

SPEEN AND NORTH DEAN NEWS

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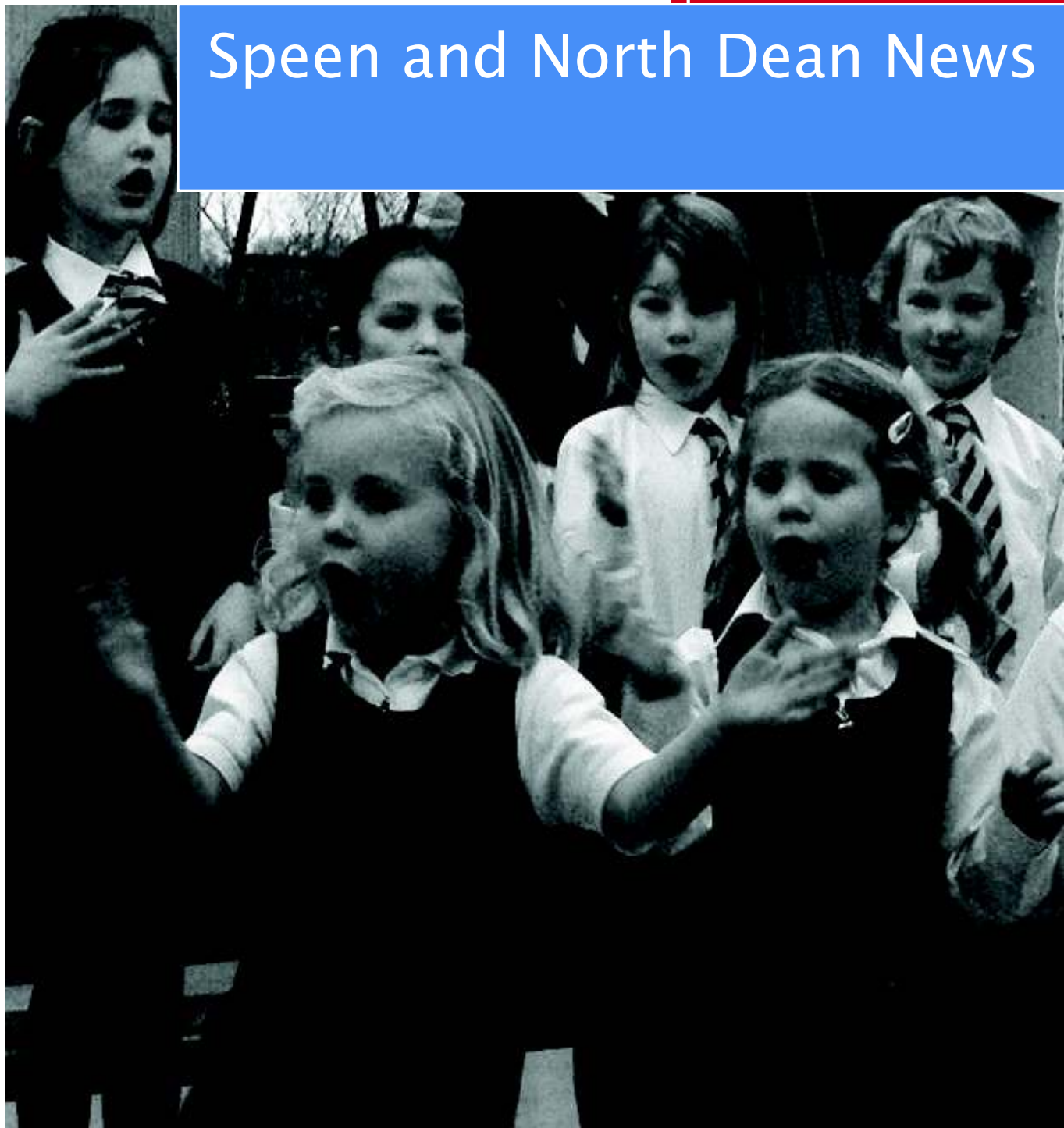
Julie White

Jan Rose

Issue 45, Winter
2009



Speen and North Dean News





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What's on in Speen and North Dean, 2009?

<u>2009</u>	<i>What</i>	<i>Where</i>	<i>Contact</i>
<u>January</u>	FOR UP TO DATE INFO CHECK SNDN PAGES ON www.SpeenBucks.org.uk		
24, 8:30 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.	Ladies Breakfast: Jo Gambi “Hanging On”	Speen Chapel	James and Sandy, 488875
29, 7:30 p.m.	Re-launch of Pub Quiz (Buck’s Air Ambulance)	KW4	Geoff and Clare, 488701
<u>February</u>			
5, Thursday, 7:45 p.m.	WI -Famous Chiltern Houses with Brian Edwards	Speen Village Hall	Barbara Collett, 488348
6, Friday, 8 p.m.	Wine tasting, Village Schools	Speen Village Hall	Amanda Dobbs amanda.speen@btopenworld.com
12, Thursday	Pub Quiz	KW4	Geoff and Clare, 488701
26, Thursday	Pub Quiz	KW4	Geoff and Clare, 488701
27, Friday	Race Night	North Dean Village Hall	Julie White, NDVH Secretary 01494 562311
27, Friday 1p.m.	Business Group	KW4	Derek Stephens, 07899 905262 enquiries@hubprinting.co.uk
28, Saturday	Auction of Promises	Speen School	Sandy Mitcheson – 488875 smitcheson@btconnect.com
<u>March</u>			
5, Thursday, 7:45 p.m.	Cycle through Viet Nam and Cambodia Shelley Jennings	Speen Village Hall	Barbara Collett, 488348
12, Thursday, 7:30	Pub Quiz	KW4	Geoff and Clare, 488701
14 , 8:30 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.	Men’s Breakfast: Noel Fellowes “Killing Time”	Speen Chapel	For tickets, Andy and Carolyn, 488758 or James and Sandy, 488875
18, Wednesday	North Dean History	North Dean Village Hall	Julie White, NDVH Secretary 01494 562311
26, Thursday, 7:30	Pub Quiz	KW4	Geoff and Clare, 488701
TBD	Safari Supper	Speen School PTA	Ann Myers (annislamyers@hotmail.com)
<u>April</u>			
TBC	WI birthday party – Members only	TBC	Barbara Collett, 488348
22, Wednesday	NDVH AGM	North Dean Village Hall	Julie White, NDVH Secretary 01494 562311
<u>May</u>			
16, 8:30 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.	(TBC) Tracey Elliot-Reep, “Riding by faith; Mexico to Canada”	Speen Chapel	James and Sandy, 488875

What's on in Speen and North Dean, 2009?

<u>2009 (May, Cont.)</u>	<u>What</u>	<u>Where</u>	<u>Who to Contact</u>
29, 1 p.m.	Business Group	KW4	Derek Stephens, 07899 905262 [enquiries@hubprinting.co.uk]
<u>June</u>			
6, 7, Saturday, Sunday	Fun Day	Playing Fields	Andy Thompson 01494 488524
20, Saturday	Speen School Summer Ball		For info Ann Myers [annislamyers@hotmail.com]
<u>July</u>			
11, Saturday	Speen Fete	Playing Fields	Nicki Pitt, Tel: 488713, npittnixi@aol.com
<u>August</u>			
1, Saturday	Annual Fete	North Dean Village Hall	Julie White, NDVH Secretary 01494 562311
<u>September</u>			
10 - 19, Thursday to Saturday	Speen Festival	Everywhere	Sue Taylor (Festival Secretary) sue@dairymed.gotadsl.co.uk Tel: 488168
<u>November</u>			
7th	Bonfire Night	Playing Fields	Andy Thompson 01494 488524
<u>December</u>			
12th	Christmas Tree Lights and Carol Singing	Playing Fields	Andy Thompson 01494 488524

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Dear Reader

No one opening this edition of the Speen and North Dean News in January 2009 will be left in any doubt about how busy the villages were in the last quarter of 2008. As summer faded, and autumn turned into unseasonal snow in October, it seems as if the money-raising, charitable impulses around these two places hit a new level. The range of activities, support for local institutions and good causes, and the sense of pure enjoyment at taking part remain impressive: the only surprising thing is that energy remained for celebrating Christmas and the New Year. We have tried hard to record as much as we can of these activities, alongside the other important events in the villages. Make it a New Year Resolution to post something to us!

