

Flooding

Heavy rain in the first week of January led to extensive flooding, countrywide. Simpson was not immune. The River Ouzel burst its banks and large areas of the Linear Park were covered. The high-water mark was reached on Friday 5th, when the road through the village was affected, from the Plough Inn corner to the entrance to the Simpson Day Care Service, as the brook overflowed. As in October 2020 – the last time there were equivalent concerns – it appears that no houses were directly affected, but drivers had to decide whether to press ahead or find an alternative route. Some of the former proceeded with responsible caution, others – typically in larger vehicles – did so at speed, creating an unhelpful wash.

Two of your noble Parish Councillors were on hand – one at each end of the hazard – endeavouring to alert and manage the oncoming traffic, until the situation eased later in the afternoon. The experience revived awareness about local preparedness for such events, which are likely to become more frequent, and the Parish Council is taking stock. We are in contact with Milton Keynes City Council's Emergency Planning Department with a view to establishing procedures for receiving flood alerts and managing the implications. We will engage with vulnerable residents facing that stretch of the road.

We know that, following heavy or continuous rain, water levels in the River Ouzel rise and that there are flood management procedures in place to reduce the impact on the River Great Ouse, which it joins at Newport Pagnell.



There are also significant implications, downstream, for Bedford. Caldecotte Lake, as a balancing lake, is part of that plan, and water can be diverted into it by raising the barrier on the north-west side of the lake, thus reducing the volume of water in the river. The



operation of the barrier is under the control of the Environment Agency and the mechanism is triggered, remotely, by the measurement of water levels downstream from Leighton Buzzard. To the best of our knowledge, the barrier wasn't raised until the Friday morning, despite there being ample capacity in the lake. We are trying to establish

whether the criteria for raising the barrier are reviewed in the light of experience, as on 5 January. It may be that Simpson has to suffer somewhat in order to ameliorate conditions in Newport Pagnell, Bedford etc.

In parallel with all of this, a team from the Bedford Internal Drainage Board has been carrying out a major operation around the Ouzel. Not only have fallen trees been removed, but the vegetation on both banks has been severely cut back and the bottom of the river has been scoured. A team from the Environment Agency has been following in the wake of the heavy machinery and disposing of the spoils of their work in an environmentally responsible fashion. Once that stage of the work is complete and as the teams work their way northwards, we understand that Parks Trust will be attending to the paths, in some places diverting them further from the river. The overall effect on the Ouzel is stark. It will restore itself over time but the implications for the ecology – birds, fish, otters, insects, plants etc – remain to be seen. As does the outlook for flooding in the future.

● Peter Barnes



Defibrillators

The Parish Council was recently successful in receiving match funding for the purchase of two defibrillators. Many thanks to Ward Councillor Charlotte Hall for bringing the opportunity to our attention, so that we were able to make a timely bid. One defibrillator has already been installed at Simpson Village Hall and is ready for use whenever needed. By the time you read this, the second one should be in place at Ashland Lakeside Community Centre (on the end wall facing the car park).

Both defibrillators are on the outside of the buildings, so are accessible 24 hours a day, seven days a week. In the event of an incident where someone is unresponsive and not breathing, phone 999 and, if needed, they will instruct you on your nearest defibrillator, how to gain access (a code to enter on the keypad) and how to use the device stored inside the cabinet.

The Parish Council plans to arrange familiarisation sessions for interested



residents. Look out for details in due course. In the meantime, take a look so that you know where the defibrillators are, the layout of the keypad etc. There is also a ten-minute video which explains how to use it in case of an emergency: **210601 - London Hearts.mp4 (vimeo.com)** It's well worth a look – you never know when you may need to use it.

If you already have relevant experience or training in the use of a defibrillator, please contact me clerk@simpsonashland-pc.gov.uk

● **Katherine Harmsworth (Parish Clerk)**

A word of advice

The Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) has a long and well-deserved reputation, countrywide. Here in Milton Keynes, their website www.miltonkeynescab.org.uk indicates that since 1972 they have helped 500,000 people in the city to find a way forward with over 2.5 million separate problems. The website also identifies the range and variety of the problems that they are equipped to respond to.

The CAB tell us that records show that their services are used and valued by people with addresses in Ashland and Simpson. So, the Parish Council is trialling a scheme to bring those opportunities closer to home. As a start, we are funding two daytime drop-in sessions at Simpson Village Hall, where you can have a confidential conversation with an experienced CAB adviser.

