

# STOCKTON'S NEWS

keeping you informed ....

**February 2026**

**Issue 183**

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**The cast of Sleeping Beauty Pantomime performed at the Village Hall**

## THE NELSON CLUB at STOCKTON

**Napton Road, Stockton Tel: 01926 812613**

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Brewed Awakening February 10th & 24th 10.00am. - 12.30pm.

Afternoon Bingo - Every Thursday 1.30pm for 2.00pm start

Saturday Evening Bingo - Eyes down 8.00pm

**Saturday 14th - Live Music - ModStory 9.00pm**

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For last minute events or changes to the current planned events please see the following:

**Web page:** <http://nelsonclub.co.uk/index.html>

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Napton Road, Stockton CV47 8JU **Facebook:** @StocktonFCCC

**About Us:** We are a non-profit, Community Amateur Sports Club, run by a team of volunteers for its members & the wider community.

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more consecutive issues.**

**PLEASE SUPPORT**

Many thanks to all those who have already contributed towards  
the cost of producing **Stockton's News**  
it is great to have your support.

If you wish to make a donation you can do so by **Bank Transfer** to -

**Account:** Stocktons News **Sort Code:** 40-42-15

**Acc. No.** 91456652 **Reference it Donation**

**Cash/Cheque** in envelope addressed to Stockton's News to -  
Steve Kittendorf - The Limes, Marion Stringer - 12 George Street  
Wendy Rumsey - 1 St. Michael's Crescent.

**The magazine is run entirely by volunteers  
and any surplus monies are used for the benefit of the village.**

Click on the link for this month's magazine.

<http://stocktonsnews.org.uk>

# Contents

Archives . . . . .	26
Church . . . . .	8
County/District Councillor . . . . .	17
Garden Jottings . . . . .	24
Local Events . . . . .	11
Parish Council . . . . .	14
Pétanque . . . . .	25
Village Hall . . . . .	23
Village Matters . . . . .	13
Weather Station . . . . .	16
W.I. . . . .	22
Who's Who . . . . .	10

## Locations of Defibrillators and Bleed Packs

**Telephone Box, The Square  
&**

**Football Club House, Napton Road**

**Stop the Bleed Pack** - For use in a catastrophic bleed and does not contain normal first aid items like plasters etc.

**Dial 999**

and they talk you through how to apply tourniquet and wound dressings.



## Village Calendar



### Regular Weekly Village Events

#### **Monday** :~

Knit & Natter: Church ~ 2 - 4pm

#### **Tuesday** :~

Create & Play: Church 9.30 - 11.00 am ~ (Term Time)

Cubs & Scouts: Stockton Scout Hut 6.45pm - 8pm (Term Time)

Clubbercise: Village Hall ~ 7.30 - 8.30pm

#### **Wednesday** :~

Chess Club: Nelson Club ~ 5.30 - 7.30pm

Lazy Cat Yoga: Village Hall ~ 7.30 - 9.00pm

#### **Thursday** :~

Afternoon Bingo ~ Nelson Club ~ Doors open 1.30pm Eyes Down ~ 2.00pm

Beavers: Stockton Scout Hut 6.15pm - 7.30pm (Term Time)

#### **Friday** :~

Toddlersaurus: Village Hall ~ 9.45- 11.15am (Term Time)

W.I. Craft Morning: Football Club ~ 10 - 12noon

#### **Saturday** :~

Bingo: Eyes down 8.00pm ~ Nelson Club (Top Room)

### Regular Monthly Village Events

#### **Monday**

Women's Institute: 1st Monday of Month ~ Village Hall ~ 7.30pm ~ **2nd**

Parish Council Meetings: 3rd Monday ~ Village Hall ~ 7.15pm ~ **None in Feb**

#### **Tuesday**

Brewed Awakening: Nelson Club ~ 10.00am - 12.30pm ~ **10th & 24th**

Folk Night: Last Tuesday of the month ~ Nelson Club ~ 7.30pm

#### **Wednesday**

Friends Lunch: Every 2nd Wed ~ The Crown ~ 12.30pm ~ **11th**

Church Lunch: Every 3rd Wednesday ~ 12noon

#### **Saturday**

Coffee Morning & Library: 1st Sat ~ 10am - 12Noon ~ Village Hall ~ **7th**

Whist Drive: Every 2nd Sat ~ Village Hall ~ 7.30pm ~ **None in Feb**

Stockton Cinema: Every last Saturday ~ Village Hall ~ 7.00pm ~ **28th**

Pétanque Melee ~ F.C. & C.C. ~ All Welcome ~ 2.00pm ~ **7th**

# STOCKTON CHURCH

METHODIST AND ANGLICANS IN UNITY

The Bridges Group of Parishes

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

## The Bridges Group Church Services

**February 2026**

BCP – Book of Common Prayer    CW – Common Worship

THE BRIDGES GROUP	01.02.26 Candlemas White	08.02.26 2nd before Lent Green	15.02.26 Next before Lent Green	22.02.26 1 <sup>st</sup> Sunday in Lent Purple
PRIORS HARDWICK	Morning Worship 9.00am Lay Led	Evensong 5.00pm Lay Led	BCP Holy Communion 9.00am	
PRIORS MARSTON	Morning Worship 10.30am Lay Led	Morning Worship 10.30am Lay Led	Holy Communion CW 10.30am	
WORMLEIGHTON				Morning Worship 10.30am Lay Led
NAPTON	Holy Communion CW 10.30am	Morning Worship 10.30am Lay Led		Evensong 5.00pm Lay Led
STOCKTON	Morning Worship Lay Led 10.30am	Holy Communion In the Methodist Tradition 10.30am		Holy Communion CW 10.30am
LOWER SHUCKBURGH				Holy Communion BCP 9.00am

**ASH WEDNESDAY – 18<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY**

**TBA**

# THE BRIDGES GROUP NOTICE BOARD

LOWER SHUCKBURGH, NAPTON, STOCKTON  
PRIORS MARSTON, PRIORS HARDWICK & WORMLEIGHTON

## Programme for Children and Youth

**Create & Play:** Tuesday mornings from 9.30 – 10.45am (term times) in Stockton Church – for further details, contact: Deborah Dutton on 01926 819016 or [deborahduttoncreative@gmail.com](mailto:deborahduttoncreative@gmail.com)

**Babies & Toddlers Group:** Monday mornings from 9.30 – 11am (term times) in Napton Village Hall – for further details, contact: Helen Eadon on 07811 010440

**Messy Church** – on 3<sup>rd</sup> Sundays of the month at 4pm – venues TBC

## Mid-week programme for Adults - Home Bible Study Groups

The following groups meet for Bible study, prayer and fellowship to pray for our communities. 4 groups are in person, or 1 is online. If you would like to join, please contact the Group leader below:

Every Tuesday online at 6.15 Zoom	Katie	07965 209 075
Every Wednesday at 8pm in Stockton	Wendy	01926 812694
1 <sup>st</sup> & 3 <sup>rd</sup> Thursdays at 2.30pm in Stockton	Jan	01926 817991
Every Thursday at 8pm in Napton	Julia	01926 811476
Weekly (day varies) at 7.30pm in Napton	Angie	01926 812225

## Social get-togethers

Knit & Natter: Mondays at 2pm in Stockton Church	Jan	01926 817991
Knit & Natter: Mondays at 2pm in Napton	Jayne	01926 813227
Coffee & Chat: 1 <sup>st</sup> Thursdays at 10am in Priors Hall	Anna	07870 685124

## Parish enquiries

For **initial enquiries about baptisms, weddings, funerals and graveyard matters etc, please contact Susan, our Group Administrator, on 01926 812383 or email: [admin@thebridgesgroup.org.uk](mailto:admin@thebridgesgroup.org.uk)**. Please note that Susan works part-time but she will get back to you as quickly as she can.