One of the most intriguing aspects of villages is the underground activities that exist without being constantly heralded and celebrated. For example, without the cell of activists who have for many years maintained, raised and lowered the Village Marquee in Speen, many of the events described in these pages

would not have taken place. While not exactly a secret society, they contribute greatly, exert huge expertise (under the expert direction of John Holmes) in raising a dry roof over our heads at dances, dinners, and festival events. And they are a good example to choose at this moment, since they have just sold the old marquee on eBay, and are about to buy a new one. The fact that this one can be raised on pulleys and not main force is, we understand, unlikely to diminish pub takings as a result of their work, since they all bear witness to the fact that pulleys induce just as great a thirst as guy-ropes.

We have decided to use a theme for each edition to encourage more writing. In the last issue the image of the bodgers singing at dusk as they worked in the beech woods struck a chord. Our local history, *The leaves of time* reflects on the many musical connections in the village. This editions' theme is therefore Music. One of our most noted former residents, Edmund Rubbra, is profiled in this issue. Kate Laughton talks about music at Speen School, while Christopher Boyce reflects on choral music. Andy Gower reminds us that music feeds the soul, while a profile of Gracie Stickings highlights one of our talented villagers. The Speen Festival has much in the way of music, and follows in the traditions of music at Piggotts, by introducing the Big Sing. But do not worry if

us that music feeds the soul, while a profile of Gracie Stickings highlights one of our talented villagers. The Speen Festival has much in the way of music, and follows in the traditions of music at Piggotts, by introducing the Big Sing. The next edition will also have a theme - Sport. Do you know of people, young or old, whose sporting prowess is unknown or uncelebrated? If so, tip us off, or, better still, write a note for inclusion here yourself. You will find the copy dates for the next editions below.

SNDN Copy Dates

No.	Copy	Approx pub
45	15/12/08	Jan 2009
46	23/3/09 (Sport)	April/ May
47	20/07/09	August
48	28/9/09	October
49	21/12/09	Jan 2010

NOTE: Ad copy due two weeks earlier

*Monimail House, Chapel Hill,
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David Worlock
epsdrw@aol.com

Tel: 488033

Visit SNDN on new village web site

www.SpeenBucks.org.uk

In the last edition we mentioned our concern that the News should have a web presence as well as a life in print. A committee is now at work to redevelop and redesign the village website for Speen, and that will also be linked to any parallel web pages that are created in North Dean. We wholeheartedly welcome the work being done on the website - please look at the beta version on www.SpeenBucks.org.uk. We think that this can help us all in a number of ways. For a start, the What's On and Who's Who pages in print can be kept up to date online, so that they can be used for reference between print editions. Then again, a digital archive of old editions will be very useful for research and recall. Finally, we can use the web to print in full longer articles which we have to shorten for print, or include all the photos (not just the ones we could fit in), or publish some articles of urgent importance before the print edition arrives. We know that the print version is important to readers, but alongside the web we think that its value in the villages can be enhanced. So we have joined the committee and will be working alongside our colleagues there to make these improvements really valuable for all of us.

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Speen and North Dean already rhyme: SNDN announces its Poetry Competition

In this edition we announce our poetry competition for 2009. This is open to any member of the 410 households who receive the Speen and North Dean News. The idea is that since it is often easier to address a subject in a short poetic form, we may get more contributions from readers on topics of interest to themselves or their families. The rules are simple:

- * there will be 3 classes - under 11 years of age; under 18 years of age; and all ages. Please make sure that you tell us which class you are entering

- * you may write on any topic you like, and in any poetry format you like. It does not have to be long and it does not have to rhyme

- * three submissions will be printed in each edition through-

out the year. At the yearend we will select a winner in each class.

- * You do not have to have your name printed alongside your entry if you do not want it - Anon is one of the greatest British poets. But the Editors do need to know your identity.

- * While you may have written your poem a long time ago, we want contributions that have not appeared in print before

- * The Editors will give a £25 Book Token as a prize to two selected winners from contributions printed here throughout the year. These prizes will only go to winners in the under 11 and under18 classes. The Editors' decision on the award of these prizes is final.

So, do you have something to say and want to see yourself in

print? Or did you doodle something last year that deserves another look? Send it over and let us have a look - getting into print could be a first step to Well, almost anything

What about the writer's block?

To help shake the writer's block, we would like to know if there is interest in a creative writing workshop, as part of SpeenFestInteractive. See p. 9

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SPEEN FESTIVAL 2009

First off, Happy New Year! Now for the news you've all been waiting for....

It gives me great pleasure to announce the truly stellar programme for Speen Festival 2009! With a cosmic, yet earthy focus, we are adding astronomy, science and gastronomy into the creative mix. We also have more events than ever before, offering you veritable panoply of artistic and musical delights gleaned from the four corners of this most talented of villages and beyond!

And just when you thought it couldn't get any better, for your delectation we present SpeenFest Interactive! This will offer you a host of additional participatory activities linked to Festival events that are designed to inspire creativity before, during and after the forthcoming Festival uniting the community as never before! Finally to celebrate the 5th Festival, we're also delighted to unveil Speen Festival's spiffing new look – a classic feel with a highly individual twist that we hope will not just reflect the spirit of the Festival but help forge its continued success for years to come.

I am reduced to a quivering, breathless heap of sweaty excitement anticipating the delights to come, but before I pass out with unalloyed joy, let me remind you all to put these dates in your diaries! Now, all that remains for me to do is to bid you farewell and allow you to feast your eyes on the heavenly delights that make up Speen Festival 2009!

Best wishes

Jem Symondson

Chair

Speen Festival 2009 Committee

Speen Festival 2009

10–19 September

Thursday 10, Friday 11 & Saturday 12 September

Community Theatre

What better way to start the Festival than our community theatre? While we cannot announce the title of our production as yet, as I write, our artistic directors,

Kate and Sam Laughton, together with stage director, Annie Hill, are under a pile of scripts whittling down a short-list.

Saturday 12 & Sunday 13 September

Photography Exhibition/Competition

As in previous years, a wonderful opportunity to give free rein to your photographic talent.

Sunday 13 September

Food Fest

Speen Festival's first Food Fest!

Spearheaded by the Chef Patron of the King William IV pub, our food fest will feature an array of local producers offering culinary demonstrations and tastings.

Sunday 13 September

Astronomy Talk by Dr. Heather Couper

In this International Year of Astronomy, we're delighted to welcome international broadcaster and writer on astronomy, space and science, Dr. Heather Couper.

Speen Festival Programme (cont.)

Monday 14 September

Music and Poetry

To help celebrate this year's Festival, our candle-lit recital will also be offering the bards amongst us an opportunity to get creative and compose poetry for the evening.

Tuesday 15 September

Wild about Wildlife

Some great fun activities designed to engage people of all ages. Will include some local experts!

Wednesday 16 September

Jazz Concert

A firm favourite of past festivals, the Martin Hart Quintet with Lynn Garner will present The Irving Berlin Story. As in previous years, it will no

doubt be an instant sell-out.

Thursday 17 September

Science Matters

To keep things lively, Barry Stickings, our Speen science guru, will be throwing fellow scientists into his mass liquid spectrometer, creating a hot, sticky thought-provoking scientific debate.

Friday 18 September

Speen Big Sing!

The day that Speen turns vocal. We're turning up the volume on the Playing Field as all villagers of Speen and beyond unite to prove that singing is LOUD and PROUD and...hey, FUN!

Saturday 19 September

Teatro Unfortunato

This riotous children's theatre company is now confirmed so hold on to your hats and be ready for anything. Literally!