The first session on 25th January had a limited but positive response. The next opportunity is on **Thursday 29 February between 10.30 a.m. and 1.30 p.m.** If you have things on your mind that you

cannot resolve, pressures that you are finding it hard to deal with, or a need for information and support that you are struggling to identify, why not call by and talk to an experienced listening ear who can help you find ways forward.

These opportunities – which are entirely free - are open to all residents of Simpson and Ashland. We had hoped to make use of Ashland Lakeside Community Centre, but the internal layout does not provide the necessary conditions for confidentiality.

In due course, the Parish Council will be reviewing options for providing CAB sessions on a regular basis, depending on identified needs and the experience gained from the trial.

● **Peter Barnes**



X marks the spot

In addition to the uses to which Ashland Lakeside Community Centre is being put will soon be that of a Polling Station. On **Thursday 2 May** Ashland residents who are on the electoral roll will be able to cast your vote there between 07.00 and 22.00. It will be your opportunity to choose from the candidates standing to represent Cambell Park and Old Woughton ward residents on Milton Keynes City Council. Despite that title, both Ashland and Simpson are within the ward; Simpson residents can vote at Simpson Village Hall. (Other ways of voting – by post or by proxy - are available!)

This year, too, the five current Parish Councillors for Simpson and Ashland come to the end of their time in office. They can be nominated/put themselves forward for re-election for a further four-year term. But there is always scope for others to stand.

The Parish Council potentially comprises eight councillors, five with seats in Ashland ward and three in Simpson ward (the relative distribution is based on population size). The five current councillors all live in Simpson but two are assigned to the Ashland ward. It would be good to have some new blood, particularly from Ashland.

If there are fewer than five nominations for the Ashland seats and three for Simpson, then there is no need for an election; all would be appointed. If more than five and/or three are nominated, then it would be a contested election and local residents would be invited to vote at the relevant Polling Station on 2 May.

If you would like to know more about what is involved in being a Parish Councillor please contact the Clerk at clerk@simpsonashland-pc.gov.uk

2 May is some way off, but nomination papers need to be (hand delivered to MKCC) between 25 March and 5 April.

● **Katherine Harmsworth (Clerk)**

Street Champions

Three years ago, amid the height of the pandemic, Street Champions united with a shared goal of keeping an eye on their neighbours. Since then, they have consistently dedicated their time to fulfil various community needs. Their efforts include supporting litter picking, reporting issues within the parish, organising community events, and distributing information leaflets.

There is no specific time commitment expected; participants are encouraged to contribute as much as they can. Quarterly meetings provide a platform for sharing feedback, and the upcoming meeting is scheduled for 13 February.

Meet the current Street Champions:

ASHLAND

Langham Way: Krishna Patel and Lars de Wijngaert
Newington Gate: Caroline Vooght

SIMPSON

Abbey Road: Chichi Ezeh
Hanmer Road and Simpson Road: Peter Barnes
Lissel Road: Margaret Carrel
Millholm Rise & Mount Pleasant: David Pye
Warren Bank: Catherine Scanlon

If you're interested in becoming a Street Champion, reach out to Chichi.ezeh@simpsonashland-pc.gov.uk

● **Chichi Ezeh**



ASHLAND LAKESIDE COMMUNITY CENTRE

Available To Hire

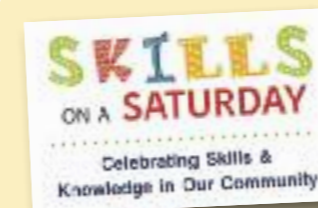
Facilities include an accessible toilet, wifi, kitchenette and free parking.

HOURLY HIRE RATE

- £20 standard rate
- £15 for charities
- £12.50 for residents of Simpson and Ashland

For more information and online booking:

- www.simpsonashland-pc.gov.uk/ashland-lakeside
- simpsonashlandhalls@gmail.com
- Ashland Lakeside, Panshurst Crescent, Ashland, MK8 4AJ



We are delighted to announce the launch of a programme of free events in Simpson Village Hall on occasional Saturday afternoons.

We know that local residents have a broad range of skills, knowledge and interests and the programme will aim to celebrate and share these. We have three events to kick off the programme and more to follow.

