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The higher purpose of local government

Ned Chatterton

Last February one unsuspecting council and a certain Jackie Weaver were catapulted into the limelight. The YouTube video of a fractious Handforth Parish council instantly became a national talking point and phrases like, "You have no authority here, Jackie Weaver!" could be called out in the street to the knowing smiles of any passer-by.

Aside from its comic value, the video also reminded people of what some see as the pitfalls of local government. Amateurism, inefficiency and egotism – all these words could be thrown at those who serve as volunteers on our parish councils.

But take a look at Oundle Town Council for a different picture.

The council declares on its website that its aim is to maintain "a beautiful thriving market town renowned for being a fantastic place to live, work and a joy to visit".

It may appear relatively basic at face value but, of course, it takes a lot to keep Oundle this good.

The council carries out many day-to-day roles such as maintaining and administering public outdoor and indoor spaces such as Queen Victoria Hall, Fletton House and Snipe Meadow as well as consulting on planning, and allocating grant money. As Councillor David Chapple put it: "This council punches way above its weight providing a small town with large town facilities."

However, local government, in Oundle at least, serves a higher purpose. Cllr Chapple said: "Of course the council is about local government, and this inevitably means matters of administration, but it means - or should do - so much more than that. It can and should be about trying to ensure that the people of Oundle have every opportunity to experience and enjoy the quality of life that

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Georgina Backhurst, Ali Lloyd and Ali Winbolt are part of the volunteer team from Blooming Oundle who have designed a new planting scheme across Oundle. With materials and plants donated from Coles Building Merchants, Nene Valley Brewery, and The Barn and with funding from many businesses, they have created new tubs, taken over old planters and renewed overgrown verges. The initiative is one of Transition Oundle's projects to promote greener living.

Conservatives claim majority seats at new North Northants Council

Robert Brettle

Oundle has elected three councillors to the new North Northants Council, all from the Conservative Party, in what was a successful set of local elections for the Conservatives overall.

These were the first local elections to take place in Northamptonshire's new unitary authority, which was won by the Conservatives with 60 seats to Labour's 14. The Green Party also won three seats in the Clover Hill ward in Kettering. North Northamptonshire turnout was low at only 34.64%.

In Oundle, the three elected councillors won comfortably with over 7000 total votes. The next largest share of the votes went to the Liberal Democrats, with nearly 3000 total votes.

One of the new NNC councillors,

Annabel de Capell Brooke, had previously represented Oundle on the East Northants Council. "I was delighted and honoured to be re-elected to represent the residents of Oundle and the villages. It's a huge and diverse geographical area and I've been fortunate to get to know and work with many community groups and organisations over this time. I am very much looking forward to continuing this work," she said. "The new North Northamptonshire unitary authority gives us all an historic opportunity to create a Council which works for us all."

She told us that she was invested in continuing to work with local groups on planning and with those who are fighting to retain Fletton Field as a green space in the town. The new NNC

will inherit the decision of how to dispose of the land. "My hope is to find a solution which can preserve the rich history. There are also vital planning applications afoot and I will be monitoring these carefully."

Helen Harrison was raised in Laxton and went to Bulwick Primary School. As a chartered physiotherapist, she worked for almost a decade in the NHS in Peterborough and Stamford and has set up her own successful physiotherapy clinic in Harringworth. She previously represented the Fineshade Ward on the ENC.

She said her background in health is what will drive her priorities in her new role on North Northants Council. "I want to see health and well-being

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Local government

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they aspire to."

Former councillor Tony Robinson said: "The emphasis is on the wrong thing - administration. It makes local government very unimportant. It concentrates more on stopping things than starting things. The governor on an engine stops it from going too fast or too slow, it's the fuel that makes it go. We grow our communities by helping them fly."

Councillor Ian Clark agrees, saying that the best thing about the council is, "the sense of achievement when we get a project through to completion and it's well received. In my time, the new skatepark and the boardwalk feel like things that have enhanced life for residents in Oundle."

The councillors are all volunteers and no one denies that this is a challenge. "It's remarkably tough work for a group of amateur volunteers!" says Cllr Clark. But they keep coming back because they want to keep that special quality which Oundle has.

Cllr Chapple joined the council thirty-five years ago. When asked how he would describe what he has been doing for those past years, at first, he said he has been serving Oundle. But then he added: "If I was going to be cynical, however, I might make a more flippant comment along the lines of - my years on the council have been at times both maddening and disheartening but I have kept coming back for more because at other times it has been truly rewarding and the pleasure at such times always outweighs any pain."

Cllr Chapple said: "Perhaps there is a perception that councillors are in it for personal glory or self-advancement. But there is no glory in what we do; there are more brickbats than bouquets to be found."

Former councillors Peter Peel and Tony Robinson were more blunt. "You have to keep fighting the b*****!"; "Don't let the b*****"

New councillors at NNC

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at the heart of policy making. The pandemic has highlighted just how important it is to ensure that residents have every opportunity to take care of their health, and I am determined that they should have access to services and an environment that promotes good mental and physical health."

Jason Smithers was elected in 2018 to represent Higham Ferrers on the Northants County Council. He has since been chosen by the new North Northants Conservative group to be their leader. He tweeted: "On the back of last weeks #elections, we have a significant mandate from the electorate and will deliver upon our promises."

grind you down!" they both said.

The Council has faced its own problems. "I could write a book," admitted Cllr Chapple. There are the common political problems: not enough funding or power.

In particular, the council was very disappointed to have its Neighbourhood Plan - the blueprint for how the residents of Oundle want the town to expand with new housing - rejected by the ENC.

Cllr Clark said, "The town council is effectively a parish council so has limited powers - and many of the decisions affecting Oundle seem to be taken in distant offices, which we need to get better at influencing."

Former councillor Peter Peel agreed: "It is not for those who wish to dictate from far afield to say you must have this or that. "It is for all those who live, work and play here that must come first."

However, an arguably greater blight gnaws at the heart of local government: a lack of recognition for the role they perform in a flourishing town.

Tony Robinson recognises this: "Possibly the greatest problem facing local government is making councillors feel successful. The image of Handforth was there long before we saw the social-media bit. So, image is the biggest problem, and you cannot just say that it's better, it has to be that way."

Not just that, but it appears our councillors are a dying breed. Of the 14 seats available, only ten nominations were received. Before any votes had been cast on 6 May, all the town councillors knew they had an uncontested place on the council. Cllr Chapple said: "I have been elected to the council as there were insufficient candidates for there to be an election, which is disappointing but hardly surprising. I wish I knew how we could attract more people to take up the challenge of becoming a councillor."

The council is unique in that it is the only institution which serves Oundle town alone. Solely focused on our town, it does so much, both in terms of day-to-day administration and by employing a broad vision for bettering Oundle.

This is why Oundle Town councillors - and the majority of other people in local government - are nothing like the shouty little boxes which appear in the Handforth YouTube video.

Even after thirty-five years, Cllr Chapple remains devoted to the Council: "The best thing about the council is that it remains apolitical. The party that all councillors belong to is 'the Oundle Party' with all of us trying to make the town as good as it can be, both preserving what is good and trying to have positive developments too."

Do local councils really matter?

Robert Foskett

Are you one of the many people who think that local elections do not matter and if you vote it won't make a difference?

In April, BBC News travelled to the Marfleet ward in Hull, which had one of the lowest voter turn-outs in England in 2019 (12.7% of eligible voters). They found that many people were not interested in voting due to a lack of understanding of local government. The polling expert, Professor Sir John Curtice, said that the perception is "general elections matter and local elections do not". This perception cannot be further from the truth.

The council is funded through a 'precept' which households pay as part of their council tax bill, and local councillors are the people who make most of the decisions on council tax and how the money is then spent.

Councils do more than just emptying the bins. They provide most of the local public services, for example, social care, education, highways, housing, libraries, open spaces and planning. Many people have views on these local matters but do not realise that their voice can be heard.

In Oundle, we have the Town Council as well as the new North Northamptonshire Council. OTC is responsible for a number of the town's facilities, such as the car parks, the cemetery, the Recreation Ground, Snipe Meadow, the War Memorial and the graveyard at St Peter's Church. In addition to this, the Town Council represents the town, commenting on planning applications.

Participation in local government is not solely confined to voting. Observing OTC meetings has made me feel more involved in the town, and I have a greater awareness of the issues that the town faces and have been able to contribute in the time set aside at the start of the meetings for public participation.

At its best, public participation leads to greater democratic representation. It includes connecting ideas with a strategy and resources. Have you ever thought of what skills and ideas you could bring to a project which would benefit Oundle? OTC are always pleased to receive suggestions, ideas and comments. It also currently has four vacancies, should you wish to take a more leading role in the town.

Local government really does matter to our daily lives. As Helen Keller said: "Alone, we can do so little; together we can do so much."

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Parish Path Wardens keep footpaths from being lost

William Caskey

Northamptonshire has 1929 miles of rights of way in a network that includes footpaths, bridleways and byways used by walkers, cyclists and horse riders who enjoy getting out into the countryside. Together with landowners and farmers, the county ensures that routes are kept open and passable. At parish level, volunteer Path Wardens play an important role in the upkeep of rights of ways.

The purpose of the warden role is to help maintain the quality and accessibility of footpaths by monitoring the rights of way network locally and providing annual reports to the Parish Council. The Northamptonshire County Council Rights of Way Improvement plan, published in July 2020, said that the Parish Path Warden scheme was "very much up and running".

The role is described as "an important link between the Rights of Way officers and each Parish and Town in the country". Despite the recognition of the importance of the role, the former NCC withdrew support for the position due to the expense of insurance cover for volunteers operating on their behalf.

The actual expense of

insuring the role is unknown. NCC insurance cover relating to volunteers forms part of the council's general insurance policies. "Unfortunately premiums are not broken down to this level of detail," the NCC said.



However, local parishes are encouraged to appoint a warden who can liaise with the new unitary authority about potential rights of way issues. Many parish councils in Northamptonshire have continued to appoint a Path Warden and sometimes cover the position under its own public liability insurance.

Danny Moody, Chief Executive

of the Northamptonshire County Association of Local Councils said: "The Parish Paths Warden Scheme hasn't been supported by NCC for quite a few years now, although there are still plenty of Parish Paths Wardens soldiering on informally. The creation of the new unitaries, and the re-procurement of the county's highways contract, presents an opportunity to have a rethink."

rights of way and access to the countryside."

Mr Hoyle said he is "resigned to wait" until further progress is made by the new unitary authority on the Path Warden issue. In the meantime, he will aim to uphold the duties of the Path Warden, despite the lack of official recognition or support by the NNC.

"I will endeavor to walk each of the public rights of way within the Oundle parish, and report issues to the highways authority," he says. Mr Hoyle assured me that he is, "no more than any other member of the public, exercising their right of access, except that it would be a systematic review of local rights of way," and so insurance cover would be unnecessary.

Mr Hoyle is adamant that the position of Path Warden is an "effective way" for the council and unitary authorities to fulfill their responsibilities to maintain the quality of local paths and is therefore a worthwhile investment.

Leon Jolly, Head of Operational Delivery, Northamptonshire Highways said they "are supporting existing Parish Path Wardens and have not removed them" but new recruitment to the scheme was suspended until a revised Path Warden scheme could be developed.

Chains of office are archived as East Northants Council is shuttered

Ned Chatterton

Retirement of the ENC chains of office marks the beginning and end of another phase in the cycle of local government.

The residents of Oundle said farewell to the ENC after it was merged into the new North Northamptonshire Council in April. The ceremonial chains of office of the East Northamptonshire District Council (ENC) were retired to Rushden Town Council when the North Northamptonshire Council was formed on 1 April.

The chains, used by the ENC since 1974, had previously been used by the Rushden Urban District Council from 1935 until it became part of ENC.

There are three chains; one for the Chairperson, his or her consort, and the deputy Chairperson.

Stepping aside from council politics for the year, the Chairperson wore the chains during their year in office. Their role included chairing the district council meetings and attending public or "chain gang" events, as they are called.

The chairperson also nominated a charity for voluntary donations

throughout the year and organised ticketed events for that charity.

Rupert Reichhold, who represented Oundle on the ENC, served as Chairman for the year 2016 – 2017, and nominated the National Autistic Society, the Royal Anglian Regiment (formerly the Northamptonshire Regiment), and the Gurkha Welfare Trust.

"My Chairman's Dinner yielded a total of £988 for the charities I nominated," he said.

The ENC was formed from an amalgamation of the local Urban and Rural District Councils which had been around since 1894.

Cllr Helen Howell, Chair of East Northamptonshire, announced at a council meeting in January that funds had been made available for refurbishing the chains to ensure that they were preserved and protected for many more years.

Councillors agreed that all three chains are historic artefacts and should be restored and placed on display at Rushden Town Council with a plaque to note all of the past chairs of East Northamptonshire Council.



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Diocesan pushes ahead with land sale

Matthew Atkin

Despite objections from Titchmarsh parish residents, the Peterborough Diocesan Board of Finance voted in December to proceed with the sale of 114 acres of glebe farmland.

In an emergency meeting last July, the St Mary's Parochial Church Council in Titchmarsh unanimously voted to formally object to the diocese's proposed sale with a 10-year development option for light industry. However, they were unable to alter the fate of the glebe land due to a change in ecclesiastical law, implemented in 2018.

Stephen Barber, lay chair of the PCC, remarked on the profound impact that the sale could potentially have on the lives of the local community. "We will be very robust in our response to the Diocese, but we also need to mobilise wider village support against this massively inappropriate proposal."

The Clerk to Titchmarsh Parish Council updated the Oundle Town Council in an email, expressing their frustration. "The letter announcing the decision makes no reference to any of the arguments put forward by the PCC, gives no information about how the review was conducted or how such a review might be applied in future. It just reiterates that the money is indeed to fund clergy in deprived areas. It would appear that nothing was going to shift them from the fait accompli presented to us in July."