Saturday 19 September

Speen Bike Park Challenge

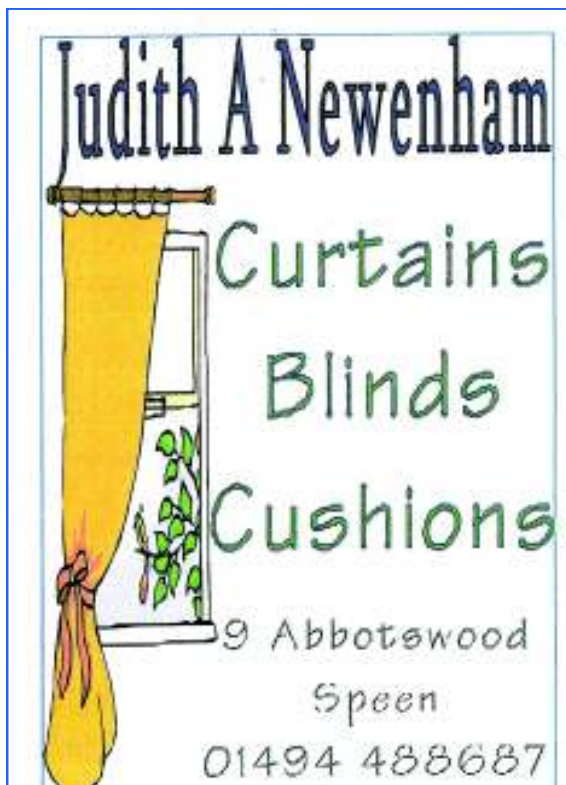
Back by popular demand, this event is bound to get the heart-beat racing for the young at heart.

Saturday 19 September

Cabaret Supper - Reaching for the stars

To conclude this Festival of all Festivals, our traditional final night Cabaret Supper will be nothing less than a spectacular evening of star-studded performances.

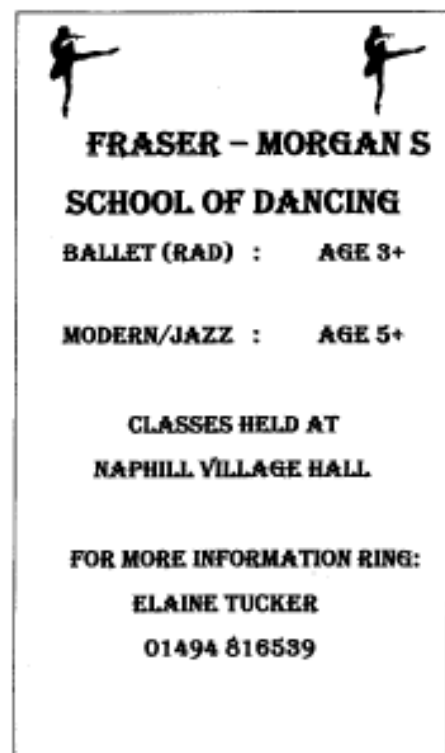
* Times will be announced at a later date. Some dates/events may be subject to change



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Caribbean Evening September 2008

We had a hugely successful evening despite the appalling weather conditions! The Caribbean Flags that decorated the sides of the marquee and the Steel Band, along with the colourful and bright costumes of the guests helped make it very enjoyable even if the rain did drip from time to time between the marquee and the catering tent. Well done to the caterers Dave & Tracy and crew from the King William IV who were magnificent.

Many thanks to those of you who supported us, either by donations, being there on the night, or helping us to put the evening together. SSG could not have raised £2,894.84 without you. And last but by no means least our thanks to Grace & Barry for once again hosting this event for us in their lovely gardens.

XMAS Fayre and All Day Break- fast October 2008

This was held for the first time in the King William IV with our usual hospice cards on sale as well as a home produce stall, inexpensive gift stall and jewellery stall. We raised £230 from the stalls and each of the individual hospice stalls made profits as well.

We have been able to give the

How the two ladies did

Last issue we told you about Shelley Jennings' and Christine Symondson's test of friendship and communal generosity as they planned their sponsored cycle tour of Vietnam to raise money for Helen and Douglas House. We doff our cycling helmets on learning that they have raised £13,000. Shelley will be speaking at the WI meeting on March 5.

hospices £1,000 each this Autumn and I can assure you your support is recognised by them and greatly appreciated.

Future dates for events

Look out for a Wine Tasting & Fun Night Feb/March time

If you are not on the list and would like to be to get details of SSG and local events, please send me your e mail address to edie@speenbucks.org



Edie Radford, 488679

Engulfed in the Wide Sargasso Sea

The decision of the Speen Supporters Group to hold a Caribbean Carnival Evening on 6 Sep-

tember was never entirely likely to match theme and weather, but the gale that rebounded around the marquee, pitched for the event on the lawns of Willott's Farm, Speen, owed more to Hurricane Ike than the balmy nights and the soft white sands of the islands. Yet everything else was there: a venue decked out in the flags of the Windwards and the Leewards (though few, put to the test, could identify them all, except for a table that seemed to think they were representing Madagascar). This slight hint of geographical confusion also pervaded the dress, with Hawaiian shirts and leis prominent amongst the dreadlocks.

But the guests only needed to know that they were there to enjoy the wonderful work of the Sunblaze steel drum band, to eat an excellent meal which combined the efforts of the organizing group and the King William IV, to patronize the bar with alacrity and enthusiasm, and then to sway to the music on the dance floor, or skitter around to the wilder rhythms of drums (and wind outside) .

Speen Fete Follows up

The 2008 Fete was very successful and there was a large turnout encouraged by reasonable weather. Each village organisation and the chosen charity, Stokenchurch Dog Rescue received £270 from the proceeds.

The Village Hall refurbishment was the special project supported this year. £1270 has helped towards the cost of new toilets.

The Fete Committee is now planning for 2009. Saturday 11th July. Suggestions for the theme and for the charity are welcome. Please send, by the end of January, to the Secretary (Nicki Pitt, Tel: 488713, npittnixi@aol.com). Also there may be an opportu-

carry out maintenance tasks on our fields. On the Playing Field along with the usual hedge and tree cutting, we removed the old cricket nets and erected a new frame ready for the new nets in spring. We also made repairs to the running boards on our traditional Wicksteed roundabout to ensure its compliance with our most recent safety inspection. Over on Ridgley's Field we continued replacing the fencing around the copse and we also added a new jump on the bike park.

The 8th November saw our annual celebration of the Gunpowder Plot and the demise of Guy Fawkes. Three "guys" this year came to an inauspicious end on top of one of our biggest bonfires in recent years. A large crowd enjoyed an excellent fire-

works display and refreshments served by Speen Pre-School and for the first time in many

celebrate the lighting of the village Christmas tree and to take part in carol singing whilst warming ourselves with mulled wine and hot mince pies. Village children, ably led and marshalled by Kate Laughton, enjoyed a procession from the school to the playing field with lanterns and musical instruments playing. A collection raised £25 for the Chiltern Air Ambulance.

Looking forward to 2009, we will have our spring work party on both fields with plenty of jobs for people of all ages to help with. Please join us if you can spare a couple of hours, tools and tea provided!

See What's On in Speen and North Dean for diary dates

Lastly a big thanks to the members of the playing fields committee for all their help and support in the last year and also to all the village volunteers for helping with events and work parties to keep our playing fields maintained and in good order for the use of the whole community.

Wishing you all a happy and prosperous 2009!

Andy Thompson

01494 488524



nity to use the village marquee in the evening.

Speen Playing Fields

Our autumn work party in October saw a small number of brave a cold autumnal day to

years on Bonfire Night, we welcomed the use of our village pub to warm ourselves up afterwards. This year we raised nearly £900 to help pay for our playing fields, so thank you very much for your support.

On Saturday 13th December about 40 hardy souls braved a bitterly cold and wet evening to

North Dean Village Hall Committee

Brings Back Their Famous Pig Roast – September 2008

Events of the summer will be a long distant memory by the time readers cast their eyes on this story, but it will bring a smile to the faces of those who attended.

