

Ashland Meeting Place



The building is now looking quite settled into its surroundings, and you may have seen we now have both lighting and heating. We've had a new worktop donated and installed by Just Tops in Fenny Stratford <https://justtops.co.uk/> and we'd like to thank them for their very kind gift.

We're starting to consider the interior décor, and we're thrilled that MK College is able to support us, and their students, by using the Meeting Place as a community project they are able to get involved with. The Steering Group will now start to work on the equipment needed for the interior, and we'd love to hear from anyone who might have been involved with anything similar in the past – we'd appreciate your insight!

There's still work to be done on the exterior. We had great input from some residents in clearing some of the soil from the side of the building, and we'll start to pay attention to the underneath once the weather is slightly warmer and we can enjoy being outside! We're also talking to The Parks Trust about more exterior landscaping, and the

groundworkers who started the initial work will be back to tidy up the site once we're close to completion.

And how about a name for the building? Well, we haven't forgotten and still have the ideas that came in from the competition last year. We'll be deciding on a shortlist soon, so please let us know if you have any last-minute inspiration.

We've still to confirm an opening date and details of how to book the

building, but we'll share all this information as soon as we have it. Please follow us on Facebook for regular updates on the Ashland Neighbourhood Watch or Simpson & Ashland pages, and if you'd like to join our mailing list, please email the Clerk clerk@simpsonashland-pc.gov.uk

● **Caroline Vooght (on behalf of the Steering Group)**



The birds...

The last weekend of January saw the RSPB's Garden Birdwatch, where people across the UK are invited to note all the species visiting their garden in the space of one hour. As well as submitting records to the RSPB, thirteen Simpson households pooled their sightings to provide a picture of the extent and nature of birdlife in the village. As a similar exercise took place in January 2021, there are also opportunities to compare and contrast.

This January, 27 different species were recorded, seven more than in 2021. The most popular, found in the large majority of gardens, were blackbirds, blue tits, great tits, house sparrows, and robins. Regularly reported were collared doves, dunnocks, magpies, and wood pigeons. Of particular interest were the species observed in just one or two

gardens: blackcap, great spotted woodpecker, greenfinch, jay, nuthatch, song thrush and stock dove. It is encouraging to see the increased diversity, rewarding those who provide sources of food, thanks to thoughtful gardening and the stocking of feeders.

Two of the gardens in the survey border the brook that runs through the village. The observers were frustrated by the absence, during their chosen hour, of the heron, little egret and mallard that they often see, though a solitary moorhen did appear, to claim the prize for waterbirds.

Waterbirds are ever-present at Ashland Lakes and at this time of year there are winter visitors like the thirty or so wigeon which can be seen grazing around the perimeter. Canada geese, greylag geese, mute swans, mallards and moorhens can be found in abundance, but look out for less common ducks like gadwall (below) and shoveler. A particular feature of the most westerly of the three largest lakes are little grebes



(below right) – sometimes four in number – who can disappear below the water in an instant, only to re-emerge some distance away. And when you are in the vicinity, stand quietly on the bridge by that divides the little grebe lake and the smallest, shaded lake and you may be rewarded by the glorious sight of the kingfisher, poised on a branch over the water.

● Peter Barnes



● Lena Bates



...and the bees

Because bees are struggling with the effects of climate change, what we plant and where really matters. Early-flowering plants such as crocuses and 'poached egg plants' give bees a good start in the spring, and the wildflowers planted in Simpson and growing across Ashland open spaces will really help all kinds of insects. Recent evidence has shown how important even small gardens can be in providing nectar for bees. Flowering shrubs and climbing plants (such as honeysuckle) are great, but daisies, aquilegias and geraniums are also good. So, next time you are adding to your garden, do consider how you can help the bees and seek out those nectar-rich plants.

● Sheila Thornton

Platinum Jubilee Celebrations: 2-5 June

To celebrate HM The Queen's Platinum Jubilee, Simpson Garden Group would like to decorate the village with knitted or crocheted flowers, in pastel colours, and invites all those interested to take part, so that we can create a floral spectacular.