The diocesan board has appointed IM Properties to take the scheme through the planning process. The Titchmarsh council said it is prepared to robustly counter any planning application that is brought forward.

Covid restrictions impact public access

Meagan Iu

The issue of land ownership and public access became a flash-point earlier this year when Oundle School closed access to previously open green spaces. Most of the existing open green spaces in Oundle are under private ownership of Oundle School or other schools, including Prince William School and Oundle Primary School, which do not allow the public to use their playing fields for recreation or dog walking.

In January, people were disappointed to find that open spaces on Glapthorn Road and South Road owned by Oundle School had been

closed to public access.

The locked gates to the Chapel lawns prompted objections on community Facebook pages. "It's hard enough to exercise in the town in a responsible and socially distanced manner. It seems to me to be very petty to shut this off, given that the route has been open since the pandemic closed the school," a resident posted. Another user claimed that the school was slowly stopping access to paths that they have used for over fifty years. "When an institution takes over virtually all the open space in the town, it has a responsibility to the community in which it has the privilege to be located," he said.

Some residents who joined the thread expressed frustration about the complaints. "I am fed up with people moaning about what they haven't got. Oundle isn't overcrowded. It's not impossible to walk around to exercise."

Another person agreed, "I chose to live here and bring my family up here - as did those people who constantly moan about the School. The School was here long before any of us. It's our choice to live here."

The Director of Communications at Oundle School, Rachel Makhzangi, explained that the School grounds are generally closed to the public because they are private property, although some areas such as the paths across the Chapel lawns are open to the public. "As with all organisations, we have a duty of care to anyone on our grounds and therefore it is important that anyone accessing our grounds and facilities, especially sporting ones, does so through the right channel so that insurance and liability, etc, are all in place."

During the lockdowns, however, the School closed areas that had been open to the public. "At the moment, the whole of our estate is closed due to COVID-19 and this includes the sports facilities," she said.

New routes had been created for pupils to walk around School safely, and movement by pupils around town was prohibited. The school also had to ensure protection for the staff who were on the site maintaining grounds and gardens. The open space on South Road also came under dispute at the start of the year when signs appeared prohibiting access. Mrs Makhzangi explained that the field is leased to the town football club and needed time to recover after the local floods. Dog fouling was also becoming an issue, as well as complaints from neighbours about disorderly groups of young people.

All these rules are under constant review in hope that as the lockdown eases, the town will resume its normal lively routines.

Right to regenerate targets unused land

Archie Atkinson

A new government initiative could force councils to sell vacant plots of land and derelict buildings for redevelopment under plans announced in January by the Housing Secretary, Robert Jenrick MP. The 'Right to Regenerate' would be built from an existing law where members of the public can try to buy unused land off councils.

This existing law, created by Michael Heseltine in 1980, gave the public the power to request a sale of underused land owned by public bodies in England - this was then extended through the Community Right to Reclaim Land in 2011. Despite the useful nature of this law, it has not yet been used much by the public. Since the 2014 creation of the Right to Contest, only 192 requests have been made under this power and only one has been granted, having usually been refused because the owner had future plans for the land.

Both main parties are in favour of the policy, and it may well soon begin to have an impact in Northamptonshire.

The government said: "We want to empower people to challenge the inefficient use of public sector land in their communities, and to bring it into better economic use, including to provide new homes."

The latest figures show there were over 25,000 vacant council owned homes and according to recent FOI data, over 100,000 empty council-owned garages last year. Underused public land could be sold to individuals or communities by default, unless there is a compelling reason the owner should hold onto it.

This bill is not very popular among some people who would prefer greater powers to purchase private property that has been left derelict. Most underused sites are not owned by councils. It is argued that the government should give councils more power to force owners to look after their sites, or to take empty buildings and neglected sites into public ownership that could create some new homes, businesses and community assets.

For instance, the Riverside Hotel, owned by Charles Lane has been derelict for over 30 years. Since 1986 it has provided nothing but an eyesore for the residents of Oundle, and many people in the area are keen for this to be changed. There has been a long history of planning applications for the site, but none of the approved plans have been carried forward. This is the sort of property that people feel should be prioritised by councils.

Planning rules expose conservation areas to development

Noa Anderson

The government has introduced new planning rules that will allow commercial high-street properties to be converted into housing without full planning applications from August 1. Although it has been possible to convert retail properties in the past, any conversion into residential use required full planning permission. The new homes will now be able to proceed through a simpler "prior approval" process.

The government has said this action has been taken to "help cement our high streets and town centres in the rightful place at the heart of our communities".

The laws follow the increase in high-street vacancies. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, many businesses have closed or switched to online retailing only, such as Topshop and Debenhams. More than 17,500 chain stores closed in 2020 alone. The rules state that after a building has been vacant for three months, it can be converted.

According to Communities Secretary Robert Jenrick, the rules "will help support the creation of much-needed homes while also giving high streets a new lease of life".

The public, however, are split on this issue. Some argue that well-maintained residences are more beneficial to their communities than dilapidated shopfronts, while others claim that allowing homeowners to snatch up these properties will discourage small businesses and lead to the end of the high street as we know it.

The Royal Institute of British Architects said that the new legislation would cause "further damage to suffering high streets by turning essential community amenities into, all too often, substandard homes". Residential properties do not provide footfall, revenue or employment for communities, and they remove locations for community assets or new businesses.

Within Oundle, long vacant properties such as the former Nat-West bank could be converted to residential use.

The new right will not apply to listed buildings. But other buildings within the conservation area will be exempt from heritage considerations.

Ingrid Samuel, heritage director at the National Trust said that councils will be practically powerless. "We're particularly disappointed that these changes will also apply in conservation areas, where extra care should be taken to safeguard local history and beauty."

Historic England audits links to transatlantic slave economy

Jennifer Yang

Earlier this year, English Heritage published an audit of Britain's built environment that had links to the transatlantic slave trade that they had begun in early 2020. Their 157-page report identified hundreds of properties, including great houses, schools, farms, pubs and gravestones.

England played a pivotal role in the early centuries of the highly lucrative commerce of transatlantic slavery. The Slave Voyages databases allow searches on nearly 36,000 slave voyages that occurred between 1514 and 1866, including those sailing from English ports.

Encouraged by the British government, trading companies flourished, and were supported by huge sums of investment from merchants and aristocrats who accumulated great wealth from slave labour. The enormous amount of wealth generated was spent in buying landed estates in Britain, "including physical legacies in the built environment". The English Heritage report lists known linkages between a house or building and an individual or business with slavery associations.

Although large cities like Bristol and Liverpool received the bulk of the investments from the slave trade, the report identified country houses in Northamptonshire that

have links to slavery.

Astrop House in Kings Sutton was built in 1740 by Sir John Willes, who jointly held a plantation in Antigua for several years.

Ecton Hall, east of Earls Barton, has similar connections. Thought to have sixteenth century connections, it was renovated significantly in 1756 for Ambrose Isted, probably by Sanderson Miller. The Isted family owned a sugar and rum plantation in Jamaica from 1694 to 1766.

In nearby Lincolnshire, Burghley House in Stamford was built and is still owned by the Cecil family. In 1724, Cecil Brownlow, the 8th Earl of Exeter, married Hannah Sophia, daughter and co-heir of Thomas Chambers, a London merchant who had grown rich in the West Indies. When their son, the 9th Earl, inherited Burghley House in 1754, he employed Capability Brown to modernise the garden, surrounding parkland and aspects of the House, including the construction of stables, an orangery and a Gothic garden summerhouse.

The audit also documents legacies in the built environment that commemorate the presence of men, women and children brought to England as slaves.

The earliest tomb currently known to have been erected to commemorate a person of African

descent, remembers 'Myrtilla' in the churchyard at St Lawrence in Oxhill, Warwickshire. The headstone was inscribed in 1705 with "negro slave to Mr Thos Beauchamp of Nevis". It is thought that Mytilla was brought from Nevis by the sugar planter Thomas Beauchamp to serve his wife Perilitta Meese, daughter of the Oxhill rector.

In Northamptonshire, Charles Bacchus, a servant to Richard Bond, is remembered by a memorial erected in 1762 in the Church of St Mary in Culworth. The boy was 16 when he died. Part of the inscription on his headstone reads: "In Memory of / CHARLES BACCHUS / (an African) / who died March 31. 1762. / He was beloved and Lamented / by the Family he Serv'd / was Grateful, and Humane / and gave hopes of Proving / a faithful Servant / and a Good Man. / Aged 16' // Here titles cease! Ambitions oer! / And Slave of Monarch, is no more. / The Good alone will find in Heav'n, / Rewards assigned, and Honour giv'n".

Charles Bacchus was probably born in Jamaica, where two of his owner's brothers held plantations. At the age of eight he was brought to England as a servant, likely to have been favoured by his owners, for the sentimental inscription on his stone memorial shows that

he was held in high regard by the Bond family. It is possible that Bacchus' owner, Richard Bond, had West Indian interests. Bond's late wife Dorcas, whose first husband had held Jamaican properties, had made him the largest landowner in Haselbech after her death in 1757. Following her death, Bond moved to Culworth, bringing his two daughters - Sarah and Rebecca - with him; they are thought to have formed part of the family of which Baccus was 'beloved and lamented'.

Apart from houses which benefited from the slave trade, on the other side of the scale, abolitionists have left their mark. Part of Kettering's coat of arms features a Black man with a broken chain dangling from his wrist, symbolising the work of the Reverend William Knibb, who campaigned against slavery in Jamaica. A plaque to Knibb was erected by the Kettering Civic Society.

Historic England said: "The history of transatlantic slavery is indivisible from the history of England. The work surveyed here reinforces the idea that buildings and landscapes, and the stories they hold, are sites of memory, identity, shared heritage, education and local connection."

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Oundle scrubs up well with initiatives by Transition's Tidy-up Team

Blooming Oundle is a new volunteer project initiated by Transition Oundle and Oundle Business Association to encourage people to take responsibility for improving the public spaces around Oundle. The last few months have seen neglected areas and town centre spaces transformed by the group's extra care and attention.

Since its launch in January, more than fifty volunteers have been hard at work planning their programme, and cleaning, redesigning, planting and tidying areas across town. Their mission is to improve the local environment and protect the town's green spaces.

The Town Tidy-up Team, led by Myra Hales, addressed Northants Highway's neglect of seven bus shelters with buckets and sponges, cleaning off bird poo, moss, green algae, cobwebs and graffiti. They also cleaned street furniture and scrubbed off accumulated grime on the five welcome signs at the road junctions into town.

Another team of experienced gardeners led by Lydia Jones, Ali Winbolt and Ali Lloyd have planted up containers around town with drought tolerant herbs and free flowering plants. They planned a colour scheme of pink, mauve and white, and have made creative use of different planting containers

to add interest to displays. Their use of former beer barrels is not only practical, but makes reference to the brewing industry that once flourished in town.

On Cotterstock Road, Talia Borley has built a community seed swap where gardeners can share

vegetable and flower seeds with each other.

The team is also supporting a gardening club at Oundle Library.

"The Blooming Oundle project has really ignited a spark in people who want to clean up and green up our beautiful market town," said Paul Eveleigh, Chair of the Oundle Business Association.

The group welcomes any volunteers who want to get involved.

Blooming Oundle was kick-

started with National Lottery Community Funding, with additional funding from the Oundle Town Council and Oundle Business Association.

Donations from a number of local companies, include Buttercups Florists, The Cycle Technician, The Splined Hub, Nene Valley Tree Services, Nene Valley Brewery, The Barn Garden Centre and Coles Builders Merchants.



Julie Wade Wallace researched permaculture irrigation techniques to design a water-saving system that she installed at the base of the town's new flower planters, which will use 70-90% less water.

Residents resume fight to keep Fletton Field green

The ongoing fight to keep Fletton Field as a green space at the centre of Oundle has been renewed by a group that includes Oundle Town Council, Oundle Transition, Oundle School and local residents. They plan to restate the case to the new unitary authority that the field should be saved from development as a multi-purpose, public green space for people to enjoy and benefit from.

The 1.7 acre site is located off Glaphorn Road with Abbott House to the north and Oundle School Chapel to the south. The field was used by Oundle Primary School until the school was relocated in 2016 and has been used by local residents and pupils at Oundle School for recreational activities for many years.

The site has not been identified for use in any Local Plans to meet the town's commitments for new housing, and the Town Council and Oundle School are opposed to development on the site. In 2016 and 2019, Northamptonshire County Council submitted two outline planning applications

for development, one for 13 houses and one for 33 extra care apartments; both were refused by East Northants Council.

In 2016, the field was designated by the ENC as an Asset of Community Value for its role in furthering the social wellbeing of the local community. Later that year, Oundle Town Council, supported by the then Oundle Recreation and Green Spaces Group submitted a further application for the land to be recognised as an official village green. The application included 87 witness statements demonstrating use of the land by the general community over a sustained period of time. After a lengthy and expensive application process and public inquiry, NCC, as the Common Registration Authority rejected the application: "The applicant failed to prove that a significant number of inhabitants of Oundle Town participated in lawful sports and pastimes on "Fletton Field" for a period of at least 20 years."

The field's status as an asset of Community Value expired in January, and has to be reapplied for to

the new North Northants Council, the body which now owns the land.

Organisers argue that most of the green space within the parish boundaries is privately owned. Oundle has less green space per person than other comparable towns in Northamptonshire: one tenth that of Raunds and one fifth that of Burton Latimer. Losing Fletton Field to development would reduce Oundle's public access green space by forty-two percent.

Tony Hoyle said: "The ideal solution would see title to the field transferred to Oundle Town Council and a charitable trust or Community Interest Company established to use and manage the space, taking inspiration from organisations such as The Green Patch in Kettering or The Geddington Brick Yard Garden.