The weather may have been against us for the afternoon,

with cloudy skies and drizzle in the air, but it didn't dampen the spirits of those present.

The wine flowed and the enticing aroma of the roasting hog left us all in mouth watering

anticipation. We were not disappointed - the food was delicious and plentiful. Despite

the inclement weather, the younger members managed to escape the confines of the

hall to enjoy some outside fun and games. Villagers old and new enjoyed the social

banter and relaxed atmosphere. All-in-all, this was yet another successful North Dean

social event. Thanks to everyone involved.

Julie White, Secretary

North Dean Village Hall Committee 01494 562311

For upcoming events in North

Dean, please see What's On in Speen and North Dean. Call Julie with ideas for future events



North Dean cho- risters repeat Christmas success

For many of the North Deaners the annual Carol singing in the village hall is the official start of the Christmas festivities and this year was no exception. Harriet Watson confidently played the organ and led us through favourite carols, the roof was raised for 20 minutes with some hearty singing (particularly from the baritone section). Mulled wine and festive decorations added to the atmosphere and it was heartening to see (and hear) such a wide spread in ages from 4yrs old to those who remember when Christmas lasted for 2 days, giving it their all. *Tony Blakely*

Meeting for All North Dean Residents – 6pm Sunday March 8th
(North Dean Village Hall)


Following discussions with the trustees and management committee of North Dean Village Hall, we would like to invite all residents to attend a public meeting to discuss the possible construction of a Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA) on the village field.

A MUGA is an enclosed hard surface designed for a variety of sports including basketball, cricket, football, netball and tennis (though not necessarily at the same time). As part of the proposal, we also want to look at opportunities to re-design other elements of the village hall facilities.

This would be a significant undertaking in terms of money, effort and impact on the village. Therefore, we would ask everyone who can make it to come and join the discussion.

Doug Wilson

Treasurer NDVH



Richard Ferguson

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News from Speen Church

Andy writes:

The editors have asked for contributions around the theme of 'Music' for this edition of SNDN. As we make a lot of music each week I thought that I would share about a recent particularly creative and exciting day.



On Saturday 4th October we set apart six hours, from 10:00am to 4:00pm, to be in God's presence together and celebrate this creatively through:

- Art
- Drumming
- Music
- Quiet reflection
- Sculpture
- Sharing lunch
- Singing
- Song writing
- Walking
- Weaving

For some, like Megan Chinn singing below, well developed talents were used to inspire and encourage. Others



enhanced their musical talents by incorporating creative

moving visual displays.



It was a day of discovery for all ages - such as tapping a simple drum rhythm as an expression of God's heart of love for us. New talents were



found and used to express experiences of God. For some the sessions on song writing were a complete revelation as their songs came together before their eyes (or should I say ears?), like Nick Baker's included below.

Awesome God of all creation
I celebrate the world you've made
I bow in prayer and adoration
Lift up my voice in joyful praise

Lord it's you I really need
Beside me, in me, every day
Faithful friend, loving saviour
Leading me along life's way

Father, Lord, you know my heartache
As I fight against my worldly sin
When I fail I can only humbly
Ask for your mercy once again

Thank-you Lord for all the blessings
You've graciously bestowed on me
Thank-you for your loving presence
That makes me yours, completely

So Lord I pray a simple favour
Make me more like you each day
Seeing the world as you made it
Living with you in grace and praise

There is not enough space to describe the art, sculpture and other sessions — but many thanks go to Anne Fradgley, Jane Farley, Kate Slade, Nicki Pitt and the team of willing helpers who made it such a wonderfully refreshing and encouraging time. We look forward to the next ...



... day.

Community 'Breakfasts with friends and ...' in Speen Chapel Hall

Price Increase - after 12 years of £5 a ticket, creeping inflation has finally caught up with us and we need to increase the price of the Breakfast tickets to £8, starting with Jo Gambi's visit for the ladies on Saturday 24th January.

For the dates of the next breakfasts and speakers see the 'What's on in Speen & North Dean' page; and for tickets contact James and Sandy on 488875 .



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Villages emerging as creativity nodes to save British economy

First meeting of Business Group

A recent report from the University of Strathclyde about the importance of businesses working from home offices will come as no surprise to those who attended Derek Stephen's first Business Group meeting at the KW4. These businesses are dynamic and prosperous, more than half of them generating revenues over £50k, and they often breathe new life into their communities. SNDN proposes a special issue in the next year on such business.

In the meantime, Derek attracted people in the following business to the first meeting in October:

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Creative Agency

Business coach

Secretarial Services

Alternative Financial Advisor

Events Co.

Next meetings are 27 February, 1 p.m. and 29 May, 1 p.m.

For further details and news of upcoming meetings call:

Derek Stephen

enquiries@hubprinting.co.uk

"Centre-Mental" Journey at KW4 Christmas Quiz

You can't go home again, according to Thomas Wolfe, but more than 110 villagers tried to do so on the 2nd of December, when the first Quiz Night took place at the King William IV since its reopening in August. Every seat was taken, including bar props. Dave and Tracy Hill and their team served 100 hot chicken suppers, with coffee and mince pies.

The Quiz proceeds were in support of the Chilterns MS Centre at Halton, (<http://www.chilternsmcentre.org>) represented by their new CEO Marion Bryant. The Centre is close to the hearts of Loiz and Stan Bale, who also promoted a jazz concert in its support earlier in the year. Quizzers raised £515, buying raffle tickets for prizes from Friends of MS-Centre'; KW4; Geoff & Clare; Liberty & Dove; Ferrero UK.

Participants bathed in the glamour of Liberty and Dove's jewellery (prize offered by Stuart Dove) and the glow of Ferrero Rocher's iconic gold wrappings (special thanks to Dave

Tucker).

With Wynne Jones' splendid PA equipment, the quiz masters, Geoff and Clare, were able to keep everyone alert, but the villagers' own competitive streak (carefully disguised as good humour), made sure the event was fun. The MS-Centre's own team, the Centre-Mentals scored highly.

Pub Quiz Renaissance

Heartened by the Christmas success, Geoff and Clare are reviving the Pub Quiz, and its astonishing ability to raise funds for charity. The Quiz will be fortnightly, its first session being Thursday, 29th January, 2009. The first charity is the Bucks Air Ambulance, with Helen and Douglas House coming up soon. Participants pay £2 per head, and can nominate charities to be supported.

Speen and North Dean generate many thousands of pounds each year for charities. We don't get on the front page of every newspaper, and the paparazzi don't follow our village stars, but we know that our efforts and our pleasure in participating make real investments in real people with real needs. So, hurrah for the Pub Quiz resurrected

For more information: Geoff and Clare, 4888701.

District and County Council News –



December 2008

Village Design Statement (VDS) for Speen

When the chairman of the VDS group left the village in 2007 work stopped on the preparation of the Speen VDS. The New Year presents an opportunity to reform the group to produce the document which will have a significant impact on the designs to be approved within Speen. It is important that Speen does have a VDS as District Council officers will give significant weight to the views expressed by the Statement when considering applications. Areas of design such densities, size and bulk, materials, landscaping and other external works considered appropriate or not for locations within the village will play a key part in the decisions either to accept or refuse permission by the Council. I would like to hear from anybody that is willing to help in the Statement preparation so that a start can be

made. It is important that a good cross-section of the village takes part to demonstrate that it is a 'Village' document. I have a list of those who took part initially but if anybody else would like to help please let me know.

Tranquil Pro- ject

In the next few months the TRANQUIL project will start to deliver the various measures which are designed to lower traffic speeds in villages and to discourage rat running through our lanes. The new 'Oak Features' for village entry points will be installed early next year. These are designed to reinforce the rural character of our villages whilst encouraging motorists to reduce their speed when entering a settlement.

