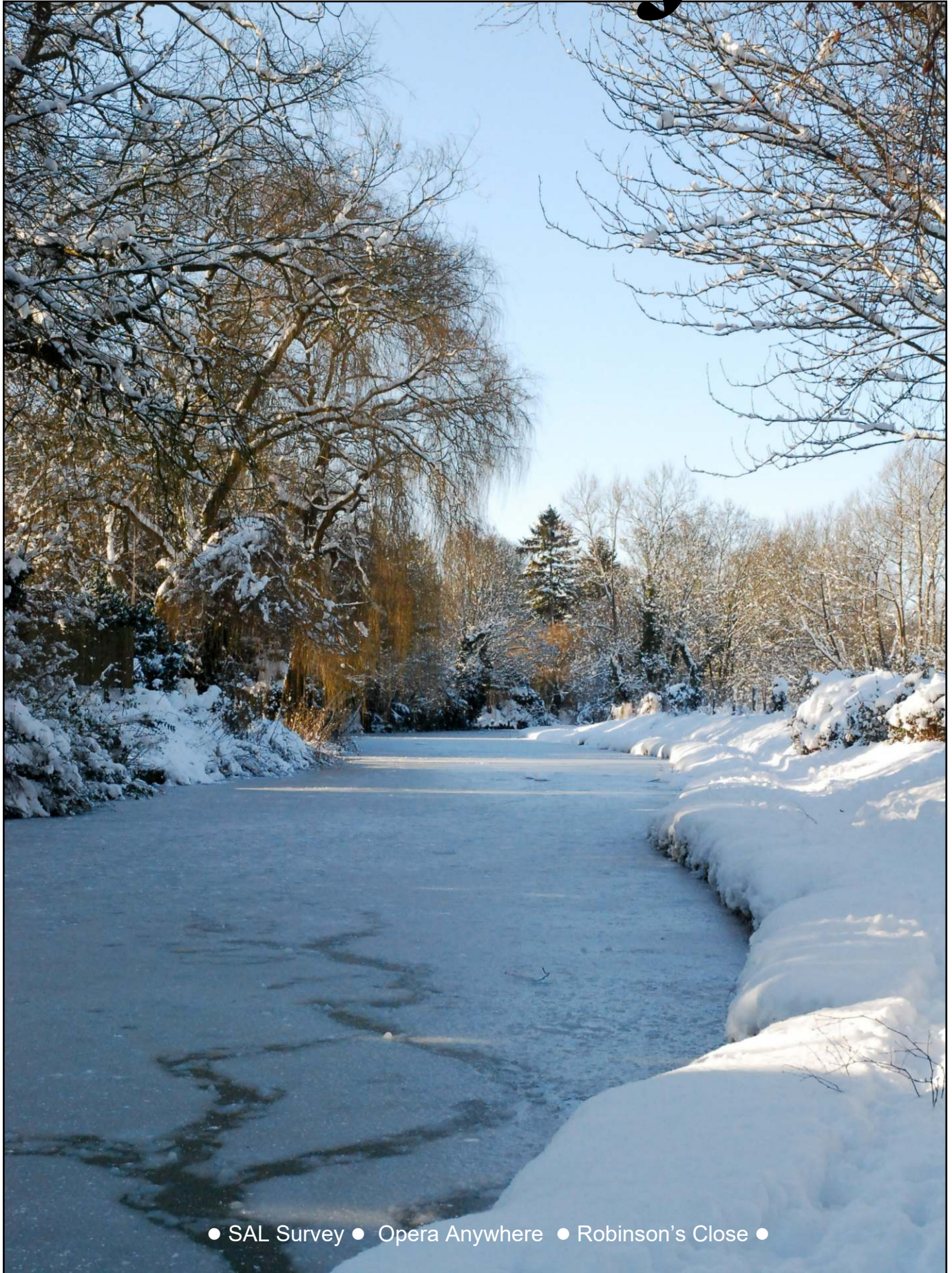


# Steeple Aston

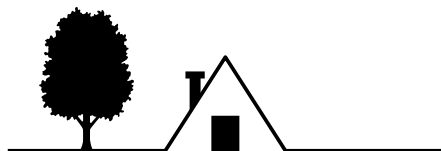
February 2026

Issue No. 630

# *Life*



● SAL Survey ● Opera Anywhere ● Robinson's Close ●



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Contributions are welcome. Please email [editorsalife@gmail.com](mailto:editorsalife@gmail.com)

Cover: Crystalline canal Photo by: Chris Neville

## Steeple Aston *Life*

### COPY

All articles and letters to  
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### COPY DEADLINES

The copy deadline for the March 2026 issue is  
Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> February

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Badminton (Thursday - eve)		Alison Moran	01869 347033
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Brownies		Fiona McLoone	01869 340132
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Cherwell District Council	Castle Quay, Banbury		01295 227001
Cherwell District Councillor:	Deddington Ward	Cllr David Rogers	David.rogers@cherwell-dc.gov.uk
Oxfordshire County Cllr	Deddington Ward	Cllr Gareth Epps	Gareth.epps@oxfordshire.gov.uk
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Village Emergency Telephone System			690691
Village Website	Editor	Jenny Bell-steepleaston.org.uk	01869 943573
Volunteer Driver Service (North Oxfordshire)		<a href="https://livewell.oxfordshire.gov.uk/services/2561">https://livewell.oxfordshire.gov.uk/services/2561</a>	0300 303 0125
Walking Netball	Wed.- 10.15am	Merrill Bayley	01869 347802
WI	President	Julie Hillier	01869 349185





*"...folly is not always folly."*  
Jane Austen

## Steeple Aston *Life*

February 2026  
Issue No.630

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# Editorial



Recently we experienced a blast of wintry weather, with subzero temperatures, frost and a smattering of snow – all very pretty from the window, but not so easy to negotiate on foot or by car! The photo below shows how heavy snowfall some years back forced the road to be closed by the lights near Rousham bridge.

This month we send heartfelt thoughts and condolences following the loss of some well-known and much-loved villagers – we hope to include obituaries to celebrate their lives in future issues.

Now, this is where we ask for your help! Steeple Aston Life is *your* magazine, so we thought it would be good to check we're covering the subjects you wish to read about, how often you want to receive the magazine, and for any ideas on how SAL could be improved and built upon to meet your needs. With this in mind, you will find a two-page pull-out survey in the centre of this issue, for you to complete and return to us in the boxes provided around the village. Alternatively, just use the web link or QR code to access the survey online, and have your say. We look forward to receiving your feedback over the next month.

This issue also includes an update on Greg, Graham and Cara's mission to Ukraine in December; Margaret gives us a run-down on the 'Opera Anywhere' performance; and Martin helps to uncover how Robinson's Close came by its name. Don't forget to have your say on the Neighbourhood Plan before the consultation period ends on 15<sup>th</sup> February.

Enjoy your tasty pancakes/Valentine delights/short month (delete as applicable)!

**Carol**



*Some years ago, the Beeches road was closed by heavy snowfall*  
Photo by: Carol Neville

# Steeple Aston Noticeboard



## Village loses much-loved residents

We are very sorry to announce the recent loss of three much-loved Steeple Aston residents: Malcolm Hensher, Jessie Coleman and Peter Stone. We hope to include obituaries in forthcoming issues of Steeple Aston Life. Sincere condolences to their family and friends. Funeral details will be posted on the SA website and Facebook.

**Malcolm Hensher:** *It is with great sadness that we report the death of Malcolm Hensher on 5<sup>th</sup> January. Malcolm and Joan moved into Grange Park in 1993. He immediately joined the bell ringing team at Steeple Aston, and was very involved in church life, serving on the Church Council, and was Churchwarden from 2009 until 2017. His funeral will take place at Steeple Aston Church on **Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> January at 2.00pm** followed by a family cremation the following day. At Malcolm's request, there will be a special peal of bells before the service. Donations in memory of Malcolm will be split between Steeple Aston Church and The Oxford Diocesan Bell Fund.*

**Jessie Coleman:** *Jessie sadly passed away on 19<sup>th</sup> December aged 91 years. She was a much-loved member of the village for over 60 years, living at Nizewell Head with her husband, Ron, and children Nina, Elaine, Neil and Adele. Her funeral will take place on **Friday 30<sup>th</sup> January at 12.00 noon at Steeple Aston Church.** Family flowers only and donations (if desired) to The Salvation Army or The Smile Train charity c/o Funeral Directors: D L Hancock Ltd, Bicester. Following the service, all are warmly welcome to join the family at Steeple Aston village hall to celebrate Jessie's life together.*

**Peter Stone:** *We are sad to report the passing of Peter (Pete) on 7<sup>th</sup> January. He and his wife, Gwen, who ran a local tailoring service, raised their family in Steeple Aston, and lived for many years at The Nest at the top of Paines Hill, a property they renovated in 1986 along with their beautiful garden. Details of Peter's funeral will be posted on the village website and Facebook page.*

**Rest In Peace**

## Handbell collection 2025 for The Alzheimer's Society

Last night, the handbell ringers, young and old, gathered together to count the money collection. It is a lovely opportunity to gather as a team (if you fancy learning next year, it's not all walking around the village in the cold), have a few drinks, eat Christmas leftovers and, of course, count the cash. It gets tipped out onto the table and everyone helps out. This year's collection raised a staggering **£2,155.08** - just outstanding! This is because of all of your generous donations, so thank you from the bottom of our hearts. The charity also benefits from an additional £63 from those who gift-aided their donation. We will retain some money to cover the cost of insuring the bells and maintenance, donating £2,000 to the charity. The church also collected for the charity and a quiz was held in the Red Lion for them as well, so a tremendous effort by the village collectively.