Saturday February 24th – Demonstrating local craft skills

This will focus on three skills – crochet, wood turning and jewellery making. You will hear from our local experts, see examples of their work and have an opportunity to try crochet and jewellery making yourselves.

Saturday April 6th – Singing for everyone, with Junction 14

Junction 14 will introduce us to acapella singing with an interactive workshop. They tell us that everyone can join in, regardless of experience or comfortable pitch. After a refreshment break, they will entertain us with songs from their wider repertoire.

Saturday April 27th – A village in a city – exploring local history

Our presenters will discuss their personal interest in local history – both what we know of the history of Simpson village from 1066 and the development of the new city of Milton Keynes. The latter will include a film 'The City Builders'.

All sessions are from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. and are **FREE**, including light refreshments. There are more events to follow including 'Repair, Restore and Upcycle' and 'Creative, nutritious cooking'. Dates to be announced soon.

If you have skills and interests you would like to share as part of this programme, please contact gillneedham3317@gmail.com

● **Gill Needham**

Quizzes and concerts

A number of quizzes and concerts were held in Simpson during 2023 and a magnificent total of **£14,191** has been made by all of us supporting these events. The money has gone to a variety of causes including the Tuesday Simpson Group, the Simpson Garden Group, St Thomas's Church funds and the Village Hall. We have supported many charities – humanitarian, environmental and wildlife, also two local community larders. A separate collection was taken earlier in the year and sent to help those involved in the Turkish earthquake and many contributions have gone to the MK Food Bank. Well done all of us.

Please check the 'What's On' section on the back page to see our up-coming dates. Please make a note of them and support them if you can.

● **Pat Hodges**

Farewell to *The Walnuts*

The Walnuts, the large house, behind trees, fronting the road through Simpson, has been a significant feature of village life and landscape for 120 years. It will soon be no more. Milton Keynes City Council, which owns the site, now home to the Day Care Service, have decided to demolish it. Work is scheduled to commence in mid-March.

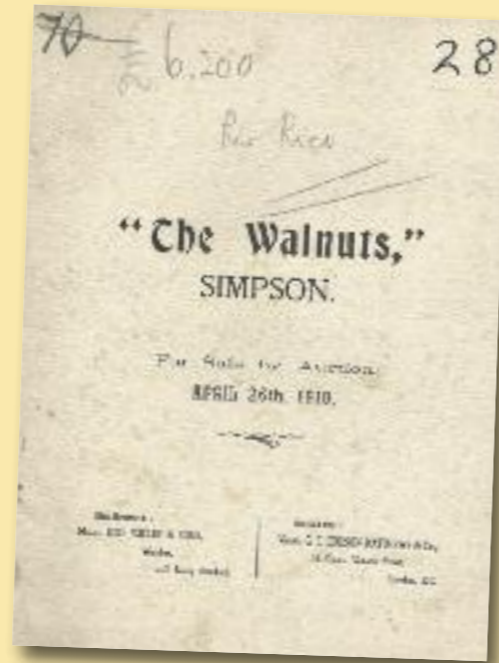
The house was built in 1903 from the designs of J. T. Lawrence, a Leighton Buzzard-based architect. The first owner was Frederick Bodley who was born in Simpson in 1842. The 1901 census records that he was a farmer. In 1911, his occupation was recorded as assistant overseer and tax collector.

After Frederick's death in late 1917, the property was put up for sale at auction and in April 1918 it was purchased by the notorious Rector of Simpson, Rev. William Rice. He paid £6,200 for it. Rev. Rice died in February 1919 and two months later *The Walnuts* was up for auction again. The purchaser was Walter Webster, the wealthy owner of a printing business in London, who went on to establish the Premier Press in Bletchley. A generous man, he gave the land on which generations of the village hall have stood since 1921. Walter was an outstanding rifle shot. He toured the world with the British Rifle team and during the 1930s was rated the fifth finest shot in the world. During World War 2 he was a Weapon Training Officer of the 2nd Bucks Home Guard, in which capacity he trained 'his own village lads and soon they were ahead of everyone else', according to the Bletchley Gazette.

Following Walter's death in 1947 *The*

Walnuts and surrounding land were sold for £9,000. There followed a succession of private owners until 1972, when it became a Buckinghamshire County Council school for autistic children. Adaptations were made and a single-storey building was constructed behind the main house. In 2007 the school moved to purpose-built accommodation elsewhere in Milton Keynes and the site became the home of the Milton Keynes Music Service. During its ten-year tenure the old house provided teaching, practice and performance space. Since the Music Service moved out in 2017 the house has been unoccupied as it was deemed unsuitable for use by MKCC's Day Care Service, which opened in April 2019 in the refurbished buildings at the rear.