The local direction signs on the minor roads will be replaced by traditional 'finger posts' that will not give 'through direction' information. In this way it is hoped that some motorists will be encouraged to use the main roads whilst the signs will bring distinctive feel to our part of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Local Commu- nity Partner- ship (LCP)

Two LCP meetings have now taken since starting in 2008 The

first took place in Great Kingshill School in September and the second in the Methodist Hall, Princes Risborough in December. These are meetings which bring together members Parish Council, District Council and County Council of the Princes Risborough area to discuss issues of local importance under a community engagement programme. Meetings include a time where members of the public can raise issues by putting questions to the Partnership members concerning local matters, petitions can also be presented. The schedule for 2009 is to be published shortly so if you have an issue or a concern and you would like to ask a question, please check on the next date and come along. It would be helpful if your questions were known in advance. Maureen Keyworth on 01296 383603 or email mkeyworth@buckscc.gov.uk is the officer to contact to register a question.

Speed Limit Review (SLR)

The SLR Working Group is scheduled to meet in December 2008 to consider the consultation feedback which either supported or rejected the advertised changes. By the time this article is published the amendments to limits will be known as it is the task of the Working Group to make final recommendations for the advertised limits. A Key Decision report is then to be prepared for the County Council's Cabinet Member's approval

which should result in changes to the existing limits being in place early in 2009. Details of the changes will be available on line by visiting the County Council Web site

www.buckscc.gov.uk

Community Fund

This year's grant funding for Community projects has now been fully taken up. I am pleased that grants were approved for the Playing Fields, the Village Hall and hedge planting between Speen and North Dean. 2009's grant scheme has yet to be approved but if you have a project that is need of funding then please let me know so I can put it on the

list in anticipation.

If you have an issue with which I can help please also let me know. As well as writing to my home address Canastel, Water Lane, Speen, HP27 0SW, I can be contacted by phone 01494 488315 or by email at progerson@buckscc.gov.uk

Paul Rogerson 488315

County and District Councillor

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After-school bites Community-led activities back with a bites

For the third successive year, children of Speen School have taken part in a club run by parents, offering a taste of creative activity after school in the darkening month of November.

Inspired by new Spanish and creative blood in the school (and hugely supportive teaching staff) this year the children have danced The Flamenco, listened to opera and decorated the school with Spanish costumes, 'Gaudi' mosaic lizards and fans. They also learnt a medley of playground songs with actions and created some hot music with some fantastic new musical instruments bought by the School's PTA.

As a result of the success of the **After-School Bites** (which now has a Summer counterpart – the **Morning Yawn!**) and inspired by the aims and resources of the National Singing Programme **Sing Up**, the school has pledged to aim for a Gold Award as part of the National Sing Up Awards and earn the accolade of a

'Singing School'. The Sing Up Awards recognise celebrate and promote primary-age schools who put singing at the heart of their lives.

Singing in Speen is on the up, so look out for ways in which you, like the children of Speen



School, can flex those vocal chords and take part over the next year.

Check out: **Speen Big Sing!** at the Speen Festival 2009 (see page 9).

Kate Laughton,
kate@oldkinggeorge.plus.com

Speen School PTA are set for a fun year

The first of a number of fund raising ideas for 2009 is the auction of promises.

Safari Supper and the Summer Ball in planning phase

Villagers can enjoy the hospitality of their neighbours at the end of March, with this year's

Safari Supper. The SNDN editorial board thought it was a terrific way to help the school and meet new people last year.

The Summer Ball will be held on 20th June, as the school year draws to a close and the long summer night tempts us out to celebrate.



Speen School
Auction of Promises
28th February 2009



an entertaining evening open to everyone
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North Dean Bonfire Night

Fireworks, fireworks shining bright

Lighting up the starry night.

Screaming, scurrying and whizzing

Crackling, banging and fizzing.

The Roman candle dripping gold,

Oohs and aahs from young and
old.

Fireworks, fireworks shining bright

lighting up the starry night.

Catherine wheels squeal with de-
light

Giving people a huge fright.

Sparklers waving give mums a
scare,

While the smell of sausages fills the
air.

Fireworks, fireworks shining bright

Lighting up the starry night.

Cows on the hill look up and won-
der

`What is this strange lightning and
thunder?`

The guy is gone, the fire is low.

The beer's run out, it's time to go.

By Alice and Emma Wil-
son

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The Old Plow makes it easy to give to Save the Children

There was a buzz of Christmas anticipation at The Old Plow in Speen, when groups of friends from Speen and North Dean met on November 13th for a Charity Lunch and Dinner in aid of Save the Children. Organised by proprietors Olivia and Malcolm Cowan, along with Rita Pulley, Save the Children area representative, this was at least the fourth annual fund-raising day of its kind hosted by the Old Plow. Donations and sales from the day resulted in a handsome donation of over £910 to the charity's important work, which combats child exploitation, neglect and suffering both in the UK and worldwide.

While they mingled and chatted over an enticing display of Christmas gifts and greeting cards and delectable Old Plow preserves, guests were warmly welcomed by Olivia and her team. At the eagerly awaited meal, Malcolm's flair for creating deliciously light, harmonious dishes was evident in the beautifully presented and tasty antipasti starter and in the main course of roast guinea fowl stuffed with tarragon and chicken mousse.

On every count – meeting charitable objectives, enjoying the company of friends and savour-

ing excellent food in a welcoming atmosphere – the event was a huge success and a great credit to its organisers.



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Centre Mental quizzers



Eating for Health was our July talk by Sarabjit Sandu who, after handing out various packs of spices for us to guess what they were, cooked up a delicious curry. Lovely. Edwin Rye from Wendover came in August, talking about plants for small gardens. He had some lovely pictures of his own garden, which had won the BBC Gardeners' World best garden competition in 2002. He was spotted later in the year on Gardeners' World again trying to win the 10-year award but didn't manage it. Enthusiastic Jill Ayres talked in September about Geology - 50 million years in 40 minutes. We enjoyed her talk very much. October brought Dr. Maisie who had us in fits of laughter with his spare parts, some of which he brought with him. We have had some very enjoyable outings, namely Waltham Gardens in July, the Mill at Sonning in November and a lovely Christmas meal at the King William. To end the year Colin Oakes came back to inform us about the life and times of John Milton. Our itinerary for the next three months will be Famous Chiltern Houses with Brian Edwards on 5th February, Shelley Jennings Cycling in Viet Nam on 5th March and our birthday party in April, which you need to be a member of W.I. to attend, so come and join us, female folks, the first Thursday in the month at 7.45p.m.

Barbara Collett, 488348

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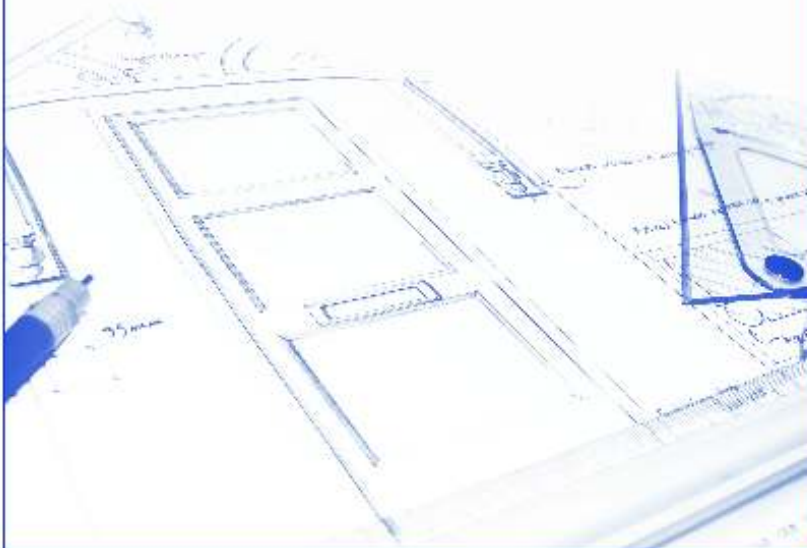


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Wildlife Watch – late 2008 – early 2009

In the previous edition I reported on two sightings of a Grass Snake around our ponds, which were a new record for our garden. Subsequently further up Abbotswood John Radford had a more remarkable record of a large Grass Snake curled around the sweet peas over the canopy at the front on the front of his house. John Holmes later reported one in his woodlands in mid August whilst John Newman mentioned seeing snake skins in the woods near Pig-gotts, above North Dean.