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

## WHO'S WHO

Parish Council	Chairman	Howard Collerson 813181
	Clerk	Robbie Robinson 814094
	Councillors	John Emberton 814267
		Helen Kittendorf 815376
		Chris Millidge 812991
		Terry Warner 813424
		Richard Rumsey 813730
		Wendy Rumsey 813730

District/County Councillor	Andy Crump	815745
Member of Parliament	Jeremy Wright	01926 853650

St. Michaels	Priest in Charge	
	Administrator	Susan Holloway 812383
	Church Warden	Wendy Turner 812694
	Church Flowers	Wendy Turner 812694

Village Hall Bookings	Helen Kittendorf 07902775078
-----------------------	------------------------------

Stockton School	Head Teacher	Mrs. A. Bedgood 812483
Little Acorns		813789
Toddlersaurs		Becca Makepeace 07733107197

Group Scout Leader/Scouts	Jo Brough	07568 653158
Cubs	Toby Leeman	07866 563301
Beavers	Jo Brough	07568 653158

Women's Institute President	Sue Gill	07502207380
	Secretary Joan Ford	810220

Football	Rick Musson	813018
Football Club House	Luke Cole	07710 864192

Magazine Editorial Team	Wendy Rumsey	813730
	Marion Stringer	812887
Advertising Editor	Steve Kittendorf	07706155358
Magazine Treasurer	Steve Kittendorf	07706155358

## LOCAL EVENTS

*Events and News from Our Neighbouring Villages*



### **Southam Gardening Club**

thesouthamgardeningclub.blogspot.co.uk  
Tel: 01926 813986 or 815086.



Geoff Hodge will give an illustrated talk  
'Clematis – Queen of climbers - How to get the best from yours'  
at 7.30pm on **Monday 16th February** at the  
Communal Hall, Tithelodge, Little Park, off Park Lane, Southam.  
All are welcome. Non-members £4.50. Refreshments included.

### **Long Itchington History Group** *Meeting at Community Centre 7.30pm* *Www.longitchingtonhistory.org.uk*

**WEDNESDAY 11th FEBRUARY STARTING AT 7.30.**

"A History of Radford Semele in Pictures" - Anthony Hitchcox.  
For further details phone 07745110666. To request transport call 07771953139

Programmes available on request

### PRESS RELEASE

Easter Art and Crafts Exhibition. **Napton Art Group** are holding their annual Easter Exhibition of members' work at Napton Village Hall (CV47 8LS) on **Saturday 4th and Sunday 5th April 2026** between 10am and 4 pm. There will be about 200 paintings in all media including oils, watercolour, acrylics and pastels, most of which will be for sale and greetings cards of some of these will be available. Admission is £1 with free entry for children and there will be light refreshments in the pop-up cafe. Everybody who comes can vote for "The People's Favourite" painting. There will be a nominated charity and members will be displaying small paintings that will be for sale at a cost of £10 with the proceeds going to the charity. Payments for items for sale can now be made by card/ phone as well as cash/ cheques. The Art Group has a membership that now stands at over 50 and meets every Thursday afternoon at Napton Village Hall and has a programme featuring a wide range of demonstrations and weekend workshops. Visitors who might wish to join the group are welcome on any Thursday afternoon 2 - 4 pm.

Further details from *Howard Collerson* 01926 813181

# Community Hub and Café

Next to Galanos House, Banbury Road, Southam CV47 2BL

Café open daily 9am - 5pm.

For a full list of events visit our facebook page: [@RBLCommunityHub](#)  
or contact us on 01926 812185 Ext 5365



**Seed Swap**

Sunday 1st February, 10am to 12 noon

**COMMUNITY SEED SWAP**

Bring some seeds, swap some seeds.  
No seeds to swap, please make a small donation.

Everyone welcome!

TOMATO BEANS



## Paper Quilling

This is a friendly and relaxed session for like-minded crafty people, so come along and enjoy the company.  
Please call 01926 812185 ext. 5365 to book your place, as numbers are limited.

There is a small cost of £5 (payable on the day).  
All you need to get started is a basic quilling kit, available from The Range for £5.99.

Quilling Workshop Dates: 2:30-4:30pm  
Monday: 5th January, 9th February  
16th March, 20th April



**Community Hub and Café**  
Banbury Road, Southam, Warwickshire, CV47 2BL  
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# VILLAGE MATTERS

To have your news included please  
Contact by email - [stocktons.news@gmail.com](mailto:stocktons.news@gmail.com)



## **BIRTHDAYS & ANNIVERSARIES**

Happy Birthday wishes for this month go to **Emilia Tolley, Ian Cooper, Wendy Rumsey, Janet Cox, Edna Noon and Arla Adkins**

*To include birthdays/anniversary please contact magazine.  
Tel: 01926 813730/812887 or email before 15th of month*

## **Locations of Defibrillators and Bleed Packs**

**Telephone Box, The Square & Football Club House, Napton Road**

**Stop the Bleed Pack** - For use in a catastrophic bleed and does not contain normal first aid items like plasters etc.

Dial **999** and they talk you through how to apply tourniquet and wound dressings.

**Mobile Library 13th Stockton Church 2.10 - 2.30pm**

For further information, ring Mobile Library enquiries on 01926 851031 or  
Mobile Library on-line at [www.warwickshire.gov.uk/mobilelibraries](http://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/mobilelibraries).

**Refuse & Recycling** Missed Bins Tel: 01789 260616

**Food Waste** - weekly Grey Lid Bin - 3 weekly - **13th**

**Blue Lid Bin & Green Bin** - 2 weekly - **6th & 20th**

**Southam Pharmacy:** 4 Market Hill, CV47 0HE Tel: 812287

**Opening Hours:-** Mon - Friday 8.30am - 6.15pm Sat 9.00am - 5pm

## **Wheelchair Short-term Loan:-**

Stockton Church - 812383

Stockton's News - 813730/812887



## STOCKTON PARISH COUNCIL

Meetings held every 3rd Monday in Village Hall 7.15pm.

*Full copies of approved minutes available from Clerk to Parish Council*

*Mr. W.J. Robinson Tel: 01926 814094 or*

*website .www.stockton-warks-pc.gov.uk*

### DECEMBER 2025 MEETING

These are informal notes only, for a full record please refer to the authorised minutes on our website.

**Planning Matters : Land west of Napton Road**, construction of up to nine dwellings (25/02294) - permission granted. The Parish Council will request that Stratford ensure that the developer's contribution to affordable housing is linked to future development in the village and not lost into the bigger district-wide pot.

**Grange Farm, Tomlow Road**, Prior Approval for change of use of two agricultural barns into seven residential dwellings (25/02888): this is not a normal planning application as it is covered by Class Q designation that allows redundant agricultural buildings to be converted for residential use as "permitted development". **Land off Sycamore Close**, erection of up to 75 dwellings (25/00823): the developer has now submitted several Assessment Reports covering flood risk, ecology, transport, utilities, mineral resources, noise, heritage, archaeology, etc that include several hundred pages of technical arguments. In view of the amount and complexity of the material the parish council decided to employ the services of a local planning consultant to advise on the best way of communicating its objections to the proposal. The parish council will ask Stratford for an extension to the consultation deadline beyond 6 January.

**Village Facilities: Orchard Grove** - request from a parishioner to install dropped kerbs to allow easier access for wheelchairs - the parish council will refer this to WCC Highways. **Street light in Rectory Close** - this is still lit all day so our contractor will be asked to advise whether this is a fault or due to overhanging trees.

**Grit bins** - some have been refilled, the others will be checked. **Village Hall application for grant for audio/visual system** - the parish council agreed to provide a letter of support for this application to the Stratford Community Grant Scheme. **Inspection of mature trees** - the parish council will seek quotes for the inspection of mature trees on land it owns for safety and insurance purposes

**Parish Council Precept for 2026/7**: this is the amount that Stratford collect on our behalf through the Council Tax. The parish council agreed to hold their precept at the same level as last year at £31,000. This is equivalent to the annual council tax on a Band D property in Stockton of £53.74 and this compares across all towns and villages in the Stratford area with an average of £84.13.

**Parish council Meetings for 2026**: 16 March, 20 April, 18 May, 15 June, 20 July, 17 August, 21 September, 19 October, 16 November, 21 December. - all at 7.15pm in the Village Hall.

## JANUARY 2026 MEETING

These are informal notes only, for a full record please refer to the approved minutes on our website.

**County and District Council Matters:** two submissions have been made to the government in response to its **proposed devolution of local councils** - one from Warwickshire County Council for a single unity authority to cover all of Warwickshire and the other from the District Councils for two unitaries, one to cover the north and the other to cover the south of the County. It is anticipated that the government will publish its response to these proposals by July 2026. **Damage to verge in High Street** - the damaged verge opposite The Crown will be replaced by a “grasscrete” surface (similar to George Street), funded out of Cllr Andy Crump’s delegated highways budget. **Stockton Crossroads Safety Audit** - WCC highways are now close to finalising their design proposal.