Using the successful knitting pattern available from Jane Anderson, Lena Bates, Brenda Ladd and Wendy Jordan or a pattern of your own choosing, we would like all contributions to be available by mid-May, please.

A Garden Group member will be available at Simpson Village Hall at midday on every Tuesday from 15 February, to collect completed flowers. Contributions of wool will be gratefully received at the same time.

Although collaborating with the Garden Group, members of the church congregation and residents of The Mount are creating their own displays.

For further information, please contact Lena Bates on 01908 664452.



With thanks to Marie Love and Anne Armstrong for these samples

Mini Jubilee Orchard

For the last 10 years the 'In Bloom' ladies from Simpson Garden Group have been looking after the plot of land just up from the Village Hall. For the first two years it was a wildflower meadow (helping us to win a Gold award in Britain in Bloom in 2013) then transformed into a herbaceous border, all funded by us on a regular basis and also some plants are needing to be replaced. Because of this – and also our aged knees and hips – the time has come for a rethink...

With the emphasis on tree planting in the Queen's Green Canopy plan for this year's Jubilee, we would like to plant a mini orchard of three or four small-to-medium trees. The area would be grassed and planted with spring-flowering bulbs. All the current plants will be relocated.

We have obtained the necessary permission to go ahead with our plans.

We would welcome donations and we know some residents have already expressed an interest in supporting us. One suggestion has been to sponsor a tree in memory of a loved one. Please contact Lena Bates on 01908 664452 for more information.

This will not be an instant project, as we aim to take time in sourcing the right trees and will be visiting specialist nurseries. Hopefully, the trees will be planted during our Queen's Jubilee year.

● Lena Bates, Brenda Ladd, Wendy Jordan and Jane Anderson

Mr Lowry & Friend



Simpson resident Gaynor Arrowsmith invites you to her arty ancestral adventure show and tell! Hear about what's been uncovered in two years of researching the intriguing story of the enduring friendship between her great-uncle and the artist L.S. Lowry.

Simpson Village Hall – Sunday 27 February
3:30pm – 6.00 pm or 7.00 pm – 9:30pm
Light refreshments.

Free admission. As places are limited please book your seat at <https://bit.ly/3F3w0ec>

MK Connect service in Simpson

In January, the Parish Council arranged a meeting in Simpson Village Hall, where residents could share their experience of the MK Connect service that replaced the number 18 bus in April 2021.

Nineteen 'older' residents attended, along with representatives of Via Van/MK Connect and Milton Keynes Council.

Residents voiced their frustrations and concerns with the service on a number of fronts: the design and suitability of the vehicles, with implications for safety; the location and identification of pick-up and drop-off points; the effectiveness of communications, particularly around the use of the booking app and the handling of phone calls; and the training of drivers.

The two representatives listened carefully to the experiences of residents and their identification of where



improvements were urgently needed. A report of the meeting was shared with the Strategic Lead Transport at MKC, as well as the Scrutiny Committee who were reviewing MK Connect on 26 January. The report and the response can be found on the Simpson and Ashland website under 'Latest News', or email the Clerk.

It has been acknowledged that there are ways in which the service could and should be improved. We will be monitoring progress...

● Sheila Thornton

Coffee & Chat



Coffee morning, every Tuesday from 10.00 to noon, in Simpson Village Hall.

Play card and board games, or just chat.

Refreshments £2, optional raffle.

Come along – we'd love to see you!

● Ruth McCracken

The colours of Ashland

Those who follow the Simpson & Ashland Facebook page will be familiar with the stunning images of Ashland Lakes, posted by Lars de Wijngaert. He is not alone – David Baume is also highly skilled with the camera.

Seeking inspiration? Lars offers the following advice:

My interest in photography started when I moved to Ashland, just over three years ago. I was inspired by the lake, its wildlife, and the beautiful skies that develop, regularly, above it.

I simply use the camera of my iPhone. Many people do not realise the options camera phones possess. I suggest you do what I did: spend some time learning the options there are. Going out and about, looking for options to shoot interesting photos is an amazing way of relaxation, which subsequently is a great medicine for mental health.

With Spring around the corner, give it a go! Happy photo shooting.



