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# OUNDLE Chronicle

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Winter 2024 - 2025

## Lee Barron MP talks about values and policy in the new Labour government

**Liav Rosenthal**

In the July General Election, Lee Barron was elected as the Labour MP for Corby and East Northamptonshire. Following nine years of Conservative representation in the constituency, voters decided it was time for change. Lee won the seat with a comfortable 42 percent vote share, beating the Conservative incumbent, and second place candidate Tom Pursglove by almost 7,000 votes. The constituency saw a surge in Reform UK support, likely taking away from the Conservatives, and winning 8,760 votes, or 18 percent of the vote share, demonstrating a divide on the Right side of politics in the region.

Lee was born and raised in Northampton and comes from a working-class background. His father was a boot and shoe worker, whilst his mother worked in local shops and banks.

After taking an apprenticeship in the Royal Mail in 1986, Lee became active in the Communication Workers Union, catapulting him into politics at a young age. Lee began representing working people in the wider trade union movement. This led him into his first major role in politics, becoming a local councillor in 1999 where he served for eight years, four years of which he led the Labour Group on Northampton Borough Council.

We spoke to Lee about his journey into politics, the important issues for the constituency, his positions on government policies, and his vespa.

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For those lucky enough to witness the aurora borealis events in May and October, the striking green and purple lights dancing in skies above Oundle were a breathtaking display. A rare phenomenon in this region, the lights were caused by intense solar storms reacting with gases in the earth's atmosphere. Photo of the October lights by Sophie Bourne.

## Urgent need for safety measures at Cotterstock blackspot

**Alasdair Hanlon**

The intersection between Glapthorn and Cotterstock on the Cotterstock Road is well known as an accident black spot, with numerous serious collisions involving injury and vehicle damage.

Residents have repeatedly raised concerns related to the intersection. In 2024, a Cotterstock village community group recorded four serious accidents that required multiple emergency services, including police, fire engines and ambulances. In April, a van and car crashed, causing damage to fencing and a traditional road sign, both of which were completely

destroyed. In June, two vans collided and overturned; one car was overturned in July with all airbags fully activated; on the first day of September, two cars collided and a family with three children received treatment at the roadside. Most recently, in November there was another accident involving a Tesco delivery van.

Even more seriously, in July 2016, a school bus was hit and overturned, resulting in more than 20 children needing medical attention by paramedics.

The North Northamptonshire Council is aware of the most serious recent accidents, but numerous

“near-misses” go unrecorded. The speed limit has been reduced to 40mph in the last year with the intention of decreasing these dangerous incidents.

Kier Transportation maintains a database of all the recorded injury collisions in Northamptonshire on behalf of Northamptonshire Police and the Local Authorities.

According to their records, in the three years between 1 August 2021 and 31 July 2024, 6 collisions were reported. Of the 8 casualties involved, 7 received slight injuries and 1 was deemed to have been seriously injured.

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## Council approves plans for new boarding house at Milton Road site

**Joshua Arumugam**

The now derelict site of the former Oundle Primary School is finally going to be developed. In September 2024, Oundle School was given planning permission for the construction of a new girls' boarding house, on the site located on the corner of Drummingwell Lane and Milton Road. The boarding house is to be named McMurray House, after former headmaster David McMurray, who first introduced co-education to Oundle School 35 years ago. The school said they can now begin the final design phase for a state-of-the-art, 60-bed boarding house for girls aged 13-18. They plan to start construction in 2025.

that the development might provide. Oundle School is an employer of nearly 800 people; several school buildings are used by the public and the school undertakes a "significant" amount of charity work in the town. Furthermore, many of the boarding houses can be let during school holidays, bringing in additional revenue for the school and town community.

This would also be the case for McMurray house, as it could be let to allow STEM and other programmes outside of term time, thanks to the house's proximity to the Sci-Tec building. The development will provide a number of jobs, predominantly



The boarding house will be named after former Headmaster David McMurray.

Before Oundle School purchased the property, the council considered other development proposals in 2017, such as the conversion of the building to form five townhouses and a studio apartment.

The school's plans faced a lengthy consultation process which gave rise to several initial objections, including from the North Northamptonshire Principal Conservation Officer. The objection stated that the demolition of the old buildings would result in the loss of a heritage asset and disagreed with the application's assessment that the former primary school had no historical or architectural interest.

It was also commented that the scale of the new building would, "compete for visual dominance with the nearby listed buildings". However, the conclusion was that the benefits of the development outweighed "the less than substantial" loss of an asset and harm to the setting.

The council also considered in their report, what public benefit

during the construction phase, and further jobs for domestic and catering staff once operational.

Lastly, the council's final report observed: "It is questioned whether the building would fall into further disrepair if the proposal is not successful".

Another benefit outlined was the environmental benefits of the development. It is reported that it will provide a biodiversity net gain of 82.81% in habitat units and 5508% net gain in hedgerow units. Additionally, the development will "promote sustainable modes of transport" and "reduce traffic generation" compared to its previous use.

Before demolition and construction can begin, further approval from the council is required for detailed design and engineering work as stated in the 30 conditions mentioned in the report.

The school must also comply with the strict conditions for vehicle access during the construction phase.

## Customers wait months for garden waste collection

**Lara Epton**

North Northamptonshire Council increased its annual charge for kerb-side green waste collection this year, but Oundle residents are reporting inefficient distribution of the brown bin stickers required for collection.

The council says that collection will begin ten working days after payment, but residents have complained about the delays in receiving identifying stickers. Some have reported waiting six months, making many phone calls and emails before their stickers arrived.

Residents have resorted to complaining on social media. One dismayed resident posted on a Facebook community page: "We still don't have one, payment taken 1st May, three complaints lodged, they just don't care!"

Some resorted to sticking payment confirmation and cardboard signs on the top of their bins. Many said they have repeatedly tried corresponding with the council. "I've sent three emails, with two responses, saying they'll forward my concerns to the relevant dept. No response from there and my bin hadn't been emptied."

In November, a Facebook thread about bins included a comment from a resident who said she had been waiting since June for a sticker.

The Oundle Chronicle asked the council about the months-long delays. Councillor Matt Binley, Executive Member for Highways, Travel and Assets said:

"We are aware of some localised issues with the garden waste service which we are working to resolve whilst looking at making internal improvements to the wider service to ensure a high level of service for residents in the longer term."

"Our officers are working hard to resolve the small number of outstanding individual cases, communicating directly with residents and responding to their queries to ensure issues are resolved quickly."

The council charges an annual subscription of £45.60 and supplies a brown bin which is collected every two weeks. For irregular collections, households can pay £17.50 for 10 sacks, each sack holding up to 80 litres of waste.

The bins' contents are taken to composting facilities where they undergo a process to be turned into a product that can be used as a soil conditioner for future use. The council says there is a cost to dispose of the waste and that it does not make a profit.



## Oundle Town Council takes ownership of Fletton Field from NNC

### Alasdair Hanlon

Since 2016, Oundle residents have vigorously petitioned for Fletton Field to remain an open green space despite the county council's efforts to sell the land for development. Campaigners testified at hearings, documented witness statements about historic use, compiled stacks of ring binders full of statistics and case studies. They fundraised, organised events, hired consultants and legal representation. The effort was determined, hard fought and ultimately successful.

At the end of August, ownership of Fletton Field was finally transferred to the people of Oundle by North Northants Council.

The future of Fletton Field is now safe as a public open space for the benefit of Oundle residents.

Fletton Field development is being led by The Fletton Field Working Party, which is made up of members of the Fletton Field Association and the Oundle Town Council Estates Committee. The field is going to be available to the community to use as open space. Development plans include picnic areas, memorial benches, fire pits, a wildflower meadow area, and raised beds for gardening, among other proposals.

The funds for developing the field will come from S106 funding from the Herne Lodge/Ashton Road development. This money has been used to purchase the field and will be available to implement some of the ideas in the plan.

The Fletton Field Association volunteers along with the Oundle Town Council maintenance team will all contribute to the maintenance of the field. The S106 funds

should help for the development throughout 2025, until council funds are allocated in the following year's budget.

Oundle Mayor, Ian Clark said: "It is such positive news that we have finally secured the long-term future of Fletton Field as a public open space. We will continue to work with the Fletton Field Association to ensure the open space keeps benefitting the health and wellbeing of Oundle residents, including a community orchard, and will make sure we grasp the opportunity to improve local biodiversity."

Fletton Field, first made available to the Oundle community in 1899, has long had historical significance for the town. It was initially associated with Oundle Workhouse, and also appears to have been used as allotments in the 19th century and for most of the 20th century. The Local Government Act in 1929 transferred the Poor Laws to local authorities and the ownership passed to Northamptonshire County Council. In 1973, it was designated as the playing field for the primary school on Milton Road. The town council asserted that the land was additionally used by the local community as a public open space. When the primary school relocated to Cotterstock Road, however, the ownership of the land reverted to NCC. The town's application stressed the point that if Fletton Field was to be sold for development, then the green space available to the residents of Oundle would be reduced by 45%. Most of the existing open green spaces in Oundle are under private ownership of Oundle School or other educational operations.

## Gerry Salerno leaves a legacy for the next generation

### Lucy Alikier

Salerno's Italian Restaurant was opened by Gerardo Salerno and his family in 2015, and since then has been a popular destination in the heart of Oundle.

After his death in June, friends and customers across the community paid tribute to the hospitality and good food he shared in his restaurant.

Known to all as Gerry, he lived in the Peterborough area his whole life, with Italian parents who had migrated from a small town in the Campania region of Italy following the Second World War. Food was important in bringing the family together when he was growing up, and his mother taught him how to cook with family recipes.

He began his career as an engineer, but after being made redundant in the early 1990s, he turned to his Italian heritage to start again. Seeing a gap in the market in Oundle for takeaway pizza delivery, he opened Luciano's.

After this success, he moved into restaurants, and opened San Giorgio on West Street in 1993, remaining there for 16 years.

Gerry's restaurants have always been a family business. Salerno's was opened together with his children, Gaby and Stefan, who inherited their Nonna's secret recipes.

Their commitment to the family restaurant remains, with exciting new developments planned for the future.



Gerry was photographed by the Oundle Chronicle when he opened Salerno's in 2015 with his daughter Gaby and son Stefan.

## Herne Road development plans approved despite town council objections

### Benjamin Jurdjevic

A new retirement complex of 42 apartments for people over the age of 60 on Herne Road has been approved by North Northamptonshire Council (NNC), despite Oundle Town Council and others objecting to the plans.

The development by McCarthy And Stone Retirement Lifestyles Ltd was a controversial application, receiving 20 objections. The two-and-a-half-storey tall complex will be located on green open space off Herne Road and will be surrounded by other residential homes.

The Oundle Town Council questioned whether the existing

healthcare capacity could accommodate it, as the existing GP practice is overstretched. There were also concerns about the lack of infrastructure and the increase of noise and traffic congestion in the area.

Mayor Ian Clark told NNC's planning committee that Oundle's streets have been "pummelled" with heavy traffic for building sites. Planning permission also exists for a 62-unit extra care facility for the elderly off St Christopher's Drive.

The development will include parking, and will come with several amenities, such as a garden and a communal lounge.



Oundle Primary School's minibus was stolen in April 2024. It took the school years to fundraise for the minibus, which was bought in 2021. They have been devastated by the theft. Although the minibus was insured, there is a £10,000 shortfall to purchase a replacement. A GoFundMe appeal has been launched for everyone to help the school buy a new minibus: [gofundme.com/f/please-help-us-replace-our-stolen-minibus](https://gofundme.com/f/please-help-us-replace-our-stolen-minibus)



## Library summer closure highlighted its importance as an essential service

**Daniel Dai**

On the morning of 12 July 2024, what appeared to be an electrical fire broke out in the staff work room at the Oundle Library. The North Northamptonshire Council said that the Oundle library would close while the cause of the fire was investigated and remedial work undertaken.

The library management at first suggested that the closure would last only a week, and then just a few weeks, but it stretched into months. The library reopened on the 30th of September for book loans and returns. All the other services and events remained suspended.

Rumours circulated that the council would permanently close the library. It was not until 15th August that the council provided further details and reassured library users that there was no intention to close the library service.

The council explained that due to the prompt response of the fire service, the fire was quickly extinguished, and only affected a

small part of the Oundle Library. The library staff moved as many books as possible to a safe area to make sure that during the remedial work, library resources would not be lost. Unfortunately, the remedial work required for the library's



Children and families are frequent users of the Oundle Library.

restoration was "more extensive than first anticipated".

The electrics and fire system rewiring was undertaken and contractors made steady process in

completing this refurbishment. The library also had to go through a complete deep clean.