**Village Facilities: Street light in Rectory Close** - the street light is affected by the nearby trees which are covered by a Tree Protection Order, so the parish council will submit a planning application to cut the trees back accordingly. **Dead or dying trees next to Memorial Green** - some of the trees between the rear boundary to Memorial Green and the old track to the Scout Field are dead or dying. The parish council agreed to have these removed for public safety reasons.

**Villager of the Year 2025** - the parish council will be seeking nominations for Villager of the Year with a closing date of 28 February. The new board has been erected in the village hall and last year’s winners’ names added.

**Planning Matters:** The consultation period for the proposed site off Sycamore Close is over and we await a decision on when and how this will be considered by Stratford as the planning authority. Cllr Crump has requested that the Planning Committee makes a site visit before the proposal is considered. Another site proposed by Richborough for 60 homes at Kineton was approved on 13 January mainly due to the 5 year land supply issue.

**Next Meeting:** the next meeting was due on 16 February but as the village hall will be closed for repairs to the floor, the parish council agreed to **cancel its meeting** and meet again on 16 March, unless an urgent matter arises.

**Howard Collerson (chairman)**

## STOCKTON’S VILLAGER OF THE YEAR 2025

The Parish Council is asking for nominations for Villager of the Year. This could be somebody who has worked hard for the village community or who has provided support for you or another person who may have needed help. Please send your nominations with your reasons by 28th February to the Parish Clerk at 74 George Street or email to [clerk@stockton-warks-pc.gov.uk](mailto:clerk@stockton-warks-pc.gov.uk).

**Stockton Parish Council**



**NOVEMBER 2025**

**Headlines - Winter arrives quite suddenly after a mild autumn**

The **average minimum temperature** was 5.5 deg. C, just over one degree above the average (4.4 deg. C). The lowest temperature was -7.5 deg. C on the 21st November. The **average maximum temperature** was 11.1 deg. C, about one degree above the average (10.2 deg. C) The highest temperature was 16.7 deg.C on the 6th. **Rainfall**, at 116.5 mm was 77 % more than the average (65.8mm). It rained on 16 days. **Sunshine** levels have been very close to long term averages.The **wind** blew mostly from the south and south west (22 days).

**Trivia of the month - the wettest November since 2019**

**DECEMBER 2025**

**Headlines - The first half of the month dominated by southerly winds, veering to the east and bringing colder winds for the last ten days.**

The **average minimum temperature** was 4.5 deg. C, about two degrees above the average (2.2 deg. C). The lowest temperature was -2.5 deg. C on the 30th December. The **average maximum temperature** was 8.9 deg. C, about one and a half degrees above the average (7.5 deg. C). The highest temperature was 13.5 deg.C on the 9th. **Rainfall**, at 64mm was in line with the average (64.5mm). It rained on 11 days and the wettest day was 15th December with 20mm. **Sunshine** levels have been only about 80% of the long term averages.The **wind** blew mostly from the south (19 days).

**ANNUAL SUMMARY FOR 2025**

**Hottest day - 32.4 deg C on 11 July**

**Coldest night - -7.5 deg C on 21 November**

**Wettest day - 40 mm on 14 November**

**Wettest month - December with 117.5mm**

**Driest month - February with 4.5mm**

**Annual rainfall - 528 mm**

**Lowest daytime maximum - - 0.6 deg C on 10 January**

**Warmest night - 19.7 deg C on 2 September**

**First ground frost - 21 September**

**First air frost - 19 November**

The year started with a dull and wet January when we had the wettest January day on record with 35mm on the 5th. February was snow free for the third year running but March and April brought a change to dry, sunny weather with a prolonged dry spell with no rain at all from 26 March until 22 April. Another dry May made it the driest Spring since the 1950's. June continued the hot and dry spell and made it the warmest first six months of the year on record. July and August were typical summer months with little of exception to record but between 10th and 17th of October there was only one hour of sunshine and not an drop of rain. November was the wettest since 2019 and the last week of December looked to be the start of a much colder period.



## News From Andy Crump

WCC Councillor for Southam, Stockton & Napton

SDC Councillor for Southam Central and East and Stockton

I do hope everyone had a good Christmas and New Year and would like to thank all the emergency, public and voluntary services who were on duty, keeping our community safe.

### **Grass isn't always greener on the other side and be careful what you wish for.**

In elections in 2023 (SDC) and 2024 (Parliament) the electorate chose to remove the current incumbents and replace them with different parties. At SDC, the departing administration had left a sound financial position as well as a strong 5YHLS (5 year housing land supply) and a recently updated Site Allocation Plan (SAP). The SAP hasn't been updated since June 22, with the current administration, I've been told, preferring to rely on evidence from the emerging SWLP. This was mentioned in the Borden Hill appeal in which the Planning Inspector's calculation of SDC's 5YHLS was reduced to 2.74 years. The Labour Government has also significantly changed the NPPF (National Planning Policy Framework) which in, my opinion, has made it more difficult for planning authorities to refuse development, that may have previously been deemed as inappropriate. It is now noted that many sites in the area are being promoted as being suitable for development with residents receiving leaflets detailing some proposals. Already potentially 2,000 homes in Southam, potentially nearly 200 in Long Itchington and activity in the village in and around glebe area. I have major concerns about the impact on local infrastructure e.g. schools, roads, doctors, chemists. In my opinion, sometimes change isn't always for the better.

Last month, I spent a large amount of time producing a comprehensive response to the recent significant planning application in the village. I would like to thank residents for their well informed and researched responses to SDC and also, to thank those who provided me with information that strengthened my response. Hopefully our efforts will make all the difference.

### **Stockton Crossroads**

I have chased the Feasibility Study that has been ongoing since July/August and escalated it to the Head of Highways. I have also informed them of the 2 collisions in one day (14<sup>th</sup> Jan). Hopefully, I will be able to give readers an update next month.

**Bad Weather** - All the advice given on tv and radio whenever roads are covered in snow and ice is that drivers should drive to the CONDITIONS THEY ENCOUNTER – which I often say. For information, WCC grits approximately 45% of its roads, with all communities having a road in and out of it, gritted.

### **Credit where credit is due**

I've always been brought up to acknowledge the positive efforts of others,

particularly around the HS2 re-opening of the A425. It appears other councillors don't adhere to that. One didn't even acknowledge my contributions to a meeting in a recent post. Another councillor claimed credit for seconding a proposal at WCC, despite the proposer (and main driver of the motion) being a different party. The proposer was not mentioned.

### **Keeping warm during low temperatures**

Low indoor temperatures can have a serious impact on your health, especially if you have a medical condition or are older. Here are a few tips to keep warm:

- try to heat rooms you spend a lot of time in, such as the living room or bedroom, to at least 18°C
  - try to reduce draughts; you can fit draft excluders around doors cheaply
  - keep your bedroom windows closed at night
- wear several layers of thinner clothing; this could keep you warmer than one thicker layer

For more information visit [www.warwickshire.gov.uk/keepwarm](http://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/keepwarm)

### **Stay safe during extreme cold weather**

Consider taking a few minutes to check on vulnerable neighbours and make sure your car is winter-ready, but try to make only necessary journeys and stick to gritted roads. Visit [www.warwickshireresilienceforum.org/risks/extreme-cold-weather/](http://www.warwickshireresilienceforum.org/risks/extreme-cold-weather/) for more tips on how to be #BetterPrepared.

### **Living well webpages**

A little bit of activity is a great way to help keep warm, as well as maintain strength and mobility.

Regardless of fitness levels the Living Well webpages have exercises to suit all:

<https://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/healthy-ageing>

#livingwell #healthy #exercise #mobility

### **Warwickshire residents among New Years Honours List**

Warwickshire's former Early Years lead and one of its deputy Lord Lieutenants are among the 14 extraordinary Warwickshire people recognised in the King's New Year's Honours list for 2026.

Read more: <https://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/news/article/7345/warwickshire-residents-among-new-years-honours-list>

### **Support available for anyone struggling with alcohol**

January and February is a time when many people cut back on drinking, but for those struggling with alcohol, it's also a vital opportunity to seek help.