Every so often a highly unusual record is received. Regular readers may recall Cherry Seekins reporting a couple of years ago, a “big cat” leaping the fence in her back garden in the early hours of the morning. In early August a similar report was received from Scott Thorn-Davies of a “Puma-sized” cat climbing a fence from the playing field into one of the gardens in Studridge Lane. Whilst he was admittedly returning from the pub late at night there are too many such reports to dismiss them as mis-identifications, in my opinion. If you search on Google under “Big cats in Bucks” a number of local records are reported since 2000 including a Puma at Chequers in 2006. The point is made that these animals would have huge territories. Nevertheless it

would be nice to find some footprints or other supporting evidence.

Many of our mammals escape our observation, particularly the nocturnal ones. For example Glis glis (Edible Dormice) are very widespread in Speen and the surrounding area yet how many of us see one regularly? One house in Hampden Road reports no less than 74 having been trapped in their loft during 2008. Similarly the recent snow reveals footprints of Badgers and Foxes on a widespread basis around the village confirming there are more animals about than we may realise.

Few interesting bird records were reported in late 2008.

Freezing conditions over New Year drove a Blackcap to our bird table, this being the first for several years. Siskins flew down to the feeders and even a Redpoll made a couple of visits. A small flock or “charm” of 12 goldfinches was a further colourful addition. These were in addition to the usual Nuthatches, Great Spotted Woodpeckers and various Tits that we usually see. Meanwhile further up Abbotswood a good mix of Redwings, Fieldfares and Blackbirds together with the local Green Woodpecker visited the windfall apples on the green.

Please let me know of any interesting records. Tel 488016 or

Symonds@speen10.freereserve.co.uk



Hedge Planting – a community project

The H30 footpath that runs from Speen down to North Dean, starting

Much excitement was generated by the Peacock that visited many of the gardens in the village before being relocated to his home at George Farm. From late Autumn we have had several Jays visiting the garden searching for nuts to make up for the poor acorn crop this year.

at Water Lane, is very well used by Speen walkers and dog owners. There are lovely views of the beech woods and the valley. We planted a hedge some years ago along one section at the top end but mostly it was bounded by a rather rusty barbed wire fence. So we extended the hedge

for aesthetic and environmental reasons.

The land on either side of the fence has for many years been used for cattle grazing. But the opportunity to plant a hedge, arose when this grazing land was put to cereals for the fore-



seeable future. We do not now need to protect the young hedge from cattle.

So we have planted a mixed hedge of mainly hawthorn with some interest plants (maple, holly). The hedge has been planted to be stock proof. It will be layed when mature, in the same way as we have layed adjacent hedges. We have also planted some native trees in the hedge (ash, oak).

As the photos show the planting became an educational and community project. Village families and children from Speen School were involved in the planting. John Morris of the Chiltern Conservation Board talked about hedges and the conservation benefits. Charlie Kent of Beechdean Farms talked about caring for our farmland. It was a great opportunity for meeting and

learning.

The hedge planting took place on **Saturday 17th January** and the tree planting on the Sunday.

John and Gloria Holmes
(HW 488420)

Wildflower News Reporting the finding of rare plants

William Turner (1508-1568) was the first to name plants in English instead of Latin, so perhaps we may think of him as the founder of British botany. Taking Holy Orders around 1537 he spent two periods in voluntary exile studying medicine at Bologna. He was Dean at Wells Cathedral where he had a "herball" garden. In his first book he named 238 native

plants. Other herbalists followed in Turner's footsteps. John Gerard, (1545-1612), a surgeon, added 1030 native plants to the list in his famous *Herball*.

Plants that were here before c.1500 are called "Native". Those plants introduced before the end of the 1500's are classified as "Archaeophyte", and new introductions after that date are called "Neophytes". The latter two are both alien kinds of plant.

Last issue I reported on the Buckinghamshire Rare Plants Recorder Group, where we follow in the steps of these early botanists. Two recent books that give useful information are Anna Pavord's *The Naming of names* and *Britain's rare flowers* by Peter Marren. Since 1836 the Botanical Society of the British Isles has been carrying on research in this area (www.bsbi.org.uk). *The BSBI can also be found at*, Botany Department, The Natural History Museum, Cromwell Road, London, SW7 5BD.

One of the rare plants that my colleague Dennis and I found was a plant called Starfruit, getting its name from the seed case fruit. At a recent meeting of the Rare Flower Group we were pleased to learn that we had added two alien plants to the Bucks Flora: Pampas Grass found in a garden throughway, and a very rare Krauss' Clubmoss.

To make a record of a rare plant you need to provide:

Name of what you have
seen or found
Name of the recorder
Date seen or found

Name of site and Grid
reference
Habitat, i.e. Garden-wood
-field-pond

Send the record to:

Environmental Records
Centre

Tring Road, Halton

Aylesbury, Bucks HP22
5PN

The information is put into a
database and is also sent to the
relevant group.

Fred Burnham 488303

Down on the Farm

The credit crunch, the disastrous fall in the stock market and in the value of the pound will affect everyone in the country sooner or later, but for once farmers hope to fare better than Mr Average. Land prices have held up well as people try to move their money into safer places and this should mean that bankers will still be willing to lend to us; so far we haven't received any requests to pay off any of our bank loan. The currency exchange rates are also in our favour as the strong euro helps to prevent meat and dairy products flooding in from Europe.

Last year bankers were caught on the hop by the subprime mortgage fiasco; farmers were pulled up short by the appalling weather at harvest time. Crops which promised very well right

up to July just rotted in the fields as it rained day after day. Once the grain has ripened it will be attacked by fungi if it remains wet and so wheat that was destined for human consumption ends up as animal feed. To make matters worse the harvest world-wide was better than average, so prices fell. In spite of agricultural economists' pessimistic predictions, we have pressed on and planted cereals again in the hope of good weather and prices for next year. Who says that farmers are not optimists!!

Like all businesses, farming is facing another set of regulations from the EC. Perhaps the downturn in the economy will kill off some of these stupid regulations. For example, all cattle food has to be stored in bird proof buildings or containers; no thought has been given to preventing contamination where the surface area of the food is much greater, i.e. in the food troughs and in the fields. !!

The latest rules concern chemical and organic fertiliser applications and driving on the land in wet conditions. The rules have only just come into force and already a special derogation had to be given last autumn to allow farmers to drive on the land in unsuitable conditions to collect the harvest!! Few farmers misuse their land (it doesn't pay) and nearly all farms have a wide variety of soils which need individual care. Someone sitting in an office cannot know individual circumstances and one size

does not fit all.

So far this winter has been colder than average. Frosts tend to kill off bugs and improve the texture of ploughed soils, so they are welcome. Our animals are perfectly happy in cold conditions as long as they stay dry. Because the last month has been dry we have been able to leave young stock in the fields for a month longer than usual, this is a big help with bedding costs as after the wet autumn straw is at a premium.

The physical work at this time of the year tends to be somewhat repetitive-----feeding, mucking out and bedding down, but the birth of a fit calf and the obvious pleasure shown by the cattle on receipt of fresh food and bedding is more than adequate reward for all the hard work.

Gill Kent 5.1.09

SNDN Music Supplement



Sweet and strange – how music changed a life

Anne of Green Gables, never change

We like you just this way.

Anne of Green Gables, sweet and strange,

Stay as you are today.

Lyrics from *Anne of Green Gables– The Musical*,

Music Norman Campbell, Lyrics Donald Harron

Music runs right to the heart of the two villages. We have amateur and professional musicians living amongst us. Residents perform classical and jazz, sing and play instruments, compose and arrange, and often entertain us all at hugely in concerts and performances. And then again there are other lives, in which music plays a

transformational role, changing the direction of a young life completely by providing opportunities which were unthinkable previously. Such thoughts were

in our minds when we interviewed Gracie Stickings, of Willott's Farm, Speen, for this edition.