During the nearly three months of closures, while many events and clubs were cancelled, the library team found alternative ways to

offer some services, promoting the Summer Reading Challenge at Fineshade Woods, and holding summer activities in the library garden.

Barclays Bank moved their customer service team into Fletton House, and it was business as usual. In contrast, the library withdrew their Blue Badge and Bus Pass services from Oundle completely, and advised customers to go to Corby, which was an inconvenient distance for those who need the service – the elderly and those with special needs.

The Oundle Library is a well-used resource. In 2023, the library issued 32,000 loans. The library closure impacted families and children, who are among the biggest weekly users of libraries during the summer holidays.

With 2726 members currently signed up at the Oundle Library, 980 members are children under the age of 18.

Regular visitors to the library not only borrow books, but also use the online subscriptions to the different databases that the Oundle Library has. Some members use this service for personal research, but some use the services for their professional work.

One library user said that of all the council services that his taxes pay for, the bin collection and the library are the most important to him and are those he uses most.

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## Cotterstock accident blackspot

*Continued from page 1*

In each case, the vehicle that caused the accident entered the crossroads from Cotterstock, and obstructed a vehicle travelling from Oundle to Fotheringhay. Nearly all of these collisions happened on dry road conditions, in the afternoon, between March and August.

Accident reports suggest that, in each case of a serious accident this year, it was the vehicle travelling west out of Cotterstock that failed to slow down as the junction was approached. When drivers were questioned, a number commented that they were unfamiliar with the road and therefore were unaware of the approaching junction.

Additionally, some drivers have claimed that their satnavs failed to alert them.

The implication appears to be that the visibility of the road

identified by the North Northants Council as a red route, despite the multiple accidents. Red routes are roads in North Northamptonshire that are the most dangerous.

For a road to be designated as a red route, at least four injury collisions must have occurred, with at least one person seriously injured or killed in the last three years.

When a route is designated a red route, the council acts through means such as engineering, enforcement and educational interviews. Over 175 profiled red routes in the county have benefited from this and are no longer deemed red routes due to the reduced collision rates.

The North Northants Council were approached for comments on why the Cotterstock junction is not currently considered a red route.

They responded: "Sections of



Cotterstock Community Group

In September, two cars collided at the intersection. A family with three children received treatment at the roadside, and both cars were written off.

requires improvement. There has been a suggestion that cutting back vegetation which obscures the drivers' view of the upcoming junction, would provide an opportunity for deceleration and caution, hopefully minimising these serious incidents.

The junction currently has two 'Give Way' signs on the approach from Glapthorn to Cotterstock, situated about 100 yards apart, in addition to lines on the road which were re-painted in early September. However, it is not uncommon for cars to drive straight across the road, disregarding signs.

There are also 40mph speed limit signs, although currently no signed indication of the approaching junction. The addition of 'Stop' signs would be a welcome reminder for drivers.

The intersection has not been

highways become Red Routes if they are subject to high numbers of collisions resulting in serious injuries or deaths. Fortunately, this isn't the case with this crossroads, but due to the high number of injury collisions, it has now been flagged as part of our junctions and roundabouts studies."

The safety improvement of this road is progressing. The Cotterstock community group have met with the council's road safety team on site to discuss their concerns. In response to the NNC commitment to monitor the junction, they said:

"The council has responded positively to the local concerns. The Parish met with council representatives to discuss options and solutions, and feasibility work is underway."

## Police Beat

**Brian Sung**

Over three months in the summer, eleven bicycles were stolen in the town. In July, four were stolen beside the Queen Victoria Hall, on Benefield Road, in the Market Place and by Waitrose. Three of the four bicycles were not locked. In August, three bicycles were stolen from Milton Road, South Road and the Market Place, where the bicycle was locked. Another three bikes were stolen in September from Milton Road and West Street. All the bicycles were locked.

On July 8th, between 12pm and 3pm, a car parked on East Road opposite the Co-op exit was hit by another vehicle that left the scene. The accident caused £4,000 of damage, for which the owner was found to be "at fault" by the insurance company because the identity of the hit and run culprit was not discovered.

In August there was armed police presence in three unmarked cars on Black Pot Lane. According to the Police Crime Map, a Public Order offence in that location is still under investigation.

On the 3rd of August, a resident reported a burglary between the times of 8am and 11:50am at their home on Mildmay Close in Oundle. There was no sign of forced entry, but money was stolen from the property.

On the 5th of August, there was an attempted burglary at a home on St Peters Road at 7pm. The offenders tried to force an entry into the home by the front door. Nothing was stolen.

Between the 13th and 14th of August, a number plate was stolen from a Ford car on Bridge Street.

On the 19th of August, a vehicle parked on South Road had a corrosive substance splashed on the car causing damage to the paint work.

On the 1st of September, a bicycle was stolen from the Market Place at around midnight.

On the 3rd of September, a thief tried the doors of cars on Lime Avenue to see if the cars were unlocked. No vehicles were stolen.

On the 15th of September, a shed was burgled on Main Street, Glapthorn. The burglars forced entry and stole four motorbikes from the shed.

On the 25th of September, there was a forced entry on a home on St Peter's Road. Nothing was stolen.

A total of 35 crimes were reported in September, an increase from September 2023 when 25 crimes were reported. In both

years, violence, sexual offences and anti-social behavior were the most common crimes.

A cyclist was involved in a hit and run at 12.45am by the junction of Hillfield Road and Glapthorn Road, involving a black saloon car. Three witnesses came forward.

Pumpkins were stolen from the front porches of multiple houses on 3 November. Ring cameras recorded an old Land Rover Defender going up and down the streets.

## Speeding

**Alasdair Hanlon**

There are no speed cameras on Northamptonshire roads, but the police regularly use mobile vans to identify those who are speeding on the roads. They release this information every month online.

In July, five people were caught speeding on the A605 in Barnwell and Thrapston where the speed limit is 60 miles per hour. These offences ranged from 68mph to 77mph. In Upper Benefield, on the A427, there were no fewer than 18 offences where the speed limit is considerably lower at 30mph. One driver was caught doing 35mph, another was traveling at 45mph. The average speed of the offenders was 39mph.

On the 18th of August, officers from the local neighbourhood policing team conducted speed gun enforcement on Benefield Road. Several motorists passed through at 30mph or less. One vehicle was clocked at 37mph and was reported for the speeding offence.

The Oundle Neighbourhood Policing Team carried out speed enforcement on Barnwell Road, Oundle on 21st August. Three vehicles were issued tickets for driving in excess speed, the highest being 45mph in a 30mph zone.

In August, only one offence occurred on the A605; one car was doing 69mph when they should have been going less than 60mph. Five offences happened on the A427 in August, where the speed limit is 30mph. No one was reported going more than 10mph over the speed limit.

In September, on the A605, where the speed limit is 60mph, one person was going at 70, one at 69, one at 72, and one at 73. Meanwhile, on the A427 only two people were caught speeding, both going at 35mph where the speed limit is 30mph.

On the 9th of November, the Neighbourhood Policing Team conducted speed enforcement on Benefield Road. Three drivers were issued tickets and reported for driving in excess speed, the highest being 40mph in a 30mph zone.



## Impact of VAT on educational services

**Brian Sung**

Starting in January, independent schools will no longer be excluded from charging a twenty percent VAT on their services. They will also no longer be eligible for the eighty percent business rate discount given to independent schools that operate as a charity.

Private schools have previously been exempted from charging VAT on their educational services, and their charitable status exempted them from business tax. The charitable status has historically been justified by a school's educational purpose and the outreach to community programmes and partnerships, as well as sharing resources and facilities. When the UK was a member of the European Union, the VAT directive prohibited taxing educational services, including private schools.

The government has said that it is up to the schools to decide how they are going to execute the tax, whether by adding the tax to the fees or absorbing the tax through their reserves or surpluses. Whilst the government expects the schools to manage the tax based on their own circumstances, the government also expects private schools to take steps to minimise their fees.

Oundle School said that the new budget has added five percent to its costs, and that absorbing the twenty percent VAT, combined

with the loss of Business Rate Relief and changes to both National Insurance employer contributions and the National Living Wage, would require saving over £10 million a year. The school said it will need to pass on the cost of VAT to parents, while continually looking at ways to reduce operating costs without compromising a quality provision. Seventy percent of its costs are in people.

Oundle School's Head, Sarah Kerr-Dineen, has strongly objected to the government's new policy. "We are now navigating a very difficult set of decisions, while abiding by our commitment to the quality of education we offer and our determination to stay true to what we value," she said. "The assumption that we would be able to mitigate this mid-year increase in costs is simply not possible without having a significant impact on the quality of education for which parents are paying. Our approach is a longer-term commitment to reduce costs judiciously and to minimise fee increases into the future, while making additional means-tested bursary support available to those parents for whom VAT makes fees unaffordable."

Independent school fees range from £15,000 to £50,000 annually. The additional tax will mean an increase of £3,000 to £10,000 for parents. Currently, about seven percent of school children attend

private schools. An unknown number of children from middle income families will leave the private sector because of the increased cost. Wealthier families will be able to absorb the cost without much impact, establishing wider social divides, instead of connecting them.

The Labour Party's platform planned for the introduction of VAT on school fees because of what they said was fairness and reallocation of funding. They estimate raising around £1.7 billion by 2029. The government aims to use the revenue to reinvest in employing teachers for the state sector. They are aiming to reduce class size, improve school facilities and reduce teacher shortages. They estimate being able to employ around 6500 new teachers to improve the student to teacher ratio in state-school education.

Critics of the imposition of VAT say it is not about raising extra funds; it is a punitive decision that does not recognise the value of independent schools.

The Independent Schools Council (ISC) point to a report by Oxford Economics that says independent schools across the UK contribute £16.5 billion to the economy, create over 328,000 jobs, and generate £5.1 billion in tax revenues. Oundle School employs 700 people and brings an additional 1100 residents to the population who spend money in the local economy.

British boarding schools have

a world-wide reputation for providing high-quality education, with excellent academic standards and a wide range of extracurricular activities, such as sports and arts. It is an educational model that is copied in other countries and has also attracted many international students to attend schools in the UK.

During a September debate in the House of Lords, Lord Winston defended the value that independent schools have to the wider community. He said that in his outreach at Imperial College, they worked with the private sector. He pointed to how the successful collaboration between Oundle School and the local state schools around Peterborough had made a huge difference to those state schools.

A group of 1400 private schools are raising a legal challenge against the VAT charge. The ISC wants a judicial review of the government's policy, claiming breaches of the European Convention on Human Rights on the prohibition of discrimination, and the right to education.

"The government's policy to impose VAT on school fees is deeply unfair to both the independent sector and to tax-paying parents," Sarah Kerr-Dineen said. "We have been working locally and nationally to engage with key politicians and stakeholders to outline the flaws in this policy and we support the decision taken by ISC to take legal action."

## Area schools celebrate Partnership programme

**Seb Arbuckle**

In November, Oundle School and Thomas Deacon Academy co-hosted the School Partnership Alliance Annual Conference. The conference welcomed 110 delegates from 82 educational organisations across the state and independent sectors who shared knowledge, ideas and experiences about advancing pupil outcomes through collaborative engagement.

The gathering was also an opportunity to celebrate six years of the Oundle, Peterborough, and East Northants Learning Partnership (OPEN LP) with its eight partner schools.

Over the past six years, the OPEN LP has run diverse initiatives to promote learning, creativity, and community involvement. Through collaborative events, it has worked to improve educational opportunities for pupils.

Among the many initiatives is the annual summer OPEN STEM Festival that involves

over 3,000 local pupils through an exciting combination of hands-on workshops, immersive activities, and expert-led sessions in collaboration with partner universities, local schools and guests from industry. The event has offered fun activities such as VR solar system tours, rocket car building, robotics, animal encounters, and engaging science shows. Highlights of the festival include a three-day residential for pupils from four schools, and full-day workshops for pupils from 18 different schools in the area.

Mathematics enrichment conferences, held three times a year, offer engaging seminars for pupils and training sessions for teachers. The STEM Potential programme supports pupils over four years with workshops and residentials that aim to prepare pupils for university. The ExpertEd programme reaches thousands of pupils with webinars and online lectures from inspirational professionals, such as astronaut



Chris Judd

Pupils from area schools attended the OPEN LP celebration and spoke about how much they have gained from being part of the Partnership collaboration.

Helen Sharman, and internationally capped football player Tim Ream.

Ian Holmes, deputy head of Kettering Buccleuch Academy, has been very involved with the Partnership. He said: "It has enriched the school curriculum beyond what we would normally be able to offer. Teachers can work with other like-minded professionals and share best

practice, resources and work together on exciting projects."