Find out what support is available in Warwickshire: [https://](https://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/news/article/7348/support-available-for-anyone-struggling-with-alcohol-this-january)

[www.warwickshire.gov.uk/news/article/7348/support-available-for-anyone-struggling-with-alcohol-this-january](https://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/news/article/7348/support-available-for-anyone-struggling-with-alcohol-this-january)

### **Cost of Living Support - SDC**

<https://www.stratford.gov.uk/benefits-support/cost-of-living-support.cfm>

## **Voice of Warwickshire Panel**

Looking for a new challenge in 2026?

Warwickshire County Council is inviting residents aged 18+ to join its Voice of Warwickshire panel. Share your views on a wide range of topics and make your voice heard.

Register now: [www.warwickshire.gov.uk/voice](http://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/voice)

## **Children's Chickenpox vaccinations**

January 2026 saw the introduction of an update to the childhood immunisation schedule, the MMRV vaccine, which now includes protection against chickenpox as well as Measles, Mumps and Rubella.

Find out more: <https://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/news/article/7347/chickenpox-vaccination-offered-to-children-across-warwickshire-from-january-2026>

## **Childminder recruitment**

Do you enjoy working with children and looking for a new challenge in 2026?

Childminders play a vital role in offering caring, home-based environments where children can learn, play and thrive.

Find out more about how to get started in childminding: <https://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/childcare/become-childminder>

## **Reablement assistant recruitment 2026**

Do you want to make a real difference to people's lives in 2026?

Warwickshire County Council are currently recruiting Reablement Assistants to join our Social Care and Support service.

Apply today: <https://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/news/article/7304/do-you-want-to-make-a-difference-to-people-s-lives-in-2026-become-a-reablement-assistant-with-warwickshire-county-council>

## **Parking text scam**

Warwickshire County Council has warned residents that fake phishing scam SMS text messages are being sent to residents across the county, posing as Penalty Charge Notice payment requests.

Read more: <https://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/news/article/7289/warwickshire-residents-urged-to-be-cautious-of-parking-text-scam>

## **Warwickshire expands surface dressing programme**

Warwickshire County Council's County Highways team is hard at work applying surface dressing to around 120km of roads throughout the county this year - the equivalent distance from Warwick to Wembley - the largest programme ever delivered.

Read more: [www.warwickshire.gov.uk/news/article/7125/warwickshire-county-council-expands-surface-dressing-programme-with-record-investment](http://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/news/article/7125/warwickshire-county-council-expands-surface-dressing-programme-with-record-investment)

## **Log highways issues and report feedback**

Warwickshire County Council has launched a new platform to support the way customers can report a highways problem or log customer feedback through its

website.

Find out more: <https://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/news/article/4953/updates-to-the-way-customers-log-highways-issues-and-report-feedback>

**Reporting highways issues – or let me know !! [cllrcrump@warwickshire.gov.uk](mailto:cllrcrump@warwickshire.gov.uk)**

Warwickshire County Council is urging residents to report any Highways faults that they encounter while driving or walking in the county via its website.

Read more: <https://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/news/article/4085/warwickshire-county-council-encourages-residents-to-report-road-issues>

**Missed Bins** – please continue to report to SDC – the App is very useful for doing so and **make a note of your reference**. It helps SDC hold the Contractor to account.

Missed bins -. Contacts are [streetscene@stratford-dc.gov.uk](mailto:streetscene@stratford-dc.gov.uk) or Telephone: 01789 260616

Or download the app.

[https://www.stratford.gov.uk/online-forms/missed-bin-report-form.cfm?](https://www.stratford.gov.uk/online-forms/missed-bin-report-form.cfm?fbclid=IwAR3vkf03zQgXUsEHH04ODeqfid1b1msbwpVg8DG6nQn47HoAcwmw5LL9Joc)

[fbclid=IwAR3vkf03zQgXUsEHH04ODeqfid1b1msbwpVg8DG6nQn47HoAcwmw5LL9Joc](https://www.stratford.gov.uk/online-forms/missed-bin-report-form.cfm)

<https://www.stratford.gov.uk/online-forms/missed-bin-report-form.cfm>

**PAVEMENT PARKING/PARK IT RIGHT – the excuse, I won't be long isn't sufficient – it only takes a few seconds for a collision to occur. THINK ABOUT OTHERS NOT JUST YOURSELF**

Every week, I get reports of some terrible parking – with cars blocking pavements (especially dropped kerbs), making it impossible for people with mobility scooters or with push chairs to get by, without going into the road. In some cases, too, emergency services vehicles (particularly fire appliances) would struggle to pass. **PLEASE THINK OF OTHER PEOPLE, NOT JUST YOURSELF**

PLEASE REPORT ANY ASB , however trivial it may seem. Small incidents can lead to bigger ones, so better to stop them before they escalate .Also, the more calls/incidents the Police have, the sooner they will realise there is a problem in a certain area. **PLEASE ALSO ENSURE YOUR PROPERTY AND CAR IS LOCKED AND SECURE.**

Reporting out of hours highways issues can be challenging, the best number for that is 01926 415000.

[streetlighting@warwickshire.gov.uk](mailto:streetlighting@warwickshire.gov.uk) or 01926 412515 (not all are currently owned by WCC – some owned by town or parish council.)

<https://www.fixmystreet.com/reports/Warwickshire>

It is worth noting for future reference that anything immediately dangerous on the highway should be reported direct to the Police on 999, which is the same process for any pressing issue Out of Hours.

During normal office hours - 8:30am to 4:30pm, WCC call centre is best on 01926 412515

## **Councillor groans –**

My mate who was arrested for impersonating a haystack , has just been bailed  
I'm making a cake to apologise for all those times when my careless wording started a fight.

Do you want some?

## **Whilst plastering my house I accidentally covered myself in cement and rendered myself useless for the rest of the day**

My dog swallowed alphabet magnets. He has been leaving little messages around the house all day long

Why can you not get a cup of coffee in Buckingham Palace Because...they only have Royal Tea.

*Andy* -07771335273 – [cllrcrump@warwickshire.gov.uk](mailto:cllrcrump@warwickshire.gov.uk)

WCC Councillor for Southam, Stockton & Napton

SDC Councillor for Southam Central and East and Stockton –

[andrew.crump@stratford-dc.gov.uk](mailto:andrew.crump@stratford-dc.gov.uk)

### **Magazine Policy**

Deadline for articles **15th** of the month and can only be accepted if in the form of a typed/written copy to Stockton's News Editorial Team  
or email [stocktons.news@gmail.com](mailto:stocktons.news@gmail.com).

#### **The Editorial Team**

- 1.Reserve the right to withhold or shorten items as views expressed are not necessarily those of the Editorial Team.
- 2.Contributors can request that their names be withheld but the team cannot accept anonymous items for publication.
- 3.Reserve the right to edit each edition of the magazine to be put on the Web.
- 4.No Liability will be accepted for loss or damage caused by error or omission from advertisements or content.
- 5.Income is aimed at covering all costs generated by the production/circulation of Stockton's News.
- 6.Any surplus funds will be distributed within the Parish of Stockton. Village groups are invited to apply for funds to the betterment of our community.

#### *Copy of Magazine Guide Lines reinstated from the 1980's Parish Mag*

- 7.We will try to print anything that wont land us up in court
  - 8.We do not endorse ALL the views expressed.
  - 9.We don't judge between those in dispute.
  - 10.We want to provide news, views, opinions and reports. We do not want to be unfair, biased, censorious or condemnatory.
- Airing a view is an opinion but a continual airing of that view and/or it's opposite becomes an argument.

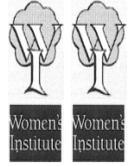


## WOMENS INSTITUTE

Meeting 7.30pm at Nelson Club first Monday of Month

President:- Sue Gill Tel: 0750 2207380

Secretary: Joan Ford Tel: 01926 810220



Well the festivities are over but our memories are still fresh of our fabulous Christmas Party where we were entertained by the very special Ella Kendrick who sang songs from the shows, and of our annual meal which this year was held at The Crown.

Thank you everyone who supplied delicious food for the party and thanks also go to The Crown for putting on a delicious meal (and agreeing to delay it because of the icy weather).

The Carol Service was held this year at Ladbroke and a small group of us enjoyed the singing, mulled wine and mince pies.

Our Christmas Tree at the Church Festival this year was very successful, our members and others spent a month of furious knitting to decorate the tree in hats, scarves, gloves and mittens which were afterwards taken by Josie to The Helping Hands Charity shop in Leamington Spa, to support those facing homelessness, poverty and hardship. Thank you to everyone who helped support this worthy cause.