If you enjoyed the bells, and would like to be part of the fun next Christmas, please do drop me a line. No musical skill needed, just a recognition of the tunes can help. Thank you!

**Vicky Clifton** 07817025948 [vmcstedman@btinternet.com](mailto:vmcstedman@btinternet.com)

## Farewell to Roger

A stalwart of village life for many years, Roger Mason moved to Monmouth in Wales in January, to be closer to two of his daughters. Roger had been very active in the 1980s campaign against USAF jets at Upper Heyford, chaired the Dr Radcliffe's School Trust board, sang in the Choral Society, wrote pantomimes and appeared in shows put on by the Steeple Aston Players, and much more besides. After some years at The Grange, he and Margaret built *The Court House* off North Side and lived happily there until Margaret's death in 2022. We all wish Roger our very best for another chapter in a rewarding life.

**Martin Lipson**



## *Editor's Letterbox*



### **Pothole letter – a response**

In the light of previous correspondence, we have been advised to clarify the following points about Fix my Street and the County Council's pothole policy.

Under the Fix My Street (FMS) guidelines for reporting, the minimum size of a pothole to be considered for repair is at least 150mm x 150mm width and more than 40mm depth. The defect mentioned on Paines Hill was reported to FMS and found to be 30mm deep and therefore not meeting the pothole criteria. The report was therefore removed, although it will be kept under close observation by the team and attended to when/if it deteriorates.

With regard to the criticism of the repair and how long it lasted – for many years the Sweep and Fill (S&F) method of repair was used as a temporary measure until the road could be resurfaced. With budget constraints meaning less frequent resurfacing, OCC agreed to introduce Cut and Fill (C&F) repairs which are permanent, and all repairs are now addressed in this way. Once this happened, it effectively meant that the village repair squad, which for insurance reasons is only allowed to do S&F repairs, were no longer able to take the initiative and respond directly. The original repair on Paines Hill is clearly S&F so several years old, and may have been one identified by the village repair squad before the introduction of permanent repairs, in which case it has lasted remarkably well. It will probably need a permanent repair in due course and will continue to be monitored.

**Ed.**

### **Your chance to comment on the Neighbourhood Plan**

Cherwell District Council is holding a public consultation on the draft Modified Neighbourhood Development Plan for the Mid-Cherwell Neighbourhood Area. The consultation period runs from Friday 19th December until Sunday 15th February 2026.

The Plan proposes policies which will be used to determine the approval of planning applications within the Neighbourhood Area. It covers Steeple and Middle Aston along with nine other local villages. The plan has been revised following the departure of Heyford Park from the MCNP Forum. There has now been an application for planning permission for a further 9,000 homes at Heyford Park. The remaining villages in the Forum have strenuously objected to this proposed development as have several hundred individuals.

The draft Plan and supporting documents available for public comment can be found online at [cherwell.citizenspace.com/](http://cherwell.citizenspace.com/). There are also hard copies available to view at locations around the district. The nearest ones to us are The Grain Store Café at The Hatchery in Middle Aston, and Kizzie's Canalside Bistro and Café, Station Road, Lower Heyford.

You can post your comments online at [cherwell.citizenspace.com/](http://cherwell.citizenspace.com/). Alternatively, you can send your comments by email to [NeighbourhoodPlanningConsultation@cherwell-dc.gov.uk](mailto:NeighbourhoodPlanningConsultation@cherwell-dc.gov.uk) or by post to: Planning Policy, Cherwell District Council, 39 Castle Quay, Banbury, OX16 5FD.



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# Driving Ukraine



In mid-December, Graham Porcas and Greg Elphick from Steeple Aston and videographer Cara Cox from Middle Aston drove a convoy taking aid and vehicles to Lviv in Ukraine, organised by *Driving Ukraine*, a charity started in 2022 by Fynn Watt from Deddington. Read Graham's fascinating account on SA website [steepleaston.org.uk/](http://steepleaston.org.uk/) which recounts how he got involved, and their three-day drive across Europe, together with photos from their mission.

In summary: 'After catching the ferry from Dover on 11<sup>th</sup> December, we drove across France, Belgium and Holland into Germany for our intended destination at Dortmund. The next morning, we were visited by local police objecting to the Christmas lights fitted to the trucks and us running the engines to check all was OK before we set off, this time destination Zabrze in Poland. Another long day's driving, not helped by appalling convoy discipline and lack of VHS protocol on the walkie talkies. The military and police members of our group were unimpressed but we arrived, after some quite strenuous driving in thick fog, being carved up by Polish drivers who seemed to have no concern about driving on a motorway at 70+ mph with almost zero visibility! Another early start, destination Lviv in Ukraine, not far but expecting long border delays. I diverted by Krakow airport to drop off Greg who was visiting Auschwitz, planning to meet him later. I set off alone to catch up with the convoy, travelling cross country on minor roads to the less busy border crossing at Budomierz, where we encountered our first border bureaucracy; illogical delays and general time wasting, finally getting through in just over three hours, then onto the workshop in Lviv to hand over our trucks. Now, the ambulance decided to play up and we had over an hour's wait in the cold whilst the team tried everything to get it going which, luckily, they did. Driving through Lviv centre was difficult, as the cobbled streets of the beautiful old city are a nightmare for convoy driving on a wet night, but we made it, being met by our Ukrainian hosts with coffee, cake and speeches - most welcome, although frankly most of us just wanted a beer and an early night.

Next morning, we drove to the city military cemetery, The Field of Mars. Witnessing so many new graves was very thought-provoking and I admit I was close to tears seeing highly decorated graves depicting so many young men and women in their prime. Even the hardened military types amongst us were affected, one of whom comforted a local woman attending the graves of her husband and son. Somewhat chastened, we drove to a civic reception with the town mayor, where we were treated as guests of honour and shown photos of the cemetery in 2022 with just a few graves, now full, plus photos of drone damage in October, now repaired. We met veterans and technicians in medical care, building support vehicles and drones. One veteran gave me a bear hug, standing on his one remaining leg, passionately explaining how much these vehicles meant, in his case probably saving his life after being rescued from the front line shortly after having his leg blown off. One of his colleagues, also rescued, later died in hospital. Another veteran said how much they value UK support, not just the trucks, but knowing that those outside Ukraine cared for and valued what they were suffering for meant a lot and helped them continue the fight. It made us very aware that these brave men and women are fighting, not only for their country, but for us too. We had a final celebratory night out in Krakow town square, followed by the plane home. Quite a trip. Thank you all again for your support.' Find out more about Driving Ukraine on their website [drivingukraine.org/](http://drivingukraine.org/)

**Graham Porcas**

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**Kizzy**

**What breed are you?** Domestic Shorthair (good old Moggy). Colour Classy Tuxedo.

**How old are you?** 14 & a half years (that half is *most* important!).

**History:** As a tiny kitten, I was found (with my sister) dumped in a binbag in an Essex car park, taken to a vet & due to be euthanised with rescue centres full, saved at 11th hour and rehomed to Steeple; at 18 months, I survived an inoperable tumour on my intestines; now being treated for pancreatitis, inflammatory bowel disease and hyperthyroidism, but still going strong - with slightly fewer of my 9 lives intact!

**Do you have any nicknames?** Amongst others, the 'enigma' for defying the odds!

**Interests?** Seeking out the warmest, sunniest spots in my home and garden.

**If I ruled the world for a day:** I would pass a law making it compulsory for all felines to have cat milk on tap! Mmmmmmmmm.....

**One piece of advice I would give my younger self:** Keep your servants on their toes at all times of the day and night! Remember, we have been worshipped for eons.

**Mortal enemies:** Dogs; any cat that dares to venture into my domain; and workmen in boiler suits and heavy boots (don't ask).

**Best friend:** My sis, Holly, was my bestie until I sadly lost her on the road 5 years ago.

**Things I am asked the most:** Is she really? (when told my age), as I've worn pretty well and still enjoy playtime with my flippy fish and catnip-filled heart.

**Local recommendation:** My servants are pretty good at meeting my needs, but don't think I'm about to share!

**Anything else that's special about me:** I love to snuggle under the duvet while my servants are slumbering; or make for the litter tray just as meals are being served!

## Valentine's blooms, Happy Pets

Before you choose that romantic gesture of flowers or plants for Valentines' Day, remember to check that they're pet safe, as some blooms can be harmful to our dear companions. For instance, lilies are especially dangerous for cats, as eating even the smallest amount can cause serious kidney problems. Amaryllis plants may look seriously impressive, but can lead to nasty tummy upsets, vomiting and tremors. You should also keep azaleas and rhododendrons out of reach, as they contain toxins that can harm your pet, along with daffodils, tulips and ivy. Safe options include roses, stocks, freesias and antirrhinum (snapdragons).

**Happy Valentines Day!**

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## Ardley Fields Recycling Centre – book before you visit

From 14<sup>th</sup> January 2026, you must book a slot online before visiting a household waste recycling centre. Bookings are available up to two weeks in advance or 30 minutes prior to your visit, subject to availability.