The partnership has created an engaging environment where learning goes beyond textbooks, offering pupils the chance to be inspired and challenged. These efforts not only prepare pupils for success in exams, but also inspire them to take an active role in shaping their futures.



## Oundle's financial and professional services power the Market Place

### Lucy Alikier

When people think of the Oundle Market Place, they usually think of the various retail shop businesses. However, there is also a thriving market of financial and professional services in the town that plays an integral role in the local economy.

The presence of these services in Oundle reflects Oundle being well-placed geographically for these companies to have a wide reach across the region, with accessible road links, such as the nearby M1. This reach extends across Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire and Lincolnshire and into cities, particularly Peterborough and Cambridge.

Legal services include Vincent Sykes at 4 West Street, who have been in Oundle for over 40 years. They focus on commercial law. Hunt and Coombs Solicitors at 4 New Street offer a range of legal services across the region for commercial, family and individual disputes.

Moreover, the town is home to various creative industries. This includes Charles Whaley Advertising, located at the

Court House, Mill Road. They offer advertising and marketing solutions to companies across the world. Paul Bancroft Architects develop significant creative projects in the region. For 50 years, they have provided commercial and residential architectural designs, with expertise in listed and historic building solutions.

Similarly, two surveying businesses are important in the region. Chartered surveyors Howard Davis Associates, at 4 Mill Road, have 50 years of experience providing residential and commercial property advice. Homesurv at 12 Market Place, is one of the largest independent providers of residential property surveying in region.

These businesses are all focused on serving the region, with many having various offices in Peterborough and throughout Northamptonshire. For example, the TC group are accountants and business advisors with 1000 people spread across 36 different offices.

The TC Group are just one of numerous financial services in Oundle, others include Bear Finance at New Street, which works

in hard and soft asset finance as well as business and vehicle finance and asset refinance.

Oundle and Stamford Mortgages on New Street is an example of the type of small business that drives a successful economy.

Emma O'Neill established her business cautiously in 2019 from her home office, and one year later rented office space at The Court-house in Oundle. After less than three years she moved to a prime location at the top of New Street.

The business now operates out of both Oundle and Stamford, providing mortgage services, most often focused within the region, but also covering areas across the UK. Her advisors provide a full range of mortgage services including first time buyer, remortgaging, buy to let investment, as well as insurance, such as life, critical illness and income protection. After five years she now has returning clients.

Like many women, Emma's interest in starting her own business stemmed from her desire to find flexibility in working around family commitments. Since establishing her business, Emma has had two children.

With her experiences and perspective as both a business owner and a mother, she has developed a business staffed entirely by women. This was not intentional but grew naturally from finding people with the right skills and with the shared values of balancing work and family life more flexibly.

She said: "When I look at the dynamic of the office, I look for advisors who will understand the struggles that we have to go through a little bit each day, looking after children, as well as trying to manage a full-time job."

With her employees, Emma creates a supportive workplace, supporting them as they gain qualifications and skills to progress in the business and industry. The office has a positive culture for professional development.

"When I interview people, I say I'm here to support them," she said. "I want every member of staff to have the option to progress as much as they want to, and I want to support them gaining qualifications or growing their career."

That sounds like a business plan for success.



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## School sets targets for sustainability

**Daniel Dai**

In a significant milestone for environmental sustainability within the town, Oundle School was recently awarded Green Accreditation, a testament to its commitment to reducing its environmental footprint and promoting sustainability.

The Green Accreditation is awarded by Investors in the Environment (iE), a national environmental accreditation scheme that encourages institutions to continually evaluate and improve their environmental practices. The school achieved its Bronze level in 2021, then its Silver level, and this summer, it attained the coveted Green level after years of incremental progress.

The journey towards this recognition has been neither quick nor simple. The school's pursuit of Green Accreditation began in 2020 when the leadership team recognised the need to formalise its environmental efforts. "It was a decision driven by the desire to do the right thing," said Bronwen Corby, Deputy Bursar of Operations. The school, already engaging in numerous green initiatives such as recycling, waste management, and sustainable

purchasing practices, aimed to consolidate these efforts under a structured framework led by a Sustainability Team.

The accreditation journey started with the Bronze award, which laid the foundation for the school's sustainability practices. "Bronze was about identifying what we were already doing and figuring out how to measure it," explained Bronwen. This step was crucial as it provided a baseline to compare future progress. The Silver award was about improving and target setting, and Green was about building on and documenting improvements in more granular detail.

The process involved extensive collaboration between staff, students, and external advisors. While the initial work was largely administrative, with the leadership team identifying and reporting on existing sustainability efforts, the scope of involvement grew over time. "The pupils were key. They are already worried about climate change, and their voices pushed the school to do more," said Paul Batterbury, Head of Biology, reflecting on the increasing role students played in driving initiatives.

The school's various teams, including environmental ambassadors, the Green House Reps, and a voluntary green team of students, all played active roles

in ensuring sustainability was embedded in daily operations. Notably, the student-driven projects, such as biodiversity initiatives and the Zero to Landfill campaign were instrumental in fostering community participation.

While many institutions have taken steps to reduce their carbon footprint, the Green Accreditation process added structure and accountability. "It pushed us to look at areas we hadn't considered. For instance, we didn't realize how much waste recycling was already happening behind the scenes in departments like IT," Bronwen said.

The Green Accreditation is not just a recognition, but also an ongoing process. The school will need to reapply annually, showing continuous improvement through detailed evidence, or establish its own systems and targets, and report to stakeholders. "It's a rolling process. Each year, we need to prove we're making incremental gains."

Looking ahead, the school is setting its sights on even greater sustainability goals. The long-term vision includes reducing its carbon emissions in line with statutory requirements within the next decade, but this is not without challenges. Paul said: "We're aiming to get to net zero in ten years. There's a limit to what we can do and what we can mandate."

The school's green initiatives

are not just top-down. The students, teachers and support teams in catering and grounds all contribute ideas and actions toward a more sustainable future. The involvement of such a wide range of stakeholders is key to driving change across the campus.

"We have to work together. If we don't, it won't happen," emphasised Paul.

Changes like improving insulation, replacing windows and installing heat pumps, require significant investment, and cannot be done all at once. The school has already implemented a range of measures, such as upgrading to LED lighting, reducing energy usage, and exploring renewable energy options like solar panels.

However, the balancing act between environmental goals and financial realities is an ongoing discussion. "It's about compromise," said Paul. "We're ambitious, but our resources are limited."

As the school prepares for its next phase of sustainability initiatives, the leadership team is already considering ways to build on the success of the Green Accreditation. Future plans include exploring new environmental strategies, and ensuring that both staff and students are equipped to take responsibility for their roles in reducing the school's environmental impact.

## The Rotary Club celebrates 50 years

**Imogen Mynhardt**

The Rotary Club of Oundle celebrated its 50th anniversary this past year. It is a milestone not only in years, but in the impact that the club has had on communities, locally and internationally.

The Rotary Club of Oundle was established in 1974, suggested and encouraged by the club in Corby. Since then, the members have followed the club's key principles "one profits most who serves best". The first president was Wally Goldsmith. His son, Paul, was president twice, and his daughter-in-law followed as president. Clare Goldsmith and the current president Jo Elwood were some of the first women to join the Oundle Rotary Club in 2011.

The Rotary International however, originally started with one man, Paul Harris, who formed the Rotary Club of Chicago in 1905. Now, the club has over 1.2 million members across the globe with 46,000 clubs in over 200 countries. All members are volunteers, guided by the motto "Service above self". Globally, Rotary International has prioritized the eradication of polio among

many projects to fight disease. Their efforts began in 1979, when they helped to vaccinate six million children in the Philippines.



Oundle Fire Station volunteers accompany the Santa sleigh and collect donations.

The Oundle club meets every two weeks on a Tuesday evening at 7pm when they plan events to raise as much money as possible for the charities that they are supporting that particular year, through events such as Santa's Sleigh Ride and the Christmas Concert.

The club welcomes new members who can spare a few hours a month to join their team. The current president Jo Elwood says club members are people that

love the local area and like to get involved and raise money for local and international charities through activities and events.

"We encourage anyone to get involved with your community to help others and form friendships.

Charity work brings a feel-good factor that is much needed and brings a smile to your face by helping others," she said.

Over the past 50 years, the club's many achievements include raising the money to plan and build the Rotary Kingfisher hide in Barnwell Country Park which was opened in 2003. The first three defibrillators in Oundle were donated by the club, as well as funding for the training to use them in the community

by the Heart Start Team, led by members of the Rotary Club.

During the Covid pandemic, they brought Christmas cheer with Santa's sleigh, supplied face masks and collected food for the local food banks.

Santa's sleigh takes place over two weeks in December, where Santa drives his sleigh around Oundle and villages with a team of elves and the crew from the Oundle Fire Station and The Salvation Army Band.

The sleigh will be running from the 11-13th and the 18-20th of December. The routes will be published on the club's Facebook page nearer the time.

Christmas time provides the best opportunity for the club to raise funds. This year, they will be raising money for charities including Birch Tree Cafe, Alzheimer's Society and Corby Dementia,

The club's fundraising has supported many other charities, including Oundle Volunteers, The Salvation Army, Marafiki Trust and Sailability, which offers people with disabilities living in or around Peterborough the opportunity to go sailing in specially adapted boats at Ferry Meadows and Rutland Water.



# Northants Hells Angels: brotherhood, motorcycles, and community spirit

## Roshan Arumugam

In recent years, members of the Northants Hells Angels Motorcycle Club (HAMC) have become familiar participants in the Remembrance Sunday ceremonies in Oundle, helping the Royal Legion to organise the event.

When the motorcycle club gathers for events, they form an impressive presence with cruiser style motorcycles and distinctive black leather vests. While the club is a brotherhood of motorcycle enthusiasts, notoriety for criminal activity among some groups can be intimidating for outsiders. To counter this impression, they emphasise they are a club, not a "gang".

Oundle resident, Lee Dixon has been a member for many years. He said he is aware of negative associations but is proud of the Northants club's reputation. "It's an unfortunate fact of life in any demographic that the actions of a few can taint the reputation of many," he said. "We believe that as long as we are true to ourselves and set our own high standards then this will go a long way to showing the club in a positive light."

The Hells Angels Motorcycle Club is a worldwide force that has 475 chapters in 63 countries. The club was founded in 1948 in California and was said to have intended to offer brotherhood to ex-servicemen who found it difficult to reintegrate into society.

The club's name is said to have been taken from the "Hell's Angels" squadron of the 303rd Bombardment Group, which was active in the European theatre of World War II. There's a memorial to the Hell's Angels squadron at RAF Molesworth, from where they flew a total of 364 missions, comprising 10,271 sorties.

This founding body of ex-servicemen likely influenced its militaristic internal ranking system. Most clubs have presidents, vice-presidents and other similar roles. Additionally, new members are generally vetted and must undergo an initiation process before becoming a fully-fledged Hells Angel.

The order and natural security of the internal hierarchy and vetting system gives the club a sense of exclusivity, which has only strengthened the brotherhood that the club has become known for.

The club is also known for their iconic uniform, consisting of a black leather vest emblazoned with the name Hells Angels and their signature winged skull logo, known as the death's head, usually

worn on the back as part of a three piece patch. Red and white are also used to display the number 81 on many patches. The 8 and 1 stand for the respective positions in the alphabet of H and A. Club members' vests also typically sport the name of their chapter and a variety of other red and white patches, such as "insane".

Hells Angels chapters have different traditions, nicknames, and symbols, and the specific meaning of any patch or emblem can vary depending on the chapter or the individual.

The significance of their patches is shrouded in secrecy. The group

internal systems of chapters can be very secretive, which can make them suited to organised criminal activity.

The Hells Angels maintain that any criminal activities undertaken by members of the club are the responsibility of the individuals and should not incriminate the club as a whole.

The UK club filed a federal court complaint in Washington, protesting the Hells Angels designation as a "known criminal organisation" by US Homeland Security, barring entry to the US.

In the UK, the National Criminal Intelligence Service has

work with my father as soon as I left school."

Lee's collection of motorcycles has grown over the years, consisting of predominantly Harley Davidson and Triumph models, but he still maintains that his favourite motorcycle is always the "last one I bought or built!"

Lee's time with the club has seen him involved in community activities, such as the town's Remembrance services. He has also raised money for the Wellidogs charitable trust and the Air Ambulance, among other charities. His work often sees him called to the aid of individuals who have fallen on hard times, offering the sense of brotherhood which the club is known for.

"We are conscious of the negative publicity the club can receive, and we are proud that our reputation locally goes some way to counteracting that," explained Dixon. "What you see from us, is who we are in everyday life."