The fabric of the house has received little attention and care for the past six years and its condition has deteriorated



1918 sales brochure

as a consequence. MKCC have been unable to identify other uses for it and, following a structural survey, have decided that the cost, now, of



maintaining and securing the building is too high. The cost of demolishing this 'asset' is presented as a 'saving'. Initially the Parish Council was told that the space created following demolition would be used for car parking. This has since been denied and it appears that there are no plans to utilise it.

The demolition of *The Walnuts* will be the first time in fifty years that one of Simpson's heritage buildings has ceased to be. (That was the mysterious demise of Rectory Farm in the early 1970s.) The only crumbs of comfort are that the 120-year history of the house and its occupants is well-documented in words and photographs.

● Peter Barnes

£1400 raised for Mental Health

In the October 2023 newsletter I was a few weeks away from completing my 100th Half Marathon at the Milton Keynes Winter Half, whilst raising money for the mental health charity, Mind.

I am delighted to report that the event was a great success, and I crossed the finish line in 1 hour and 54 minutes. More importantly, thanks to everyone's kind donations a sum of just over £1,400 was raised for the charity. This exceeded all expectations and is very much appreciated! Even though 1 in 4 people have mental health problems, most of us don't get the help we need. Mind was formed to change this, to fight for mental health, for support, for respect, for you.

So, what's next? Well as I mentioned in the previous article, running is one of the ways I deal with all of the challenges that life brings. I've just completed "RED (Run Every Day) January" and I've already



booked up several half marathons in the first half of 2024, plus the Twin Lakes 20 miler next month, here in MK. At these events I will be representing my wonderful running club, The Redway Runners (www.redwayrunners.com). Redway Runners are a truly inclusive club and are among the biggest running

clubs in the UK. We have numerous runs/walks every day, catering for everyone's pace and ability, from rambling groups, beginners, social groups all the way up to faster-paced runs. We also fund-raise at our various events, with an annual chosen charity and collections for MK Food Bank. The current charity of the year is Thames Valley Air Ambulance. Club membership is only £5 per year...what great value! Whatever your passion, I wish you a happy and healthy 2024 and beyond...

● Gary Howard

Garden Birdwatch 2024

The RSPB's annual Garden Birdwatch takes place over the last weekend of January, when all over the country people submit a list of the birds seen in their garden over the course of an hour. It's the UK's biggest Citizen Science project, which aims to monitor both the overall numbers of different bird species but also evaluate trends over time, as some populations decline and others secure a firmer perch in the pecking order.

In 2021 a small number of Simpson residents decided to pool their individual garden records and that practice has continued for the following three years. 2022 was a bumper year, with a total of thirty-three species recorded, but this year's results fell far short of that figure – just eighteen species were listed, across nine gardens. Robins and blue tits were the most ubiquitous, followed by blackbirds, dunnocks, great tits, magpies and wood pigeons. The most 'exotic' bird was a female blackcap, a warbler that has taken to over-wintering in the UK in recent years. There was a level of frustration among some observers that birds that they would normally expect to



see chose not to put in an appearance. So, although we know that feral pigeons, great spotted woodpeckers and stock doves are regularly seen in some Simpson gardens, they did not feature in the 2024 submissions.

If you submitted sightings to the RSPB this year and would like to join in the Simpson project, please email peterwbarnes@hotmail.co.uk Let me know, too, if you would like to be added to the contact list for January 2025 – the more the merrier. And if your garden is in Ashland, why not set up your own scheme with like-minded neighbours?

● Peter Barnes

Introducing Rachelle Dalgarno – new Parish Councillor



I moved to Simpson two-and-half years ago, with my family. I enjoy the open spaces, walks along by the canal and the surrounding countryside. I'm interested in discovering more about the history of the area. As yet, I'm not experienced in Parish Council operations but I'm looking forward to being more involved. I recently accompanied Katherine, our Clerk, at a presentation by MK City Council on the new waste and environmental services contract – there's dedication!