Booking your slot is easy:

- Enter your details
- Choose a household waste recycling centre
- Enter the type of waste you are bringing
- Choose a date and time

You will receive a confirmation email with all the necessary details, which explains what to do if you have any chargeable waste, and your weekly free allowance. If you are unable to book online, you can book by calling the Customer Service Centre (01865 519800) Monday to Friday.

On the day of your visit, please bring proof of address, such as:

- A driving licence
- A recent utility bill
- A recent Council Tax bill

This is to prove you are an Oxfordshire resident and are eligible to access our sites for free. If you are not an Oxfordshire resident, you will need to pay £15 per visit to use one of our household waste and recycling centres, paid on arrival (contactless payments).

Sorting your recycling: Separate all the recyclable items from your waste to make your visit quicker and easier. Use our waste wizard tool if you're unsure what can be recycled. There are sorting areas available on-site if you're unable to sort this before your visit. Sorting items for recycling helps to reduce the amount of waste sent for incineration or to landfill, which is cheaper and better for the environment.

Van and trailer permits: Current permit holders will need to apply for a new permit via the website; the number of permitted visits is reduced from 12 to 10 per year; trailers need a permit and must be no longer than 2.4m in length. Vehicles with ramps/tipping mechanisms are not permitted (apart from customers with disabilities), and horseboxes will no longer be permitted.

**Oxfordshire County Council**



## Football Focus

There's no match report this month as Steeple Aston FC have enjoyed a well-earned break over the Christmas period (lengthened into the New Year somewhat by the weather), so here is our mid(ish)-season update, having played 10 out of 16 league games. Our first four games (September-October) saw us lose two, draw one and we failed to field a team on another occasion. Since then, the team has had a fantastic run, winning five out of six and scoring 16, so we now sit mid-table with 16 points and in position to kick on for the remainder of the season. To set this in context, over the whole of last year, we only scored 17 and ended up on 8 points (although that was one division higher). This truly is a brilliant turnaround and huge congratulations to the team, as well as Stuart Baillie, as interim manager.

All upcoming fixtures are on the village website, so please do come out to support if you can spare a few minutes: this is your team, Steeple Aston! Thank you.

**Spyro Markesinis**



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# Steeple Aston Spring Show

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**Sunday 22nd March**

**2:30—4:30**

**Village Hall**

**Fir Lane, OX25 4SF**

**Admission £1 Adults—U16s go free**

---

**Teas & Cakes**

**Plant stall   Raffle   Show exhibits**

**Family friendly activities!**

Entries are welcome from all, no matter your age or skill level!

Copies of the schedule are available from the village shop,  
or visit the website:

**[www.steepleaston.org.uk/clubs-societies/gardening/](http://www.steepleaston.org.uk/clubs-societies/gardening/)**





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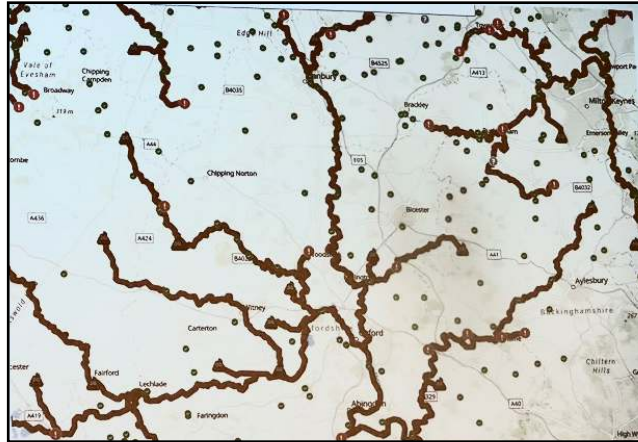
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Julie Hillier started the first meeting of 2026 with information about upcoming events: a local WI walk on Friday 30<sup>th</sup> January; a coffee morning on 2<sup>nd</sup> February hosted by Sally Cooper, to raise money for Katharine House Hospice; and lunch at the Royal Sun on Friday 6<sup>th</sup> February. Looking further ahead, contact Tina Ferguson if you would like to join a trip on 7<sup>th</sup> May, to see 'The Beekeeper of Aleppo' at Oxford Playhouse, with supper afterwards. Merrill Bayley encouraged people to try Walking Netball in the village hall at 10.15am every Wednesday. Suitable for any level of ability, it is easy to join in and requires no previous experience. Hildy Frenken thanked members for their generous response to the appeal for wounded servicemen and women in Ukraine. The conflict does not look like ending any time soon, so we may well be making up boxes again next Christmas. Members then voted for which of the five resolutions they would like the WI to choose as the focus for action this year.

Finally, Julie introduced the evening's speaker, Sue Smith, Climate Ambassador for the Oxford Federation of WIs. Sue started by giving some statistics, which clearly show not only that the climate is changing, but that the *rate* of change is increasing. Sue talked about our rivers. Most of us were aware that sewage is pumped into the rivers, but thought this only happened rarely, in exceptional circumstances. In fact, our Victorian sewerage system is no longer fit for purpose, and so this happens *all the time*. Sue showed us records for the previous day at Thames Water's treatment plant in Heyford which showed that on that day, sewage had been pumped into the River Cherwell for 17.5 hours! She also showed us a map of the waterways in this area (photo above), and explained that those coloured brown on the map had sewage pumped into them. In other words, she said, this was a map of the poo in the rivers of our local area, and it was a shocking picture!

The water companies are fined for breaches, but the punishments are always a long time coming, and the water companies are not held accountable in real time. For instance, Thames Water paid £104.5 million to Ofwat in 2025 for breaches they had committed *four years previously*, in 2021.

Sue told us that wet wipes are a major pollutant - although described as 'flushable', wipes are not biodegradable. They combine with fat to build up huge 'fatbergs' which block the sewage system, and have to be removed manually. Dirty water poses health risks such as *e.coli* to wild swimmers and surfers; in addition, instances of polio in London have been linked to pollution in the Thames.

It was a fascinating and very informative talk, and made us all think about what we can do to improve the situation. Sue encouraged us to talk to our MP, to protest, to write to the water companies, and to make those responsible for the cleanliness of our rivers more answerable.

Next month the speaker is our own member, Hildy Frenken, who will tell us about walking the Camino de Santiago.

**Cathy Lawday**



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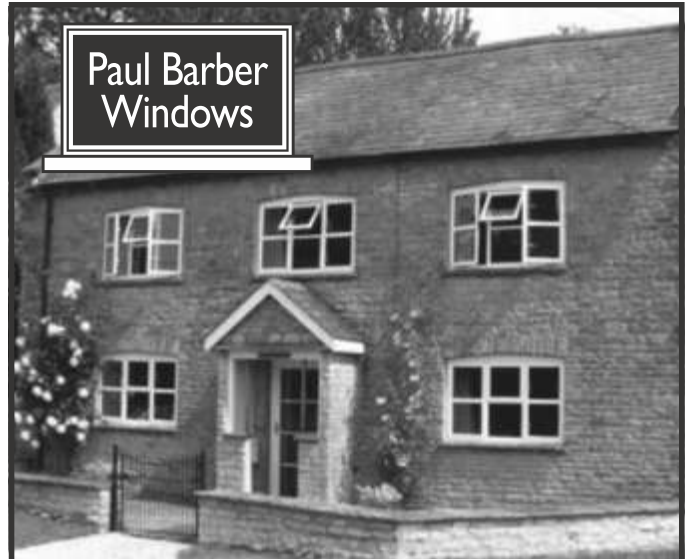
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# The ARTS Page



## It was 50 years ago today ...

How many of the albums of 50 years ago stick in your memory? Do you recall Bob Dylan's *Desire*, which caused a stir with the song *Hurricane*, a passionate assertion that the boxer Rubin *Hurricane* Carter had been framed for murder? How about the Eagles' *Hotel California*, which became one of the biggest selling albums of all time? Steve Miller's *Fly Like an Eagle* was named album of the year by *Rolling Stone* magazine. Joni Mitchell's *Heijira* heralded the start of her experimentation with a more jazz-fused approach. The Rolling Stones' *Black and Blue* came out to a very mixed reception, and controversy over the way it was promoted. You may be familiar with all those, whether you were around at the time or not; but there are a couple of albums from that era which might have escaped your attention, and which might provide some enjoyable listening through the dark and wintry early months of 2026.

The first is Ry Cooder's *Chicken Skin Music*, an eccentric album that is unconfined by geographical borders, featuring styles from outside the USA, and a variety of rhythms, genres and instruments. For example, Ben E King's *Stand by Me* is performed as a gospel song; Jim Reeves' *He'll Have to Go* is given a bolero rhythm. Cooder is joined on the album by a large coterie of excellent musicians. He himself plays an extraordinary number of different instruments: among them bajo sexto, mandolin, mandola, bottleneck guitar, French accordion, electric guitar, slack-key guitar, tiple, and Hawaiian guitar. Andy Childs in *Zig-Zag* magazine November 1976 wrote "... there's so much music here, so much fascinating and enlightening music." He goes on to call the album "... both educational and ... immensely enjoyable". And don't just take his word for it. *Time* magazine called it "... a pure joy ... a work of art even."