Members of the the Hell's Angels are encouraged to participate in "ride-outs", long group bike journeys on the open road, aiming to cover 20,000 miles a year.

The Northants chapter's "ride-outs" have seen them travel all over Europe, to countries as far as Hungary, Slovenia and Austria.

"In the early years as a member of the club, all of us in the Northants Chapter rode to the south of Spain for a gathering of members from all over the world," recounted Lee.

"The shared experience of life on the road together, experiencing different cultures and landscapes along the way will live with me forever. It instilled a passion for travel and adventure that has never left me."

Lee is also known for his passion for tattoos and body art. "I have always had a passion for body art, so it was a natural progression to own and run a tattoo and piercing studio. In recent years the success of our catering business has left little time for other enterprises."

When asked about the club's future, Lee said: "If we can promote our lifestyle in a positive way that attracts younger potential members, then that will secure our future. If in 10 years' time we are still doing what we are doing now, then it will be a success."

He further explained: "Motorcycles give you a sense of freedom in an ever more regulated world. This is the common denominator within motorcycle culture. If you want to get involved, start with getting a bike!"



NorthantsHAMC

Members of the Northants Hells Angels Motorcycle Club assist the Royal Legion at Remembrance Service events in Oundle.

is not only secretive about its emblems, they are also protective. The name Hells Angels, in any form of spelling, along with all variations of the death's head insignia are copyrighted. Numerous suits brought by the club to protect its brand, include one against Walt Disney Motion Pictures for trademark infringement and one against the fashion house, Alexander McQueen.

After the club's inception in California, chapters formed across the United States. Some chapters became associated with the hippy movement of the 1960s, and were often at Grateful Dead concerts. The club began reaching overseas with its first European charter issued in London in 1969 for two clubs, one in East London and one in South London. They merged in 1973.

Each chapter has varying internal systems, although they all share a signature style and connection to the overarching club. Different chapters often have relationships with each other. Relations with non-Hells Angels motorcycle clubs have sometimes involved violent rivalry. The

investigated criminal activity among members for roughly 30 years. In 2019, 27 foreign members of the club were barred entry to the UK when they arrived to join the 50th anniversary celebrations of the club's British contingent. NCIS has never been able to prove that Hells Angels operate as an organised crime gang in the UK.

The growth of the club has been due to the club's social bonds around motorcycle culture. These qualities are what attracted Lee Dixon to the club. "I knew of the Hells Angels during my formative years, but it was by meeting them later in life at local motorcycle shows and charitable events that I realised that they had the traditional values of truth, trust and honesty that I had grown up with," he said. "The sense of a collective brotherhood of like-minded people was very appealing. I approached my local chapter and asked what was involved."

He comes from a family passionate about motorcycle culture. "Having a father who ran a motorcycle shop meant I was around the biker lifestyle from an early age," he said. "I was keen to



## Interview with Lee Barron MP

**Liav Rosenthal, Vidushi Singhvi**

*You've had quite a journey from trade unionism to Parliament. What was the biggest lesson you've learned along the way?*

It's about representing people. I think the only thing that's kind of shocked me a little bit is the tsunami of casework that you get and people's levels of expectation. You know, we get 1000 emails a week, and if you haven't replied within two days, they're wondering why. It's challenging meeting those expectations. And you know, you can't get everything right.

People say that they elect politicians to represent them, and they do, that's right. They also elect us to be part of a government. And if the government isn't strong and stable, then the country isn't strong and stable. The difficulty then is that you start to get into the realms of whether you're representing us first or your party first. And it's kind of a tricky balance.

We've seen some tough decisions recently which haven't been met with universal popularity, to say the least. But at the end of the day, if you come into this and the government is weak, the country itself, its economy and everything stands on the edge. So, it's important that we have that discipline.

*When did you realize you wanted to pursue a career in politics, and why did you choose to be affiliated with the Labour Party?*

The Labour Party are my values. I believe in equality, solidarity and social justice. I believe that in the sixth richest country in the world, our economy should be the route out of poverty. I don't think people should be at work and also claiming benefit, which they have to in order to sustain their living.

If there's one thing that I'd want to do, before I leave politics, I'd like to close the last food bank. Not because we don't like them, but because we won't need them. Those are the kind of values that I have. Getting involved in politics is about sharing those values and spreading those values.

I also believe that politics shouldn't be for the playground for the privileged. I believe that more working class people should get involved because it takes all of us to make up the society. There are no betters, we're all equal. It's just the contributions that we've got to bring in order to make that kind of happen for a better, fairer and more representative society.

*What do you think are the government's most important domestic priorities?*

First of all, stabilising the economy and getting it growing. Because when the economy grows, then basically that's what puts money in the pockets to be able to make the changes that we need. There're so many of our public services at the moment which aren't working for people, like the NHS. We need to get that back on its feet.

Last time Labour was in power we had a two-week guarantee for tests and cancer treatment, and that's obviously now been blown out the window. You had the highest satisfaction rates, we've now got the worst. Something's gone badly wrong over years and needs to be put right.

than the truth on those platforms, and that needs to be dealt with. I think the Australians are doing some work on it at the moment, and we need to, because what it's feeding isn't healthy for us as a nation, or indeed as a democracy. That's what really concerns me more than anything. And as you say, that led to concerns being used by extremists to fuel hatred.

People are concerned, there's no getting away from that, but my point is that they're turning those concerns into hatred. It's one thing to be concerned about illegal immigration and it's another thing then to burn a hostel or a hotel that people are staying in. They're human beings and what we've got to do is find a human response to this.

Social media is being used for all

*Recently, you voted against the motion to block the cutting of the winter fuel allowance, which was quite an unpopular decision. What support is there for those who do live in fuel poverty?*

The support is there. What we did was we means tested it. That means that those that need it are targetted to get it. What I voted against was a Conservative motion to restore the universal winter fuel payment, which means that millionaire pensioners would get it and UK pensioners living abroad would get it. I thought that was a little bit wrong.

What I'm concerned about is those who sit just above the mean tested rate of those that get pension credit. I've said that the cliff edge is too sharp. What we need to do is to put a safety net in, so anybody that falls through the gap, we can basically catch.

The Warmer Homes fund is



It seems everything at the minute is a bit broken. Phoning up a doctor to try and get an appointment, you have to phone back the next day because it's full. Dentistry is something which people struggle with at the moment, the state of the roads, transport. There's a lot for us to do and it's going to take a while to do it, but stabilising the economy has got to be the first step towards creating a better future.

*What role do you believe the government should play in combating the rise of radicalization online, which contributed to incidents like the Southport riots?*

I think that there should be some fundamental review of social media. Full stop. Lies travel faster

the wrong reasons and there's no accountability for what people say or do.

One thing that we learned from what happened in the summer was some people now are going to have to think about what they say. People who, if you knew them or saw them in the street, you'd think of them as regular, decent people. But these same people are now in prison for some of the things that they said.

One's the wife of a Conservative councillor in Northampton. She said, "burn it down, and if that makes me a racist, then, I'm a racist".

Well, that racist is now in prison because of what she did, and social media. There needs to be some review into it without a shadow of a doubt.

available, but I've got real concerns about people having to go around claiming benefit. If we know that there are 800,000 people who are not getting fuel payments that are entitled to them, why don't we just give it to them? Why wait for them to claim it? There's a lot of pride in people who say to me, "I've never claimed benefit in my life". Even those that are entitled to it won't claim it, because for them it's a badge of honour to say "I've never claimed anything. I don't want it". So why can't we just give it to people who are entitled to it? There are some people that clearly don't need it.

It isn't something, believe me, that I walked into politics to want to do. I've spent two years to get myself elected, and on the 14th day of me sitting in Parliament, I had



to go through and vote on that. It wasn't a nice thing to do in any way, shape or form, but it goes back to my first point. If Labour people had voted against it and the government had lost that vote, then the government would be at best weak, at worst, vulnerable, and when your government is weak and your government is weak and vulnerable, so is your country.

We've had four prime ministers in six years. That's the level of chaos that we're going to have to put by. And part and parcel of that, is staying united in terms of providing a strong and stable government.

*Oundle School is quite a big part of the local economy. What's your opinion on the imposition of VAT and the elimination of business relief on private schools?*

That's been a key plank of Labour's policy for over two years now. It isn't something that we sprung on people at the last minute. They've written to me in terms of delaying the introduction of VAT on school fees and I wrote back that it wasn't something I was prepared to support, because it isn't a shock, people could see this coming a long way off and should have planned for it, now make the adjustments. The government said that schools should use reserves to meet the cost, not necessarily pass it on to parents, which is something that we've continually pointed out.

It's a policy in a manifesto that I stood on, and it's a policy and a manifesto that in effect the country voted in favour of, and we're going to make the changes to try and get the education system across the board working better for all.

*The Labour Party in Corby won a big swing from the Conservatives, but a large number of voters defected to the Reform Party. You mentioned that the relationship between voters and politicians has deteriorated. So how do you aim to rebuild this trust?*

To me, that is one of the crucial elements moving forward, because I think that there's a real issue around democracy. In one constituency in Scotland, only 48% of the people voted. That means the majority there turned their back on democracy. And if you do that, something else is going to fill that void. What we've got to do is treat this really carefully and really seriously. We need to restore a bit of faith.

I think we can do that by doing fundamentally two or three things. First of all, providing that stability where people start to believe in politics again. When I was growing up, there was always this view that the next generation would be better

off than the generation before. That's changed. People haven't had a pay rise for the best part of 14 years in real terms because it was pay cuts, pay freezes, pay squeezes across the sectors from 2010 onwards. I think when people start to feel change, and start to see it, they'll start to believe in politics again.

I think we are in a different political world. I think the world has turned sharply to the Right, because it sees the answer to problems in a very divisive kind of narrative where people are to blame. It's always the people that are the problem. It's them versus them. I think it has taken a turn to the Right, that probably came from the States. When the then president of the so-called Free World tells congresswomen who were black to go home, that means people can say that in the staff canteen. It means they can say it in the world of work, it emboldens people to push that boundary.

We've got a bit of it in the UK with Reform. I do think we're in a four-party state now. In 2017, Labour and the Tories were almost 90 percent of the vote. In the last election Labour won a landslide with 34 percent of the vote. That's changed significantly in a very short space of time.

My fear is people will go further to the Right because they'll see that as the only option they've got. The challenge for Labour over the five-year period that we've got, is to restore their faith and then people can see that in the mainstream, in the centre ground, we can do better than when we rush off to the more radical kind of extremes.

*What local issues do you think will be a priority this coming year?*

We're trying to do a couple of things. We want a jobs market which is better for people, so less zero-hour contracts, more security, where people know what it is that they're going to earn and work each week.

We're going to pull together a Skills Council with the local colleges. Vocational qualifications should be viewed as well as academic qualifications. We're going to pull employers together. We want the best for Corby and East Northants.

Nike are moving here. They're going to put their UK headquarters in Corby. I've met with them. I want to see what jobs they're going to bring. What we don't want are loads of temporary contracts, and we've had a really good discussion. Their European headquarters is based in Brussels, and they were telling me that more than 50 percent of the staff there have

been there over ten years. That's a decent retention rate. That means they're doing something proper to treat workers, and that's what we want to see. The local jobs market is going to be crucial.

Also, special educational needs for children is a busted and a broken system which is failing. Children who are entitled by right to an education are being denied because they've got special educational needs, particularly in the state sector.

I did some work with a lady whose daughter has been out of school since this time last year. Her tribunal is next January for her to get her EHC plan. 98 percent of parents that go to tribunals over SEN issues, win their case. Either the tribunal agrees with them or the local authority withdraws their case when they get to the doorsteps of the tribunal. That's a system which is built and designed to fail children and parents.

I also want to start a national conversation about the future of the Royal Mail. The Royal Mail is a sector that some people still rely on. We're not all online. The workforce has been treated shockingly. There's now a two tier workforce, and the service itself is still fundamental to the nation's infrastructure. We need some sort of social contract with the company to make sure they're still going to deliver a service that once again serves the nation.

*Do you know what the status is of the promised Kettering Hospital upgrade?*

It's under review, because they promised an upgrade and they didn't fund it. You can't spend money you ain't got. If somebody turns around to you and says I'll buy you this and then there's no money to buy it, then you're going to find it difficult, so it is under review.

I've got a view on it, incidentally. I'm not sure the site is fit for purpose anyway for an extension. I think that if we're going to do something, we should maybe look at something new. I dare say my Kettering counterpart might disagree with me, but part of the review ought to look at whether or not the proposed extension is indeed even achievable there. And if it's not, put it somewhere else.

The Corby Diagnostic Centre is still going ahead. We've got spades in the ground there.