Roadworks



The ongoing work to strengthen the supports of the H9 Groveway bridge over the canal is scheduled to be completed by the end of February. Once the cones and 40 m.p.h speed limit signs have been removed and traffic is flowing freely again, we are expecting Milton Keynes City Council Highways Department to begin the traffic survey, planned last year. The evidence gathered will inform ways of improving the safety of this stretch of Groveway, especially around the junctions with Marshworth, Newport Road and Simpson Drive – where there was yet another accident on 24 January.

News from St. Thomas' Church

A Cafe Style Christmas Carol Service was a new venture, which proved to be very successful. We sat round tables which all faced the altar, sang traditional carols and Rev Nicola led the worship. Coffee and mince pies were served. The atmosphere was full of Christmas cheer and was very well attended.



The Christmas Eve Midnight Holy Communion and Christmas Day services were well attended by friends from the local community, as well as our members.

Each month a small group from St Thomas's Church sing hymns at the Simpson Day Care Service. This is a positive experience for the elderly, who remember hymns and carols that they learnt as children. The group take percussion instruments and the staff provide the drums!

We were invited to sing on their last meeting before Christmas. Together with members of the Day Centre staff we truly sung out hearts out a great atmosphere.

We are waiting for the Diocesan Advisory Committee from Oxford to visit the church to decide how best to deal with the fractured walls in the chancel.

Sunday Worship at 10:30am

- 25th February - Holy Communion, followed by Soup and Soul
- 3rd March - Service of the Word
- 10th March - Holy Communion for Mothering Sunday
- 17th March - Service of the Word
- 24th March - All-Age Worship for Palm Sunday
- Friday 29th March - Good Friday - Prayers around the Cross with Taizé chants, 7.00 p.m.
- 31st March - Easter Holy Communion

● **Iola Samuels (Church Warden) and Nicola Vidamour (Minister)**

Simpson Garden Group

Tuesday 12 March 8.00 pm
at Simpson Village Hall
Geoff Hodge (Garden writer and broadcaster) *Gardening with a Changing Climate.*

Tuesday 9 April 8.00 p.m.
at Simpson Village Hall.
Graham Austin (Delphinium specialist, Home Farm Plants): *My journey to getting a Royal Horticultural Society Chelsea Gold Medal.*

All welcome – Non-members £ 5.00

● **Jane Anderson**

"Please, Sir, I want some more..."



That familiar phrase may conjure up the workhouse scene from Oliver Twist – book, film or musical. It seems that wherever we look the news is of household expenditure going up, be it utilities, mortgages, fuel etc. Now is the time in the financial year when the Parish Council has to decide the amount of precept that eligible residents will pay from April. The precept is the amount of money that funds the work of the Parish Council and it forms part of the Council Tax bill from Milton Keynes City Council that will arrive through your letterbox in March.

We have carefully scrutinised our finances and have agreed that the parish precept will be **reduced by 7.99% from April 2024**, as we do not wish to add to the burden of increased bills that we are all facing. This will be the second year in a row that there has been a reduction – it was 5.6% in 2023/24.

So, although the bottom line of your Council Tax demand will be higher from April, you will see from the 'Charge of the property band' box on the notice, that the amount to Simpson and Ashland PC has gone down. Unlike Oliver Twist, we will not be asking you for more.

● **David Pye**

Footpath repairs at Ashland

We have been notified that Homes England will shortly be carrying out repair works to some of the footpaths around Ashland. The contractor, Jones Site Services & Installation, will be on site throughout March (weather permitting). They will be diverting the footpaths, temporarily, and ensuring a safe environment while the work is

carried out.

The contractors will be repairing three sections of path, in turn, starting with Footpath 1 on the map, leading towards to the lake. Footpath 2 is at the western end of the estate and Footpath 3 is on the western side of V7 Saxon Street.



Simpson Village Hall

AVAILABLE TO HIRE
FOR REGULAR CLASSES TO ONE OFF EVENTS

We offer a bright space for up to 50 people.
With a fully equipped kitchen.
Wifi.

Accessible toilet and baby changing facility.