David Baume



Lars de Wijngaert



Lars de Wijngaert

News from The Mount



The bring and buy sale held in the Village Hall on 4 December, in support of The Mount's garden project, was a great success, raising over £1100. Mrs Lynne Millen was the lucky winner of the whisky raffle, which she plans to raffle again for a good cause. We are now two thirds of the way towards our target and hopefully, by next summer, we will be able to enjoy our new patio. It's also good to know that unwanted items from the sale were donated to local charity shops and are now enjoying a second life instead of going to landfill.

● Karen Steeden

Simpson Garden Group – Forthcoming talks

Tuesday 8 March

Peter Richardson
– Preston Bissett Nurseries
Colour and Interest for the Spring Season (plants for sale)

Tuesday 12 April

Ruth Barton
Distant Gardens of the British Isles

Simpson Village Hall at 8 p.m. All welcome. Non-members £3.00.

Neighbourhood Policing

We are your local Neighbourhood Policing Team who cover from Central Bletchley all the way across to Newton Leys. We comprise eight Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) and three Police Officers and operate out of the Blue Light Hub in West Ashland. We are more than happy to help with any queries or concerns you may have in the area.

Unless it is an emergency, please feel free to contact us by email at MKBletchleycluster@thamesvalley.pnn.police.uk You can also report incidents via 101, online or Crime Stoppers, anonymously, by calling 0800 555 111.

As often as possible, we attend the Tuesday coffee mornings in Simpson Village Hall, where we are more than happy to have individual chats about your concerns or queries.

If you see us around the area, please stop us and say hello!

● PCSO Louise Bailey on behalf of the team

Leaky Houses!

How do you make your property less 'leaky' and save energy and make keeping warm less expensive? The One House/Whole Street project in Simpson has proved of interest to many residents of Hanmer Road and

Lissel Road and those who live in old (sometimes listed) properties. Following surveys on three houses and several online meetings, it has been decided that residents will continue to share ideas, research and learning in groups based around their street or type of property. Monica Shelley, Sian Lewis and Matt Porter are co-ordinating the initial meetings.

Please contact the Clerk if you would like to be part of the discussion and make 'leaky houses' a thing of the past.

The surveys and extracts from residents' feedback are on the parish website: www.simpsonandashland.co.uk/latest-news.html

● Sheila Thornton

Simpson Village Hall Open Again!



Saturday 13 November saw the celebration of the re-opening of our Village Hall. Over 80 people turned up to enjoy homemade soup and cakes and an exhibition of photos and artefacts illustrating the history of the Hall. The informal Working Group, which has been working on the documentation necessary for the re-opening, as well as painting and decorating the Hall, were delighted to see Simpson residents old and young, as well as visitors from other parts of Milton Keynes. We are hopeful that bookings, which have already opened up, will increase over the coming months.

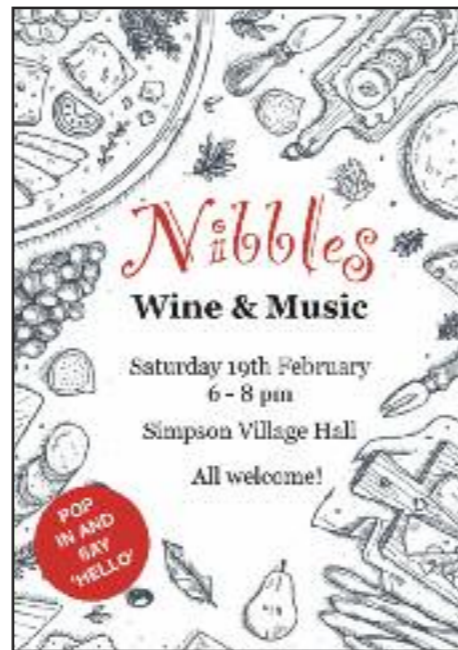
The Open Day also provided an opportunity to thank Peter Barnes for his

many years of running almost every aspect of the Hall - a very heavy task for one person. Peter was presented with a splendid cake.