There was music in Gracie's life from the beginning. Living in Alabama, and being taken to church to hear the gospel singers admired by her nanny, Edna, in Memphis, Tennessee when the family moved there remain powerful memories. Music was important in her mother's family too as Gracie grew up in Prince Edward Island (PEI), Canada. Gracie lived there from the age of 9, her parents having seen wartime duty in Europe (her father was a well-known radio correspondent) She attributes



much of the steely determination required for her subsequent career in music and acting to the strength of purpose of her

mother's family, steeped in local tradition and productive of local leaders and cultural figures. By the time that Gracie was 15 she was the lead in a local production of *The Diaries of Anne Frank*, and while looking back, she sees herself as a tomboy with some serious academic interests in science and a yearning to learn medicine, life, through music, was about to take her in a different direction.

"Gracie, you look like an orphan". This well-remembered joking remark was made by her future director when Gracie won the part of Anne in the musical of *Anne of Green Gables* at the age of 16. It signalled an era of very rapid change in a young life.

L.M. Montgomery's classic children's story of the young orphan Anne is well-known in the UK: in Canada it is rightly a cultural icon, a world class contribution to literature about and aimed at children. *Anne* is nowhere more hallowed than in PEI, home of the author and, this year, the focus of celebrations of the 100th year since the publication of *Anne* in 1908. *Anne* is a world-wide bestseller, but PEI has always celebrated their great author with particular relish.

When Gracie was 13, a musical based on the book was launched. When its supporters relaunched the musical three years later, determined to have a lead actress closer in age to Montgomery's Anne, Gracie Finley, as she then was, won the prize. In the seven years that followed Gracie Finley became a household name in Canadian

musical entertainment, as for a certain generation she still is.

While performing Anne, on tour across Canada, in Charlottetown, PEI, at the annual Festival, at Osaka as part of the Canadian contribution to the Worlds' Fair in Japan, Gracie somehow managed to be a successful schoolgirl, study at Concordia University, and maintain leading roles in other plays and films. And when a Canada Council grant brought her to London to develop her singing talents at the Wigmore Hall, she met and subsequently married Barry Stickings. The musical performer who ended this initial run as the lead in Anne of Green Gables was now seven years older, older than Anne had been - and pregnant with her first child.

In conversation with Gracie, one has a real appreciation of the mountains that the 16 year old had to climb. She speaks with understandable terror of the move from the rehearsal room and the quietly accompanying pianist to the dress rehearsal with a full orchestra in the pits between her and the audience. She is convinced that singers must be actors first and her disapproval of microphone-aided voice projection is complete. And, despite family pressures, her musical career continued. When the Charlottetown Festival production was revived after 20 years, Gracie Finley once again took up her starring role of seventeen years earlier, and remains convinced that this

version of Anne was her best. With three children by this time, and a husband whose own career involved postings to Germany and the USA, before finally coming to rest in the UK, choices needed to be made. Gracie regrets none of those, though she may still be excited by the opportunities that music and musical theatre placed at her disposal at such an early age. She and Barry now have a house in PEI too, and the family determination and theatrical knowledge learnt from a life as Anne are now being put at the disposal of local producers, directors and artists.

Speen goes to Great Missenden – singing in the Great Missenden Choral Society

One of the lovely things about living in Speen is that if you're doing something and want your friends in the village to support you, they arrive in numbers. And so it is with my membership of the Great Missenden Choral Society. Twice a year a trusty band of Speenies (with some other friends, from as far afield as Great Kimble) make their way to the parish church in Great Missenden to support the Speen Tenors – yes there's more than one; I'm delighted that I managed to recruit Wynne Davies to the choir a couple of

years ago. It's great for us to have the support of our friends and neighbours, and – on the principle of 'no pain, no gain' – we have a little party afterwards.

I'm writing this the day after our Christmas concert – Bach, more Bach, Schutz and Britten – the first of two concerts in our Diamond Jubilee Year. It went very well – some of our friends were kind enough to say it was one of the best we have given. It's this Christmas concert every year that makes me realise that Christmas is here; driving down Church Lane in Great Missenden, with its elegant, understated Christmas decorations (very Great Missenden), singing Christmassy music to a packed church, and having a party with our friends afterwards – what could be better?

Singing is such a wonderful thing to do. I gather there's some physiological reason why it makes you feel better. Certainly my experience is that, although I may feel pretty tired when I arrive at rehearsal on Monday nights, not so fresh off the Chiltern Line, by the end of a good rehearsal I feel hugely energised. Our conductor John Cotterill has that admirable knack of motivating an amateur choir – to get us to give our best (including by gently telling us off where we deserve it), while recognising that people are doing it in their spare time and want to enjoy it. Like all good conductors, he introduces us to music we didn't know before

and, by his unfailing enthusiasm and personal commitment and energy, persuades us to love the pieces as much as he does. And the choir is very friendly and welcoming.

Like most amateur choral societies, we're always on the lookout for new members – especially TENORS. So if you have some sight-reading ability and would like to find out more, give me a ring or drop me a line. Our next concert, in April, is Haydn's Nelson Mass, some Purcell and a piece by Jonathan Willcocks (son of David, of that ilk). More information on our website – www.gmcsonline.co.uk

And the Speen Tenors don't restrict themselves to Buckinghamshire, either. Once a year we join the Midland Festival Chorus which puts on a concert in Worcester Cathedral. Next year it's the Verdi Requiem; we hope it will be the Three Tenors – Wynne, Eric Baines and me. The tenors are multiplying – watch out.

Christopher Boyce

christopher@dairymed.gotadsl.co.uk
(01494) 48816

Edmund Rubbra –
“Our Speen Composer”

Although Edmund Rubbra was born in Northampton,

we do have some right to call him “our” composer. After all, he lived in Valley Cottage on Highwood Bottom for a quarter of a century from 1934 and composed many of his most important works here, including his first seven symphonies. Altogether, Rubbra wrote 164 works right across the musical spectrum and was a regular at Proms and other concerts and on the radio, especially from the late '30s into the '60s. He is much less often heard today, although he was composer of the week on BBC Radio 3 back in April 2001. This is a real pity since Rubbra's music is very approachable (he was certainly no great fan of 12-tone music) and quite varied (something for everyone). The experts tell me that Rubbra's compositional style was neither analytical (Bach's Goldberg Variations) nor synthetic (Sibelius Second Symphony) but was “organic” – he started with an idea and took the piece wherever his fertile musical mind led.

In reading about Rubbra, I was struck by how he

made his own luck. As a boy, he played Mozart at

an uncle's piano shop to encourage potential buyers. The uncle repaid with the loan of a piano on which the young Edmund practiced at home. When he left school at 14 and instead of going into the boot and shoe industry, he became a clerk in a railway office. Here he perfected his shorthand which got him a desk job during the war and enabled him to form a small musical group that went out entertaining the troops. And when he was still only 17, he put on a concert in Northampton of Cyril Scott's music. Scott got to hear of this and took on Rubbra as a pupil at his house – cheap rail travel for railway employees definitely helped here! A scholarship to Reading and eventually to the Royal College of Music enabled Rubbra to study not only with Scott but also with Gustav Holst.

We are lucky that there is a good selection of Rubbra's

work available on CD. For this we have to thank par-

ticularly Chandos Records and Richard Hickox, who tragically died only a few weeks ago, for the complete symphonies on six CDs. By the way, Hickox himself was born in Stockenchurch and went to RGS. Let me tell you about a few of my favourites.

The Fourth Symphony, which is perhaps the culmination of his “pre-war” output, was written in 1940 and finally orchestrated in 1942. It was premiered at the 1942 Proms with the BBC Symphony Orchestra conducted by Rubbra himself, something the army allowed provided he wore his sergeant’s uniform! Also on this CD are two of the later, shorter symphonies (10 and 11)

The Fifth Symphony – written in 1947/48, this shows just how much Rubbra’s musical inventiveness developed during the ‘40s. The coupling is the

Eighth Symphony and Ode to the Queen, written for

the Coronation in 1953.