Another gem is Graham Parker's *Howlin' Wind*. Parker is often cited as a kind of proto-punk rocker. The tracks *Don't Ask Me Questions* and *Back to Schooldays*, respectively railing against God and the education system, justifiably earning him the reputation of being an 'angry young man'. However, that doesn't really do justice to his unique blend of rock and roll, R&B, reggae and folk. As well as the wonderfully straightforward arrangements of the songs, what makes them so striking is the directness and simplicity of the lyrics and the passion of Parker's vocals. He told *Sounds* magazine: "I feel strongly about the words, having written them. I get very full of energy ... I want them to feel gritty. I've always wanted a voice like I've got now and the songs I've got now so it's quite a fulfilling thing to see people affected by it. They listen to the lyrics and they know what I mean ..."

### Songsmith



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## THE VALENTINE CLUB

Daffodils are showing their heads and snowdrops have decided to make an appearance, so it must be getting nearer to spring. As described in the January issue, the Christmas dinner went off well with 86 sitting down for a fabulous meal, followed by entertainment from, firstly, the Pre-school and their superb singing which certainly puts me to shame. Followed by Glyn, who sang his way through the decades and encouraging audience participation. Then, for many of us, time for a rest and building up energy for 2026. I think club members might need some energy as we have a full programme of events and three holidays planned. Trips by rail and river, historic houses, museums and what I hope proves to be some superb entertainers and speakers.

We started off with the return of an old favourite. Yes, Elvis came back for one day only. Not only did the great man arrive, but we welcomed some new members to swell the crowd. Membership is now back to 100! This in turn has reduced the waiting list, but we still have over 20 seniors patiently waiting to join this group of over-grown teenagers. I guess, to accommodate everyone wanting to join in the fun, we could request a larger village hall, but not sure who to ask and how well the idea might go down! Now, for February, we welcome Hayley, who has served many years as a police crime-scene investigator with the Metropolitan police. She is telling us all about her exploits and the work of the investigation team. In the hope that our members actually read this, please be on your best behaviour, as it's embarrassing to see any over 60s dragged out of a village facility in front of friends or possibly, accomplices!

The Valentine Club survives extremely well, mostly down to the amazing support provided by the members themselves, but with coach hire at around £850, speakers and entertainers at £150 and all the other expenses accumulated by a club of this size, finances are always in the back of the mind. We are extremely grateful to organisations like OCVA and other local bodies that provide grant aid, but without the support of all those who gamble a very small amount on The Cherwell Lottery (in support of The Valentine Club), we would struggle to provide such an amazing programme of events. If you would like to support our club, please subscribe to The Cherwell Lottery where 50% comes directly to the club and you have a better chance of winning than most lottery schemes. Last year, we had two winners of £250 and numerous smaller prizes, all for just £1 per week. Google Cherwell Lottery support The Valentine Club and you could win £25,000! To find out more, simply visit our website on [valentineclub.wixsit.com/aston](http://valentineclub.wixsit.com/aston) (log-on to the village website; go to 'clubs and societies' and click on The Valentine Club link), keep up-to-date on the village website [steepleaston.org.uk](http://steepleaston.org.uk) or use that old-fashioned thing called a telephone and call me on 01869 340512.

Thank you to everyone who has supported us over the past 12 months.

**Richard Preston** – Group organiser (for lack of a better description) [Richard.preston5@btopenworld.com](mailto:Richard.preston5@btopenworld.com)  
Tel. 01869 340512

## 1st Deddington Guides *Report*

Our new year began with some fun and games, and fudge! We also started to plan our Patrol Projects. The Phoenix patrol is organising a fashion show, the Panda patrol a tea party and the Young Leaders a pamper evening! We are also making decisions about our next badge work, and have a wide variety of activities planned for the rest of the term.

All girls aged 10 years or over are very welcome. Just come along for the evening and see what we're all about.

**Maggie Rampley 07957 600755**





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# Village Hall News



Congratulations to our winning team 'Quizical' at the recent quiz. A really fun evening that is well-established in the village calendar. Thanks go to all those involved, and even if you didn't win, it's the taking part that really is the fun bit.

The winning team:

Lynne and Edward Dowler,  
Martin Lipson, Caroline Langridge,  
Miranda and Nick McConnell,  
Cathy Lawday and Richard MacAndrew

*Photo by Nigel Francis*



As village hall trustees, our role is to ensure that the hall is a facility for all to hire. In order for us to keep it ticking over, events like the quiz, wassail evening and fireworks evening are hosted to raise funds, so we are very grateful they are so well attended. However, there is always space in our calendar for something else that all would enjoy. Suggestions please - or better still, organise one for your group.

- With a meal? Live band?
- Judge the best pudding? Sausage? Cake?
- Another quiz/competition evening?
- Remember, we have a lot of sound and lighting kit so it could be a big extravaganza!

## New hiring fees:

I was voted in as chair last May and, as you'd expect, I've questioned how the hall is managed, to ensure we offer the best value for the community we are in, and also to ensure the bills are paid and that the hall remains in a good state of repair. With this in mind, we will be altering the hiring fees. Some will go up, some of you may now find it's cheaper, but hopefully they will be fair and easier to understand. They hadn't been changed for three years and, as we all know with the rising costs of electricity, gas and other services, we need to remain commercial. Plus, internet/WiFi has arrived at the hall, which I for one am eternally grateful for, however, this is an additional cost. We are just double checking our sums, but we aim to publish the new fees next month, with the intention that any bookings made after the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2026 will be at the new rates.

## Hiring agreements:

When you hire the hall, you should read through the hiring agreement and then acknowledge you have done so, when you book with our letting agent Angela. This is also being re-written to simplify and shorten, but it is important you read it. It contains health & safety guidance, deposit info such as why they are retained and where equipment can be found, as well as commitments we make to you as well. If they are unclear, please do ask.

**Pilates – ERROR LAST MONTH: the two Pilates classes on Monday afternoons run from 2.00pm-3.00pm and then 3.15pm to 4.15pm. Apologies for causing any confusion.**

Our letting agent is Angela Smith – 07734 112967

Please do not call this number between 6.00pm and 8.00pm unless urgent.

Email [steeple-aston-village-hall@hotmail.com](mailto:steeple-aston-village-hall@hotmail.com) Collect keys from 'Mijas' South Side, Steeple Aston OX25 4RU

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\*\*\*\*\*

## Steeple Aston Life survey

\*\*\*\*\*

We'd love to hear from you. As a reader of Steeple Aston Life magazine, your opinion is important to us. This survey is designed to gather your views on the content of the magazine and what you enjoy most about life in our village. With your input, we can ensure that the magazine continues to reflect the interests and concerns of our community. Whether it's the latest update from the Parish Council, news from the school or local club activities, your feedback will help shape the future of the publication.

Please take a few moments to answer the questions overleaf – thank you. ***Deadline for replies: Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> March 2026.***

***Either*** pull out this paper copy, complete and return it via one of the boxes situated at Steeple Aston village shop, the Grain Store or the Red Lion; ***alternatively***, complete the survey online via <https://s.surveyplanet.com/9uhcrso5> or use the QR code:





## **SAL Survey Questions**

### **1) Which sections of SAL do you enjoy reading the most?**

***Please circle below: (1 = least enjoy; 6 = most enjoy)***

Arts Pages	1	2	3	4	5	6
Church Matters	1	2	3	4	5	6
Eco/Nature articles	1	2	3	4	5	6
Garden/Horticultural Society	1	2	3	4	5	6
Local MP/Councillor updates	1	2	3	4	5	6
Parish Council report	1	2	3	4	5	6
SAVA history/old photos	1	2	3	4	5	6
School Report	1	2	3	4	5	6
Steeple People/Pet Pawtrait	1	2	3	4	5	6
Sports Clubs' updates	1	2	3	4	5	6
Valentine Club News	1	2	3	4	5	6
WI News	1	2	3	4	5	6

### **2) Is there any content or topic you feel is missing from the magazine that you'd like to see included in future issues?**

.....

.....

.....

### **3) How satisfied are you with the overall balance of topics in the magazine?**

***Please circle below: (1 = dissatisfied; 6 = very satisfied)***

1      2      3      4      5      6

### **3a) Do you think anything should be given more or less focus?**

.....

.....

.....

.....

**4) How useful do you find the information sections in SAL?**

**Please circle below: (1 = least useful; 6 = most useful)**

Bus Timetables	1	2	3	4	5	6
Calendar (at back of SAL)	1	2	3	4	5	6
Church Services	1	2	3	4	5	6
Directory (at front of SAL)	1	2	3	4	5	6
Parish Councillor listing	1	2	3	4	5	6
Refuse/Recycling dates	1	2	3	4	5	6
Village Hall News	1	2	3	4	5	6

**5) Is there any other local information that would be useful to include in SAL?**

.....

.....

.....

**6) What do you think about the balance of editorial articles-v-advertising?**

**Please circle: (1 = dissatisfied; 6 = very satisfied)**

1      2      3      4      5      6

**6a) Why?**

.....

.....

**7) How often would you prefer to receive SAL? (please circle):**

Monthly      Every 2 months      Quarterly      10 issues per year

**8) Do you feel that the presentation/design of SAL needs any changes?**

.....

.....

.....

**9) Any other comments you may wish to make about SAL?**

.....

.....

.....

**ABOUT YOU:**

**10) Do you live in Steeple Aston/Middle Aston/elsewhere? (please circle)**

**11) SAL is run entirely by volunteers. Would you be interested in helping out? (please circle): Yes/No**

**11a) If yes, how?**

.....  
.....

**12) Your contact details (optional):**

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**Email address:** .....