But I think it just comes back to that fundamental point about why people don't believe in politics anymore. If somebody tells you they're going to build 40 new hospitals and there aint 40 new hospitals or indeed the funding for 40 new hospitals, people think, well

that was a load of old tosh. You know what we gotta do is be honest with people, and sometimes the honest answers aren't the popular ones, but we've gotta get away from just being popular in the short term with sticking plasters, to being honest with people about a better long-term future.

*How do you plan on staying engaged with the concerns of your constituents?*

The great thing about our constituents is they'll always tell us what their concerns are. I ain't gonna worry too much about being necessarily engaged. They're not backwards in coming forwards. That's for certain.

But there are things that I do. We have little groups that we've set up in each of the communities, and we have little WhatsApp groups. For instance, recently there was a spate of burglaries in Raunds. Somebody WhatsApp'd that to me and said Lee, you need to get on to this. So, by the next day, I'd written to the assistant chief constable asking what we're doing about this. The following week we had a walk around the victims of the burglaries with the police, enabling and bringing people together.

We've got a surgery in Oundle this evening, so we're getting out to meet with people. But I don't just want to meet with people who've got problems. That's only one thing. I want to meet with people so that they can engage, and a member of parliament can be accessible to them. There's a lot of security issues around that because two members of parliament have been killed in recent years, so the security services say you can't do that.

But what I want to do is say "come and have a cup of tea with your MP, come and have a chat". Don't just bring your problem, bring yourself. I want to meet people, I want to be accessible to them, just sit down and chew the fat a little bit. They can tell me what their issues are, what their concerns are, and then I can act on it. I think there are good ways of doing it.

*Did you drive your vespa here? I read it's got 16 mirrors?*

It's got more than 12. Over the top if you ask me. No, it's too cold. I'm a fair-weather rider and it's got continental white wall tires, so we're not going to get them dirty for anybody.

I got my first Vespa when I was 16 years old. It was a PK 50 XL. It had a top speed of 36 mph. It took me nine and a half hours to get to Morecambe Bay, but I did it. Some people arrive in speed, I arrive in style. That's how I've always looked at it.



# Southport riots: how a rampage exposed the perils of misinformation and the fault lines in British society

**Vidushi Singhvi**

In a horrifying event that shook the town of Southport earlier this year, a 17-year-old was charged with the murder of three young girls. His rampage left eight other children, and five adults critically injured, sparking outrage. The tragedy ignited spiralling violence and unleashed ideological tensions, ultimately culminating in acts such as flares thrown at statues of Winston Churchill.

What began as local heartbreak, quickly transformed into a national crisis, exposing deep-rooted prejudices within British society and highlighting the corrosive influence of misinformation.

For many this event was merely another scandal, plastered across tabloids for a few weeks in the summer before fading from collective memory. Headlines at the time chose to fixate upon the insensate violence of rioters. I sought to explore the root causes behind this eruption.

Misinformation, especially online, thrives on preexisting biases, serving as a vehicle that amplifies latent tensions. In Southport's case, these tensions were already simmering, and social media platforms only intensified them. Islamophobia and xenophobia, damaging attitudes in their own right, were sharpened in this digital forge, striking deep into society's existing cracks with precision.

Some have suggested that the Southport riots echoed the tumult of the 1980s Thatcher-era unrest. The *Financial Times* writer Lucy Fisher said it was a "summer of unrest", a chaotic outburst spurred by a kind of heat-induced boredom, transforming British streets into an outlet for pent-up frustration.

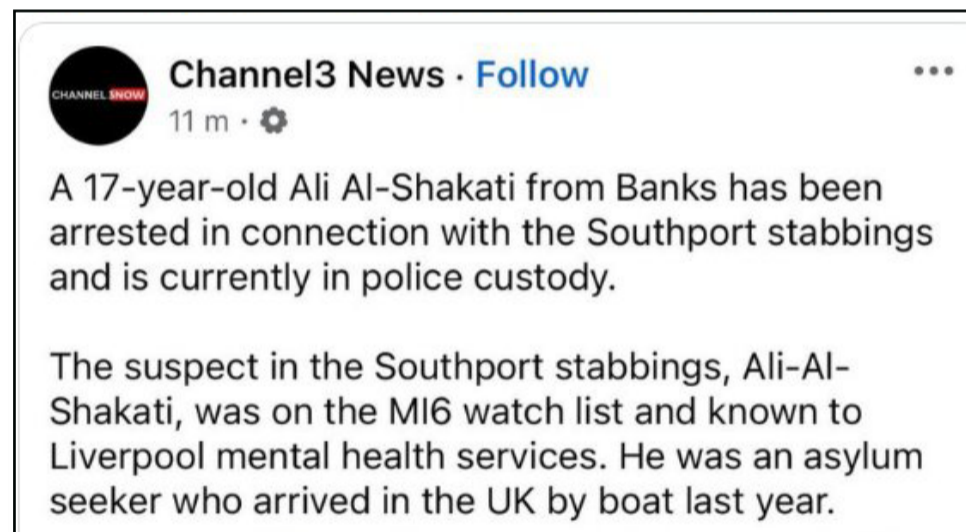
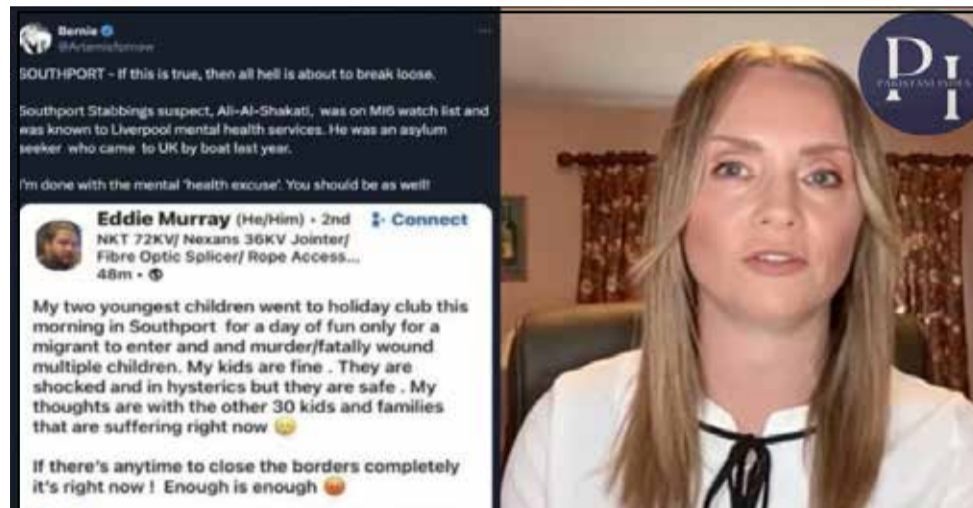
Yet the violence in Southport marked a significant departure from that era. Unlike the riots of the Thatcher years, which were driven primarily by socioeconomic grievances, the Southport incident was fuelled by a more insidious fear of "the other".

The sentiments unleashed by misinformation on online platforms about Southport indicate a deeper societal issue that transcends mere discontent, revealing a nation grappling with its identity and values.

Misinformation, unchecked, did more than skew public perception, it catalysed a frenzy of suspicion and anger. In an environment where old prejudices had already mutated, online platforms served to legitimise and fuel these harmful sentiments, creating a potent

atmosphere for violent expression.

Tracing the roots of the misinformation leads to Bernadette Spofforth, a businesswoman from Chester. Spofforth was arrested on August 8 for sharing a false name of the Southport suspect, Ali al Shakati, who she said was an asylum seeker who came to the UK on a boat and was on a MI6 watch list. She wrote: "If this is true than all hell is about to break loose." With a substantial following of over 50,000 on X, her post unleashed a torrent of anti-Muslim sentiment.



Bernadette Spofforth and the now offline site Channel3 News were among the first to publish misinformation about the identity of the Southport suspect.

Spofforth later deleted her post and apologised. She said that her post could not reasonably be seen as the catalyst for the riots that ensued. While she insisted that she committed no crime, her actions reflected a lack of personal responsibility.

The police took no further action due to insufficient evidence, but the charges raise questions about the efficacy of existing laws in addressing misinformation. In a time when social media can incite real-world violence, it seems increasingly clear that a more robust framework for accountability is necessary to deter reckless behaviour that can have devastating consequences.

Another driver of the misinformation was Channel3 News, a crime news aggregator with ownership traced by ITV to a

man in Pakistan. This geographical dispersion complicates efforts to hold the site accountable and reflects the global nature of misinformation. Authorities arrested Farhan Asif in Pakistan in relation to the site's misinformation about Southport that reached millions, but he was released after police could not find evidence that he was the originator of the false news. The site is no longer online.

While a spokesperson later issued an apology for the site's inaccurate reporting, such

found that his posts, some later debunked, have garnered over 1.2 billion impressions since the beginning of the year.

This is not just a matter of impressive optics. This reach underscores a pressing issue of public responsibility: the extent to which Musk's and other platforms should be held accountable for the repercussions of their content.

The legal quandary surrounding this role is complex. Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act in the U.S. shields social media platforms from liability for third-party content, complicating efforts to hold them accountable for the fallout from misinformation spread on their sites.

Ultimately, Musk's vision of X as a free-for-all public square may align more closely with a form of techno-libertarianism or, as some have suggested, a "techno-authoritarianism" that leaves little room for democratic safeguards.

Whether or not regulations change, the implications of these platforms' unchecked influence over global conversations raise critical concerns for democracies that value integrity and security.

The Southport riots reveal a pressing need for improved laws around online accountability. Implementing mandatory content verification processes and requiring platforms to work closely with independent fact-checkers could mitigate the spread of damaging misinformation. Enhanced regulation, potentially aligned with the UK Online Safety Bill, might address the structural issues that enable digital echo chambers.

Adding another layer of complexity is diversity in the UK. With the nation becoming increasingly multicultural, there is need for initiatives that encourage unity.

Education programmes focused on digital literacy and cultural awareness can help prevent the splintering of communities into polarised, prejudice-prone groups. However, such policies call for broad-based support to be truly effective. Potentially, the government could spearhead such an initiative.

Southport reminds us of the fragile balance between trust, accountability, and freedom; one that demands our constant attention. Like cracks in a foundation, we can either ignore them and invite disaster or take deliberate steps to reinforce them, preserving the stability of the whole nation.

retractions do little to address the harm caused or to ensure that the perpetrators of misinformation are held accountable for their role in the spread of harmful content.

Even prominent public figures may have been to blame for the spread of false information. In the midst of the Southport riots, X owner, Elon Musk told his 204 million followers that "civil war is inevitable" in the UK.

With his support for absolute free speech, even his minor endorsements can lend credibility to otherwise fringe views, pushing them into mainstream discussions. Statistics back this up. According to the *Financial Times*, after his provocative post about Southport, site traffic on X saw a marked increase. Analysts from the Centre for Countering Digital Hate have



# The election of Trump 2.0 creates unease in UK

## Ben Jurdjevic

The relationship between the British government and the incoming Trump administration could be off to a rather rocky start, depending on how forgiving Donald Trump feels. When he was a backbench MP in 2018, the foreign secretary David Lammy said: "Trump is not only a woman-hating, neo-Nazi-sympathising sociopath. He is also a profound threat to the international order that has been the foundation of Western progress for so long." He declared he would be "out protesting on the streets" if Trump came to the UK.

While it was not the best of diplomatic starts, David Lammy is not alone in changing his mind about Trump. After all, the incoming vice president, JD Vance was once a fierce critic and called Trump "America's Hitler", before transforming into a stalwart loyalist. David Lammy has also called his criticism "old news" and has since said that he is looking forward to working with the administration and nurturing the special relations that the two countries share.

A Trump presidency will mean several things for the UK, particularly regarding foreign policy. Trump's "America First" philosophy may prompt the UK to take more responsibility to drive and lead political discussions in Europe, particularly concerning Ukraine and Israel. Domestically, the tariffs that Trump is promising to impose on imports will not only strain trade relations, but also affect the economy and UK businesses. Analysts predict that tariffs will reduce the UK's growth and lead to an economic slowdown.

The UK and US have long enjoyed a "special relationship" due to their shared culture. Whether the US continues to value that relationship depends on the attitudes of his incoming administration of MAGA loyalists, and most crucially, what Trump thinks he can get out of it.

## Andrey Savenko

When I interviewed Oundle residents in September about the US election, there was appreciation of the "special relationship" between the UK and the US, but there was also worry about the future of international relations. One person said: "It is vitally important, for America and the world, that Kamala Harris wins. Trump must disappear from the political stage." After the election, I returned to find out what people's reactions were to the results.