We shall be back to our regular meetings from February and will soon be planning for this year's Group Darts Competition. I wonder whether we can get a hat trick! Our next meeting will be **Monday 2nd February 2026** at 7.30 pm at the Village Hall.



**W. I. Annual Meal**



## STOCKTON VILLAGE HALL

**Bookings - Helen Kittendorf Tel: 07902 775078**

**email: [helenkittendorf@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:helenkittendorf@hotmail.co.uk)**

**Hourly Rate £10**

We have lots of events planned for 2026 and would love for you to join us!

Firstly, we'd like to say thank you to everyone who came to the panto, *Sleeping Beauty* – we had a full house, and it was so much fun for the children and adults – oh yes it was! Some feedback received:

“The pantomime was off the scale!! If you want something funny this was perfect. The actors were amazing and had a great sense of fun! We got lots of nice treats too”. *Albie, aged 9*

“I would recommend going to see a pantomime, this one was so funny. The actors were very good especially the wicked witch. We laughed a lot and we got popcorn too!” *Wilf, aged 7*

We've already booked for this year – **Aladdin on 30<sup>th</sup> December at 2.30pm** so pencil in the date and we will advise when tickets go on sale later in the year.

We held our first Quiz Night which was a great success – it was really well attended and a fun, social event – many congratulations to the winning team, The Young Ones, and thank you for donating your winnings to the Village Hall – it is much appreciated!

Other events we have booked in are a production of **Oscar Wilde's 'An Ideal Husband' on Friday 1<sup>st</sup> May at 6.30pm** – tickets are available to buy now - and **'Murder Most Medical' on Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> October** – further details to follow soon. It is also 80 years in April, that the Village Hall was designated as such to provide a space for the whole Community to use and we will be celebrating this occasion at some point during the year!

We're starting a new **Singing Group**, with the first session on **Friday 6<sup>th</sup> March at 6.30pm**, – it will be a fun session, good for wellbeing and managing stress. The cost is £2 per person (per session) – no need to book, just turn up on the night. Going forward, sessions will be held on the first and third Friday of the month.

The Village Hall will be unavailable for use between 9<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> February inclusive as we are replacing the floor joists and then having a new floor installed – this will ensure that it remains in good condition for years to come. However, this does mean that there will be no monthly Quiz Night or Whist Drive in February, but both will be back in March in their regular slots.

The **February Coffee Morning** will be on **Saturday 7<sup>th</sup>** from 10am-midday and the **Lunch Club is on Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup>** at 12.30pm at The Crown. Also the next Cinema Night is on **Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> February** – if you want to join the mailing list, please contact Steve at [stevekittendorf@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:stevekittendorf@hotmail.co.uk), to find out what film is coming up and the supper on offer.

Thank you for your continued support and use of the Village Hall - we hope to see you very soon at one of our events.

**The Village Hall Trustees and Management Committee**



## GARDEN JOTTINGS

from Bridge Nursery - your local Hardy Plant Specialists



*Christine Dakin, Bridge Nursery, Tomlow Road, Napton.*

*Tel: 01926 812737*

*www.bridge-nursery.co.uk*

### **JANUARY**

Aren't plants amazing? In 2024 they (mostly) survived the excessive rainfall when they were sitting in saturated ground for many weeks and in 2025 it was the other extreme when they had a very long time without any rain. The pond was no more than a muddy puddle but it is beginning to fill up again. Many gardening jobs just couldn't be done when the ground was too wet or too dry. This means there is a backlog of jobs to get on with if the weather is reasonable.

During the last 3 months I have been doing some 'proper' gardening including digging out some of the unwanted self seeding plants, reducing some clumps which had become too large and adding compost and plants.

Reminders to myself (you too if appropriate) as follows

Cut off hellebore and epimedium leaves, later in the month cut dogwoods right down leaving only pencil thickness stems, use the pile of woodchips as a mulch in areas which have gone a bit wild to keep all the weeds down (it is usually a waste product for tree surgeons, just ask for a load to be delivered), empty one of the compost bins (I have 6) and spread round the borders, and last but not least, check seed catalogues to see what to order.

**FEBRUARY** An unwelcome start to the year was the discovery of a large tear in the shade tunnel cover after the snow overnight on 8/9th Jan. It's done exceptionally well though and hasn't been renewed for maybe 20years. It might be possible to mend it temporarily to delay getting a whole new cover for a year or two.

Other things are showing signs of aging (including me!). The pergola leading into the garden has some rotten timber which needs replacing before the rambling rose causes the whole thing to collapse. The garden benches all need some wood preservative applying and Polly the panda needs some patching with resin.

As soon as the weather starts to perk up it will be time to cut down all the ornamental grasses. This takes quite a while because there are a lot of them.

Interestingly they are all shorter than normal after the dry summer last year. There is still time to plant bare-root trees and hedging, a much easier and cheaper way of adding native plants and fruit trees than buying pot grown specimens. Broad beans can be sown in trays but keep them out of reach of mice and voles which will happily deprive you of a crop later in the year.

# Stockton Pétanque



Chair – Catherine Black  
Administrator – John Emberton  
Club Captain – Rich Rushton  
[www.stocktonpetanqueclub.org.uk](http://www.stocktonpetanqueclub.org.uk)

On 11<sup>th</sup> January Stockton played round 2 of the Euro Cup for Clubs competition against Hampton-in-Arden on a very cold and windy morning.

Hampton won both triples to start, but Nouri Beladaci and Rick Hayes pulled one back with 13-7, followed by Rich Powell and Jenny Lowe who levelled the match 2-2 with a narrow 13-11 win. Gaz Potter and Emily Adams then played a superb decider to win 13-9, giving Stockton passage to round 3 of the Euro Cup.

Four teams from Stockton have competed in The Heart of England Winter Pairs league, which is halfway through. Rich Rushton/Alfie Potter are 2<sup>nd</sup> in the league with 13 wins from their 16 games, just one win behind the leaders – a pair from Whitnash. Nouri Beladaci/Richard Collyer are 3<sup>rd</sup> with 11 wins from their 12 games, so both Stockton teams are well placed to challenge for the trophy. Well done to them. Jeff Rand/Gaz Potter are also in the frame with 6 wins from just 8 games, and Catherine Black/Steve Neale have 5 wins from their 8 games.

Stockton's Annual Singles League finished on 27<sup>th</sup> December and Nouri Beladaci was declared 2025 Champion with a comfortable lead of 26 wins. Sarah Jerger and Anthea Sansom tied on 22 wins each for second place, with Steve Neale fourth on 19 wins.

Stockton's Winter League started on 4<sup>th</sup> October and after 15 weeks Sarah Jerger is in the lead with 53 points, ahead of Jeff Rand on 49, Steve Neale on 48 and Catherine Black on 47 points.

18 players turned out for the December melee and after three rounds there were two unbeaten players, Ben Merrick and Jeff Rand, Ben winning with +15, just ahead of Jeff with +14. Richard Collyer was the next best player with two wins +16.

16 club members turned out on a very frosty day for the January Melee and were joined by six players from Whitnash. After three rounds there was just one unbeaten player – George, one of Whitnash's juniors, who was declared the day's champion. There were 10 players with 2 wins, the best being another Whitnash junior – Jayden, on +15, followed closely by Jenny Lowe and Nouri Beladaci on +14 each.

On the social side, we played the Annual David Kimpton Challenge against Coventry Pétanque Club on 16<sup>th</sup> November. Coventry fielded 6 pairs, whilst we had 10 pairs.

In the spirit of the game we allowed 2 of our pairs with Coventry connections to play for the opposition for an 8 team competition. Unfortunately for us the pairs we lent them played well and Coventry won the challenge 9-7. We all adjourned to the clubhouse for an excellent buffet laid on by Becky Rushton.

On 22nd November we played the Beaujolais Nouveau Melee, which is now dedicated to the memory of Bill Bentley. 20 brave players turned out to play on a very wet afternoon which was curtailed after round 2 with everyone soaking wet. At this stage there were just three unbeaten players, Jeff Rand winning the Bill Bentley trophy with +17, ahead of Catherine Black on +10 and Iain Cunningham on +9. After drying out we all enjoyed an excellent buffet washed down by this year's Beaujolais Nouveau followed by games of indoor pétanque to round off a great evening.