Hourly Hire Rate
£20 Standard Hire Charge
£15 for Charitable Organisations
£12.50 for Residents of Simpson and Ashland

Further info & online booking is available at:
<https://simpsonashland-pc.gov.uk/simpson-village-hall/>

Yoga classes

There are regular Yoga classes at **Ashland Lakeside** on **Mondays at 18:15**.
For further information and to book, go to www.beingwellholistichealth.com/book-online

Evergreen Yoyalates

Come along to gently move your body, calm your mind and feed your soul

Tuesday at 5.30pm to 6.30pm with Shakila

Simpson Village Hall, MK6 3AD
Bring your mat, water and small cushion/towel

Forever Green

Chair based exercise class for older adults
For everyone – all levels and abilities welcome
Move it or Lose it!
Come and have some fun, improve your sleep and better manage those aches and pains

Movement and exercise helps you:

- Improves your balance
- Increases your stability
- Reduces the risk of falling
- Aches and pains reduce
- Stronger bones
- Sleep better
- Flexibility improves
- Posture is better
- Muscle strength and tone increases
- Better blood pressure control
- Lowers risk of stroke
- Better blood sugar control
- Breathing is better

Join Shakila to get moving, feel healthier and happier

Wednesdays
10.30am to 11.15am at Simpson Village Hall, MK6 3AD
£4 per session
For more information call Shakila on 07752378876

Coffee & Chat

Simpson Village Hall
Tuesdays: 10.00 – 12.00

What's On...

S&A CALENDAR

2024

An overview of upcoming events around the parish...

PLEASE NOTE: Quizzes in Simpson Village Hall – places **MUST** be booked with missquiz@sky.com or 01908 644785.

FEBRUARY

- **Saturday 24th** Skills on a Saturday – Demonstrating local craft skills, Simpson Village Hall 2.00-4.00 p.m. Free.
- **Saturday 24th** Quiz in Simpson Village Hall at 7.00 p.m. for Devon Air Ambulance Trust.
- **Thursday 29th** Citizens' Advice Bureau drop-in session, Simpson Village Hall 10.30 a.m. – 1.30 p.m.

MARCH

- **Saturday 2nd** Coffee morning in aid of the RNLI, St Thomas's Church at 10.00 - 12.00.
- **Monday 4th** Parish Council meeting in Simpson Village Hall at 8.00 p.m. All welcome.
- **Saturday 9th** Children's Craft session (Milton Keynes Play Association), Ashland Lakeside Community Centre, 10.00 a.m. - 12.00 p.m. Booking required.
- **Saturday 9th** Concert *Mad March Merriment* – St Thomas's Church, 7.00 p.m. Optional collection for church funds. Bring & Share buffet.
- **Tuesday 12th** Garden Group talk at Simpson Village Hall at 8.00 p.m. Geoff Hodge (Garden writer and broadcaster): *Gardening with a Changing Climate*.
- **Saturday 23rd** Quiz in Simpson Village Hall at 7.00 p.m. for Firefighter's Charity.

APRIL

- **Saturday 6th** Skills on a Saturday - Singing for everyone with Junction 14, Simpson Village Hall 2.00-4.00 p.m. Free.
- **Saturday 6th** Quiz in Simpson Village Hall at 7.00 p.m. for Let Net.
- **Tuesday 9th** Garden Group talk at Simpson Village Hall at 8.00 p.m. Graham Austin (Delphinium specialist, Home Farm Plants): *My journey to getting a Royal Horticultural Society Chelsea Gold Medal*.
- **Saturday 27th** Skills on a Saturday - A village in a city: exploring local history, Simpson Village Hall 2.00-4.00 p.m. Free.

MAY

- **Thursday 2nd** Local elections.
- **Saturday 4th** Quiz in Simpson Village Hall at 7.00 p.m. for Streetlight Trust.
- **Saturday 18th** Quiz in Simpson Village Hall at 7.00 p.m. for Water Eaton Community Hub.



Simpson & Ashland Parish Council on Facebook

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



www.simpsonashland-pc.gov.uk
clerk@simpsonashland-pc.gov.uk
07597 304 054 Twitter: @SimpsonAshland

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

With thanks to the following contributors: Jane Anderson, Chichi Ezeh, Rachele Dalgarno, Katherine Harmsworth, Pat Hodges, Gary Howard, Sian Lewis, Gill Needham, David Pye, Iola Samuels, and Nicola Vidamour.

Delivered to your letterbox by: Ruth Aguilar, Jane Anderson, Jane Ashby, Peter Barnes, Brenda Daghlish, Julie Jones, Sian Lewis, Helen Morland, Cathy Pope, Catherine Scanlon, Karen Steeden, Caroline Vooght, Amanda Weaver.

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