**Mob/tel no:** .....

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***Alternatively, complete the survey online at: <https://s.surveyplanet.com/9uhcrso5>***



***By Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> March 2026***



# Opera Anywhere



The final public event in the village hall last year proved to be an absolute gem, when *Opera Anywhere* returned with their winter programme of *Trial by Jury* and *Amahl and the Night Visitors*. This incredibly talented and versatile company give their imaginative performances not only anywhere – including on punts on the Thames – but also, for anyone – opera fans and newcomers alike.

In Gilbert and Sullivan's ever-delightful operetta, *Trial by Jury*, the audience is part of the jury. This works brilliantly, as for newcomers there is a wonderful 'surround-sound' effect and die-hard G. and S. fans can sing along too. The Judge introduces himself and emphatically states that the trial must be completely unbiased. However, when the pretty plaintiff appears, he seems to waver, and when the defendant tries to speak, he is booed and hissed by everyone. Complications ensue, but in the end the judge decides he will marry the plaintiff himself. Special mention must go to baritone Will Costello's lively performance as the judge, having stepped in to sing the role, with a couple of hours' notice.

The Italian-American composer Carlo Menotti's *Amahl* was the very first operetta written for television and was first broadcast on NBC in 1951, before reaching the BBC in 1953. It became the Christmas Special of its day, repeated each year. Having watched it as a child in fuzzy black and white, I was looking forward to seeing it performed live and in colour, and I was not disappointed. The 'three kings' are travelling to Bethlehem and stop to rest in the house of a poor woman and her disabled shepherd boy son. The mother is tempted to steal from the kings, but when she realises that the gold is meant for the child that has been born, she returns it. Amahl insists on the kings taking his crutch, as it is all he has to give, and as he does so, he finds his leg has been healed. Mezzo-soprano Serenna Wagner gave a performance of power and pathos, as the mother, and treble Raffy Gill-Wagner as the young shepherd boy Amahl was assured and totally convincing. All this, with a trio of kings, dancing shepherds and villagers, made for a heart-warming performance. The talented trio of musicians skillfully accompanying the singers were pianist Nia Williams; flautist Nick Planas and Steeple Aston's very own star, violinist Holly Viner.

This was *Opera Anywhere's* final performance of their 25th anniversary year, and we thank them for choosing to spend the occasion in our village hall. Please return before your 30th anniversary.

## Margaret Bulleyment

*Photos – Chris Gill*



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# Parish Council Meeting *Notes*



The meeting started with a visit from two young firefighters who came to tell us about the 'Oxfordshire Fire & Rescue Service Consultation' that's going on as a result of the challenge in recruiting daytime on-call firefighters. They said that Steeple Aston will very much be affected if the proposals go ahead, with our area possibly being covered by just two fire engines (and eight firefighters), rather than the current five engines (with 35 firefighters), with longer wait times and decreased night-time cover. They spoke passionately on the topic, saying they feared safety was being compromised. We have until 31<sup>st</sup> January to make our views known: [letstalk.oxfordshire.gov.uk/ofrs-consultation](http://letstalk.oxfordshire.gov.uk/ofrs-consultation)

Cllr Gareth Epps' report by his own admission carried 'various iterations of doom and gloom' mainly involving potholes and budgets; while Cllr David Rogers agreed that there was indeed plenty of 'doom and gloom' out there. He did, however, gift our Clerk three UV pens to mark PC property with, so that's something. Big news as far as Mr Miggins will be concerned – WE ALL NOW NEED TO MAKE A BOOKING IN ORDER TO VISIT THE TIP!

**[oxfordshire.gov.uk/waste-and-recycling/book-recycling-centre-visit](http://oxfordshire.gov.uk/waste-and-recycling/book-recycling-centre-visit)**

We heard about concerns regarding speeding – especially past Dr Radcliffe's School. There is the possibility that our local Speedwatch brigade may be resurrected, so please do get in touch with the PC if you might want to volunteer (you will get the chance to wear high viz). Staying with Highways & Footpaths – it was agreed that we have a really super Super User when it comes to our local 'Fix-My-Street' – and what a great job he does for us.

There seems to be some movement on changing the smiley face we all get when coming into Steeple Aston, even if we're going *above* the 20mph limit. The PC have been asking for this to be changed for as long as 18 months, and finally it seems they have a breakthrough and the company in charge (Vision Zero) is responding! The way our councillors were talking, though, if something doesn't happen soon, they may resort to simply putting a bag over the device.

Next, we heard of new regulations that give local councils the powers to crack down on pavement parking and some discussion around the junction of North Side/Water Lane, where white lines have been discussed as an option. I couldn't help but think that a can of worms was being opened, with precedents being set.

It seems a number of Grange Park residents have been approached by developers offering to buy their properties at above market rates possibly with a view to getting access to a field ahead of a potential development. Residents will be asked if they would like to be invited to a meeting to express their concerns.

There was a long discussion on the roofs and dormers (some with apparently no use at all) of our Village Hall and SRC. I confess I nodded off, but came round in time to hear about some interesting planning applications on North Side and also the activities of Nora. Our councillors didn't sound too keen on NORA (North Oxfordshire Residents Association), as they're asking for thousands of pounds to help with their campaigns, for example, fighting the Puy du Fou planning proposal. Our Chair wasn't sure we'd always agree with NORA. I'm not sure I liked the sound of her either.

Next meeting is 16<sup>th</sup> February.

All the best

**Mrs Miggins**



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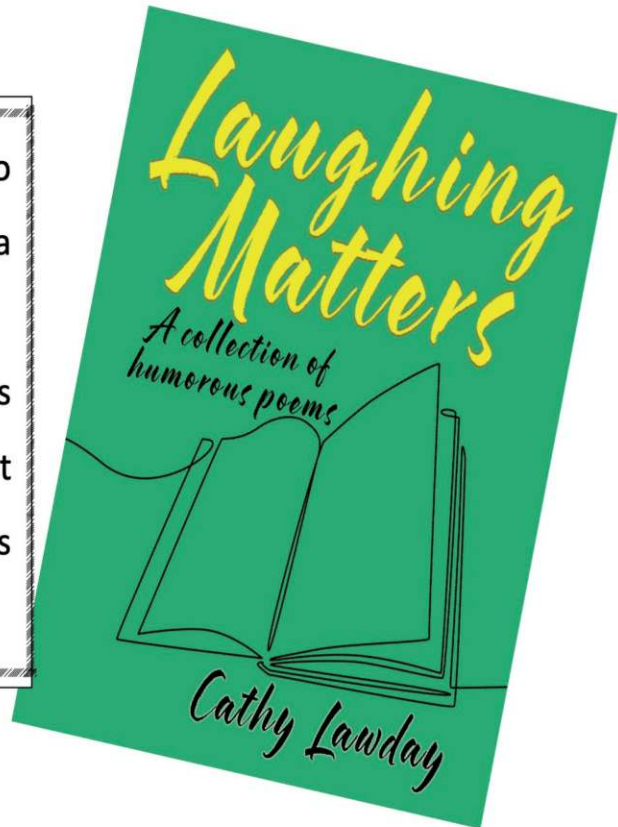
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Cathy Lawday, a regular contributor to Poetry Corner, has published a collection of her poems.

*Laughing Matters* costs £7.99 and is available from Steeple Aston Post Office or from Amazon, Waterstones & other online booksellers.



Steeple Talks 19<sup>th</sup> February  
In the Church – 7.15pm for 7.30pm



## Was John a Bad King?

**Jackie Watson**

A fresh look at possibly the most reviled king in English history...

Refreshments from 7.15pm  
Donations are welcomed for church funds.  
All Welcome

## Steeple Aston Parish Church and Allotments

Are seeking a gardener to lead the  
**Steeple Aston Community  
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This is a new Church initiative partnering with the Allotment society and local community. It is envisaged that this will be part time position. We will work with the right candidate to develop this role.

If you are interested in this post please apply in writing by February 14th 2026 to the Rector: Revd Harriet Orridge

Email: [harriet.sntchurch@gmail.com](mailto:harriet.sntchurch@gmail.com)

Post: The Rectory, Fir Lane,  
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## Festive Performances at Dr Radcliffe's

December is always a busy month at Dr Radcliffe's, as all our classes are involved in a Christmas performance. Our Reception children performed on stage for the first time in a *Noisy Nativity* with many wearing new costumes from generous parent donations. KS1's performance of *Baubles* was another take on the Christmas story, in which the caretaker gets help from some mice as they help the children at the school rediscover the true meaning of Christmas. In KS2, Year 5 performed *The Amazing Adventures of Superstan*, where Stanley Marvel may be the clumsiest clot in Megaville, but he's happy to read his comics and dream his life away. That is, until it's turned upside-down when he discovers that local hero, The Candy King, is actually a Super-Villain determined to conquer the world with his corrupt confectionery! Year 6 performed *Shakespeare Rocks*, where Aubrey, the Rough Shakespeare Company's pretentious director, obtains what appears to be William Shakespeare's lost diary. Along with Al, his down-to-earth assistant, the pair decide to embark on an exclusive adaptation of the flamboyant Bard's personal journal. Year 3 performed the Christmas story and some songs to their parents, focusing on the story, and Year 4 led our annual Candlelight Service in the church.

It is great to see how the children grow in confidence from performances such as these throughout their school journey. The staff work hard to support the children to feel so confident with lines and singing, as well as using props, along with great support from our families. It's wonderful to see so many children living life to the full.