The next Open Melee will be on **7<sup>th</sup> February 2026**. Everyone is welcome – we will provide the boules and tuition on the rules

## Stockton's Archives

### Stockton and I by Victor Neal 186 - 1978

#### Part 27

One day whilst in Bishop's Itchington I scuttled round as hard as I could go to get my load delivered before the threatening storm broke, anxiously watching the ominous black cloud. Very relieved to be empty, I was on the way home through Southam, and just as I rounded into that straight stretch only about a mile from Stockton I was startled by an eerie sight: at the far end of this straight the trees and hedges were waving and whirling madly and yet at my end all was calm and still. Then more frighteningly one black mass of I knew not what was racing towards me. 'Whatever's this?' I hardly had time to ask – I believe that if I had had time and room I would have whipped round and away from it – but just by Spier's Farm gate with the haunting associations mentioned earlier I was hit – bang! and simultaneously my engine conked out and there I was, fortunately on the correct side of the road, at a standstill. One mass of water, it appears, had struck us and I can only assume it must have driven under the bonnet or somewhere and shorted out some circuit, probably the plugs. I was alone and I can assure you more frightened than I'd ever been in my youth about the reputed hauntings at that spot. This was real danger, for I can never remember such a terrific storm; it seemed to thunder and lighten without a break for an hour or more, and rain seemed hardly the word. Although home was so near I honestly wondered at times if I'd ever get there again.

I strove with my sacks to stem the rain driving in the various window and door-cracks, first one and then the other side. My self-starter naturally was out of order, and how could one get out and try the starting-handle when in one second one would have been soaked one to the skin. I didn't know yet what actually had

stopped us, and whether she would start at all. So there I was, penned, for what perhaps in that situation seemed a lot longer than it actually was.

Eventually of course the storm did ease and with one wind at the handle we were off and truly grateful for this preservation. When I got down to the Blue Lias yard I was compelled to stop just inside as the place was flooded, and cousin Fred was just getting ready with his drain-rods, with which he and I struggled for some considerable time before we got rid of the water.

This account reminds me of another similar story when, round about Whitsun, we were delivering in Stockton and sat in the lorry cab awaiting the passing of another thunderstorm, not so intense by any means, but suddenly – flash, bang! – a ball of fire raced across and hit a tree in Arthur Rawbone’s orchard opposite the post office, when this was still in Post Office Lane.

This was as near as I’d ever care to be to such a thing – we were some twenty or thirty yards away near that old yew by the butcher’s yard – but old Ernie Rainbow (who had been coming with Arthur Barr’s paraffin and hardware vehicle from Leamington since the horse-drawn days, and who would dish out to us children – and in the course of time to our children – his sweets with a paraffin-flavoured hand) was knocking at the cottage door right opposite the explosion only a few yards away. Throughout the later years we knew him he never forgot it, and neither would we have done. I thought to myself: ‘That must have made some crater’, and we walked along to see, and were surprised that not a speck of dust seemed to have been disturbed.

If you like to know the dates of storms and such like things, the first-related one was in 1934, I’ve worked out, and I’m pretty sure our cobbler friend of Southam, when this cropped up in one of our conversations, hunted up his statistics and was able to give the date as 24th July.

Perhaps the silliest hold-up of a day’s work was that time before we left Tomlow. Finishing up one Saturday I noticed the carburettor was leaking and to avoid it possibly dripping away over the weekend I turned off the tap so inconveniently situated on the old T-Fords, making it necessary to lie on your back to reach the tank under the seat. I had never had need to do this before, and I dare say the weekend’s diversions put the thing right out of my head, but when the engine failed to start on the Monday morning I blush to say I spent some hours vainly seeking the trouble before it came back to me.

So inexorably on to the Second World War. The press, you remember, for some years frayed our nerves with its imminence, but I couldn’t conceive that mankind could ever again be capable of that crass stupidity or that human selfishness could descend to such depths with such utter disregard for the teachings of the Saviour so many professed to believe in and to follow. When the incredible happened I for one was bewildered.

But the day before the war broke out – not quite the same as Rob Wilton’s opening line – 2nd September 1939, I ran into a remarkable happening which I’d better get down before we get too involved in the war’s troubles. Otherwise we’ll lose the incident, much as it was lost to the village at the time amidst the cares of the morrow when we in Stockton, in common with the rest of the country, had enough to think about worrying about the hail of bombs expected the instant war was declared. Even

in the countryside it was difficult to imagine a square yard escaping the holocaust this new sort of warfare might produce. [Here follows the story of the carthorse in the charge of the young Tom Griffin disappearing into a hole on the ground at the top of Stockton Hill, which has been told elsewhere – Ed.]

So on to that spell called the phoney war and eventually to the bombing and that night of 14-15th November 1940 which created the word ‘Coventration’ and destroyed so much of the old city twelve miles away. But all that is history and I needn’t repeat it; in our own village we lived, and I hope we learned to be less selfish than the elderly lady who vexed my wife by saying: ‘I wouldn’t mind the fighting, if only they’d stop this bombing.’ How much more generous was Mrs May Thornicroft when she said: ‘I’m glad we’re all amongst the bombing; you know, so that we’re in as much danger as the lads out there.’ Poor May! She had her son Bill out there, and he never came back.

My firewood sold easily enough these days, the difficulty becoming to find a sufficient supply. I feel no urge to dwell upon the Second World War: its sickening disillusionments are still too fresh in mind, and goodness knows enough was written and said about it without my adding to the confusion. So let’s get on to the simplicity of our rush-seat chairmaking; it was 1947 before Neville could be spared from the spud-bashing aftermath of the war in Yorkshire to return to the peace and quiet of the Prior’s Marston workshop and the tranquil sanity of the craft he had been learning in his apprenticeship with Mr Edward Gardiner from early 1939 until his call-up on reaching military age in 1943.

Neither need I go into the history of the craft, for it can be found in more or less detail in our scrapbook of cuttings from newspapers and magazines, if you happen to be interested. It is interesting enough but, to make another excuse, I have had to make so many pleasurable repetitions of the story to fellow-enthusiasts for such rural crafts, met at various demonstrations we have attended, that I baulk at the thought of writing it down.

The shortage of coal for some time after the war, while creating ever-growing demand for our firewood, had also brought in so many competitors taking advantage of the situation that it became more and more difficult to obtain our supply. Prices continually rose until I was getting ashamed of asking more of my customers, and my realisation grew that selling firewood was no job for an ageing chap; so I thought the time had perhaps come to carry out the idea of learning rush-seating and enough of the chair-making to be useful to Neville, if and when he took over the job and might be glad of some help.

With Mr Gardiner’s agreement I went to learn for a week or so, and that time so one developed that here I am still involved in chair-making. Mr Gardiner has passed on and we have brought the workshop to Stockton, Neville having duly taken the business over. It’s brought us back to the vicinity of that same old ‘pibble’ we told you about long ago, near Wilks’s shop [now Braunston House at the end of High Street – Ed.] and next to the old working men’s club, now the Co-op butcher’s, in fact in the old Co-op building in which was run the store by Stockton’s own Co-op before Rugby took over and moved on to the larger building previously occupied by dear old Clara Shelton of happy childhood memories.

Before going on to our chair-making, though, a letter in one of the periodicals has reminded me of another sentimental angle – the street singers, instrumentalists and barrel-organ players who used occasionally to visit Stockton and doubtless many another place. We have had chaps with dancing bears; there was the gentleman who would walk jerkily two steps at a time in step with his jerky rendering of ‘Three cheers for the red, white and blue’. But the vocalists, more often soloists, usually played up the mournful songs like ‘Genevieve’, but their dismal cadences didn’t have such an effect as the cheerful lilting of a well-remembered and well-dressed quartet whose irresistible repertoire much more readily charmed the coins from our pockets and purses.

Assuredly topping the bill of these performers were those two chaps with violin and accordion doing ‘O sole mio’ and, to my untutored mind, doing it better than the Coventry Hippodrome had ever managed to achieve. Don’t ask me how far the setting may have been responsible for this, up Elm Row it was, and I who scorned almost the whole of the classical set-up found myself deeply affected.

There were scissors-grinders, too, trundling their ingenious contraptions for the job. I recollect one of these educated me by bringing to my notice that snobbery was not confined to one particular degree of society: he told me that the usual patrons of lodging-houses (there was one at Southam) resented a chap with one of these machines – scorned him, in fact – so did I know anywhere he could leave the thing overnight?