"North Northamptonshire Council replaced NCC and ENC from 1 April 2021, so now is the time to reassert the town's claim."

In response to surveys, Oundle residents have indicated suggestions for use, including a community garden and venue for outdoor

events and learning.

"The COVID pandemic has reminded us of the value of green space - for exercise and fresh air, for health and well-being, and once it has disappeared, getting it back is nearly impossible. We have created a vision for the field, based on public survey, and we want to see it become a reality," said Camilla Sherwin, leader of the campaign.

Fletton Field is part of land that was sold to the Guardians of the Poor of the Oundle Union by the trustees of John William Smith in 1899 and was originally used as allotments for the workhouse.

The Local Government Act in 1929 transferred the Poor Laws to local authorities and the ownership passed to NCC. The Indenture for sale of the land includes a covenant that prohibits building on a substantial part of the existing field.

In 1973, it was designated as the playing field for the primary school on Milton Road. When the school relocated to Cotterstock Road the ownership of the land reverted to NCC.

Eligibility for free school meals increased during pandemic

Cherry Yang

The school closures during the pandemic revealed how vulnerable those children are who rely on free meals at school to help alleviate food poverty at home.

At the start of the lockdown in January, a mother posted a picture on social media of the free school meal parcel that she had received. The supposed £30 worth of pictured food meant to last 10 days looked to be worth only £5.22. Her post prompted mass outrage and an abrupt change in how the government would assist families whose children would qualify for free school meals.

In addition to the option of a food parcel, the government launched the national voucher scheme, enabling families to order online £15 worth of supermarket vouchers per child.

In Northamptonshire, there are 17,001 children who qualify for free school meals. The Northamptonshire County Council announced that they would distribute vouchers after the food hampers were widely panned as inadequate.

All children in Reception, year 1 and year 2 are entitled to free school meals under the Universal Infant School Meals Scheme. If a family is eligible for benefits, which depends on income-related allowances, as well as pension, tax, and universal credit they can apply for their school to receive a pupil premium, which is additional school funding paid directly to the school to help improve the quality of education.

Parents can apply for free school meals for older children in full-time education up to the age of 18 if they are in receipt of certain benefits. If a child is eligible for free school meals, the school will automatically receive a pupil premium payment. Both Oundle Primary School and Prince William School have been actively involved.

In response to a Freedom of Information request, the NCC said OPS had 22 pupils eligible for free school meals in Years 3-6 in January 2020. This increased to 29 pupils in January 2021.

At Prince William School, there were 70 eligible pupils in January 2020, which increased to 101 pupils in January 2021.

The increases at both schools are an indicator of how the pandemic has left more families financially vulnerable.

In a controversial vote in October, 322 Conservative MPs voted down a Labour motion to extend free school meals over the school holidays until Easter 2021. East

Northamptonshire Conservative MP Tom Pursglove was appointed to verify the count as a teller for the vote, so his vote did not officially count.

For the October half term break last year, Northamptonshire County Council announced that they would fund £15 vouchers per child, at a cost of £255,015, using the money received from central government to the council for Covid-19-related costs, which included support for children. Parents applied for the vouchers online and received them by email.

In November, the government announced a Covid Winter Grant Scheme that provided funding to support free school meals during the Christmas and half term holidays.

During the period from January until March this year when pupils stayed at home, schools were able to claim additional funding for either food parcels or vouchers for families entitled to free school meals.



EMAT distributed food parcels to its pupils during the shutdowns

In February, the East Midlands Academy Trust, which runs the Prince William school, was awarded the prestigious Rose of Northamptonshire Award that celebrates unsung heroes during the pandemic. The award recognized the trust's work to support families in need during the first coronavirus lockdown in 2020. The national school closures last spring and the delay in the introduction of the food voucher scheme meant families that had originally been relying on free school meals were facing severe difficulties. EMAT managed to provide a total of 35,000 meals to be collected or delivered to families from its seven schools.

Lord-Lieutenant of Northamptonshire James Saunders Watson, who led the virtual award presentation, commented: "The 35,000 meals EMAT provided is a fantastic amount and will have kept those families going at a time when they would have felt most vulnerable, so many, many congratulations."

Grade assessments aim to avert problems that beset last year's results disaster

Paxton Leung

When school exams were cancelled last year due to coronavirus lockdown, within the space of less than one term, exam boards had to come up with an alternative system for awarding qualifications that would determine university and job applications. Instead of using exam results, they asked teachers to refer to previous performance in the classroom, internal exams, and coursework, and provide a grade based on what the school thought a pupil would have achieved on exams. The Centre Assessed Grades were submitted by the schools. The exam boards then calculated the grade boundaries and the actual grade for each pupil.

The system was criticized for the confusion caused by determining marks last year, with important dates left unconfirmed until the last moment. The grading systems were altered to compensate for the absence of exams, and finally an algorithm was applied by the exam boards that used the school's previous performance to weigh the marks of individual pupils. Many pupils were awarded far lower grades than they had been predicted by their schools. The outcry forced the government to reverse the marks adjusted by the algorithm.

This year's examinations have once again been cancelled in 2021, but the assessments have become the responsibility of teachers, and pupils will be awarded Teacher Assessed Grades. The main difference between last year and this year is that instead of making an assessment based on predicting what pupils might have achieved in exams, teachers this year are making assessments on

demonstrated achievement.

Each teacher will submit several grades the student has achieved throughout their GCSE course, either from practice examinations or coursework, which will then be examined by a teacher, who produces the final assessed grade for the student based on that 'basket' or 'portfolio' of work. More recent work will be given a bigger weighting on the final grade of the student, and timed examinations that are done in test conditions will also be given a bigger weighting.

The maximum mark of the student can only be as high as the student's maximum mark in the basket of evidence, and the opposite is true as well. The past performance of the school will not be factored in when the decision is made.

The Head of Oundle School, Sarah Kerr-Dineen said the teacher assessed grades will be "a holistic judgement of demonstrated achievement".

To moderate results, exam boards will randomly request schools to submit students' baskets of evidence to ensure the school is adhering to the guidelines.

Learning from last year's mistakes, this year's examination system is drastically different to the catastrophic algorithm-based system of last year, with a heavier emphasis on producing a grade on demonstrated performance instead of expected performance. This should hopefully make for a less controversial and more satisfactory result.

This year, final A level grades will be released by exam boards on 10 August and GCSE pupils will receive theirs two days later on 12 August.

Census charts changes across the decades

Cherry Yang

The national census for England and Wales took place on 21 March, 2021. Filling in the forms was compulsory and those who did not complete it on the day were sent warnings about fines of up to £1,000.

The Office for National Statistics has been responsible for administering the census every ten years to build a detailed snapshot of our society. Information such as work, health, ethnic background, education, and marital status collected from the census will be used by the government as well as local authorities to design policies for development, plan and run public services

including schools, health services, roads and libraries, and decide on how to allocate funds.

In the 2011 census, the resident population in Oundle was 5735, up from 5347 in 2001. By projection, the population has expanded by 18% in 2011-21, and will continue by 14% from 2021-31.

The number of houses in 2011 in Oundle was 2127. It is projected that the total housing in 2021 has increased to 2543.

The ONS is planning on publishing the initial findings from the Census in March 2022. However, the full results covering all Census data will be revealed a year later, in March 2023.

Queen honours local volunteer with British Empire Medal

Priyanka Menon

In this year's New Year's Honours, Sarah Lee was awarded a BEM (British Empire Medal) from the Queen for services which she gave over several years to senior citizens and young people of Oundle. The nomination came as a surprise to Mrs Lee, who did not

developed ministries for older people in Oundle and local villages through St Peter's Church.

She created the Senior Adults Growing and Exploring ministries (SAGE) which were used to deepen connections between older community members and the church.



Sarah Lee has been appointed to Kingsthorpe Ministry in north Northampton to be a full time curate for three years

know that her name had been put forward for the award.

The British Empire Medal is awarded for sustained and creditable charitable or voluntary activity. Over eight years, Mrs Lee

Mrs Lee's motivation to begin working with senior members of the community began when she first moved to Oundle, joining older people for the market day Holy Communion and coffee every

Thursday morning.

"I began to realise that many lived on their own and would enjoy meeting more often, so in 2011 with the help of some friends from the church we started the Tuesday Club," Mrs Lee said. The club grew from a handful of people to around 30, with a team of volunteers who helped bake cakes and make the tea, and drove people to and from the club.

Mrs Lee initiated the Monday Munch Club in a partnership with Oundle Primary School and volunteers from the church and town. The school provided the hall space, whilst the kitchen team from Kingsthorpe Catering cooked lunch for up to 100 guests at a time. The club focused on bringing senior members of the community and children together, with the school children performing songs and playing instruments.

"It was great in bringing an intergenerational community together in a warm and friendly way. We all hope it can start up again when Covid restrictions allow."

The big summer holiday event, Holiday at Home ran annually from 2014 to 2019. It included a morning of workshops, lunch and afternoon concerts followed by tea and cakes.

"This one-day themed holiday extravaganza for older people was

very popular. Everyone hopes it will return."

Additionally, Mrs Lee started short courses throughout the year to discuss topics, explore Advent and Lent and to generally look more deeply at faith.

"The SAGE ministries has been left in good hands, with different people running the different areas that started up whilst I was there."

For the last two years Mrs Lee and her husband have been training for ordination at Trinity College, Bristol. After the work Mrs Lee did with younger and older people, she felt as though she wanted to continue full-time.

"I think I had been called to ministry for some time, but only faced up to the reality of this when my youngest child was in her last few years at school. I finally gained the confidence I needed to step out in faith, through the encouragement of Rev Stephen Webster and Rev Jema Ball at St Peter's Church," she said.

After their ordination at Peterborough Cathedral, the Lees will go to Kingsthorpe Team Ministry in north Northampton to be full time curates for three years.

"It's exciting to be starting afresh in a new church setting and helping them develop their ministry to the community in this new location for us."

How to nominate someone for a national British honour

Priyanka Menon

Sarah Lee's award for her service to the community of Oundle started with a nomination. British Empire Medal nominations, much like many other honours within the national honours system, are made by members of the public, who nominate candidates they believe have made sustained and creditable voluntary contributions to a local area. The starting point for nominations is the form and guidance on the Cabinet Office webpage for UK National Honours.

Nominations go through a

careful process of scrutiny by specialist non-political committees and a validation process, where not all nominations are accepted. A national honour has a rarity value and when an honour is awarded, it makes a difference not just to the individual, but to the community that has benefitted.

The nominations themselves are a chance to thank those who have made significant contributions to the life of a community. Without these, the accomplishments of an individual or group can go unrecognised. At a national level, the awarding system has an important role to recognise and thank those who have made such contributions to society.

Dominic Hopkins, Under Sheriff of Northamptonshire, encourages people to submit nominations for honours. He said: "If you feel that someone you know has gone beyond the ordinary and been extraordinary, perhaps now is the time to consider making a nomination for an individual National Honour."



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Bakery brings classic French pastries

Meagan Iu

In February, Oundle's Facebook community pages were introduced to The Delicious Factory, an online patisserie business run by Matthew and Lily Fullerton from their home in Lower Benefield, which has received huge success since its launch on Valentine's Day this year.

They had often talked about doing cake stalls at local markets. "We were originally going to buy a horsebox and convert it into a mobile patisserie stop," said Matthew. But when the pandemic restricted access to markets, they created a different business model, with online orders and delivery. They product tested, gathered photos, created a menu and launched their Facebook page in the middle of February.

Matthew said: "We got orders in the first three hours and about 6,000 views, and that was the start. It's been hectic ever since."

"The response has been amazing to be honest, we didn't expect to have so much business so fast," said Lily. "We found that social media is very powerful; as soon as we post something, people start ordering straightaway."

They do free delivery in the local area. Most deliveries are within a five mile radius, but can range up to about ten miles.

Originally from Australia, Matthew has worked in hospitality and catering from all sides of the business. In the kitchen he prefers to do the breads and savouries. "Lily's the supremo in the patisserie section; she does all the sweets and that's hands down what the business is all about" said Matthew.

"I've never gone to baking school, but I used to cook a lot with my grandmother and that's just how it started," said Lily, who is from France, and has a background in events.

"I think everyone knows more or less how to bake in France; it's just a way of life. I used to bake at home every Saturday or Sunday."

The Fullertons started off baking professionally doing afternoon teas at the Cutty Sark in London. Matthew said: "We pitched to the booking's coordinator, you got all these tour groups of people coming in, why don't we serve them afternoon tea? So we started doing afternoon teas and they were a smash hit, weren't they?"

He said to Lily, "It was all your macarons. We did some really great stuff, and it was very successful. It was a great crew there as well, probably one of my favourite places I ever worked"

The Delicious Factory's unique selling point is as an authentic

French patisserie. Lily said: "In France, patisserie business is huge; you have patisseries and boulangeries everywhere and the French absolutely love their sweets. It's very traditional; every Sunday they go to a patisserie and they buy cakes."

Lily says that the best-selling item has been her lemon meringue

said: "We have all sorts of ideas for the future about how we are going to take it to the next step." Their aspiration is to open a shop. "We want to get our house back, don't we? It's just turned into a patisserie kitchen, which is good, but it would be nice to have our house back," said Matthew.

Lily added, "I think it's still im-



portant to have a business working on social media." Matthew agreed, "The online model has worked really well, and I think we'll probably look at opening a shop but continue the delivery aspect of the business because it's been very successful."

Matthew said: "The response from the local community has been amazing, and we've had so much interest, so much positive feedback."

To place orders, go to their Facebook page at The Delicious Factory.

As for future plans, Matthew

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To place orders, go to their Facebook page at The Delicious Factory.