There were other traditional events, including the Santa Fun Run, where we raised money for Helen and Douglas House, thanks to kind donations from school families. The children jogged around the playground and field to Christmas tunes, many wearing Santa hats, which made for a very festive sight. Everyone also enjoyed a delicious Christmas lunch, which the children ate together in the hall, with the staff serving their dinners. Many of the children made hats in their classes to wear for the occasion, which added to the festive atmosphere.

Mrs Rymell and the Year 1, 2 and 3 members of our Eco-committee have been busy planting some bulbs ready for Spring. Some pots and bulbs were donated by parents, and Nicholsons kindly donated four bags of compost. We look forward to seeing them bloom in the Spring outside the front of the school.

### Sarah Goldsworthy



Children enjoying the Santa Fun Run around the playing field. Photo by Lisa Yates  
Planting bulbs ready for Springtime. Photo by Kerri Rymell



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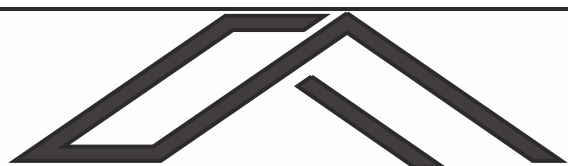
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# Steeple Aston *Garden Club*



Although the Garden Club don't have a meeting in January, we are busy planning for the summer and looking forward to the first of this spring's monthly talks. The first talk will be on Tuesday 3rd February 2026 in the village hall, when Caroline Landless from Rousham is coming to give a talk entitled 'A potted history of Rousham House & Gardens'. As the name suggests, it will include both the history and development of the gardens, as well as the famous landscaping of the grounds. Doors open at 7.00pm for a 7.30pm start, so there is time to collect a cup of tea or coffee and a biscuit.

The next visit will be a joint talk with Tackley on Tuesday 17th March at 7.45pm by our favourite speaker, Tim Walker, former Head Gardener at Oxford Botanical Gardens. For those who haven't heard him speak, the entertainment, as well as his gardening knowledge, make the short journey to Tackley well worth it. We are working on a list of gardens for our monthly visits this summer, which will hopefully include a follow-up visit to Rousham, and visits to other local gardens including Waterperry Gardens, nr Wheatley, and a garden near Chipping Norton. The calendar of events will soon be updated on the website, or in the meantime, please contact Richard or Alison for more information. By the time this is published, hopefully spring will be much further advanced with snowdrops and crocuses in bloom, and daffodils and hellebores on the way for the start of a new gardening season.

For any non-members, please come along and join us for any of these events. Please contact either: Alison Llewellyn [alisonllew.home@gmail.com](mailto:alisonllew.home@gmail.com) or Richard Preston [richard.preston5@btopenworld.com](mailto:richard.preston5@btopenworld.com)

**Alison & Richard**

## Steeple Aston *Community Orchard*



Young Millie Townson (pictured) was among volunteers who helped to plant 200 daffodil bulbs in the community orchard at the end of last year, and there are plenty of snowdrops, primroses and hazel catkins. So, watch out for the first signs of Spring and the possibility of frog spawn in the pond, newly relined since it began to leak.

To celebrate the 110th anniversary in November 2025 of the WI, the Steeple Aston branch has generously presented (and helped to plant) a Morello cherry tree. This is a fruiting variety, which is particularly appropriate considering that one of the main aims of the Institute on its foundation was to increase Britain's self-sufficiency by encouraging women to become more involved in food production. On Thursday, 18th December at 10.00am, WI President, Julie Hillier, presented the cherry tree to Kay Francis, who accepted it on behalf of the Orchard Committee. A plaque will be placed beside the tree in due course.

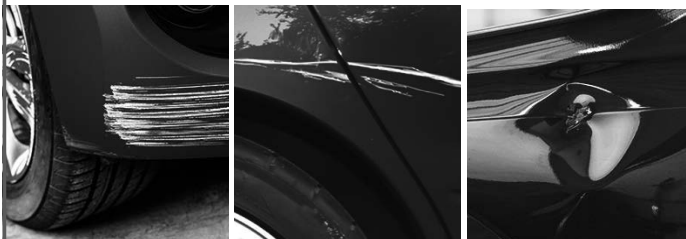


*Photo by Nigel Francis*



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## Robinson's Close

We all know that our Recreation Ground is called Robinson's Close, but who – you might ask – was Robinson? The village War Book of 1942 contains the earliest written reference to Robinson's Close that we've come across, named as the location for an emergency 'rest centre'. The use of the word 'Close' in the name, however, suggests an earlier date of origin. The word is much used in describing plots of land, usually with a dwelling, typically enclosed by hedges or trees. The Enclosure Map for Steeple Aston, however, shows the area which now includes the Recreation Ground named as 'The furlong below Ten Score Baulk' (the odd name for what later became Fir Lane). There was no sign of any dwelling then (in 1768) or since; the land was probably planted with crops, or was pasture land (as we discovered later).

Quite recently, when SAVA was researching village families affected by war, we came across mention of evacuees placed with 'Mrs Robinson, Manor Court'. Our former SAVA member Eugene O'Sullivan recalled the Robinsons at 'Manor Cottages' in an article about the airfield at Hopcrofts Holt. In the 1942 War Book for the village, E. Robinson of Manor Cottages is listed as 'available to provide heavy transport'. What is now called Manor Court Cottages was two small dwellings before modernisation in the 1970s. The 1939 'wartime census' has the following entry for 'Manor Court':

1 William C R Robinson M 20 Sep 1907 M Cement Maintenance Fitters; Labourer Heavy Worker  
2 Margaret A Robinson (became Mitchener in 1949) F 13 Oct 1906 M Unpaid Domestic Duties  
3 George (Edward) Robinson M 10 Aug 1931 S At School  
4 CLOSED (*this was used for those still living in 2015*)

William married Margaret Callow in 1930 but died young and was buried in Steeple Aston in 1944. Edward (Ted) Robinson had been involved in the Korean War in 1950, and later lived in Nizewell Head. This 'Ted' was the George (Edward) from the 1939 census (who was only eight at that time); that would make him nineteen in 1950, which would be about right. In 1949 National Service - a form of peacetime conscription - came into force for all able-bodied men between the ages of 17 and 21. After Korea, both he and Richard Walton came back to Steeple Aston after their conscription periods were over. Richard became the village butcher following in his family's footsteps, and Ted Robinson worked locally and lived with his family in the village.

So, we know that there were Robinsons in the village in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. But we also know there were earlier Robinsons. Looking through the archive's 'village families' files, we found a Robinson family first recorded in 1801, who later moved to Wadhams in The Gap, North Side. John Robinson was a tailor, draper and baker, and in March 1837 an advert appeared for the sale of a three acre 'close of rich pasture land' near the Church, known as 'The Ridgeway' and 'occupied by Mr. Robinson'. The land had been owned by the Rector, who had recently died. There is a strong chance that this land was already called, or then became, 'Robinson's Close'. John died in 1848 and has an elegant gravestone not far from the Church porch.

Unfortunately we can't yet make a connection with the Robinsons later living at Manor Court Cottages, but it seems likely they were connected. Whether Ted was the descendant of the Robinson family from the previous century, or connected to the 'Close', we do not yet know. But at least it seems we have traced the origin of the name of the Recreation ground to John Robinson, around 1837. The Dr Radcliffe Trust took over ownership of the land in the 1950s, and now leases it to the Sports and Recreation Trust.

Does any reader know more?

**Martin Lipson, SAVA**

## Steeple Aston & Middle Aston Horticultural Society

### What should I be doing now?

We are now eight weeks off the Spring show, so there's still time to get ahead. Or better still, start planning for our annual show at the end of August!

Last call for amaryllis planting, as these typically take 7 to 8 weeks to bloom.

Keep an eye on other potted bulbs – do they need speeding up and putting somewhere warmer or slowing down somewhere cooler? It's still a lottery if they flower on the day.

Seed potatoes – now is the time to buy your seed potatoes and start chitting them, ready to plant in March and April. More advice on this can be found on the RHS website

[rhs.org.uk/vegetables/potatoes/grow-your-own](https://rhs.org.uk/vegetables/potatoes/grow-your-own) and there is no excuse for not having enough space – you could grow some in a big tub on the patio.

Daffodils – every year we have the same question: is mine a short or long trumpet?



**Long trumpet** – trumpet longer than petal

**Multi headed** – many blooms on one stem



**Short trumpet daffodils** – trumpet length is shorter than petal length.

Exhibiting daffodils – make sure there are no holes in the petals or trumpet.

COUNT and re-count how many stems you have put in the vase. If the judge is having a bad day, they will disqualify it if there are more blooms than specified in the schedule.

Standing proud in the vase – you can always use screwed up newspaper or metal wire, if you don't want to use an oasis.

**CHILDREN'S CLASSES** – Remember we have reinstated our old structure for children's classes. Children will now be able to enter classes that are in an older age section if they wish to, however, they will not be given special consideration by the judge for this. For example, if they are 5 years old and enter the under 12-year section, the judge will not take their younger age into account. But I'm sure there is a budding Picasso out there who could challenge us all. If you have any questions, please contact a member of the committee.



HALF TERM... so the children are bored... it's raining again outside.... so, how about focusing that energy on doing an early exhibit? Decorated plant pots are available in all children's age ranges AND adults too. If you don't have a pot, I'm sure you must have a neighbour who would be only too glad to give you one or maybe hundreds! These ideas came from a quick google search. Other classes that can be made ahead are sock puppets or pop-up cards.