For the future, we need to organise some form of management committee which will take the overall responsibility for running the hall. Are there supporters of the hall out there who'd be willing to join such a group? Please contact the Clerk at clerk@simpsonashland-pc.gov.uk. If you'd like to discuss joining, one of the current informal group would be happy to talk to you. All will be welcome! To enquire about booking the hall please email simpsonashlandhalls@gmail.com



And don't miss this!...



Quiz Nights

From August 2021 onwards, we have had a variety of quiz nights and concerts at St Thomas's Church, raising £3,599 for different charities and church funds. These events are attended by many people in the Church, the village, their friends and families.

We started 2022 with a Quiz Night, with fish and chips, on Saturday 15 January, which raised a total of £380, divided between Healing Hands and church funds.

The winners of the quiz finished with a brilliantly high score. The winners of the draw for the chocolate (right) said they would rather win the chocolate!



Further quiz nights and concerts are being planned this year. If you want to be included on the circulation for

emails giving information, please contact missquiz@sky.com

● Pat Hodges

Canal tow path upgrade

In November 2021, the Parish Council joined the Canal and River Trust Partner Group Scheme. This allows Councils and volunteer groups to organise and carry out improvements on their adopted stretch of the tow path. On 22 January, Parish Councillors teamed up with three volunteers from the Canal and River Trust – Shelini, Sarah and Jim – to replace the hedging on the boundary with Warren Bank, which was destroyed in a fire some time ago. Rows of whips were planted – hawthorn, blackthorn, alder, briar rose – which, in due course, will provide an attractive screen, at the same time as benefitting wildlife.

The next project is to improve the particularly muddy stretches of the tow path – like that bordering The Mount – by resurfacing them with compacted hardcore. If you can spare an hour or two in the morning on Saturday 26 February and/or Saturday 5 March, please contact Ross Eatwell

ross.eatwell@simpsonashland-pc.gov.uk

● Ross Eatwell



News from St. Thomas' Church



We were glad that most of our Christmas events and services were able to go ahead last year. We now have a carbon dioxide monitor in the church which lets us know when we need to increase the ventilation. We were delighted to welcome a large group from the Dementia Day Care Centre to sing carols in the church and we also enjoyed holding a Christingle service for the local uniformed organisations. We were only sorry that the latter clashed with the turning on of the Christmas tree lights.

Mary and Joseph and the donkey had a busy advent travelling around and staying in different people's homes. They also came to the coffee group in the Village Hall and took a carload of donations to the Foodbank. We collect for the Foodbank all year round. If you would like to make a donation, please

let us know or you can pop into church with them on Sunday morning.

The bee orchids are coming up in the church yard again and several members of our congregation have also started knitting and crocheting flowers so that we can join in with Simpson Garden Group's plans to decorate the village for the Queen's Platinum Jubilee in June.

We continue to host quizzes and concerts in the church to raise money for a wide range of charities as well as for the church building

fund. The next quizzes will be held on 12 and 26 February. Please email missquiz@sky.com to book your place.

As Fairtrade Fortnight approaches, we have made a commitment to become a Fairtrade Church which means that all the tea and coffee we use will be fairly traded. We have a dream that Simpson and Ashland could become a Fairtrade community!

Our plans for Holy Week and Easter will be announced shortly. In the meantime, you are all very welcome to come to our regular Sunday services at 10:30am or to join the monthly hymn-singing sessions with our neighbours from the Dementia Day Care Centre. These are normally on the second Monday of the month at 11.00am.

● **Nicola Vidamour (Minister)**
revnicolav@gmail.com
01908 322366

● **Iola Samuels (Church Warden)**
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07855 757005



Simpson & Ashland Parish Council on Facebook

Are you a Facebook user? Become a friend of Simpson & Ashland on Facebook. Stay in touch, comment on and ask questions about what is going on in your neighbourhood. We also tweet! @SimpsonAshland



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This edition of the parish newsletter has been edited by Peter Barnes and designed by Dylan Jeavons.

With thanks to the following contributors: Jane Anderson, Louise Bailey, Lena and Steve Bates, David Baume, Lars de Wijngaert, Ross Eatwell, Pat Hodges, Sian Lewis, Ruth McCracken, Iola Samuels, Monica Shelley, Karen Steeden, Sheila Thornton, Nicola Vidamour, and Caroline Vooght.

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