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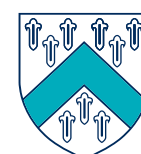


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At 50th anniversary, Chris Lowe looks back on 30 years as Head of Prince William School

Matthew Atkin

When Chris Lowe retired in 1999 after 29 years as principal of Prince William School, a profile in the Times Educational Supplement said he was the longest serving secondary head of a single school in the country, and "might also be the most famous head in the world".

During his career, Mr Lowe sat on the board of the Royal Opera House, was president of the UK Secondary Heads Association, and visited 43 countries as one of the founders of the International Confederation of Principals. He was awarded a doctorate, a fellowship, a professorship in Australia, and a CBE by the Queen.

So how did Chris Lowe find himself at the helm of a brand-new school in 1971 at the age of 33? I spent an hour with him via a Teams call to discuss his remarkable career as an educator.

He was born over a grocer's shop in Newcastle under Lyme, grew up in a terraced house on the outskirts of Stoke on Trent, attending Wolstanton County Grammar School. The lofty heights of Cambridge were never part of his family's plans. "I had never really heard of Cambridge. All my connections with public schools and universities were through schoolboy books," he said.

As with many promising pupils, it was a teacher who raised his aspirations. "And then I had a wonderful teacher of English. I didn't even know I could write. And he was a teacher who brought it out of me in the sixth form. He said, you are going for an interview at Cambridge." And sure enough, after accumulating the sufficient funds, he was on a train to Cambridge for three days of entrance exams and interviews.

After Cambridge he studied for a law degree, thinking it would be a good career for making money. He taught in a school during the day to support himself and his new wife and found it thoroughly enjoyable. "The last thing I wanted to be was a teacher, until I discovered it was really rather fun."

He taught for several years, when he saw the advertisement for a head teacher at a new comprehensive school, known then as Oundle Upper School. "It was a very attractive proposition to just build a school up gradually. I said I'd stay for something like seven years to see it all through, and I ended up staying for 28."

The first year was far from easy, there was barely a school to be the head of. "We opened on September 6th, 1971. Unfortunately, the school wasn't built, most of it was only about six bricks high. There are photographs of the Sunday night before we opened of the caretaker and I standing in the rubble. But the Chief Education Officer insisted, because he'd told the parents it was going to open, we had to open. I think we could be the only school in history, possibly anywhere in the world that opened at 9am and was shut by 9.30am. The pupils arrived, the buses were kept there and after a long assembly they were all sent home

again. After a week, enough of the school was finished, but it wasn't truly finished for the whole of the year."

The school was named in memory of Prince William, the eldest son of the Duke of Gloucester from Barnwell. He had opened the school but was killed just eight weeks later in the King's Air Race. "His mother, Princess Alice, and the Queen let us know that they would like the school to be the memorial to him. We had a letter from Buckingham Palace saying the Queen commands that its name be changed to Prince William School."

Of course, the creation of a comprehensive school attracted many antagonists and presented challenges to the development of the school. "There were those who said we would never get physics teachers to teach in a comprehensive school. We'd never get anybody to university, but we did. They then said, well, you're never getting anyone to Oxbridge, but we did. The only way to meet the doubters is to say, okay, well, you may be right. But let's see. And I can't think of any of those whose doubts were ever confirmed. We just met them by saying, give us a chance. And that's what they did."

Another challenge he faced was the ever-changing educational acts that were pumped out almost annually from 1986-2000. In total there were 12 different acts going backwards and forwards between both Labour and Tories. "I was in the middle of it because I had originally been a lawyer. And so, I was the honorary legal secretary of what was then called the Secondary Heads Association. It's now called ASCL." Mr Lowe found this especially challenging as those charged with making decisions were not particularly knowledgeable about education. "It was painful, really. Because they had been to a school, they all thought they knew what a school should be like."

He always had an international outlook, stemming from sharing his bedroom with a German exchange student in the 1950s when no one else in the town would host him. The banner in the PWS entrance hall "A school for Europe" was introduced by Chris Lowe. He said: "The only way humanity can grow is by working together." Over the years he introduced links with twelve schools, in America, Eastern Europe, Australia, Gambia, India, all of which they visited.

Professionally, he found his skills in demand internationally, as well. After the breakup of the Soviet Union, Mr Lowe travelled across Eastern Europe and started heads associations in countries from Bulgaria to Ukraine. "And you may ask what was happening back at Prince William School? Well, I had three very, very good deputies. They pretty well ran it for my last five years. I was in and out," he admitted.

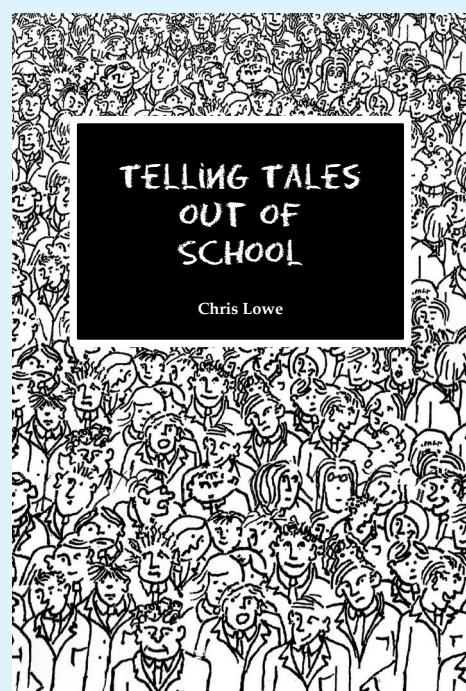
His time at PWS might best be remembered by pupils for his focus on the arts. One highlight was the school's collaboration with the Royal Opera House and a performance of Carmen on four consecutive nights. He remem-

bers every detail. "In the final scene in Carmen, we made the stage like a bullring and put 150 children in the chorus on the stage. And what happened was that every night they started to cry, they were so taken up with what was happening artistically in front of them. It was to make them understand what the feelings are when you get absorbed into any sort of art, whether it's pop or classical. If you really get absorbed, it does something physically, as well as mentally, to you."

One important characteristic about the town of Oundle is the presence of a large, well-financed private school. Whilst this could have created tensions, true to his pragmatic nature, Chris Lowe said: "Independent schools exist, and because they exist, you have to work on those terms. In strict terms of education, youngsters have a right to be educated wherever they go to school. It wasn't for me to be interfering. And we got a lot of benefit from having such a school in the town."

In the 1980s Channel 4 came to Oundle to do a half hour programme about a town that had both a state school and an independent school. They interviewed pupils from both schools to probe different attitudes about each other. "A lot of it turned out to be about respect. Respect for difference."

Chris Lowe has remained in close contact with many former pupils and is proud of what they have achieved. He not only helped build Prince William School up from "only six bricks high", but he has watched thousands of children grow up and go out into the wide world of opportunities.



Look back over his years in schools, Chris Lowe wrote 50 tales for *Telling Tales out of School*. He said: "Thanks to all the staff, pupils and parents, who make up 'a school'. If you were not so deliciously funny there would be no book." Proceeds from the book will benefit The James Rutterford Trust, which enables support for PWS pupils to take part in co-curricular activities, and provides materials for their study. The book will be launched and on sale at anniversary reunion events on Friday 3rd September, and on Saturday 4th September at the Party in the Park from 12pm-6pm. So far, over 2000 former pupils have reconnected on the Facebook PWS Reunion page, sharing photos and memories.

41 years as a teacher at PWS

Graham Snelling has seen more children pass through Prince William School than any other member of staff in its 50 year history. He joined the school in 1975 at the age of 21, and retired in 2016 after 41 years at the chalkface. Or whiteboard, as it became after decades of change.

He was hired to teach PE, but over the years he worked in the design department, headed the careers department, developed partnerships, led overseas music, sports and cultural exchange tours (including trips to Finland, Ukraine and the Czech Republic), and finished as the assistant headteacher.

"Prince William School was a school of opportunities, not just for pupils, but for staff. There was so much vitality. A great place to work," he said.

When he started, the roll was just 200 pupils. It grew to 1300, even before the 11 year olds were introduced in 2015. "For the first 20 to 25 years, the school was in a growth mode. Any initiatives that came along, we tried to get hold of. The headteacher, Chris Lowe, was a visionary, and let you try things out."

Looking back on his career working with teenagers, he seems most proud of the work he did with pupils outside the curriculum doing activity based learning. For many years he took pupils on week long camps to give them the chance to do something different. "There were the odd few who were difficult. Why are they challenging? Because they think they are going to fail. The aim was to give them the experiences that they could succeed at. Kids learn just as much out of the classroom as in it."

He said the most difficult time for many pupils was in year 11 when they have to make the decision about what pathways to follow after their GCSEs; whether to go into work, go to college to train, or stay on for A levels. One programme he developed gave pupils opportunities to gain different experiences working in the community, from primary schools to entrepreneurial initiatives. "For instance, we formed a little business making picnic benches for a few years and suddenly they could see the importance of accurate measuring. They then saw the relevance of what they were learning in the classroom."

Partnerships with other schools were another important way to expand pupils' opportunities. PWS established partnerships with five other schools in Northamptonshire and exchanged specialist subject

teaching. "We specialised in engineering, and our pupils went to their schools to do things like catering, hair and beauty."

He places great value on sports in and out of school. Mr Snelling was the driving force for the founding of the Oundle Rugby Club on Occupation Road, where staff and pupils played. "Coaching is a completely different ballgame when you are working with youngsters, because they want to be there, and they want to succeed. When teaching PE, there is always some sport or activity that every child can do. And I includes darts in that!"

Despite working with teenagers over 41 years of social and technological change, Mr Snelling said he could not track any great changes in the character of his pupils. "Kids are kids, they are more or less the same 40 years on - even though they don't think they are."

While any teenager can be challenging at times, he always found pupils at PWS to be thoughtful. "That's what always impressed me. The majority were very caring, and cared for each other."

He pointed to a very strong pastoral system in the school, then overseen by Val Hepple. "She dealt with all the naughty boys, shall we say. We'll call it pastoral care, but that is what it was at the time. They used to dread going to see her, but they would never forget her for the support she gave them."

Over 41 years there were a lot of changes to adapt to, including the educational curriculum handed down from above, and the school's management within. He said he just had to take them in his stride. "There were a lot of changes, including a time when the school went through an unsettled period. Unfortunately, for such a successful school, we lost parents and pupils. Now it's back on its feet where it should be."

Mr Snelling has always lived in Oundle while working at PWS. He said that in his last years he was teaching the third generation of Oundle families. "One of these little kids said to me, 'you know you taught my grandma'."

He still sees a lot of his former pupils around town. "Some of them still call me Mr Snelling, they can't call me by my first name." The eldest former pupil is probably now 62. To keep busy in retirement, he currently works part-time at a local engineering company, where his boss, now 59, is a former pupil.

He said a good school has the children at the heart of the school, led by dynamic staff, and that is what he felt most strongly about at PWS. "There have been real good characters. That's what you remember about your school days, the people."

What former pupils remember most about their teachers

I remember Val Hepple with great fondness, she tried so hard to teach me French. Despite my inability to write coherent sentences and grasp any concept of trying to use verbs in different tenses, Miss Hepple was incredibly patient, always thorough, and tirelessly encouraging and supportive. I love to visit France and whilst I am still trying to learn to communicate verbally, I am always astonished by the amount of vocabulary I seem to know. I did have a regular spot at Miss Hepple's lunch table when a group of us would have lunch together before the vocab retest I invariably had to do. I did enjoy these lunches. Miss Hepple was incredibly good company; always interesting and often had me laughing. As a teacher myself, I can only hope that I manage to show the same dedication, so although she did not succeed in turning me into a linguist, she has been a role model for me in my career.

Penny Rowe (1985)
Biology teacher, Oundle School

When it comes to the teachers, I think it's easy to remember the characters. There was Mr Whitcombe, affectionally nicknamed 'Worzel' because of his scarecrow like appearance and huge floppy mannerisms (he didn't so much arrive in a classroom as crash-land in it). There was Mr Hyde, who was incredibly well suited to being a Computer Studies teacher because he acted like he was assembled by a shadowy group of boffins in Silicon Valley - when he blinked at you, it seemed like he was taking photos with his eyes in order to store on a floppy disk. There was Mr Melhuish the physics teacher, who, I'm sorry to say, we used to torture by humming in class and interfering with his hearing aid. There was Mr Barnes in his cool motorcycle leathers, Miss Swift with her dirty laugh, Mr Ellard and Mr Bratell with their artistic beards...so many characters! Even though I remember their quirks and idiosyncrasies I remember those that became friends the best, such as Miss Corby and Headmaster Mr Lowe, who both opened up a world of words and plays and books and opera and music performance which is both my career, my hobby and my first love.

Nev Fountain (1987)
Writer, Private Eye

I have the fondest memories of Mr Hadman, my Archaeology teacher. To say he was a maverick would be putting it very lightly. In hindsight, it seems a little odd that we were able to study archaeology at all - I'm not sure many other schools did. We'd skin goats (dead ones!), make Mead, and go on field trips where we rampaged up the banks of Iron age fortresses. Health and safety was not his strong point, but inspiring, empowering and creating a love of learning certainly was. He would also get us involved in extra-curricular activities - principally helping him organise and run the world conker championships! We all

adored him and sought his praise as he treated us as interesting individuals, not just a group of kids he had to endure. At the time, I thought I just loved archaeology. Sadly, when I went to university to study it, I realised it was the teacher that I loved, not the subject. A brilliant teacher can bring any topic to life - even one thousands of years old.