Photos are the obvious exhibit to do ahead. Classes include – ‘White’, ‘Recycled’, ‘Aged’ and for children ‘Food’.



## PLANT SALE



**Once again, we'll hold a plant sale of outdoor and house plants.  
If you have any spare seedlings, cuttings, or other potted plants  
you'd like to donate, please contact Mary White [maryw39@aol.com](mailto:maryw39@aol.com)**

**And, of course, bring some money to buy a few others!**

**Any spare seed packets - please bring to swap.**

Lastly, a little reminder: our next show is on **Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> March**. It's open to everyone, and there is no point visiting on the day, only to comment "mine is better at home" - it's never going to win a prize and be admired by villagers sat in the front room. Please enter it, as the worst that can happen is you lose 30p entry fee. Have a go, and if you want any help, please contact me.

**Victoria Clifton - Show secretary**

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Email: [vmcstedman@btinternet.com](mailto:vmcstedman@btinternet.com)



# SWIFT

**numbers are plummeting**

Sadly, they're now on the UK's Red List of Birds of Conservation Concern. For every ten Swifts zooming across our skies in 1995, there were only about three by 2022. **Swift populations in Britain slumped by 66% between 1995 and 2022** and have continued a rapid downward trend.

**What can we do?  
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**Chris Mason - Swift expert**

(not the BBC political editor!)

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Steeple Aston Environment Committee

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## **England regress, Steeple Aston rise...**

I had a wonderful Christmas save for the Ashes! The highlight was undoubtedly watching every ball of Joe Root's first century in Australia; when he is on song, to watch him bat is a thing of great beauty. I was a bit tired that day, but it was worth it. I was also fortunate enough to watch Jacob Bethell too. As for the rest of the Ashes, well, let's move on. As you will no doubt recall from the November issue of SAL, Steeple Aston CC's win rate was 65%, identical to England under Stokes & McCullum before the Ashes. England now sit well behind us on 60%.

## **Awards Dinner for 2025 Season...back in the Red Lion**

The Steeple Aston CC Awards Dinner was held at the Red Lion for only the second time in 16 years. We were well looked after by Renee, Bryan and their team, who not only produced delicious food, but it was great value too – as a Yorkshireman, I appreciate that enormously! The awards were as follows:

### **2025 Batting: 3<sup>rd</sup> Nige Doggett, 2<sup>nd</sup> Nick Foster, Winner: Arthur Higgins**

Arthur averaged over 100 (only out once!), the third year in a row that our winner has achieved this.

### **2025 Bowling: 3<sup>rd</sup> Paul Longman, 2<sup>nd</sup> Raj, Winner: Ben Woods**

Ben is new to the club, but has quickly become an integral part of the team. It was particularly good to see Raj in second place and we hope he can manage his time at our wonderful Village Shop to play more next year.

### **Young (or Old) Player of the Year 2025: Messrs Doggett and Longman**

With no young players to the fore last season, the Award was made to Nige and Paul, who played in every game in 2025. Our Club only survives with such commitment.

### **Clubman of the Year 2025: Peter Higgins**

This felt like the "Award for the Best England Fielder" in the Ashes, ie nobody stood out! However, I am grateful and humbled to be voted for.

### **Magnificent Cricketing moment of 2025: Paul Longman and Andrew Fergusson**

The Chairman's XI match versus Steeple Aston was a fabulous game of cricket with the result see-sawing either way and in the balance right until the end. The village required 21 runs to win off 6 overs. Eminently doable, you would think, but then at the crease were Paul Longman with 28 ducks to his name and a lifetime batting average of 5.78 and Andrew "Ferg" Fergusson who had already been out 3<sup>rd</sup> ball for nought. Surely a win for the Chairman's XI? But like Cummins and Lyon at Edgbaston in 2023, they both dug in playing some handsome cover drives and won the game with 6 balls to spare. In a sense, this is what makes cricket such a wonderful game, because anyone at any time can have their moment.

With best wishes to all.

**Peter Higgins - Chairman SACC**

*Editor's note: SAL congratulates Peter on his award of OBE in the New Year's Honours.*



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The Messy Church  
Shrove Tuesday

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[blairrachel@hotmail.com](mailto:blairrachel@hotmail.com)



## Candlemas

Shortly before Christmas, which seems ages ago already, I was part of an interesting discussion about when people put up their Christmas decorations. Some enjoy getting into the Christmas celebrations by putting up the decorations early, 1<sup>st</sup> December (or earlier), whilst others wait with increasing anticipation and excitement until Christmas Eve, making it a special whole family activity. In contrast, there was much more consensus about taking the decorations down by Twelfth Night.

If you'd visited Steeple Aston Church throughout January, you would have seen the crib still out, because in Church, the Christmas season officially ends with Candlemas at the beginning of February. This is when we remember Jesus as a tiny baby being taken to the Temple in Jerusalem to be consecrated to the Lord. There, Simeon and Anna recognise Jesus as the one through whom God would redeem the world. Simeon, in a beautiful intergenerational moment, taking baby Jesus in his arms, says the words that we know as the Nunc Dimitis:

"Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,  
you may now dismiss[d] your servant in peace.  
For my eyes have seen your salvation,  
which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:  
a light for revelation to the Gentiles,  
and the glory of your people Israel."

We have sadly lost several village members recently, tributes for some of whom will be included in future issues of SAL. Whilst death comes to us all, it is the one certainty of life, it is not necessarily easy or welcome. Simeon had been promised, "by the Holy Spirit that he would not die until he had seen the Lord's Messiah". As he holds Jesus in his arms, he knows his life is complete, and he is at peace and ready to die. He knows God's love and purpose for the world, and his own small part in that larger story.

This gift of peace, as we face the death of a loved one or our own mortality, is a wonderful, beautiful gift. Over the Christmas period, I watched a couple of 'RomCom' style films telling the story of giving a loved one peace and life again following someone's passing. As we move through February with the lengthening of the days, and hopefully warmer weather, we are reminded of the turning of the seasons, that there is a cyclical nature to life, birth, growth and death, and new birth. We also see this reflected in the life of the church, as we move from Christmas to Lent, and head towards Easter and the celebration of Jesus' resurrection and in our own lives.

My prayer for you is that you would know God's peace, like Simeon, as we face death, and can be at peace knowing that life continues.

God bless,

**Harriet**

## Watch bumblebee queens



*Buff-tailed bumblebee, Photo: Jon Hawkins, Surrey Hills Photography*

On sunny winter days, listen for the buzzing sounds of bumblebee queens flying and feeding on winter flowers. It's too early for them to breed, but the sun's warmth wakes them up from hibernation and they need to feed to restore their energy levels.

First to be roused are the buff-tailed bumblebee queens, emerging from their nests to seek nectar from snowdrops, crocuses and winter-flowering shrubs such as mahonia and honeysuckle. Most bumblebee queens and workers spend the winter hibernating beneath the soil in gardens and parks, or sometimes under sheds or in birdboxes. There are 24 bumblebee species in the UK, and the ones most of us see in our gardens are the common carder, red-tailed, early, tree, garden, buff-tailed and white-tailed bumblebees. Another insect you may spot in late winter sunshine is the hairy-footed flower bee (which is not a bumblebee), often seen buzzing around the pink and blue flowers of its favourite plant, the pulmonaria, also known as the lungwort.

Go to PoMS [ukpoms.org.uk](http://ukpoms.org.uk) to record sightings of bumblebee queens. The UK Pollinator Monitoring Scheme collects data on bees, hoverflies and other flower-visiting insects nationally. For more tips on helping bees, visit [bbowt.org.uk/actions](http://bbowt.org.uk/actions)

**BBOWT – Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust**

### Your County Councillor

A very busy year lies ahead for those involved in local councils, planning, or responding to consultations and requests for comment. As I write, the overnight closure of the dual carriageway highlights one challenge. This is peak 'pothole growing season'. Many of our roads were built between 1945-80, and we need to maintain these key assets, many of which are needing renewal at the same time. The world of local government in February is filled by budgets, thoughts of cuts and increased charges. It is challenging – but we need to remain focused on the bigger picture, while I add photos to FixMyStreet and ask officers to prioritise the most severe problems.

By the end of the year, we are told, Government will have announced the shape of our new local authority that will replace both Cherwell and the County Council. Parish councils will remain; we must make sure local voices are heard by these new and bigger councils. Both outgoing councils have a lot to sort out. How do we best learn the lessons from other councils that have 'gone unitary'? Learn, we must. Meanwhile the plethora of major planning applications between the Astons and Bicester have served to draw those local councils closer together. The challenges of dealing with the impacts have been well set out, given the thrust of government policy. What we are seeing is a coming together of local knowledge and expertise for the greater good. People are sharing ideas, pressing elected representatives for action and showing the skills and resourcefulness in our midst. I'll be sure to share those consultations. There will be a lot of them, and the expertise of all of us will be important to shape our future.