Since Trump was reelected, I've been in a somber mood. I've started to try and get to grips with what happened. I couldn't look at any news website. I subscribe to the FT, I couldn't look at that, couldn't look at the BBC. I was in a real mood for a week. Trump is just in it for himself. It's just a massive ego trip for him. It's all about him. I think the first time he was elected, we couldn't believe it really happened, it was by chance. But this time, it's something else. I don't think much is going to change in our relationship with the US and the Middle East. And Ukraine? That's not simple. Putin has Trump under his thumb. He's a useful idiot. I feel really sad. I've been to America several times, and there's some lovely people out there. But there are hardline Trump fans, and it doesn't matter what he's done or continues to do, they will still support him. A guy who's been bankrupt six times, a guy who's had terrible sexual cases brought against him in the past. All this stuff should never get through the vetting process to get to the top. I can't imagine for one minute someone like him ever becoming leader of any other western democracy. I think in time we'll all look back and say, that was a rocky period.

*Cafe Owner*

I think it was inevitable he was going to win. One part of me thinks he might actually just do what he says he's going to do, so he will deliver. But part of me feels sorry for the Americans. You can't get rid of the stigma against him. His first policies were all very hard hitting anyway, with "the wall". He's always been a very aggressive character. But then you've had Biden who hasn't really sort of achieved much. So, maybe it's what they do need. The war in Ukraine is the most important issue for us, and keeping good relations with these countries, because I think we're all very vulnerable. Someone needs to stand up to them. Who knows whether Trump can do that. He's been there before, so it's a bit of a *deja vu*.

*Estate Agent*



I'm not happy with the result of the election. I don't believe that a convicted felon should be allowed to be the head of state of an entire nation. I am surprised Trump had so much support when there was someone else quite qualified. I do think there is a massive gap between them. I do think Harris would have probably been a much better president than Trump will be. I don't think it's even close.

I think the most important issue in the election was women's rights, and how people should be able to choose what they do with their body, at least from what I saw. I think it's a huge reason not to vote conservative in the US.

Internationally, I think that Trump sets a bad example for other nations. A lot of nations in Europe have growing right-wing parties that can have quite harmful views. I do think that his election sets a really bad example and that it can get worse, too. And with the Ukraine war, it's not going to be as easy as he always makes it out

to be. Every time he talks, he says how he'll just get it done, but it's not quite that simple. To be fair, I don't think Kamala Harris would have dealt with those issues that well, at least from what I've seen, but I definitely don't think Trump will be any better.

I will say, I'm very impressed how someone has managed to be so charismatic and so underqualified at the same time, that they've managed to convince half of the population of a massive country that he would be fit to lead with a felony or two under his belt. I'm shocked. I've just been shocked since it happened, really. It's just such a surprise. It just feels really stupid that over half the US voted for a felon.

*Bartender*



The most important issue to us is stability in the Middle East. Ukraine is one thing and but Gaza in particular, because of Israel. That whole problem there could easily blow up even further. You've got the likes of Iran involved and everything else. For the sake of the world, I think that's the biggest issue, followed closely by Ukraine.

The economy affects us, but actually, to be fair, the American economy does quite well under Trump. But I think Trump is inflammatory. I think that's the problem. Would Harris have been better? Who knows. She was untried. But whatever percentage it is, thinks Trump is a good thing. They voted for him because they think he's good for employment and everything else. I don't think it's good for the rest of the world, in the long run. He's unpredictable. He'll change his policies, he's done it before, and it could be something totally outlandish. The only predictable thing about him is how much he loves himself.

*Estate Agent*

I followed the US election. The President has considerable powers both on US internal issues and on the US decision-taking on foreign affairs issues. At a time when we face considerable challenges and risks in addressing Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the decisions taken by the incoming President will be critical to world peace and stability. Russia, a dictatorship, has considerable potentially destructive nuclear weapons.

I had hoped that Kamala Harris, the Democratic candidate would win. Donald Trump's record in office, in my view, demonstrated his unfitness for office. Kamala Harris came across as sensible and experienced in public life.

With a Donald Trump win, we cannot be certain how he will respond to the serious issues, particularly Russia's challenges, and, of course, how to come to terms with China. Trump could well make very serious mistakes. The British government will want to accredit a British Ambassador to Washington who, when issues in which Britain has a locus come up, will make the case to Trump for sensible measures without infuriating him.

*Councillor*



In 2016, I was shocked that Trump had won, but I thought it was a fluke. This year I voted for Kamala Harris, a competent, experienced, empathetic and principled candidate. I thought she had a very good chance of winning and am very disappointed at the outcome. There's been a lot of handwringing about what went wrong with her campaign, analysis of what demographic block of voters did not support her, postmortems about the Democratic party's messaging and what Harris or Biden should have, could done better. Harris ran a very good campaign. She set out policy proposals from childcare and healthcare to eldercare. She addressed inflation, immigration and small business growth. But people rejected her. I have no empathy for the concerns or fears of those who voted for Trump. We know that Trump incited a riot against the nation's seat of government and tried to overturn an election. We know that he did not care about the violent threats made against his colleagues. We know that Trump was found liable for sexual abuse; he is an adjudicated rapist; he is a felon guilty of multiple charges of business fraud; he's a serial liar, an ageing "moron". The fact that Americans chose Trump is disgusting. That's the story.

*Librarian*



## From Oundle to Ontario: the journeys of Elizabeth Simcoe

### Joshua Arumugam

Writing about lives in the past can lead historians down a warren of rabbit holes. Following the article in the previous Oundle Chronicle issue about Elizabeth Creed of Cobthorne and the restoration of her memorials at Titchmarsh, a reader wrote to tell us about one of Elizabeth's descendants who was born locally, but who adventured afar to remote territories, and made a significant impact.



Images: Toronto Public Library

Portrait of Elizabeth Posthuma Simcoe 1766-1850.

Elizabeth Simcoe, born Elizabeth Postuma Gwillim, lost all her close relatives in her early life, bore eleven children, travelled extensively through the wild territories of Canada and endured the harsh living conditions there. Despite these challenges, she managed to raise nine of her children to adulthood and leave lasting legacies through her church building and furnishing.

Elizabeth Gwillim was born in 1762 in Aldwinckle. Her father, Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Gwillim (born in Cotterstock) married his cousin Elizabeth Spinkles of Aldwinckle. Both were descended from Elizabeth Creed of Cobthorne, Oundle.

Her father died just months before her birth while posted in Germany, and her mother died during childbirth. Elizabeth was baptised on the same day as her mother's burial. The middle name Posthuma was given to her in commemoration of her posthumous birth after her parents' deaths.

Elizabeth was first cared for by her grandparents, but both her

grandparents died by the time she was six years old. She then moved with her aunt to Devon, where she grew up.

In 1782 she married John Graves Simcoe, born in Cotterstock, the godson of her aunt's husband, becoming Elizabeth Simcoe. Her life took a large turn in 1791 when her husband was appointed as the first Lieutenant Governor of Upper Canada. After receiving this news, they took their two

youngest children and set sail for the colonies.

When she arrived in Canada after 43 days at sea, Elizabeth started to keep a record of her journey, amassing a collection of 595 watercolours and several diaries that described what life was like in colonial Canada.

The family first arrived in Massachusetts in 1791, where she wrote her first entry in her collection of diaries: "We arrived in Weymouth. I walked with Lady Collier on the Esplanade in the evening".

They still had more travelling to do however, setting sail for Canada in September 1791, arriving two months later at Quebec City, where they were meant to winter. Elizabeth was not impressed. She wrote, "I was not disposed to leave the Ship to enter so dismal looking of a Town as Quebec appeared thro' the mist sleet & rain."

Despite her initial impressions, her feelings towards Quebec quickly improved and throughout her time there she documented the flora, fauna, and scenery in a series

of watercolours and diary entries.

However, her husband's duties were further inland, so with the arrival of better weather they continued to travel along the St Lawrence River to Newark, now Niagara-on-the-Lake where she saw the spray from Niagara Falls: "A clear cold day, made little way, a head wind. I saw the spray of the Falls of Niagara rising like a cloud. It is 40 miles distant."

Later, her diaries detailed a description of the falls: "...the fall is said to be but 170 feet in height, the River previously rushes in the most rapid manner on a declivity for 3

children, Elizabeth quickly settled back into life in England. She stayed at the family's home in Wolford that she had bought and built with her inheritance, rarely leaving. Back in England, she had four more children. None of her seven surviving daughters married during her lifetime.

Not too long after Elizabeth's return, John Simcoe was appointed Commander in Chief in India, and she was set to follow him. However, he became sick while in Portugal and was sent back to England. Elizabeth had been in London preparing for India, but



Don River, 1793. Elizabeth Simcoe's watercolours are among the earliest recorded images of Canada.

miles & those rapids are a very fine sight - the fall itself is the grandest sight imaginable from the immense width of waters & the circular form of the grand fall...the whole center of the fall is frequently seen a Rainbow." She also painted several watercolours of the falls from different viewpoints and perspectives.

The Simcoes wintered in Newark, where Elizabeth gave birth to a daughter, Katherine, in mid-January 1793. Elizabeth also travelled extensively during her time in the Niagara peninsula. In Queenstown she described a great storm with strong winds, fearing they would blow away her tent: "I wrapped myself up in two or three greatcoats and intended, if the tent was blown down, to take shelter under the great dinner table. The rain and wind did not cease for two hours, and we had no means of drying our clothes and were obliged to sleep in a wet tent."

In the next three years, Elizabeth accompanied her husband on his administrative duties, dealing with a forced move to Quebec briefly without her husband due to threats of war, and the death of one of her daughters. Finally in 1796, largely due to her husband's deteriorating relationship with the Governor General, they set sail and returned to England, marking the end of Elizabeth's travels in Canada.

Reunited with her older

rushed to Simcoe upon learning of his illness, arriving the day before his death.

After her husband's death, she no longer travelled. With the inheritance from her family, she devoted herself to philanthropy and set up a workshop to design, build and furnish churches, following in the philanthropic tradition of her great great grandmother Elizabeth Creed, who decorated churches. Elizabeth died 44 years later in 1850.

Her diaries and watercolours are among the earliest records of life in Canada. Her family name of Gwillim, descended from the Creeds of Oundle, has lived on through the naming of a lake and two townships in Canada. An image of Elizabeth can even be seen today, as there is a statue of her in Gwillimbury, erected in 2007.

In a small distant corner of Canada, there remains a lasting legacy of a woman born in a village near Oundle.

*If readers would like to learn more about the artist and philanthropist Elizabeth Creed, who lived at Cobthorne in Oundle, Dr Carew Treffgarne wrote a comprehensive article about her life and work in "Elizabeth Creed's Legacy", Northamptonshire Past and Present, No.75, 2022.*



## Serving the community from dawn to dusk

### Vidushi Singhvi

The bell chimes softly as I step into Oundle News, the scent of freshly printed newspapers and the quiet hum of late afternoon activity surrounding me. Rows of colourful snacks, greeting cards and other knick-knacks line the cramped shelves of the shop, a cheerful assortment wedged carefully into every available space. Following a narrow pathway, I am led past the displays to a small, dimly lit back room where owner S. Niranjana sits at a high worktop. He offers me a chair, a small gesture that softens his initially brisk demeanour. Though reserved at first, he is unexpectedly thoughtful, making sure I am comfortable as he prepares to share his story.

Niranjana's journey began in Sri Lanka, from which he fled in the 1990s, escaping a civil war. "They arrested me," he recounted quietly, the sadness evident as he detailed the accusation of supporting the Tamil Tigers, an allegation without basis, but rooted in the chaotic suspicions of wartime. An advocate, a former school principal turned Parliament member, intervened on his behalf, arranging

his release. "After two days, I was freed," he said, his voice steady but laden with memories of fear and displacement.



Oundle News sells everything from newspapers and milk to party supplies.

Eventually, Niranjana found a new beginning in the UK. Arriving in London and spending time in Liverpool, then Harrow, he gradually built a life for himself, working tirelessly in a series of roles before he could afford to buy and run his own business. He explained how he started with a petrol station, then owned shops in Enfield and Letchworth, detailing the journey that led him, finally, to buy Oundle News, bringing his family with him to live in Oundle.

When the previous owners of Oundle News decided to put the business up for sale after decades

of serving the town, many locals worried about the fate of the newsagents. Analysis of ABC circulation data by Press Gazette reports that UK national newspaper sales have fallen by nearly two-thirds over the last two decades. With the number of independent shops in Oundle changing hands over the years, and newsagents across the UK in steady decline, it was uncertain whether anyone would take over this small but valued service. When Niranjana stepped forward, there was relief: Oundle News would stay open, maintaining a staple of daily life.