Sarah Champion (1988)
Member of Parliament, Rotherham

It was probably Mr Bailey more than anyone else who inspired me to become a modern languages teacher. He was an expert in his field, and was strict but fair. Perhaps, above all, he was something of a comedian, having us rolling around in stitches much of the time. He was keen to maximise his pupils' potential, stretching us through challenge and praising us sparingly, forever leaving us wanting more. These days, I try (but often fail) to follow his lead in every respect. Mr Adams may have been small in stature but had a large red face and bellowing voice, which when combined with his Welsh accent (one that thickened with rage) become all the more threatening - partly because you struggled to understand him! The prompt for you to reply (if you dared) was "..., boyo?!" which he tagged onto the end of his outbursts. It was his strictness and exacting standards that inspired us all in his A-level Design group to reach for the stars. His praise was like gold dust and cherished. Mr Howe encouraged me to pursue my love of basketball (and to become captain of the county team). His kind manner always made him easy to talk to, but he also knew how to keep us in line. He was a talented sportsman and despite basketball being his third/fourth specialism, he could still show up the young upstarts who thought they knew it all (of which I was probably one) with his steady layups and reliable jump-shots.

Sam Northwood (1990)
Headmaster, Nelson Thomlinson

Harry Stern was an amazing teacher and kept me engaged in every lesson with his perfect balance between discipline and brilliant humour. I am still able to recall individual lessons that he taught with energy, intellect and wit. A lesson on decimalisation included a dramatic silent entrance into the classroom by Harry, which in itself got our attention. He looked over his half spectacles in the door entrance, walked slowly to his desk, looked at everyone in the eye before placing his doctor's bag carefully on the desk and picked up a piece of chalk. He proceeded to write 0.00000 all the way across the double blackboard and place "1" at the very end. He turned around, looked at us over his glasses, and then picked up a wooden 1m ruler and whacked it against the blackboard to break the silence. Speaking quite softly, he said: "This children is a very small number. It's smaller than a fish's tit.". We were

all completely captivated by the lesson that followed. When Tony Blair asked the nation to remember that one teacher that made a positive impact on us, it's always Harry Stern for me.

Jim Briscoe (1993)
Commander, Royal Navy

Mrs Cracknell was hands down the most inspiring teacher I had the pleasure of being taught by. She set a fire in me to believe in my creative expression and was fantastic at making a space to feel safe and comfortable in. There was never a feeling of being judged, but always supported. I have taken the attributes she taught me into so many facets of my adult life. I have many fond memories of my time at PWS, but her English lessons were definitely a highlight.

Ross Duffy (2006)
Musician, Fenech-Soler

It's fair to say I wasn't the best of students. I always struggled to keep my head focused on the work, far more interested in the social aspects of school. But while I was endeavouring to pull away, I had some fantastic teachers dedicated to keeping me on track. Mrs Hopkins, who took my form and English classes, always went above and beyond to help with coursework; a consistent rudder towards the right path. Mr Baxby nurtured my love of public speaking, a crucial facet of my career today. Mr Kelly showed me tough love when I needed it most, but always with a warm smile. I didn't finish school with the grades I could have done. Looking back it's almost as if I was driving for that outcome. Yet, I'm certain I wouldn't have made it to the finish line at all without the commitment, creativity and care these special people showed me. Their efforts weren't wasted; the lessons I learnt from each of them contribute to my day-to-day life, both in and out of work.

Tom Notley (2008)
Partner Manager, Databarracks

I had many inspiring teachers during my time at Prince William School, but a couple that particularly made an impact on me were Miss O'Connor, my English Literature teacher, and Miss Worboys, my A level Art teacher. Miss O'Connor's energy made every class a pleasure, which meant I enjoyed reading and studying the texts in their own right, regardless of the looming exams. One of her tips that I can't get on board with, however, is reading the end of a book first to make sure it doesn't have a disappointing ending. I'll take the risk! My Art classes with Miss Worboys were the highlight of my time at PWS. She gave us the freedom to work as we pleased yet provided much-needed motivation (and snacks) as coursework deadlines approached. Both teachers went beyond their classroom duties and it did not go unnoticed!

Emily Greenwood (2017)
Graduate, University of London

Readers' undying love of romance fiction

Jennifer Yang

Romance fiction was already a billion dollar publishing industry when in the middle of the pandemic lockdown, the Netflix series *Bridgerton* introduced the romance genre to millions more fans across the world, who turned from screen to page in search of escapist stories. Amazon bestselling author Kate Bateman has written nine romance books that have readers yearning for even more.

Before she launched a writing career, Ms Bateman was known in the UK for her appearances as an antiques expert on popular shows such as *Flog It!* She grew up in Oundle, where her family had an antique shop on West Street, and she helped establish her family's auction house in Stamford. She was living in Oundle before she and her husband moved to the United States for work seven years ago.

During lockdown we spanned the global time zones from Shanghai to Illinois via a Teams meeting to talk about her writing career in the romance industry.

The inspiration that sparked her career was a £1 bet with her husband. She recounts that after reading an awful historical romance book, she told her husband she could write better. He bet she would not finish it. "And I wrote the damn book!" she tells me triumphantly.

The majority of romance fiction is historical, and most novels are set in the Regency period. Publishers have little interest in the Renaissance or Victorian eras. Ms Bateman says her background in antiques probably helped a little; she has handled the furniture and accessories that form the setting to her novels, and has absorbed "what things are like by osmosis". But it is solid research in historic facts that is the source of inspiration for her plots and characters. But she cautions, she does not write historical novels, her novels are about romance and escapism, set in a historical period.

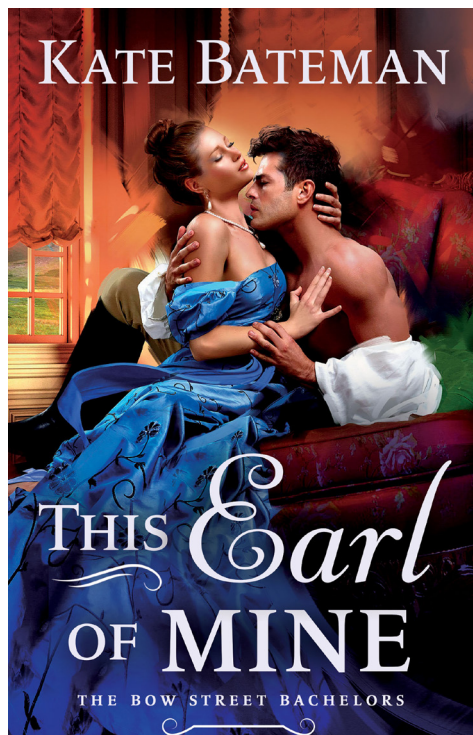
Ms Bateman describes herself as having two sides as a historical romance writer. "Historical Kate has those plot points. Romance Kate is like, ooh submarines, they are really small and dark. We can squish two people together. Romance, brilliant. So, it comes together quite nicely."

In her book *This Earl of Mine*, her story about rescuing Napoleon from exile on St Helena using a submarine in 1815 is not fantasy. She was fascinated by the development of submarines at that

time and decided to fall into "a research rabbit hole".

While she ensures that her historical settings are authentic, she does not get bogged down in historical detail. Ms. Bateman reminds me that she is writing for a modern audience, and the historical fantasy is there for the enjoyment. Romance fiction has changed, and modern women do not have to be successful in the marriage market to be heroines. "I don't want to read about ninety percent of the historically accurate women who were owned by their husbands. It's interesting for me to think about what women could do within the framework. They can manipulate or they can push the boundaries or they can find a clever way around something, and those are the women I like to write about."

Modern readers are surprised and thrilled to find out that historically, some women were adventurous despite the legal and social restrictions. "I think people are surprised by the fact that women often did have agency. There were kick-ass women in history. People are like, well, she'd never do that because she wasn't allowed out. I think you'll find there's this historical person who



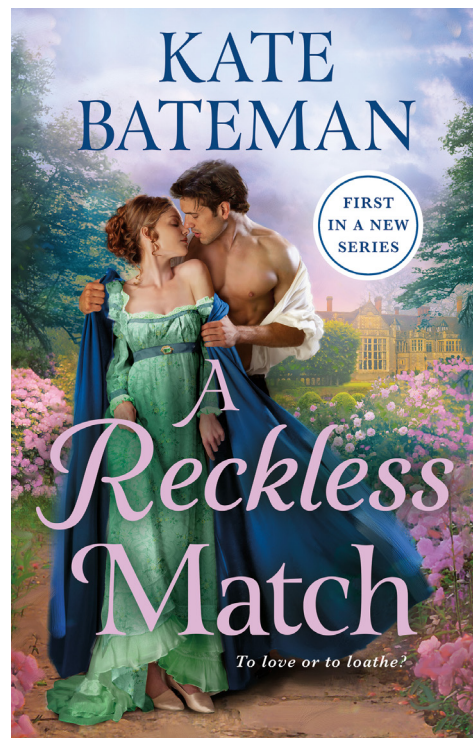
ran off with a pirate. It happened," she said.

Although Ms Bateman writes as close to the truth as possible, she does allow herself some historic license to suit the escapism. Ms Bateman said: "In reality all the royal dukes were fat, gouty and disgusting. I make them all gorgeous, rich, 28 and hot."

Romance book covers featuring these young, hot dukes are the genre's most immediately recognizable feature: brightly

coloured, alluring images usually depicting two lovers embracing passionately. Created in Italy, the hyper realistic images used to be physical paintings, but they are now computer-generated. The covers promise

romance, and within the covers, the books never disappoint; flaming sex scenes are inevitable in a page-turning romance novel. Ms Bateman explains that sex scenes are crucial to completing the characters' relationship, as a lot of trust is needed during this delicate period of intimacy. She says that sex scenes are in fact, quite difficult to write. Each sex scene has to have a purpose in driving the plot by worsening or bettering the situation. This is where the difference between romance novels and literary novels comes in; sex in literary novels usually represent dysfunction, whereas sex in romance novels speeds up the path



to its happy ending. Not all sex scenes are well written, particularly when terrible euphemisms, or graphic details are used.

"You don't want to remember that you are reading about sex," said Ms Bateman. "You can get super sexy and super romantic without actually doing open-door describing."

With the popular romance TV show *Bridgerton* starring a diverse cast of actors such as Regé-Jean Page and Golda Rosheuvel, I asked Ms Bateman whether she feels a need to introduce racial diversity in her romance novels. She replies, "These are my experiences as a fairly posh white girl in England and so I think that's what I would write best. I think there's a danger in somebody like myself trying to write or pretend to pass off other voices. I much prefer to read a book written by a black author, or a Chinese American, because they will bring such a rich experience."

She does see publishing trends that are more receptive to settings other than Regency England. One of her own stories is set in Egypt, and romance fiction set in Ming Dynasty China is gaining popularity. "What I'm the most thrilled about is the fact that there are more opportunities now for different time periods and voices," she says.

Romance fiction is one of the few genres where women write for other women. It is a \$1.3m industry. For Ms Bateman, being an Amazon best-seller isn't easy; she has readers constantly begging for more. However, she is an absolute perfectionist. "I can't write fast enough," she says. "I want to put the best foot forward. They just have to wait."

Her work ethic is condensed into the acronym "ABC", which stands for "Apply your Butt to the Chair". After dropping off her three children at school, she starts work at 9am in front of her screen with a cup of coffee, either writing, corresponding or practicing her writing. "I never stop, I'm always going to craft workshops. I don't think you can ever stop improving."

Ms Bateman's readership comprises mostly well-educated women over 25 years old, with money to spend. Before the pandemic she used to go to Romance conferences with 3000 readers in attendance. What she wants above all for her readers is that they finish her books feeling happy. "I studied classic literature in university, so I read a lot of miserable, white men, who wrote about women, even their heroines, who all die!" she says.

"The doctor patches up your body when you are sick, but the person in the hospital bed still needs a book to cheer them up. I think that's just as important."

The high stakes work of a hostage negotiator

Gabriel Sun

From the peaceful enclave of Oundle, hostage negotiation specialist Leslie Edwards' work takes him on missions to negotiate ransoms and the safe return of hostages with some of the most dangerous criminals in the world.

A new book by Colin Freeman, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, draws upon Mr Edwards' experiences as an "unflappable negotiator" during the peak of the Somali piracy crisis from 2008-12 when 2,000 sailors were taken hostage over the years.

It is a gripping story, and true in every detail. I caught up with him in Oundle to hear first-hand about his high-stakes work.

Hostage negotiator work is not for the faint-hearted and inexperienced, and for that reason, recruits tend to be over 40 and often former British Army officers with experience in conflict areas.

Mr Edwards was working in Angola on a contract with the United Nations when the company hired him to work on a kidnap response team, mostly in South America. This led him into the work of negotiating for hostages' lives. He now runs his own company called Compass Risk Management that provides consulting services regarding kidnapping and piracy.

The primary aim of a negotiation is to ensure the safety of the kidnapped victims. To get there requires research where conclusions might be based on deductions, rather than facts. Within the first few days, he tries to identify the size and professionalism of the operation he is dealing with: for example, their abduction methodology, presentation on the phone and how demands are asked for.

Then he establishes the mission's objectives. "You've got to know where you are going to end up. It may not be that exact spot, but you should have an objective before you start the negotiation," he said.

Most importantly, he has to establish the condition of the hostages, and get proof they are alive. Dated photographs or videos are required, or answers to proof-of-life questions such as the name of a pet or other answers which only the hostage would know. "Otherwise, you can end up paying for dead hostages or paying the wrong group."

Research also involves looking at previous cases in the same area and identifying the "going rate" for ransom, which can be based

on the hostage's health, age and nationality. He never pays the full ransom, but usually settles between five to twenty-five percent of the original demand after what looks like a traditional bartering process. Occasionally, he has had to switch from a terrorist situation to a financial situation, where instead of a life being lost, it is money.

"You have to have a good tactical ear for what's going on, but every case whether it'll be short or long, involves an intellectual appreciation of who you are dealing with, what their track record is, what their expectations are and what your options are. And that intellectual exercise still has to be done even in short, rapid cases."