**Cllr Gareth Epps**, Liberal Democrat  
Deddington Division



## Local *Information*

### Church Services February 2026

| Date                                                  | North Aston                     | Steeple Aston                    | Tackley                                 |
|-------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| <b>Sunday<br/>1<sup>st</sup> February</b>             | 9.30am<br>Holy Communion<br>BCP | 11.00am<br>Holy Communion<br>BCP | 5.30pm<br>Evensong                      |
|                                                       |                                 |                                  |                                         |
| <b>Sunday<br/>8<sup>th</sup> February</b>             | 9.30am<br>Morning Prayer        | 11.00am<br>Family Service        | 5.30pm<br>Holy Communion                |
|                                                       |                                 |                                  |                                         |
| <b>Sunday<br/>15<sup>th</sup> February</b>            | 9.30am<br>Holy Communion        | 11.00am<br>Holy Communion        | 5.30pm<br>Evensong                      |
|                                                       |                                 |                                  |                                         |
| <b>Ash<br/>Wednesday<br/>18<sup>th</sup> February</b> |                                 |                                  | 6.00pm<br>Holy Communion<br>With ashing |
|                                                       |                                 |                                  |                                         |
| <b>Sunday<br/>22<sup>nd</sup> February</b>            | 9.30am<br>Morning Prayer        | 11.00 am<br>Morning Prayer       | 9.30am<br>Holy Communion                |
|                                                       |                                 |                                  |                                         |

[www.sntchurch.com](http://www.sntchurch.com)

Our church buildings are also open every day. Do feel free to visit at any time.

## STEEPLE ASTON VILLAGE HALL

[www.savh.org.uk](http://www.savh.org.uk)

**Our hall is  
available to hire:**



- Ideal site for parties, receptions, seminars, exhibitions and workshops
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- HD projector and retractable screen
- Meeting Room to seat 20, with separate access
- Off-Road Car parking
- **For more details and photos** see our website

[savh.org.uk/contact-us](http://savh.org.uk/contact-us) or  
call 07734 112967

| <b>All Facilities</b>                                          |                                               |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| <b>Peak Times – involving hire after 6pm</b>                   |                                               |
| Village Residents (up to 6hrs)<br>(Additional hours at £10/hr) | £65 (Plus Refundable Deposit £200)            |
| Non-Village (up to 6hrs)                                       | £110 (Plus Refundable Deposit £300)           |
| Non-Village (over 6hrs)                                        | £160 (Plus Refundable Deposit £300)           |
| <b>Off-Peak – all hire before 6pm</b>                          |                                               |
| Hourly Rate Plus Refundable Deposit £200                       | £10/hr (or £30 for 4 hours)                   |
| <b>Hall Only</b>                                               |                                               |
| Represented Clubs                                              | £9 (up to 3hrs)                               |
| Others                                                         | £17 (up to 3hrs plus Refundable Deposit £200) |
| <b>Committee Room</b>                                          |                                               |
| Represented Clubs                                              | £6 (up to 3hrs)                               |
| Others                                                         | £12 (up to 3hrs)                              |

## Steeple Aston Sport & Recreation Centre and Field

| <b>Letting charges</b>                                                                                 |              |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| Social Function peak times<br>(Daily up to 6 hours from 6pm)                                           | £55          |
| 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          |
| Caution money for private lettings                                                                     | £100         |
| 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!)

Get involved!  
Join the  
committee & help  
keep village  
activities going.

# HARRIS'S STORES & POST OFFICE

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7.30am - 7.30pm (Mon-Fri)

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*Thank you all for your continued support.*

*Please let us know of any ideas or suggestions of ways in which we can extend our services to you.*

**Tel: 01869 340201**

**e-mail: [raj4878@hotmail.com](mailto:raj4878@hotmail.com)**

**Steeple Aston and Middle Aston  
Rubbish bin collection day  
is THURSDAY.**



### February 2026:

Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> Blue and brown

Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> Green

Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> Blue and brown

Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> Green

### March 2026:

Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> Blue and brown

Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> Green

Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> Blue and brown

Thursday 26<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 collected weekly.

Glass bottles and jars can now be placed in blue recycling bin or approved recycling sacks – please rinse items first to remove any residues. No need to remove labels/lids. Please consult the Cherwell District Council website for further details of collections: **[cherwell.gov.uk/recycling](http://cherwell.gov.uk/recycling)**

## BUS TIMES

### STAGECOACH S4 BUS SERVICE (timetable effective from 31<sup>st</sup> August 2025)

**From Steeple Aston (outside Post Office) to Oxford (arrival time in italics)**

**Monday to Friday (excluding Public Holidays)**

0619 0721 0831 0931 then hourly to 1531 1645 1754 1849 1937 2037 2216  
0703 0817 0920 1020 1620 1737 1840 1932 2022 2122 2253

**Saturday**

0721 0821 0931 then hourly to 1531 1641 1746 1849 1937 2037 2216  
0809 0909 1019 1619 1729 1834 1932 2022 2122 2253

**Sunday (and most Public Holidays)**

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

**From Steeple Aston (outside Post Office) to Banbury (arrival time in italics)**

**Monday to Friday (excluding Public Holidays)**

0758 0910 1008 then hourly to 1508 1624 1732 1835 1933 2025 2113 2213 2341  
0837 0947 1045 1545 1703 1809 1909 2006 2055 2142 2242 0009

**Saturday**

0758 0908 1008 then hourly to 1508 1608 1718 1828 1927 2025 2113 2213 2341  
0737 0837 0945 1545 1645 1755 1905 1958 2053 2142 2242 0009

**Sunday (and most Public Holidays)**

0917 1044 1214 1344 1514 1644 1814 1944  
0956 1122 1252 1422 1552 1722 1852 2022

*Times subject to change. Before starting your journey, please check the timetables at: [Stagecoachbus.com/timetables](http://Stagecoachbus.com/timetables)*

### OURBUS BARTONS

*OurBus Bartons offers services through Steeple Aston to and from Lower Heyford Station (Mon-Fri), to and from Chipping Norton (Wed), and to and from Bicester (Fri). See the website for details: [ourbusbartons-org-uk.stackstaging.com](http://ourbusbartons-org-uk.stackstaging.com)*



# 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)

| Month                         | Event                                                                     | Venue           | Time              |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| <b>February</b>               |                                                                           |                 |                   |
| Tuesday 3rd February          | Garden Club: History of Rousham - Caroline Landless                       | Village Hall    | 7.00pm for 7.30pm |
| Saturday 7th February         | Consensio - choral concert for Epiphany and Candlemas                     | Duns Tew church | 3.00pm            |
| Sunday 8th February           | Snowdrop Sunday at Steeple Aston churchyard                               | SA churchyard   | 2.30pm - 4.30pm   |
| Tuesday 10th February         | WI: Walking the Camino de Santiago                                        | Village Hall    | 7.00pm            |
| Wednesday 11th February       | Lecture on Swifts                                                         | Village Hall    | 7.30pm            |
| <b>Saturday 14th February</b> | <b>SAL March copy and advert deadlines</b>                                |                 |                   |
| Monday 16th February          | Parish Council Meeting                                                    | S & R Building  | 7.30pm            |
| Tuesday 17th February         | Messy Church Pancake Party                                                | S & R Building  | 2.00pm - 4.00pm   |
| Tuesday 17th February         | Valentines: A day in the life of a Met Police Crime Scene Investigator    | Village Hall    | 2.30pm            |
| Wed 18th - Sat 21st February  | Launton Village Players 'Treasure Island' Panto - Cooper School, Bicester | Bicester        | Various           |
| Thursday 19th February        | Talk: 'Was John a Bad King?' by Jackie Watson                             | Church          | 7.15pm for 7.30pm |
| Saturday 28th February        | Deddington Farmers' Market                                                | Deddington      | 9.00am - 12.30pm  |
|                               |                                                                           |                 |                   |
| <b>March</b>                  |                                                                           |                 |                   |
| Tuesday 10th March            | WI: 108th Birthday Night & Charlie Ross, Auctioneer                       | Village Hall    | 7.00pm            |
| <b>Saturday 14th March</b>    | <b>SAL April copy and advert deadlines</b>                                |                 |                   |
| Monday 16th March             | Parish Council Meeting                                                    | S & R Building  | 7.30pm            |
| Tuesday 17th March            | Valentines: Debi with her 60s & 70s Show                                  | Village Hall    | 2.30pm            |
| Tuesday 17th March            | Garden Club - talk by Tim Walker, Oxford Botanic Gdn.                     | Tackley         | 7.45pm            |
| Sunday 22nd March             | Spring Horticultural Show                                                 | Village Hall    | 2.30pm - 4.30pm   |
| Saturday 28th March           | Deddington Farmers' Market                                                | Deddington      | 9.00am - 12.30pm  |
| Sunday 29th March             | SACS Concert: Gloria! Gloria!                                             | Tackley Church  | 7.00pm            |

**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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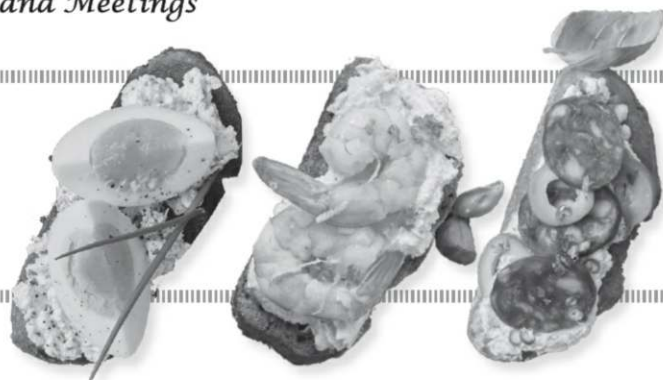
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