The Morning Watch, first performed in 1946, is a large scale orchestral work in the style of Elgar or Parry based on religious themes – grand cathedral music. Coupled with the Ninth Symphony.

Missa in Honorem Sancti Dominici. Rubbra converted to Roman Catholicism in 1947/48 and was received into the church on the Feast of St Dominic, 4th August 1948. Our daughter Ali sings in the choir of St Barnabas in Nottingham and tells me that this mass is as delightful to sing as it is to listen to. Available on Chandos, the couplings are other religious works by Rubbra.

Improvisations on Virginal Pieces by Giles Farnaby. Rubbra had a great interest in early Eng-

lish music and these improvisations on keyboard pieces by Giles Farnaby (1563-1640) are easy listening. Available on Naxos coupled with the Violin Concerto.

If you like classical music in any of its forms, why not give Rubbra a listen. Like me when I first heard *The Morning Watch* about 10 years ago, you might be really pleasantly surprised and impressed by “Our Speen Composer” and even buy a few more CDs.

by Barry Stickings



Anthony Hernandez

02.06.79 - 21.09.08

*In loving memory of a wonderful son, brother &
friend*

forever missed and forever in our hearts.

Our 'eco-warrior' and keeper of this earth.

You can shed tears that he has gone:
Or you can smile because he has lived.

You can close your eyes and pray that he will come back;
Or you can open your eyes and see all that he has left.

Your heart can be empty because you can't see him;
Or your heart can be full of the love you shared.

You can turn your back on tomorrow and live for yesterday;
Or you can be happy for tomorrow because of yesterday.

You can remember him and only that he has gone;
Or you can cherish his memory and let it live on.

In these pages we invite villagers from Speen and North dean to make a personal contribution with text memories and messages that they wish to communicate to the wider community.

In this issue we welcome communications from Julie White of North Dean, (immediate right) on her son Anthony.

We also welcome John Oliver of Speen who contributes an allegory for our times.



A Cautionary Tale – John Oliver

And it came to pass that the wicked Oil God took over the Earth and girdled it under a gaseous shroud.

And the sages and prophets of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change foretold of a Great Inferno and a Great Flood. And the signs of Foreboding were there for all to see.

A Great Extinction began: frogs died; polar bears died; penguins died and trees withered. Millions of species perished; billions of years of meticulous Darwinian evolution were undone in a thrice.

And the icecaps and glaciers melted. And the rising Waters and expanding Deserts drove the People off the Lands of their Fathers into the barren wilderness. At night the Lamps went out; blackness came upon the Earth.

But the Earth was peopled by heretics and non-believers, who were too busy carousing and planning their holidays to understand the anguish of Gaia, Goddess of the Living Earth. Many of the non-believers also thought that the Earth was flat.

And the Other Gods took up arms against the wicked Oil God. The Earth must have a road to Salvation.

Zeus set up an Earth Rescue Task Force.

Apollo sent photons of Light to the Earth and offered magic panels, so that when the photons hit the panels, the Lamps would burn brightly. These photons had once made the Earth green. The People were bemused but did nothing.

Poseidon moved the waters and offered ingenious sea serpents. When the sea serpents wiggled in the waves, the Lamps would burn brightly. The People gawped incredulously but did nothing.

Aeolus sent a Great Wind and offered a deviously clever machine to help save the Earth. From a distance, the machine had the form of an Andreas cross – with arms stretching upwards in Hope. When the arms rotated, the Lamps would burn brightly. This same Wind had powered Viking long boats and scattered the Spanish Armada. It had pumped water from Holland and ground corn in England. The People blinked without comprehension. They deemed these Gifts to be unworthy and inconvenient – and again did nothing. The People did not want Change. They only wanted to worship the Oil God, to eat out once per week at the Pub and to live in Arcadia without constraints on a dying Earth that was three times too small.

And British Petroleum saw the Light, relished these Gifts, unleashed itself from its erstwhile shackles and made an Odyssey to the Promised Land, where Ignorance did not prevail, and an enlightened People did not smite each other. In distant lands the Oil God was seen to be a false God. But this was too little, too late, by too few. This did not save the Living Earth.

And so the Fires of Hell came upon the Earth; the Waters rose up higher. Green became brown, and the Earth became void. Famine followed plagues of locusts. Drought followed Deluge.

And those that heeded the Word

were dragged down to Perdition by those that did not.

The wicked Oil God was triumphant.

And there was a great wailing and gnashing of teeth. Grandchildren cursed their Grandparents. Children cursed their Parents for doing nothing.

In desperation, the People turned to Gaia, fell upon their knees and cried, “Help Us!” But Gaia replied, “You must be joking! Who do you think I am? Some sort of miracle worker! I was the perfect Earth that you have destroyed. There are practical limits to what I can do for you now. It’s too late – the tipping points of global warming have been passed”.

Who's who in Speen and North Dean

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This review first appeared in the
MAIL on SUNDAY
November 9 2008



The Old Plow

Katie Webb discovers a charming culinary gem hidden in the Chiltern Hills

I have long harboured a desire to open my own restaurant but, as everyone keeps reminding me, I am always socialising – in a great bar, restaurant, or at home. So running my own eatery would prove inhibiting on that front. However, if I did fulfil this pipe dream, I'd do everything I could to tempt Olivia Cowan to be my *maitre d'*. She is warm, welcoming and offers refined yet supremely friendly service.

I think, though, she could never be persuaded to leave the country idyll she currently presides over. The Old Plow nestles on a sheep-strewn hillside in Flowers Bottom Lane, in the Chiltern Hills. Entering this 17th century inn, you are greeted by the quintessential, perfect snug – all nooks and crannies, with a roaring log fire – where Aimee and I enjoyed a welcome aperitif of sparkling wine.

Olivia Cowan has owned the Old Plow with her husband, Malcolm, for over two decades. Having worked as a chef in some of London's top restaurants – The Ritz, Simpson's in the Strand, Maxim's – his classical training, with strong French influences, is evident in the Old Plow menu, which is sophisticated and brimming with fresh, seasonal produce, including a daily fish delivery from Devon.

Aimee, a dedicated vegetarian, ordered cautiously from a menu devised for carnivores,

starting with a salad of baby artichokes with sweet Spanish peppers, avocado, caper berries and a walnut oil and sherry vinegar dressing. She declared that it would be impossible to follow, but her reaction as she sampled the hot goat's cheese, leek and Stilton tart with lemon butter and herb sauce was like Meg Ryan in *When Harry Met Sally*.

As I had already ordered, it was too late to 'have what she's having', so I followed my hot black tiger prawns and chorizo la plancha with a char-grilled Aberdeen Angus rib-eye steak with a Stilton-stuffed mushroom and red wine sauce. Complemented by a glass of Jacob's Creek Reserve Shiraz, it proved a perfect, hearty lunch on a dark, wintry weekend.

Aimee indulged her sweet tooth with a dark chocolate truffle cake with black cherry and kirsch coulis, while I savoured a warm winter mulled wine pudding, with vanilla ice cream and white-peach coulis. It is such a joy to discover truly brilliant cooking and service anywhere, let alone in an unassuming former blacksmith's. I urge you to go and enjoy it for yourself.

The Old Plow*, Flowers Bottom, Speen, Bucks HP27 0PZ.

Tel: 01494 488300 or visit www.yeoldplough.co.uk

***Open Tuesday to Saturday**



**RESTAURANT
REVIEW OF
THE WEEK
KATIE WEBB**

The Old Plow



Katie recommends
To accompany a starter of spicy tiger prawns, Katie suggests Jacob's Creek Three Vines Rose, while Jacob's Creek Reserve Chardonnay will complement a goat's cheese tart, and a glass of Jacob's Creek Sparkling Shiraz is the perfect partner for a chocolate truffle cake.

*These wines are recommended, but not necessarily available at this restaurant.

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