His experiences of communication with kidnappers covers the full range: they have been straightforward, difficult, and sometimes almost impossible. The worst cases can stretch for years. "The best sort of case scenario is when you're dealing with professional kidnappers who understand how the game works and they are doing it as a business. Then you can usually have a straight one-to-one conversation and can get a deal done after a reasonable time, and for a reasonable amount money. The most difficult people to deal with are amateurs because they don't know how the system works and they're likely to turn to panic-induced violence," he said.

Occasionally the police track the kidnappers afterwards, but Mr Edwards' job does not involve caring about the kidnappers and what happens to them after the hostages are released. He is primarily aiming for "a win-win situation" where "hostages are released safe and well in a reasonable amount of time for a reasonable amount of money in an agreement that would be honored and without high-risk complications".

Sometimes those objectives fail, and he has had to be realistic about what is possible when dealing with the mix of business and emotion of all those involved.

He recalled a failed case where two foreigners working for a telecoms company had been kidnapped in Iraq. "I flew from Sweden to the communications company in Egypt. When I got there, no one would make a decision. It was five days before I could see any decision makers and even then, they wouldn't decide. If clients don't follow advice, things go wrong. I don't know what happened to the hostages. We had contact for

a while and then we never heard from them again."

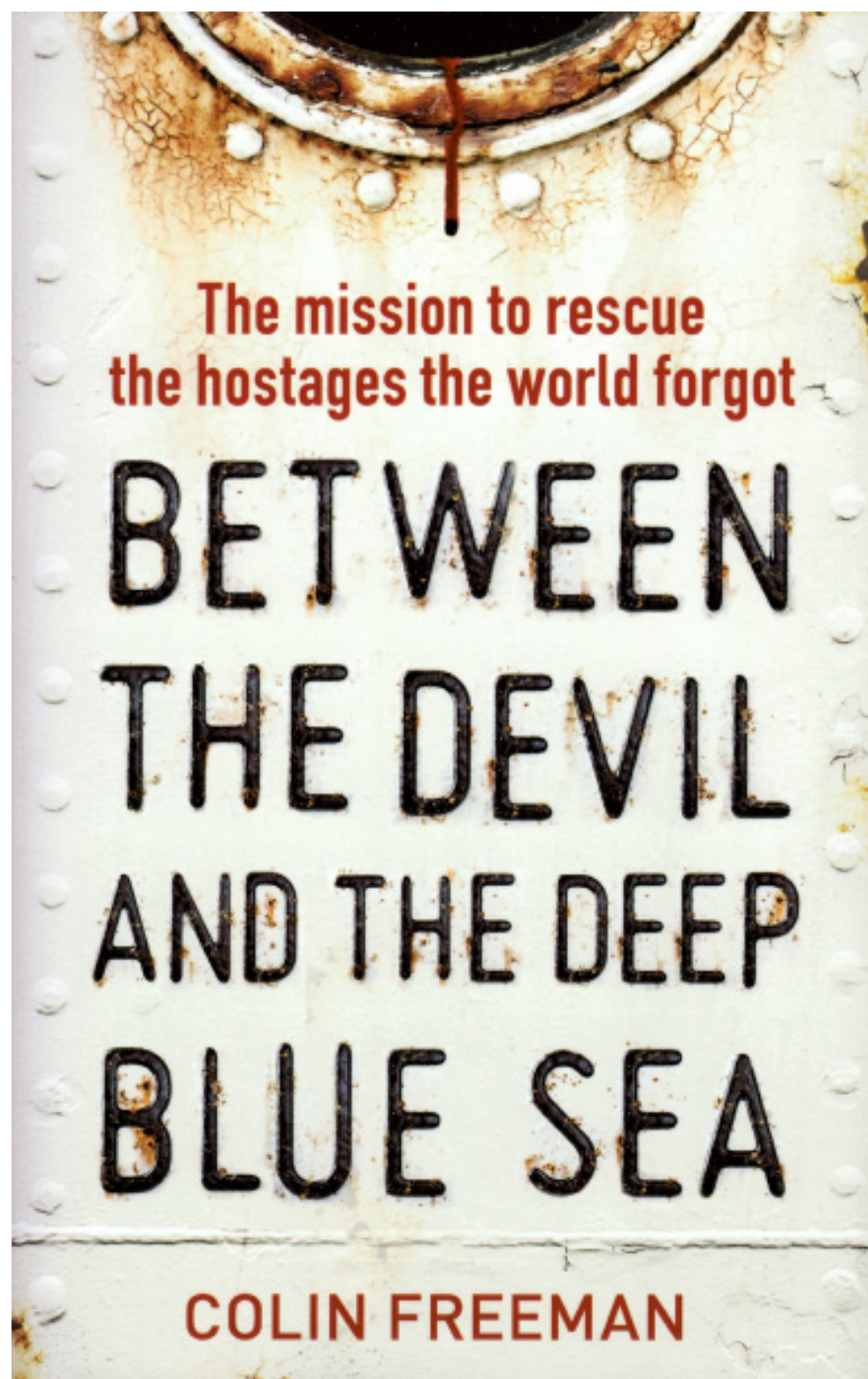
Another case in Iraq had a happier end after appealing to the captors' humanity. "Two hostages from Turkey had been kidnapped in Iraq. Before we were involved, one of them had his head cut off, and that was filmed and posted on the internet. The demand was that they would cut the head off the other guy if all foreign workers did not leave Iraq.

"I flew to Turkey and spoke to the guy's mother," he recounted. "We posted an appeal from her. She was a widow with four other children to support, it was Ramadan. She asked that the kidnappers have mercy on her son who knew nothing about politics." The captors dropped their demand for foreign

workers to leave and settled for \$60,000. "That's one of my best cases ever."

He emphasises that the process is not about a victory and defeat but calculated mutual understanding. "You're not trying to necessarily defeat the other person, you're trying to create a win-win. That is often true in all negotiations in life."

Through his work Mr Edwards has had to face the extreme deprivation of people's morality, from barbaric murders to inhumane captive conditions leading to malnutrition. It has helped him keep the last year's hardships during the pandemic in perspective. "There is always someone worse off than you. People don't realize how lucky they are."



Colin Freeman's new book recounts the peak of the Somali piracy crisis when three kidnapped ships were abandoned to their fate by their employers. Leslie Edwards was part of the team that negotiated the high risk release of all three ships.

Special occasion and dining domes to beat the English weather

Meagan Iu

The Duende experience was introduced to Oundle in September 2020 by Mayte Botella-Getino and Sheridan Baker. This new venture makes spectacular dining experiences and special occasions possible no matter the restrictions or the weather.

Pronounced “dwen - de”, “the brand name is Spanish, like myself!” said Ms Botella-Getino. “Its meaning is associated with flamenco, and means inspiration, passion, charm. It aligns with our philosophy to deliver unique experiences of passion and inspiration.”

Both Ms Botella-Getino and Ms Baker have school-aged children who had demanding home learning, after-school schedules, and social lives to juggle amidst the pandemic shutdown. The idea for their business came about when trying to arrange events such as children’s outdoor sleepover parties and outdoor cinemas that complied with covid restrictions. They also realised that people were apprehensive about going out to eat. As a result, Ms Baker suggested the use of igloos.

Following detailed research, they found a gap in the local market and concluded that dining igloos were something that people would enjoy. They also considered how they could adapt the use of dining igloos for different themes and occasions that would be in demand after the pandemic restrictions had been lifted.

Duende now caters for a variety of occasions with a range of options including igloos, tee-pees and bell tents for sleepovers, cinemas, private dinner parties, and any other special occasions.

Private igloos can be set up in any setting for anniversaries, engagement proposals and other celebratory events, and come fully furnished and dressed by the company. Each igloo seats six people and is designed with two windows and a large door.

They have also partnered with local restaurants and pubs and set up furnished igloos in their gardens, including Dexters, Oundle, The Old Red Lion, Great Brickhill and The Swan, Stewkley. Bookings to dine in the private igloos are made via Duende’s website.

“We have been overwhelmed with positive feedback from both customers, and our partner restaurants,” said Botella-Getino.

Both Ms Botella-Getino and Ms Baker made good use of the lockdown to come up with creative ideas to expand and grow the business.

For winter months there are themed events for different

occasions such as a Valentine’s Experience and an Après Ski Experience that helps take some of the pain away of not being able to actually go on the slopes.

As the community emerges from the year-long covid restrictions, there will be many new opportunities to organise events and celebrations made possible by Duende’s hospitality.



The Duende igloos at Dexters offer a festive, private dining experience



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Archaeological digs reveal the layers of history beneath our feet

Noa Anderson

In January, just as news of the discovery of a significant Anglo-Saxon cemetery was reported in Northamptonshire, the star-studded film *The Dig* was released on Netflix. The film's story about the extraordinary discoveries at Sutton Hoo evoked the drama and wonder of archaeological excavation and was a reminder of how much history lies beneath our feet.

The newly discovered cemetery excavated in Overstone Leys was found on a Barratt and David Wilson Homes development just 30 minutes from Oundle. The site dates to the Anglo-Saxon period and is a significant discovery for the region. Closer to home, however, is the story of a dig at Nassington in 1942, just three years after the Sutton Hoo discovery, which undoubtedly had an influence on the Nassington excavators.

Northamptonshire has a rich ancient history, with artefacts from digs having been found that date back 4,000 years. The Nassington dig contained artefacts from the Roman occupation, but more significantly, the finds documented



Gold gilt brooches belonging to a woman of importance were found at Nassington

layers of information about settlement by the Saxons, and settlement by Anglians: "two cultural forces at work, distinguishing two stages in the early history of the occupation."

The cemetery in Nassington was by far the largest in the area, despite the damage caused by its unusual discovery. The site was discovered during the construction of a gravel pit in June 1942 while over two feet of dirt was being moved.

The construction workers were

in for a surprise when they churned up 1,000-year-old bones.

However, the mechanical scrapes would wreak havoc on the historical finds, shattering smaller bones and sweeping away delicate artefacts and pottery. Despite this hiccup, Northamptonshire archaeologists, joined by pupils from Oundle School, were still able to gather a wealth of information from the site.

From topsoil damage, it was clear that the graves had been looted by grave-robbers many centuries earlier. Luckily, three graves were relatively undisturbed, and bore evidence of Roman occupation.

The bones from the cemetery were large and well-formed, including a man's skeleton that was estimated to be seven feet tall. However, many bones showed signs of severe arthritis and rheumatism, most likely caused by malnutrition. Couples were found buried together, and skeletons from ages 10-50 were found throughout the cemetery. Fifty graves were found in total, but the true number could not be counted due to the destruction caused by the construction machinery.

Most of the discoveries were dated to the Anglo-Saxon era 410-1066AD. The most striking finds of the dig were the artefacts, including

intricate brooches and beads. Signs of Roman occupation were found towards the north of the site, with the bottom of a wooden vessel and various hearths with charred animal bones.

Both men and women carried small knives, but spearheads, wooden buckets and shields were exclusively found with men. Women's graves contained the more historically significant treasures, with jewellery consistent with other digs all the way from York to Surrey, including intricate findings such as sleeve clasps used to hold up dresses, belt fittings, buckles decorated with animals, and beads.

The beads were the artefacts most decimated by the diggers, but the team was still able to find 74 beads, including blue and green glass, blue guilloche with red dots, and amber beads, which could have come from the East Anglia coast. The pottery was also heavily damaged, but the designs that were salvaged were traced from across Britain to northern Germany.

Among the finds were objects that were regarded as loot or acquisitions from earlier Celtic sources. One was an iron pin with its head fashioned in the shape of a shepherd's crook.

Boys from Oundle School were lucky enough to assist the professional archaeologists on this dig, and a collection of some of the artefacts was given to the school.

Excavators spend their time digging in the dirt, but their work is not as dry as dust, as viewers of *The Dig* discovered.

The *Antiquaries Journal* 1944 report of the Nassington dig is instrumental in telling us about the ancient history of settlers in the area, and also about how digs were conducted at that time. The report concluded with the "devout hope" that future excavations of Anglo-Saxon cemeteries would conform to all the demands of modern archaeology "to serve to illumine the dark page of the valley's past".

Escaped parakeets go wild

Digby Pratt

In early January, Charlotte Barford was surprised to see a bright green bird in her garden. "I had to look twice. My initial thought was it must be someone's escaped pet!" After she posted a photo on Facebook, others confirmed that it was a now wild parakeet.



Although only a few sightings of parakeets have been reported in Oundle and local villages, they have been seen at Ferry Meadows, and last year the Northamptonshire Bird Club reported breeding residents at Abington Park near

Northampton.

Parakeets are small to medium-sized species of parrot that can be found across the world and have 155 known sub-species. The parakeets that have been seen in England are more specifically rose-ringed parakeets, or *psittacula krameri*, and are endemic to Africa and Southern Asia. The rose-ringed parakeet is easily identified by its lime green body, and its distinctive black and red ring around its neck.

The sightings within Oundle and Northamptonshire are few and far between, and the parakeets are more commonly found around the greater-London area. Although there have been sightings as far north as Yorkshire, these birds prefer the abundant food and slightly warmer temperatures of the city and its surrounding countryside.

Birdwatcher Noah Wood keeps a close watch on local bird populations. He said: "I saw one about twenty years ago on the Oundle pitches, but these are rare sightings in this part of the UK."

It is suspected that the population of parakeets within the UK is largely down to how common it is for people to keep them as pets. As an exotic looking bird, yet cheap

and abundant in Africa and Southern Asia, it is a popular choice for those who fancy a bird as a companion. There are about 50,000 living in the wild now due to the large number of escaped parakeets.