For Niranjana, it seems that running Oundle News is more than a business; it's a daily rhythm that binds him to the community. His day begins before dawn, the daily papers sorted and bundled by hand before 4:30am, ready for delivery to villages from Warmington and Glapthorn to Laxton and Luton.

With two drivers, he manages a service that reaches over 300 to 400 homes every morning, ensuring the familiar thump of a newspaper pushed through the letterbox.

Amid changing times, Niranjana's role as a newsagent in the area seems especially significant. "We're the only ones who deliver papers here now," he said, a subtle pride

in his voice.

Inside the shop, a steady stream of regulars trickle in, most of them older residents picking up their daily magazines and papers or stopping by just to say hello. It is a scene of quiet routine and friendly exchanges, as familiar faces keep up the ring of the doorbell with their habit of visiting Oundle News. During the school day, the pace changes as pupils from nearby schools pile in, stocking up on sweets and snacks, filling what little space there is with laughter and chatter.

The shop is a symbol of perseverance for Niranjana, blending his Sri Lankan heritage with his dedication to embracing the traditions of his adopted home, and serving Oundle's community. In his early-morning paper-sorting, his late-night balance sheets, and his quiet pride in the shop, Niranjana seems to find a sense of belonging. "I'm very happy; I'm pleased," he grins when asked if he finds his job fulfilling.

The shop, an anchor in Oundle's Market Place, stands not only as a testament to Niranjana's resilience, but also as a familiar space where stories of faraway lands, quiet struggles, and hopeful new beginnings can be told.



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## Stroke survivors share their experiences

Lara Epton, Ella Younie

One of the most common diseases in the UK is stroke, a type of cerebrovascular disease that affects around 100,000 people per year. Numerous factors have the potential to cause strokes such as blocked blood flow to the brain, usually due to a blocked blood vessel or artery, and temporary sudden bleeding in the brain. Often, speech and movement can be damaged and may only be recovered under certain circumstances.

The NHS offers immediate care after the stroke, however, upon returning home, stroke victims must significantly alter their careers, activities and expectations of their ability to continue living a "normal" life. The path to any kind of recovery can be lonely and requires deep reserves of perseverance.

Pepita Aris suffered a stroke at the age of 84 and had to make dramatic adaptations to her lifestyle. Pepita grew up in Oundle and returned with her husband after they retired. Prior to her stroke, she was a serious gardener, opening her Oundle garden to the public. "250 people visited the garden per day," she said. She also enjoyed cooking. She and her husband had a house in Spain, and she wrote 18 cookbooks on Spanish cooking.

She was active into her 80s, until four years ago, when just after a holiday in Cuba, she suffered a stroke. She spent nine weeks in hospital where she was placed into medically induced coma, allowing her brain to restabilise and to protect it from future damage. "I owe my life to the Peterborough hospital," she said.

Pepita is lucky to be able to live in her own home, surrounded by her books and garden. Her husband was a journalist, and she keeps up with current events. But a recent hip fracture immobilized her and the rooms have been rearranged and adapted to accommodate her limited mobility. She is fortunate that her home carer, Fatima, lives with her and is able to assist her at any time.

Strokes impact younger people, as well as the elderly. John Arkell was only 55 years old when he suffered a stroke which was thought to be caused by stress. John used to be Oundle School's head of academic music and the school organist. He also wrote several very successful GCSE music books, which are still used in the current syllabus, and he conducted the Oundle and District Choral Society.



Before her stroke, Pepita was an accomplished gardener, opening to the public the Oundle garden that had once belonged to her mother.

As a residual impact of his stroke, John now has aphasia. Stroke patients frequently experience aphasia which affects communication in speech, writing and occasionally in speech interpretation. To improve conversational skills, John initially used communication cards to allow him to visually represent the word he was attempting to say. During speech therapy, he also practised the pronunciation of commonly used words, so he would be able to remaster basic sentences. John was unable to continue teaching, but he can still play the organ for the Choral Society.

While many stroke survivors are forced to give up work, Paul Pearson was able to return to work in a more limited role, thanks to a very supportive workplace. He suffered a stroke whilst skiing in France and was taken to the hospital in Grenoble with a brain hemorrhage, where he was kept under observation for 48 hours. He then underwent surgery to fix a leak in the carotid artery. He was kept in a coma for ten weeks.

After coming out of the coma, Paul was paralysed down the right-hand side and could only speak slowly, with slurred words. He was brought back to Addenbrookes in Cambridge in a small plane and remained in Addenbrookes for over four months. By the time he was released home, he had started to walk again, however the house was adapted with ramps, grab-rails and banisters on the stairs. To ensure he could walk correctly without a stick, he enrolled in physiotherapy to help with movement.

When asked about the most challenging part of recovery, Paul said, "Everything!" He had to undergo surgery again, and was not able to drive for two years, "which means you lose a lot of

independence".

Initially, he had help from Volunteer Action to get him around until he could drive an adapted car to work. Having previously been a Global Segment Manager for Rough and Machined Casting for Caterpillar, he was reemployed in a lower-level position, but still with Caterpillar. "They were a great employer, and very supportive," he said. The Stroke Association helps to support everyone touched by strokes and aims to 'rebuild lives after strokes'.

Although there is no cure for a stroke, there are many approaches used to assist recovery. The main approach is rehabilitation to combat the effects of paralysis or loss of movement. For other side effects, such as aphasia, patients can work with speech therapists to improve both communication and understanding of information.

Paul has taken early retirement and now finds opportunities to sail with Rutland Sailability and G-Whizz Tandem Rides, organisations that accommodate a variety of disabilities.

As part of adapting to a new lifestyle, John started painting, which he had never found the time to pursue when he was previously fully employed. He is lucky to be able to drive and continues to indulge his taste for sports cars.

Pepita said that the hardest part of her recovery journey was to keep going. People thought she would fade away at her age, but when she first returned home, she would walk up and down her room 50 times with a walker, she was so determined to keep some mobility.

She is looking forward to her 88th birthday. "I've been here for four more years, and my children visit me, which brings me great joy." She emphasised the most important message: "Never give up."

## The Lemon Tree brings flavour to the Market Place

Emily Ward

There is a stylish new coffee house and cafe in the centre of the Market Place that is attracting a lot of attention. The Lemon Tree opened in the summer, a family business run by mother and son team, Lisa and Cam Lennon.

Cam is the chef responsible for the menu. He started out studying computer sciences, but decided that cooking was the interest he wanted to take seriously. He was lucky to get some early experience in Michelin star restaurants such as Alchemilla in Nottingham and Ynyshir in Wales. He then worked at Hambleton Hall. It was not long before he realised his ambition to be independent.

"I think every chef wants to have his own place one day. When I found out a space in Oundle would soon be available for lease, I jumped at it." Having his own place, means he is free to be creative. He loves "coming up with an idea, testing it, tweaking it, experimenting and then finally putting it on the menu."

He describes his style as "a little classical, with a modern twist".

"I like using less common cuts of meat and creating something you might not have tried before," he said. He sources his meat from local suppliers such as Trendalls.

This is showcased in dishes such as the best-selling Croque Monsieur, consisting of two slices of bread, homemade bechamel sauce, lots of strong cheese and shredded ham hock, toasted under the grill and finished with cornichons.

"The ham hocks are a little labour intensive but definitely worth it," he said. "They are braised in the oven for 16 hours in a stock made from pork bones, shallots, coriander seeds, fennel, garlic, and lots of white wine."

Other offerings on the menu have included poached pears with torched Cremet cheese, wild venison with bone marrow sauce on sourdough, triple cooked chips.

There is always coffee, hot chocolate specials, along with scones and cakes on display in the glass cabinet, baked fresh every morning by Cam.

Cam may be new to the restaurant business, but it seems to be all in the family. The name of the coffee house was inspired by his grandfather, who was a chef when he was younger in hotels around London. "His last name was Lemmon, so it's a homage to him."



## Gino's chimes spread sweet joy across Oundle

### Rebecca Musgrave

For every Oundle resident, the most recognisable sound across town is the chiming bells of Gino's ice cream van heard along the streets.

It is thought that ice cream was brought to England by the Italians in the 18th century, and Gino Cocozza has continued that tradition.

He was born in a mountain village in Italy. "Very different to where I live now!" he said. After moving to England, he needed a job, and began selling ice cream from his van in 1977. He became an independent vendor, rather than relying on a company to finance his venture.

From then on, Gino has amassed a loyal base of customers across the local region. Not only does Gino sell ice cream in Oundle, but also in six other towns and villages from Stamford to Yarwell. He began his route in Oundle in 1980.

After all of these years, it is safe to say that Gino has had the

opportunity to speak to a lot of people every day, and the social aspect of his job has become his favourite. He said that for some families, he has served an astounding three generations, which just goes to show that Gino and his ice creams are an integral part of Oundle life.



Gino's van is always a favourite attraction at town events.

"When I first started, I was serving customers with their babies, and those babies have had babies of their own, and I am now serving them!" he said.

No ice cream van is complete without their signature chime.

However, there are government rules about playing the chimes.

For many years, chimes could not legally be played for longer than four seconds. But since 2013, the maximum length has risen to twelve seconds, helping ice cream vendors to reach potential customers from a further distance. There are also restrictions on the hours during which they can play their chimes.

Gino said: "Most vendors stick with certain tunes because then people in their houses will hear me and know it's me outside." For the vendors, chimes allow their specific van to be recognised, bringing in business, and for the residents, it is the sound of their incoming tasty treat.

He chose his chimes because they are recognisable. "I use Captain Pugwash, Blue Peter and La Cucaracha. Should they hear a different tune, it most probably is a different van."

Ice cream vans have faced a number of challenges over the years. Since the 1960s, the number of vans on the streets have reduced

from 30,000 to a mere 5,000, reflecting the number of homes that have acquired their own freezers. The more recent Coronavirus restrictions made it difficult for some vendors to recover.

Despite these challenges, Gino's bookings for private events have increased, thanks to social media, and his trade is thriving. "I do an array of events from school sports day, proms, weddings, birthdays, factory fun days and food fairs, as well as my round."

One of Gino's products is the biscoff ice cream in which the ice cream is rolled in crushed biscoff, with a matching sauce, and a whole biscoff biscuit in place of a flake. It has easily become his bestseller. However, Gino says his favourite remains the classic, Flake 99.

During sweltering summers, and even all year round, there is nothing that the comfort of your favourite ice cream cannot fix. Ice cream vans like Gino's are something we take for granted, but nobody should forget their timeless appeal and the inexplicable joy they bring to children in every neighbourhood.

## From missing to miraculous recovery: the nine lives of Ben

### Imogen Mynhardt

There are over 13 million dogs in British households, but it is cat content that often drives viral traffic on the internet. Cats have become icons. From memes to YouTube videos, cats can be discovered pretty much everywhere across the internet.

Local community Facebook groups find their content filled with one topic more than any others: missing cats. Nationally, the Facebook group, Lost and Found Cats UK, has 53 posts every hour reporting missing cats.

Cats are not kept on leashes and by nature, they are curious creatures and tend to meander off, and sometimes even get locked in neighbouring sheds. To address this problem, microchipping cats has recently become mandatory by law, with a fine of up to £500 if you fail to comply.

One story that captured the Oundle community's attention featured a very regal looking tabby cat named Ben, three years old, who belongs to Wendi Harker in Oundle.

One day in July, Ben went through the cat flap as normal, but didn't return. This was unusual behaviour. "Ben had never wandered off before. He rarely left the garden," said Wendi. She has had (Big) Ben since September 2023. She got him and his brother (Little) Ben from the Peterborough Cat Rescue. Wendi is a dedicated

cat lover with six cats.

"I put several posts on a local Facebook site, asking if anyone had seen him. I had several possible sightings, all of which I followed



Wendi Harker

Ben wore a protective body suit after surgery to heal his extensive injuries.

up, but none of them were him," she said.

Seventeen days later, Debbie Wales shared a photo on Facebook of a cat curled up on a chair in her garden in Southwick. When she tried to approach, the cat ran away, but later returned. The tabby cat in her garden looked like Ben. She was right.

Wendi rushed over to Southwick three miles from her home. She found him in the pub car park across the road. "I started calling him, and eventually heard a little

miaow. I followed the sound, kept calling him, and he crawled out from an outbuilding in the pub car park," she said. Severely injured, Ben was almost unrecognisable.

Wendi was shocked.

"He was covered in ticks, maggots, and had open wounds right down to the bone, across his back. His ears were disfigured, he was extremely skinny. He just looked pitiful."

Ben was taken to Zoe North and her team at New Lodge Vet. Zoe suspected that the cat had come into contact with something caustic, because he was covered in burns.