I made friends a couple of years back with a couple who were in a better position with a motor caravan and trailer containing the ‘grindery’, as they called it, specialising mainly in lawn mowers. They were encamped on my route to Prior’s Marston for about a week, and we became friends over many a cup of tea, and they have sent greetings each Christmas since, which I cannot reciprocate for I never know where they are in their wanderings. I sincerely hope we meet again.

In Dickens’s ‘Uncommercial Traveller’ he includes my present line of rush-seating, though his exponent of the craft is of the itinerant type – ‘chairs to mend’ and all that.

I don’t remember any of these visiting our village, but our old boss Mr Gardiner used to tell us that he remembered them in the old Cotswold villages when he was a lad, and that there was a rumour of one who, with an eye to future business, would include a kipper’s head in the seat stuffing. Need I explain this encouragement for the cat to scratch it out, thus providing another job on his next visit?

### **Part 28**

Gipsies we had, and still have, for that matter. There was that one, in my ‘Cosy Corner’ shop days, who opened with: ‘Ah, you’ve got a kind face,’ and all that fortune-telling thrown in with the deal, and we played battledore and shuttlecock, you might say, with her rug which she flings over the counter with each reduction in price, and I return it, not having the slightest use for it at any price. I think we finished up with a consolation deal for a few clothes-pegs, and she says on leaving, ‘Ah, I made a mistake; you haven’t got a kind face,’ which goes to show that fortune-telling isn’t infallible.

I hadn’t been at the chair-making above a month or so when Mr Castle, the Rural Industries Organiser for our area, brings me in on the demonstration side at the

Warwickshire County Agricultural Show, that year held at Alscot Park near Stratford-on-Avon, and thereby adding to my already considerable interest in the job by jolting me into the realisation that it contained an element of showmanship. It also provided many an anecdote, beginning here with the gentleman who, after watching for some considerable time, says: 'Ah, old chap, you've done a few in your time, haven't you?' And I truthfully responded with: 'Yes, I've done a few!'

That was a good one, at one of the Leamington Horticultural Show, when the dear old lady (typical of the older Spa, I should say) says quite enthralled: 'Now isn't that nice work? I suppose you're making baskets?' And there I was, weaving the seat on as solid, and I should have thought as visible, a chair as – well, as usual.

A chap at a Rotary Club's Arts and Crafts Exhibition in Rugby says: 'How I should love a job like that, creative and time to think.' Another at the 'Bath & West' held at Castle Bromwich, Birmingham, says: 'Lumme, what a b——y job. I should go potty. Do you ever have a row with the missus, mate?'

I don't suppose my attempt to draw the latter's attention to another view was of any avail; he didn't know where mass-production was leading, but when we got to that month at Bingley Hall for the Midland Ideal Homes Exhibition there was a chap who did. He got me quite embarrassed, patting me on the back – in front of the endless crowds that month – and burst out: 'That's the way, old boy! You're the backbone of the old country, you chaps, helping us to hold on to a bit of sanity.' We wonder about Ruskin's concern for the Redditch needle-maker who used to make a needle in which he took pride, but nowadays (even in Ruskin's day) puts only the point on it or the eye in it, and we wonder what Ruskin would think today. And about soul-destroying mass production my friend emphasises: 'I know! I'm in it!' And on leaving he gives me another pat on the back and 'Carry on with the good work, old fellow.' It would have done our old philosopher friend, Mr Mainwaring of Southam, good.

Bingley Hall gave us some flattering remarks from another direction, too, if I may be permitted to repeat them. Maybe modesty will be appeased if I add that I hadn't noticed such things until overhearing similar remarks on two separate occasions. I couldn't say, even now, if I was supposed to hear them. 'Look! Pianist's fingers; fingers for a piano.' Perhaps better was the second as, if I were able to play at all, I would sooner have chosen the violin: 'Craftsman's fingers! Craftsman's hands!' In any case, I was old enough to expect varied comments from a month's endless queue.

But as Mr Smith, exhibition manager for Herbert Daniels Ltd, who ran the show, remarked on asking for our reactions as the show was nearing its close, and I had replied that it carried mixed feelings, 'Oh, I know. It gets hold of you, doesn't it?' I said to the man with the corn-cure and the delightful patter on foot welfare, 'We're nearly on the last lap,' and he responded simply by holding his head in his hands and reeling. Charles Gardner, our own Stockton wood-turner, told me that someone had commented to him that he was glad the show was nearly over as his feet were b——y awful.

I told the potter, Joe Lester, about the lady catching sight of his stall opposite us, who burst out to a friend: 'Oh, there's the potterer!' and Joe says, 'Ah, she must have been watching me,' which was modest of him, for he had kicked at another lady's comment: 'I suppose you're a bit of an artist?' 'Only a bit?' replied Joe in disgust.

There were six of us in the annexe to the main hall, billed all over the place as a star attraction, 'Craftsmen in Action'. Returning from lunch one day and finding the rest lounging round Joe's stall, I exclaimed: 'Craftsmen in action?' and Bill Blackhall, the basket-maker, reminded me: 'What is this life if, full of care, we have no time to stand and stare?'

Bill Swingewood the glass-blower, probably the greatest crowd-drawer of all, completed our craftsmen's corner.

I still feel grateful to our good Chas (Gardner, not to be confused with Gardiner) and his good lady – 'Doo', as he called her – who for that long month carried me to and from the Great Western Station at Leamington, from whence we daily took the train for 'Brum', they preferring not to face the traffic chaos there with their car. Neither do I forget those cups of tea from their wood-turning stall with its fascinating exhibits. This period seldom comes to mind without the tunes from their marvellous model roundabout organ also ringing in my ears: Anniversary Waltz, Chapel on the Hill, Galway Bay and Irish Eyes.

You needed to talk to Chas himself if you wanted to know all about the hundreds of different kinds of wood in these models of theirs, unless you'd already read about them in the many glowing press reports. And you could follow this up by visiting their new bungalow, practically laid out by themselves, and count the various woods in window-sills and other fittings. I never cease to marvel at the ingenuity and industry of these two – Chas and Doo – and feel honoured to have the privilege of their friendship and fellow-craftsmanship. 'Age cannot wither them, nor custom stale their infinite variety', whether you are intrigued by their home's interior, the gardens with the goldfish pond, or their many other outside activities.

Here are a couple of villagers, at least, who are not run off a production-belt, in Stockton whose proximity to the whirligig of Coventry endangers its individuality so much. So much that it's no wonder my daughter has developed such a love of her adopted Broadwell two miles away whose inhabitants have not yet lost their capacity for knowing each other's business!

This showman's aspect to our respective crafts often throws Mr and Mrs Chas together with us at the various exhibitions which, as I relate, is all very pleasurable. It has drawn mentions, articles and pictures in papers, magazines and periodicals of all description from *The Countryman* and *Country Life* to our local press. Chas and I have even each achieved a front page to ourselves in the *Birmingham Weekly Post*. I have often remarked that rural craftsmanship is a serious rival to 'mayormanship' in the business of public photography. Chas and I have achieved an appearance on television, if that counts as an achievement. At any rate, I thought in my case that it produced a good story, because I wasn't aware of it until Chas said, on the second morning of the Warwickshire County Show one year, 'Did you know you were on telly last night?' I didn't, as I say. 'Oh yes, Brenda (his daughter) saw you.'

I later recollected two chaps amongst other cameramen who had asked me if I'd mind moving forward into the better light. Anything to oblige, and the chaps, who I thought could be press or private and to whom one soon develops immunity, twiddled away and one says: 'Carry on; I'll just have one of your fingers at work as well.' Then it struck me that we had none of the usual flash, so I said: 'What, no flash?' and the chap says, turning to his mate, 'No, we don't believe in these new-

fangled ideas, do we?’ It was only when I learnt that this picture, including my fingers, must have been the one on television, that I appreciated the irony of his humour.

It’s all very well, but this demonstration business is by no means the be-all and end-all of our work. Neville had plugged away for years cycling the five-and-a-half miles from Stockton to Priors Marston – and I always contend that this is the hardest five miles one could take from our village – with Napton Hill and up those field slopes fettered with seven gates, until we used to consider that Neville could perhaps claim to be the world’s champion gate-opener. We would work out that fourteen gates a day amounted to 4,000 a year and we awarded him – oh, I forget – twenty or thirty thousand gates before they did away with five of them.