It is not clear how the first bird was introduced to Britain, and there are a number of stories that include Humphrey Bogart, a plane crash at Syon Park and the great storm of 1987. My favourite theory is that the lineage of the UK wild parakeet population originated with the release of a pair of parakeets by

legendary guitarist Jimi Hendrix. Many believe that it was this pair that gave birth to the thriving population of these beautiful birds. Scientists cannot provide any evidence to back any of the stories, though.

If you happen to see a parakeet flying around the skies of Oundle, count yourself lucky, for now. The RSPB is expecting populations to keep on increasing, so they might be just as common as the house sparrow in years to come.

Banks and Police issue emergency warnings not to click on unknown text messages

Noa Anderson

Covid-19 is not the only pandemic that is sweeping the UK. Thousands are being scammed by internet ruses pretending to be the government, the NHS and even the World Health Organisation. In April 2020, Google reported finding more than 18 million scam emails per day exploiting Covid-19. Scammers have capitalised on the uncertainty of the pandemic to lure people into giving away personal information such as addresses and credit card information. According to Action Fraud (the National Fraud and Cyber Crime Reporting Centre), over £200 million was stolen through these methods in the first half of 2020 alone.

However, there are clear ways to tell if a message or phone call you receive is fraudulent. HMRC says that it is likely a scam if a message: uses threatening language; asks for a bank transfer; asks for personal information such as bank details; leaves a voice message; or uses the messaging platform WhatsApp.

Common topics of these scams include government tax returns, charges for the Covid vaccine (the vaccine is free) and a false "Covid-19 refund". Police have advised: "If you receive a text or email that asks you to click on a link or for you to provide information, such as your name, credit card or bank details, it's a scam".

If you receive a scam text, don't simply ignore it: Take a screenshot or photo of any messages received or make a note of the fraudulent phone number, making sure that you do not click on any links. Then, forward the information to Action Fraud.

Banks across the UK and the government have been providing

relief to those affected by such scams, setting up relief for 'no-blame' cases (when neither the customer nor the bank is at fault). The scheme was enacted in May 2019 and is due to end by late June 2021, but thus far only a quarter of fraud victims have been reimbursed.

It is a delicate balancing act. Customers are expected to be vigilant about transferring money, but as scams grow more sophisticated and payments faster, banks have a duty to warn account holders of suspicious tactics and trace stolen funds.

The Treasury said: "We are engaging closely with the Payment Systems Regulator as it considers what steps are required to tackle the issues – including whether legislative changes would help."

While scammers selfishly capitalise off a destructive pandemic, both consumer vigilance and bank responsibility are key to keeping money in the correct hands. You can do your part by:

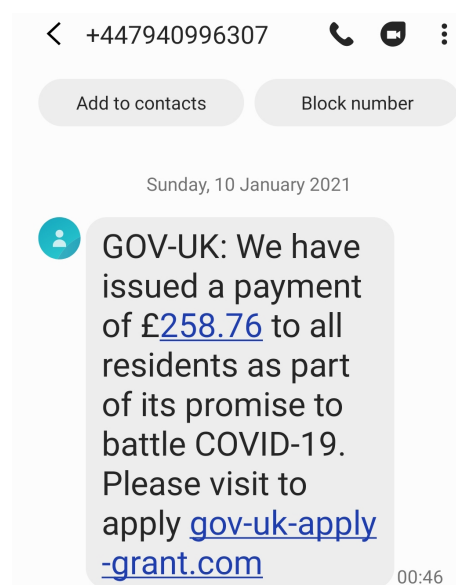
- Reading each message carefully;
- Reviewing it against the criteria for common scams;

- Reporting any messages or calls that you believe to be fraudulent.

This will allow the National Cyber Security Centre to act quickly and prevent others from being affected.

If you believe you have been the victim of fraud and have lost money or been hacked as a result of this type of scam, please report it to Action Fraud: 0300 123 2040

If you have received a suspicious email, please forward it to the Action Fraud Suspicious Email Reporting Service: report@phishing.gov.uk



Scammers send fake text messages to trick you into giving them your personal information. Topics range from parcel delivery to vaccinations.

Protect your pooch and prevent dog theft

Johannes Mynhardt

The pandemic lockdown has caused many disruptions to home life, but one of the most heart-breaking has been the increase in dog thefts across the country. These crimes have affected people right up to high profile celebrities like Lady Gaga whose dogs were abducted during a violent attack.

With the massive increase in demand for dogs and puppies as companions during lockdown, the prices and profits have skyrocketed. The Stolen and Missing Pets Alliance has seen a 170 percent increase in dog thefts nationwide during lockdown, mainly because of the rise in prices for dogs.

Northamptonshire has not been immune; a springer spaniel was stolen from a yard in Harrington, a dachshund and a puppy were stolen from a home in Northampton during a pre-arranged viewing of the puppy, and there have been numerous reports of working dogs stolen from farms and other properties.

Police have been working to return pets to their owners. Five bulldog puppies were found safe and well after being taken from a house in Wellingborough, and a cocker spaniel was brought back to

its owner after it was stolen from a kennel in Harpole.

PC Michelle Clapson, from the Rural Crime Team at Northamptonshire Police said: "We understand how important people's dogs are to them – they are part of the family, so we want to help everyone understand the best way to keep them safe."

"With demand for dogs still really high, we're sharing advice with owners to keep their beloved pets safe, and also sharing advice to help those looking for a new dog to do so responsibly."

Dog owners can take a few simple steps to protect their pets, such as ensure all microchip details are up to date; secure outdoor kennels; use a lead for walking outdoors; do not leave the dog unattended by a shop.

Those buying a new dog, should also be vigilant, ensuring that the breeder is licensed. The Kennel Club advises that a good breeder should be as curious about you as you are of them, and that when viewing puppies, ask to see the mum and watch how the dog interacts with the mum and the rest of the litter. Ask to see papers and vet reports. Walk away if it does not look or feel right, and alert a local vet or the Kennel Club.

Police Beat

Sofya Meshechkova

During the last year there have been fewer crimes across England, largely attributed to the lockdowns. Roché Security found that compared to 2019, there was a thirty-four percent decrease in residential burglaries.

In East Northants North, there have been twenty-six percent fewer crimes since May 2020. According to the latest available data from East Northants Police, thirty-three crimes were reported in Oundle in March 2021.

Between January 15-17 there was a car theft on Station Road.

On February 8, Oundle resident, Joshua Gull, punched a police officer in the head. PC Leo Clarke suffered a brain bleed and underwent surgery. Mr Gull was jailed for 1 year and 8 months. "On average there are 43 assaults on police officers per month."

On February 10 and 11, a few people received text messages from a man called Adim, who claimed to be from a building society and wanted to talk about their security details. No one fell for the scam. It is strongly recommended not to give personal details to any un-

known person or company.

Between February 5-12, Northamptonshire Police has received over 750 reports about Bitcoin-phishing fraud. People received emails with fake celebrity endorsements, luring the receiver into an investment scam. The provided links in the email were designed to steal money online.



On February 22, a 28-year-old who worked in Oundle died in a lethal car crash on the A427, between Oundle and Lower Benefield at about 2pm.

Between April 12-14, recurring malicious damage to a car parked on New Road was reported.

On the night of April 24-25, car number plates were stolen on Benefield Road.

Also between April 24-25, a catalytic converter was stolen from a car parked on South Road.

Northants speed cameras are switched off despite high levels of speed violations

Robert Brettle

Instead of using fixed cameras, Northamptonshire Police now rely on mobile speed cameras, because all the speed cameras in the county were decommissioned in July 2011. The mobile speed cameras are run by local police and speed-safety officers to help keep the roads safer. While these cameras are often mounted on marked vans, they can also be fitted to unmarked cars, as well as manually operated by officers on foot.

According to the most recent available data from the Northamptonshire Police, the Safer Roads Team monitors sections of the A605 at Barnwell and Thrapston on a monthly basis.

In January 2021, mobile cameras were set up on the A605 at Barnwell in the 60mph section where 27 people were caught speeding; 19 were travelling over 10mph above the speed limit. Later in the month on 22 January, mobile speed cameras set up in the 40mph zone on the A605 by the Thrapston bypass caught 80 people; 31 were going over 10mph above the speed limit. Seven hours in total were spent monitoring the A605 in January.

In February, the police set up camera traps on the A605 on four different days, three of which were on the 60mph section near Barnwell. At this section, 28 people were caught speeding; 20 of those were over 70mph. In the 40mph section near Thrapston, 60 people were caught; 22 were over 50mph. The

police spent eight and a half hours monitoring the A605 in February.

In March, the police only spent just over four hours over two days on the A605, during which they caught 12 people on the 60mph section. Of those, nine were going above 70 – the highest speed being 82mph.

Finally, in April, the police caught 119 people speeding over ten hours of surveillance. 55 were going 10 mph above the speed limit, including someone going 106mph in the 60mph area near Barnwell.

According to research by Road Safety Analysis, there is no need to turn on speed cameras because having sight of the cameras influences behaviour and makes drivers more cautious. Their research indicates that there has been a reduction in road deaths.

However, if so many drivers are caught speeding on two short sections of the A605 over a few days, there must be hundreds more who every day routinely speed down roads without fear of any fines.

This suggests that if the police wanted to reduce the amount of speeding that takes place on roads such as the A605, there should be speed cameras, or more police presence by the side of the road.

However, given that the decommissioned cameras are succeeding in their job of reducing road deaths, there is an argument that it is not necessary to turn them back on.

New Road lives up to its name



For years, residents on New Road endured an unprecedented increase in traffic caused by HGV construction vehicles and buses diverted by the North Bridge closure. The heavy use created an obstacle course of lethal potholes. After Covid and weather delays, New Road was resurfaced and is finally worthy of its name.

Traffic enforcement powers expanded to local authorities

Robert Brettle

Nearly 300 local councils in England will be given new powers to hand out fines for motoring offences. Last year, the Government announced its plans to implement the moving traffic enforcement powers in Part 6 of the Traffic Management Act 2004. Work is underway to bring these powers into force, which will take several months.

Drivers can be fined up to £70 for offences such as ignoring banned left and right hand turns or stopping in yellow boxes.

Currently, only London authorities have the power to enforce these so-called "moving traffic offences", although the government aims to change this. In London, almost 4000 drivers a day are caught breaking traffic rules, such as driving in a bus lane.

Baroness Vere of Norbiton, Minister for Roads, Buses and Places

confirmed to the Oundle Chronicle that North Northamptonshire could assume powers to enforce fines for these offences. She said: "When these powers come into force, it will enable those local authorities outside London with civil parking enforcement powers to apply to the secretary of state for enforcement of moving traffic offences."

Northamptonshire currently has no operating speed cameras, and relies on mobile patrol vehicles to monitor speeding. Questions remain about whether the authority will have the ability to enforce traffic violations.

The RAC said that there were also concerns that the powers were going to be used as a money-making scheme. The head of the RAC's roads policy said: "There is a risk that some councils might use this as a lucrative revenue-raising tool."



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Specialist help needed for sufferers of long Covid fatigue

William Caskey

Patients across the country, having recovered from Covid-19, are still reporting bewildering ongoing symptoms of Coronavirus for several months afterwards. This condition is now recognized as long Covid, though little is understood about what actually causes it. Thousands of people suffering from long Covid symptoms will soon have access to specialist care, as the government implements new measures for tackling the condition.

Post-Covid-19 syndrome is a form of post viral fatigue specific to Covid-19. Its symptoms include ongoing fatigue, breathlessness, and other debilitating conditions. It is a condition which can persist for many months after a person has recovered from the virus itself, and one which can leave a person completely incapacitated. Other reports include symptoms of impaired cognitive ability, more commonly referred to as 'brain fog.'

One local resident who came down with Covid at the start of the pandemic in March 2020, suffers from long Covid. She said, "Long Covid came as a surprise. I didn't even know what it was when I started having symptoms."

Six months after her initial Covid infection, she noticed several symptoms including headaches and brain fog. "I felt like I had early onset dementia," she said, and it was difficult to do her job for a while. She also suffered heart palpitations, dizziness, anxiety, fuzzy vision, shortness of breath, loss of smell for nine months, and several other maladies.

"But the worst was that I was beleaguered by an overwhelming and complete fatigue. Even walking up the stairs was exhausting, and I'd have to sit down and rest frequently. I had to stop running because I felt physically ill after any exercise at all, even just a dog

walk," she said.

In November, when she suffered a debilitating headache and aches, she saw a doctor and an osteopath, but could get no relief.

"A friend recommended a sports physio who also does acupuncture. I gave it a try and found it helped immediately," she said. "It was the sports physio who connected the dots and said it might be long Covid. She had had other clients with the same symptoms. Once I knew what was happening, I was able to come up with a plan for trying to get better again."

New evidence has shown that one in five people who suffer from coronavirus go on to experience long term Covid-19 symptoms. In response to this new data, the government has begun to roll out its new initiative for dealing with long Covid and is currently opening specialist clinics around the country to provide both physical and psychological assessments for people suffering from long Covid.

Anyone experiencing symptoms four weeks or more after coronavirus should speak to a GP to begin the process of receiving necessary medical attention. If the patient does not have shortness of breath, they will be sent for a blood test. If they do have shortness of breath, they will also be required to have an ECG and chest X-Ray. If the tests provide no clarity as to what is causing the symptoms, the GP will refer them to the nearest long Covid clinic.

More than 70 clinics currently exist across the UK, and a further 12 are scheduled to open. The nearest clinic to Oundle is in Kettering. The clinics bring together doctors, nurses and physiological and psychological therapists, to support patients suffering from long Covid and to help them receive the care they need.

England Showground, Peterborough, as designated by the South Peterborough Primary Care Network of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG). A CCG is an NHS organisation which delivers NHS services in that area.

