport & Rec Centre - 9.30am -11.30am - Thursdays  
**Badminton.** Village Hall - 8pm - Thursdays  
**Village History Centre (SAVA).** 10am - 12 noon - Saturdays

**Steeple Aston Life is published by Steeple Aston Life Committee**

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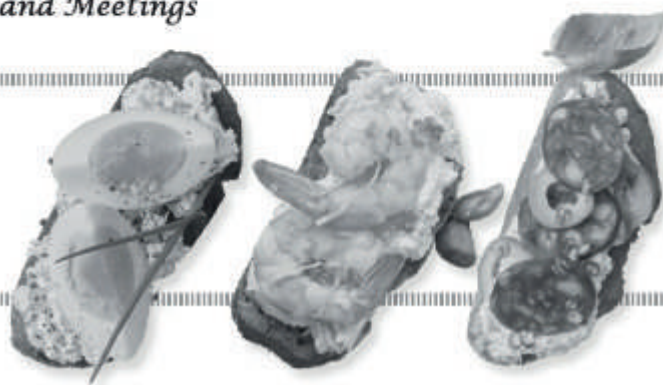
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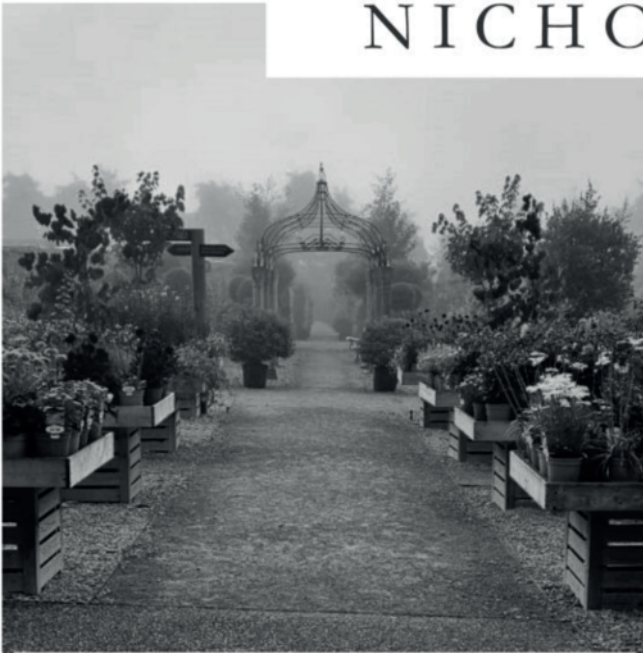
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