Despite the severity of his condition, Ben's blood tests came back normal, allowing further

treatment. His back was debrided and covered with manuka honey dressing. He continued on IV fluids, medication and opiates and returned to theatre after 48 hours. The vets were able to clean the wound enough to close it with clips, and Ben was sent home wearing a protective body suit.

Ben's story was updated regularly on Facebook during his treatment and recovery, and his story was regularly followed by dozens of concerned supporters. A GoFundMe page was created to help cover his significant vet costs.

Now, Ben is back to normal after weeks in isolation. His fur and whiskers have grown back, though his ears remain slightly misshapen. It could be said that Wendi has rescued Ben twice in his nine lives.

Ben has his own Instagram page where supporters can continue to follow the journey of Ben the Cat. Wendi has received many messages from strangers asking if they can visit Ben, which she has confirmed they can. "As an added bonus, Ben and I have made a lot of new friends along the way," she said.

Thanks to the kindness of a stranger who matched the cat in her garden to Wendi's Facebook posts, Ben was found just in time. The family urges anyone with a missing pet to seek help from the local community.

Now, Ben spends most of his time wrapped around Wendi's neck "like a luxurious furry tabby scarf".



## Relationships at Phab last a lifetime

### Rebecca Musgrave

"Opportunity, not pity, for disabled people," were the words of Terry Rolfe, spoken during a conference for young people in 1957. They were the catalyst for the creation of Phab, a nationwide charity which now has over 120 branches focused on promoting inclusivity for those with disabilities.

The Oundle branch was started 50 years ago by Gladys and Harold Ashby from Cotterstock. Their daughter Joyce had special needs, inspiring them to take an active role in spearheading local support for those with disabilities.

"In those days there was absolutely no support for anybody that had a special needs child, and they looked after their daughter," Eryl Howard said. "Thank heavens things are different. Now special needs families do get support. Not as much as they would like, but obviously much better than it was for the Ashbys." Joyce is now in Corby since her parents Gladys and Harold died.

Today, the group meets weekly at Fletton House, and is run by a



Evenings are spent playing games.

team of helpers, including Maureen Weston and Eryl Howard, who have been volunteering for between 20 to 30 years.

"I had a lovely elderly neighbour who'd been a Scottish suffragette," Eryl said. "I remember she tied herself to a double decker bus because there weren't arrangements for people to get on with wheelchairs. She really influenced me to get involved with people with special needs."

The weekly club evenings are spent chatting, playing games and making crafts. Maureen and Eryl said that some members have been coming for thirty years, since they were very young, and pupils from Oundle School also volunteer.

Highlights of the year are organised trips, such as bowling in Wellingborough or a forthcoming trip for ten members to the Black Country Museum. "Cadbury World is a favourite," Maureen said. "They get a bag of chocolates!" These trips are a fantastic outing for the members. Most of the members of the Phab Club, do not go away for a holiday. There are a couple that do that, but for the rest, going out for the day out with Phab is really a family holiday.

Eryl said not only do these trips provide entertainment for members of Phab, but they are also appreciated by the members' families. "If someone with special needs is at home all the time, it can be difficult for the family because they're the carers. Whereas if they can have a day out with us, it just becomes a bit of respite for their family."

Without the presence of local charities such as Phab, the needs of both members and families would not be met. Phab's efforts are vital to the Oundle community.

However, over recent years there have been many challenges for Phab. Councils are cutting funding for smaller charities, so organising trips for Phab members can be challenging.

"Funding is definitely an issue for little local charities. And you know, we're not the only local charity. There are lots of other local charities as well." Members of the group pay a weekly fee to cover the cost of renting the room at Fletton House.

Another problem is arranging transport for members to come once a week.

"It's transport that's the problem, particularly during the winter months. If you have somebody that has special needs, getting them in on Wednesday evening when it's cold is not easy for parents to do," Maureen said. "We used to have about four or five people come from Thrapston, but then Thrapston Council withdrew the funding. Unless something is absolutely essential now, there isn't the funding."

Although membership has declined over the years, the helpers are committed to the members who find the weekly meetings an important part of their routines.

Maureen said: "They are very tightly knit, almost like a family unit, which is really nice."

Phab's inclusive and supportive environment allows friendships to flourish, building bonds that last a lifetime.

# WHAT'S ON

## AT OUNDLE SCHOOL

MUSICAL PERFORMANCES

NOVEMBER  
**30**

SOUL AND STRUCTURE

YARROW GALLERY  
30 NOVEMBER - 13 DECEMBER

DECEMBER  
**2**

BAROQUE CONCERTO FESTIVAL

CHAPEL - 1.30PM

EXHIBITIONS AT THE YARROW GALLERY

DECEMBER  
**5-7**

THE CRUCIBLE

STAHL THEATRE - 7.45PM

DECEMBER  
**9**

ORCHESTRAL CHRISTMAS CONCERT

GREAT HALL - 7.45PM

PERFORMANCES AT THE STAHL THEATRE

FOR THE FULL SCHEDULE OF EVENTS AND DETAILS OF HOW TO BOOK, PLEASE SCAN THE QR CODE

Discover the vibrant arts scene at Oundle School! We regularly host a variety of theatre productions, art exhibitions, and music recitals - and they're all open to the local community. **Plus, enjoy weekly lunchtime concerts at St Peter's Church every Thursday at 1:30pm during term time.**

To find out more, please visit:  
[www.oundleschool.org.uk/whats-on-listing](http://www.oundleschool.org.uk/whats-on-listing)

EVERYONE IS WELCOME TO ALL EVENTS



## Oundle Golf Club is an emerald gem at the edge of town

### Saul Fletcher

In England there are 43,452 towns and villages, but just 2,200 golf courses. Oundle is one of the rare communities to boast a golf course. I recently played in a four-ball and was very impressed by how unique the course was with its unusual features, and by the beautiful landscape.

Oundle Golf Club was founded in 1893 as a 9-hole golf course. When it was first founded, players wore bright red scarlet coats. This was suspended during the First World War when the course's land reverted to its agricultural roots and became part of the war effort. After the war ended the course was resurrected and remained open throughout World War Two. It was then extended in 1971 to 18 holes.

The club has an unusual ownership structure. There are no private owners; it is run by a committee that is elected by the members. This selected committee then works with the club administrator Nes, who acts as a conduit between the committee and club members. This means that almost all the decisions are made in the interest of the members, and all proceeds go towards maintaining and developing the clubhouse and grounds, not to a private owner.

The people who run the club set the tone for a very friendly place to work and socialise. Nes took over as administrator after her husband retired, but after a diagnosis of incurable cancer three years ago, she balances her job with her treatment. The membership

community is unfailingly supportive.

Although Oundle is privileged to have use of a golf club, its location at the parish boundary means it can be overlooked as a useful facility. "We are a big part of the town, but sometimes I feel we are forgotten," said Nes. But for those who use the Oundle Golf Club regularly, it is an essential



Ivan Queiglas

Oundle Golf Club is rated highly for its well-presented course, superb greens and good challenges.

part of life.

The course is 6,254 yards with a par of 72, set across 99 acres of parkland. Woodpeckers and red kites can be seen, as well as occasionally peacocks from the adjacent farm.

Steve Gray is a long-standing player who appreciates having a golf course on his doorstep in Oundle. He said the course offers

unique challenges. "I think it's short, but challenging, because there are a lot of trees and obstacles in the way, and the fairways cross over each other."

He thinks it is one of the best courses for a small town. "It is very, very well looked after. The greens are in fantastic condition," he said.

For warming up before a round, there are putting greens.

With all the club has to offer, it is very good value for money. "Membership's good, there is a senior membership, and juniors has everything you want," Steve said. "The other day I was at the driving range in Peterborough at Thorpe Wood golf course and their annual membership was more expensive than Oundle's, and that's a municipal golf course, whereas

Oundle is a members' course."

A golf club is not just about the game. The social aspect is also very important for members. Steve said: "It's all there if you want it. There's a very good social calendar, very good competition calendars. The club is very inclusive."

The clubhouse has a bar serving drinks and light meals with outdoor seating, open during the week and at the weekend. The club also has function rooms available to hire for private parties and corporate events.

Applying for membership in the club is straightforward and can be done through recommendation or via an online application, with no joining fee or handicap necessary.

The club also offers a variety of golf lessons with the golf pro Dave Moreland. These involve one-on-one private lessons at Oundle School's golf simulators, which are only a few minutes away from the course.

"The simulators offer the option to provide lessons when the weather is bad, and although more limited than outside, the technology provides a pretty good visual for customers," he said.

"I wouldn't recommend them for complete beginners, but for those who already play, they offer good feedback through video playback and ball flight analysis which is great for most mid to low handicap golfers."

He also plans to run more seasonal group programmes for between five to eight people. And due to their popularity last year, he will be running another short game series at the club starting in April.

## The world's fastest growing sport comes to Oundle courts

### Andrey Savenko

After taking the Americas by storm, pickleball has risen to prominence for its novel approach to racket sports and its accessibility to people of all ages and sporting abilities.

Described by Oundle players as accessible to everyone, pickleball has the potential to become one of the town's most popular activities, with two possible pickleball venues, the Oundle School Sports Centre and the Oundle Tennis Club.

The Oundle Tennis Club is currently arranging for pickleball courts to be built at the club. The club's chairman, Jason Atkinson said: "We believe pickleball (and perhaps padel in the future) will be very popular with our existing and future members and offer more choice." He said they are likely to

have a dedicated membership for pickleball.

Elspeth Langsdale recently started playing the game with friends who are members of the Oundle School Sports Centre.

"We play on a badminton court with a lowered net as that is the nearest we can get to a pickleball court. There are, of course, certain pickleball rules that are unique but easy to pick up and we learned very quickly that you can't volley in the kitchen!" she said.

For those unfamiliar with the sport, pickleball is played on a court around half the size of a tennis court, and with a net slightly shorter than a standard tennis net. At the front side of the court, the non-volley area, or 'kitchen', is where much of a rally takes place. The court does not change between singles and doubles, making

the sport much easier to learn than other racket sports, such as badminton or table tennis.

Pickleball becomes even more accessible due to its similarity with more popular sports. The diagonal serves, the single bounce rule, and volleying will all be familiar concepts to any tennis players or fans, but there are some important rules that only apply to pickleball. For instance, points can only be won by the serving side; one team continues to serve until they foul, when the opposing team will repeat the process until one team reaches eleven points or wins by two points at deuce.

With a similar weight to a standard tennis racket, pickleball rackets are wooden or graphite paddles that can generate both speed and spin and are fully customisable with any style or

pattern you can imagine.

The pickleball itself is different to any other racket sport. Most notably, the small holes poked around its surface give it a slightly lower, yet more predictable bounce than a tennis ball.

A sport that is easy to pick up, yet still competitive for the more experienced sports person is a quality few can manage, yet pickleball has already captured the attention of Oundle players, and will continue to gather more interest.

"Over the past year I've seen different groups of all varieties come and play and they are all having a great time," Elspeth said.

"It is an easy, fun sport to play for all skill levels and it is so accessible for Sports Centre members, as all the equipment is there ready for you to use."



# OUNDLE SCHOOL SPORTS CENTRE



At Oundle School Sports Centre, we believe that staying active is key to a healthy lifestyle. We're dedicated to offering our members a great experience that encourages a lifelong love of fitness. Whether you're here to stay in shape, try something new, or push your limits, we've got the facilities and expertise to support you.

For those looking to take their fitness to the next level, we provide opportunities for structured training and guidance to help you achieve your personal goals.

## FUN FACT

The Sports Centre is used by Olympic and Paralympic champions Adam Peaty and Lauren Steadman. The 50m pool also features a central boom and moving floor.



**100**

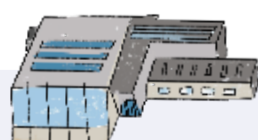
cups of Beans coffee sold daily

**40+**

fitness classes per week

## CAN YOU FIND ME?

I am sculpted by OO Tom Hiscocks and recognise the generosity of the Oundle School community. What am I?



## FACILITIES

- 70-station fitness suite, 50m swimming pool
- 8 cricket squares, 4 floodlit astros
- 2 Indoor Golf Simulators, 20 netball courts
- Squash and Fives courts, Athletics track
- Tennis courts, 8-court sports hall
- Indoor and outdoor cricket nets, 10 rugby pitches
- Performance gym, Dance and exercise studios.

## HAVE YOU BEEN HERE?



Explore all that Oundle School Sports Centre has to offer with our flexible membership options.

Our dedicated team is ready to support you every step of the way, providing a welcoming space to stay active, achieve your goals, and connect with the community.

Call or email us for more details about our memberships and start your journey with us today.

Call: 01832 277208

Email: [sportscentre@oundleschool.org.uk](mailto:sportscentre@oundleschool.org.uk)