Our friends the Harold Rawbones of Church Farm, Leamington Hastings, completely shattered these impressive figures and made us blush in modesty by bringing forth Mrs Harold’s father’s boy. He had lived Shuckburgh way, and besides the seven gates from the Shuckburgh turning to Marston, he had in his farming duties daily negotiated so many others across bridleways and so on that his daily total was twenty-eight gates! Each way, I think.

They – whoever they were – very kindly, as I say, did away with five of the gates before I joined Neville on these travels. I wonder, now that our business as well as our residence is installed in Stockton, thinking about my early journeys, which I was beginning at the age of 53, up to what age a chap was capable of cycling a dozen miles a day. I thought maybe another ten years but had to leave it rather vague for, though I could think of people biking at the age of 63, 73 or even 83, I decided it depended on their state of health and the matter lay in Higher Hands.

I was permitted to do it for almost a dozen years – twelve springs to watch the lambs gambolling in those fertile pastures, then summers, autumns and winters. Ever-changing continuity, contradictory though that may sound.

At two periods in the year the sun was hastening to work at the same time as we were and we saw two or three sunrises each morning – weather permitting – as we topped the slopes and dipped down into the hollows.

Sometimes on our evening return our and the sun’s times would again match and we would get perfect lighting as we reached the summit nearest to Shuckburgh, with the beauty of autumn tints over the Napton slopes, the village, windmill and church silhouetted over all, that would have been worth a much longer journey to see.

There are views on that side of Napton that can bear comparison to the Yorkshire Dales, just as Yorkshire here and there reminds one of the lanes round Kenilworth.

Burton Dassett with its beacon, but now lacking the neighbouring windmill, and Edgehill; beyond them the start of the Cotswolds and the Malverns themselves – an entrancing ride to work, this, but only on a push-bike with time to absorb it all.

Then there was the odd satisfaction of struggling against all sorts of weather: wind, rain, frost and snow. Our saddlebags carried our waterproofs, except when we were wearing them, essentials for year-in and year-out riding. But on the whole reasonable weather predominates and summer follows winter, unless you’re a pessimist who puts it the other way round!

## Part 29

Most of these years our journeys were brightened by our young friend June Barrett (now Taylor) who plodded by cycle as we did to and from work, but in the other direction, from the farmhouse just outside Priors Marston to Warwickshire Farmers Ltd – which I have mentioned as being the former Kendall’s Corn Mill, where I used to be accosted by Billy Francis for ‘a fag, kid’ near the station – where she worked in their office. We met her for so many years until I should think we might call her our ‘old’ friend, and she being so pleasant, I’m sure she wouldn’t object. Often we’ve opened those two gates for each other until we had an understanding that, meeting there, we left the little courtesy to the one on the pushing-side of the gate rather than the pulling-side, which obviously is the more convenient.

I still admire the little lady’s stoic courage in facing that lonely ride, summer and winter. I mean, she was only a kid, you might say, when she started, to tackle the dark winter times, and occasionally there were gypsies encamped near the top slope with the exquisite views. Not that I’ve ever thought gypsies any greater menace than gorgios [Romany word for non-gypsies – Ed]. Luckily June was a farmer’s daughter and had no fear of the cattle that were often on the road, which might terrify some people.

The road’s proximity to Shuckburgh Woods gave us other delightful interests, with the occasional weasel or stoat playfully bouncing about on our highway, or byway if you like; the owls at dusk searching the hedgerows for potential prey would sometimes accompany us for upwards of a mile; pheasants temptingly crowing nearby; now and then reynard himself slinking across our way, perhaps congratulating himself on another escape from the Warwickshire Hunt with their foxhounds who meet frequently at Shuckburgh Hall in the season; and maybe swans on the canal or that large pound at Tomlow, or more rarely a heron. There would be anglers in their season at the canal or the pound, doubtless seeking that something which Coventry cannot give, that something which is more important than the fish they may or may not catch.

The gaily-painted narrowboats are seen less frequently on this stretch of the canal, though it is good to see more pleasure craft, often moored near Napton and its reservoir which, as well as being popular with the anglers, has achieved a picturesque addition with its sailing activities since some club has acquired those rights. It reminds one of the Norfolk Broads with the sails similarly appearing, from a distance, to be travelling over land, a phenomenon visible even from our windows at home. There are mushrooms to be found in the fields on our route, as well as blackberries in their season, with happy memories of gathering the same, not forgetting eating them later when prepared for the table. On Napton Hill this year I have gathered ground ivy, in a return of my herbal interests, for its medicinal properties – it can be used as a snuff as recommended by Dr Fernie (who as a labour of love, he tells us, compiled that marvellous volume of encyclopædic knowledge on the subject of what he calls ‘herbal simples’, published by Wright of Bristol) who tells us it is useful for headaches, asthma or bronchial troubles.

Then we have watched Arnold Atkins, my cousin Tom, Dick Tomkins (now regrettably passed on), Bert Collett, Freddie Green – all of the in the farming line, right on to Marston – struggle to get their hay in, then the harvest, and watched the

methods change with the ever new machinery nowadays involved in these tasks, from hayforks to harvesters.

There are perfumes, odours and stinks, too. The may blossom surpassing description, the new-mown hay and sometimes just the smell of the earth itself, the stench of silage en route, pigs here and there, the reeking chemicals used in weed-spraying, with the drifting dust from lime-sowing perhaps not so objectionable.

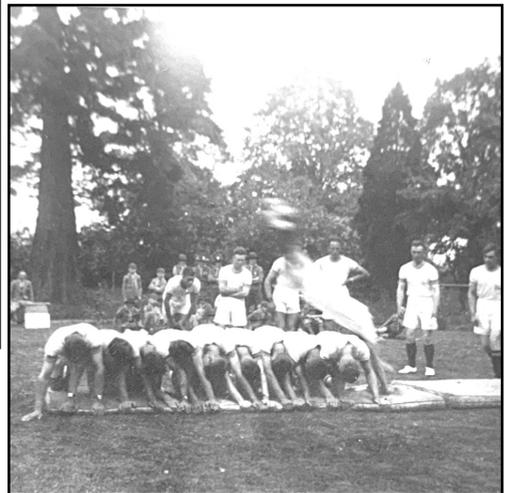
I've never disliked the tarry smell when they tar and chip our road to work every few years, and how differently this needful work has developed, even during these comparatively few years we have been riding to Marston. From the old 'hot-potato' boiler and hand-brushing the tar on the road, which sometimes took a week or more on our little section of road, to the modern mechanised outfit which Neville and I have noted has sneaked in and completed the job without our even seeing them, in less than one day between our morning journey and our return in the evening. No, I've never resented the smell as much as the inconvenience, the extra wear and tear on our cycle tyres and the loose chippings.

Through writing about these things on our route I have more fully realised myself the multifarious interests to be found there. They seem to teem into my mind: the profusion of willow-herb at the wayside, both the great hairy and the rosebay; noting whether the oak is before the ash (which as far as I can remember it always is in our district); here and there herb robert, early lesser celandine and later agrimony and yarrow – the 'poor man's tobacco'. I must stop somewhere before going on to the endless birds and their nesting habits, with which my father would have been so much more competent to deal; and besides, for tonight, supper calls!

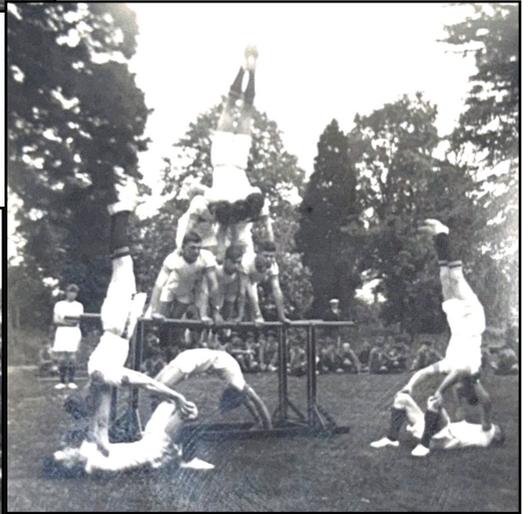


### Photographs of The Rovers

Stockton Gymnastic Club run by Mr. Henry Cleaver in the 1930's



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