Some have questioned why Oundle does not have its own vaccination centre and residents were unhappy that the elderly had to make the trip to Peterborough for their jab. Local MP Tom Pursglove brought up the matter with the CCG, asking for "a local solution," to reduce inconvenience for Oundle residents.

On 12 January, Dr Richardson,

How to ward off Seasonal Affective Disorder

Gabriel Sun

After having spent much of the past winter confined indoors over lockdown, it is time for us all to take stock of its impact on mental health and make plans to improve our coping mechanisms before the next winter season.

Seasonal affective disorder is caused by decreased levels of sunlight which commonly occurs during the winter. The effects of SAD often result in symptoms of depression such as a decrease of mood and energy levels, due to the disruption of one's body clock caused by a change in seasons resulting in a feeling not far off jet lag, plus a drop in serotonin and melatonin levels.

Countries located away from the equator such as Nordic countries have a higher risk of encountering SAD due to their lack of sunlight hours. Now, it may be surprising that the citizens of Nordic countries are rated the happiest on the planet despite being the most susceptible to SAD, but because of their coping methods, it has less of an impact. These methods include having a diet of oil-rich fish such as salmon, mackerel and herring which contain omega fatty acids and vitamin D, known as the "sunshine vitamin" you get from sunlight.

They also follow the Danish lifestyle of hygge which is very important in their culture, and the similar Norwegian version known as koselig. A key feature of this

lifestyle is staying cozy. Through wearing warm clothes, surrounding themselves with fireplaces, drinking soup and simply living for the simpler things in life, these Nordic countries are able to bear the harsh winter weather much more easily.

Despite having a lifestyle revolving around warmth, the Nordics still go out and appreciate nature. Through looking to natural beauty and living life with a positive outlook, the psychological and physiological health of Nordic residents during the winter are often better than other countries.

An easy way to combat SAD that will not involve changing lifestyles is light therapy, also known as phototherapy. Some countries have clinics for light therapy, however you can also just purchase a light-box which will provide a source of artificial sunlight.

My family bought one during the long winter break in London, and had daily sessions during breakfast, which probably helped keep our spirits up during the short, dark days.

Through having daily sessions with the lightbox, the symptoms of SAD should be alleviated. The artificial sunlight should raise one's melatonin and serotonin levels, and also help your body clock adjust.

By recognising symptoms of SAD and planning ahead to make adjustments, those who struggled this past year, will be able to cope better when winter returns.

the CEO of Lakeside Surgeries, which runs the Oundle Surgery, and a local GP himself, said that a vaccine centre in Oundle was not feasible at that time because of limited vaccine supply.

On 10 March, Jan Thomas, the Chief Executive of NHS Cambridgeshire & Peterborough CCG, said in a letter to Mr Pursglove MP that vaccine uptake has been encouragingly high in Oundle with 97% of people aged 75+ and 95% of people aged 70-74 taking up the vaccine, based on data up to the 28 February 2021.

However, she confirmed that they were looking at setting up, "a traveling "pop-up" vaccination service to bring the vaccines closer to the homes of people who may not be as able to travel to existing vaccination centres.

She followed up, "Whilst we are working through the logistical challenges of hosting a "pop-up"



service at pace, I would like to urge those eligible constituents who do feel able to travel to a vac-

cination site outside of Oundle to book their appointment as soon as possible."

Only five months into the campaign over 60 million jabs have been delivered nationally and the vaccine is now being offered to those aged 32.

Coupled with the news that the Pfizer and AstraZeneca vaccines are highly effective against the variant identified in India, hopes remain high that the vaccine campaign will be our ticket to freedom on 21 June.

No sign of vaccine hesitancy in Oundle

Ned Chatterton

On 8 December 2020, Margaret Keenan became the first person in the UK to receive a coronavirus vaccine as part of the nationwide rollout. Since then, the UK has had one of the most successful vaccination campaigns in the world.

Here in East Northamptonshire, 90% of people aged over 40 have had at least the first dose of a coronavirus vaccine, according to data up to 21 May from the National Immunisation Management Service.

The nearest vaccination centre for Oundle residents is at East of

Lockdown life for the Oundle Chronicle correspondents writing from around the world

Gabriel

Unlike my school peers, I had it pretty easy during the first lockdown in Hong Kong. Although I had to self-isolate on my return from the UK, restaurants and shops were open. Even masks were not a big deal since it is pretty common to mask up. Whilst at home, I even managed to pick up music production and vocal lessons. So, when I returned to Oundle in September all the covid restrictions were surprising. My family joined me in London at Christmas, but when we learned about schools being closed again in January, we decided to take a circular route back to Hong Kong and endure the dreaded quarantine, rather than stay in London for lockdown. Due to flights from the UK being banned, we flew to the US west coast for a few weeks and managed to look at some universities in the process. While on the road, I had to try and keep up with online school, but the time difference took more of a toll than I expected. I returned to Oundle for the summer term, and am glad that restrictions are beginning to ease – and that flights to Hong Kong look to be back on schedule.

Cherry

I did not go home for Christmas and was at my guardian's house in Bournemouth when I heard about the January lockdown. At the time, there was no indication about how long it would last, if flights would resume to China or if schools would return to in-person learning before summer. I have to admit that I was worried about being in lockdown in a foreign country without my family. I checked the Chinese Embassy website first thing in the morning to keep track of the rapidly changing flight policies, but I soon accepted that I just had to be patient. Lockdown life actually provided opportunities to try out new things and I was really lucky to have such an understanding and supportive guardian, devices to support online learning, and teachers and friends that kept in close contact.

Jennifer

Before leaving school when the first lockdown was announced, I hastily grabbed a battered copy of *Cat's Eye* by Margaret Atwood from the boarding house library. It was a gripping read. I remember turning the dog-eared pages on several jet-lagged, sleepless nights spent in my quarantine hotel in Shanghai. The book had belonged to a pupil who had gone on to read English at university and in the margins were annotations; her thoughts flowed like a river on the yellow pages. It was the most wonderful experience reading the book with another soul, a connection that I had longed for. I got her contact details and texted her to say that I had her old book. She replied: "I hope you are enjoying New House, I really loved my five years there and I have such fond memories - enjoy it!" I won't deny that tears welled up. Everything came back as I traced those pages: our discussions of poems, of life, of everything after restless school days. These memories still linger in those stuffy rooms, despite the hasty

farewells of those pupils leaving for the final time last year. The pandemic separated our human connections, and I have not been able to return to school this year, yet stories can heal scars left by disappointment and hardship. It has allowed us to understand, create, and dream. The mahogany shelves of the house library are a paradise for lovers of literature; they are also eyewitness to enduring friendships.

Noa

When I flew home to Dubai in March 2020, people wearing masks were rare and my suitcase was light: "It'll be over in a month and I'll be back at school after Easter." This prediction proved to be staggeringly incorrect, and it was more than a year before I returned to the UK via Denmark. The UAE's immediate response to Covid-19 was swift and the measures were harsh. I made it back just before the borders closed, shutting out even citizens and residents. There was a full lockdown: no dog walking, no outdoor exercise. A police permit was required to leave one's house (only for groceries or medical reasons). Non-compliance involved fines reaching thousands of pounds and the threat of jail time and permanent deportation. In December, when tourist numbers rose in Dubai, cases spiked dramatically. As someone clinically vulnerable, more time spent staring at my laptop instead of being physically in a classroom was inevitable, and the monotony of daily life was hard.

Paxton

I was no stranger to masks when the pandemic began, as I would wear one to school in Hong Kong every time I got sick (and I got sick a lot). I adapted quickly to online learning, and I didn't have much of a social life to lose. Being the largest introvert the world has ever known, this felt normal and completely fine by me. Due to increased free time, I decided to take a machine learning (AI) course. I expect this will take me a couple years until I completely wrap my head around the subject. I returned to Oundle in September, and was expecting to return to Hong Kong for half term as normal. But that did not happen, and I had to stretch my instant ramen supplies to Christmas, like Matt Damon in *The Martian* (maybe less extreme though). After returning home for Christmas, I wasn't able to return to school until April. Now I just hope they let me back into Hong Kong for the summer holidays as my flight back to HK has already been booked.

Priyanka

When we gathered for a house assembly in March last year, everyone was buzzing. We had just been told that we were going to be leaving school early. "If we're lucky we might get a whole month off school," we thought. I went home excited to rest after a busy term. It's now a year later, after months spent at home, working online, with little real interactions. I enjoyed the "long holiday" at first, but I found working online a very difficult task. In my GCSE year, it has been hard to cope with the uncertainty of not knowing what's coming next. But lockdown was

not completely unproductive; I found more time for reading and writing, and closely followed news and current events. I did more exercise from home, more cooking and most importantly, spent more time with my family.

Robert

Lockdown was not necessarily unpleasant, it was just mind-numbingly boring. Most of my lockdown days were identical. I got up at 7am, went for my daily exercise at 7:30am around my local park in London, and then sat in front of my computer screen for the rest of the day. I maybe watched a bit of TV, and went to bed. As a result, all the days that I spent in lockdown merged into one grey blur. I acknowledge that it could have been a lot worse, and I am lucky that it was merely dull. Other people have had to contend with far worse – loss of relatives and friends, and unemployment – whereas I merely sat about not doing much, which is completely tolerable. I did take the opportunity to do more reading than I would normally do, and played the piano more, which probably irritated my family! With the roll-out of the vaccine, it looks like life can return to normal, although I seriously doubt that we will be back to 2019 for a while.

Sofya

I spent my quarantine on the outskirts of Moscow, where there are lots of tall forests and classical Russian scenery. The pandemic experience in Russia was relatively easy, and actually inspired some new trends. The demand for both domestic and exotic pets increased, and forty percent of Russians dug vegetable gardens. Russian pensioners mastered their internet skills, blogging and setting up Instagram accounts. My friends even taught their grannies how to use Zoom and Facebook! We have a saying in Russia: "The best locomotive for personal progress is a strong kick from the outside world." And, of course, I managed to spend a lot of time with my family, which would not have happened if the pandemic hadn't locked us at home.

William

When looking back on my lockdown experience, I am reminded of the 1993 film, *Groundhog Day*, where Bill Murray finds himself trapped in a seemingly infinite loop, reliving the same day over and over. My lockdown routine was similarly repetitive. I would get up late in the morning, drag myself downstairs for a bowl of cereal, brush my teeth, have a shower, and spend the rest of the day doing whatever I could think of to fill the daunting amount of time I had at my disposal. I would then have dinner, go to bed, and do the exact same thing the next morning. The days seemed to morph into one, and it became difficult to distinguish between what I had done yesterday, and what I had done last week. This gave rise to a curious paradox in which the days seemed to crawl by, and yet the weeks would leap past. In the film, Bill Murray is only able to finally break the loop when he decides to improve himself and become a better person, and whilst I can't say that I was

able to do that, I did use the lockdown to catch up on a great deal of reading. In fact, my lockdown experience was filled with little more than reading, sleeping and YouTube. Needless to say, the reopening of schools was a welcome relief.

Meagan

In March 2020 when teachers ushered us back to House to announce early school closing, I already had a flight to catch with only a few days' notice. There were no direct flights from the UK to Macau, and I had to transfer in Hong Kong. It took about nine hours, instead of the usual one hour to drive across the world's longest sea bridge from Hong Kong to Macau because of all the Covid checks. The 14 day quarantine was a rather luxurious experience, with meals delivered to the door, and I could indulge in Netflix for hours. When I finally left the hotel, I still had to isolate for a week at home, but the sense of freedom was enormous. Macau took serious measures early on when the first covid case was reported on 22 January 2020. Within days, the entire community went into a complete lockdown. Every Macau resident was allowed to buy ten face masks every ten days to prevent panic buying. Businesses slowly opened back up at the end of April and schools resumed in May 2020; everything then felt normal again. There have been 49 confirmed cases and no covid-related deaths. But because Macau had closed its borders, it was difficult to find a flight to the UK in September. Then, I was stranded in the UK for Christmas, and little did I know that I would be remote learning at my guardian's house for three months. It has been difficult being here knowing that everyone back home is living safe and carefree lives. The chances of restrictions being lifted and air travel to Macau returning to normal are still slim. This is the longest time that I have been away from home. I just hope that I will be allowed to return to Macau when I finish my final year at Oundle.

Matthew

I think that we were all equally fed up when we received the order for a new national lockdown in January, but it would not be true to assume that it was such a bad experience for me. Whilst online lessons were far from ideal, I am able to appreciate that these lessons were far from the worst possible outcome. Whilst I did not hit the ground running, I soon found my stride and was able to adapt successfully to the bizarre circumstances, adaptations that had been universally developed across the country and the globe. Whilst the streets were empty, they sprang back into a more vibrant and unique expression of life during periods of communal appreciation for the essential workers fulfilling their roles on the frontline. To me, this was truly remarkable, creating a sense of community that I had never before experienced. It did not spring from any joy that the lockdown brought, but rather from the acceptance that we were all separately simply doing our bit, and in that, we were far from alone.

The workers who kept the community going during pandemic lockdowns

During the last year's pandemic lockdowns, communities across the country endured inconvenience, illness, hardship, loneliness and anxiety. But throughout it all, despite the health risks, a legion of workers and volunteers kept on going, providing essential services to everyone, and assistance to vulnerable and isolated groups. Featured here are just a few of these workers and volunteers, representing all those across Oundle who have been a familiar and reliable presence during the lockdowns, reassuring the community of its resilience.



Angie Boyne
Cambridgeshire and Peterborough NHS Foundation Trust



Cathy Wenden
Hermes



Liz Turnbull, Helen Hardy
Community Action



Michael Nyczka
Oundle Primary School



Lorraine Adam
The Co-operative Food



Piyush Paw, Alexander Ward
Oundle Post Office



Alfie Parr, Robert Hemmings, Dan Ketyi
North Northamptonshire Council



Margo North with Sue Farrell
Volunteer Action