

Mayor's Report for Town Council Meeting January 2025

Saturday, October 9th, Performance of Handel's "Messiah", by Atherstone Choral Society at St. Mary's Church, Atherstone

This was a very special occasion for the Choral Society as it was not only the 50th Anniversary of their performance of the "Messiah", but it was also performed at St. Mary's Church, where the Society's very first concert took place in 1974.

On arrival we were welcomed by the Chair of the Choral Society, Pru Allington-Smith. Having been shown to our seats we were pleased to see how packed the Church was with eager audience members.

Under the experienced baton of Kevin Gill, Musical Director for the Society since 2008, the concert was soon underway. Soloists included Alexandra Wynne (Soprano), Tom Lilburn (Countertenor), Dale Harris (Tenor) and Andrew Randell (Bass). Musical accompaniment was provided by Darren Hogg (Organist), Tom Peverell (Percussionist) and the Beauchamp Sinfonietta, from Leamington Spa, the "premier chamber orchestra in the West Midlands". The Choral Society were in fine voice and their singing of the awe-inspiring "Messiah" gave us all a very memorable and uplifting evening.

Sunday, November 10th, Remembrance Day Service at St. Mary's Church and Remembrance Parade to Atherstone Cemetery and War Memorial

There was a very good turn-out at both the Service and the Parade for this year's Remembrance Day. The Service was led by Reverend Michael Brandsma and amongst those in attendance were the Deputy Lieutenant of Warwickshire, Dr. Eric Wood, Rachel Taylor M.P., County Councillor Mejar Singh, Atherstone Town Councillors, members of the Police and Fire Services and of The Royal British Legion. Under the direction of Parade Marshal, DC Taf Evans, Standard Bearers entered the Church and placed their colours on the drum stack in front of the altar. Wreaths were laid near the altar and at the base of the drums. Towards the end of the service the standard bearers collected their standards which were then lowered to the "Last Post" played by the Bugler, Richard Moore, followed by a two-minute silence. A very moving and thought-provoking service.

The pews were packed with people - veterans, families and youngsters, including GFS, and the First Atherstone Scouts Group. At the end of the Service the Parade assembled outside the Church under the direction of the Parade Marshal. The Phantom Knights, with drums and brass band, led the way as the whole parade marched down to the Cemetery, where wreaths were laid at the War Memorial. I was privileged to lay a wreath on behalf of Atherstone Town Council honouring those who have served and sacrificed for us all. A number of tributes were made by members of the Scout Group. Once again the bugle announced a two-minute silence. At the end of the ceremonies at the Cemetery, I was honoured to receive the salute from the parade, on behalf of the town, as it returned to the Church and on to the Market Square.

The whole event seemed to go very smoothly. Well done to all those who were involved in the organisation of this very important event in the Town's calendar.

Friday, November 15th, Christmas Card Competition Judging, Congreve Walk, Bedworth

I was invited by Rchel Taylor MP to join her and several others from the North Warwickshire area to help her to select the winners of her Christmas Card Competition that had been running over the last few weeks. Primary school children across the North Warwickshire and Bedworth constituency had been given the challenge to design a Christmas Card on the theme of "Christmas in Parliament".

Prizes were to be awarded for first, second and third places and certificates awarded for those who took part. The decision making was very hard as there were so many that were possible winners. Finally, we were able to select the prize winners. I believe that an Atherstone Primary School did particularly well. I am not able to report the names of the winners at this stage until they have been notified, but I'm sure they will all be delighted when they hear that they are winners and will be very pleased to receive their prizes. I believe all the entries will be on display at the Bedworth Civic Hall leading up to Christmas.

Friday, November 15th, Atherstone Dramatic Society Act 2, Owen Street Community Arts Centre

Atherstone Amateur Dramatic Society Act 2, is the junior group within the Dramatic Society. The play they had been rehearsing weekly over many months was not one I had previously been aware of. It is called "DNA", by Dennis Kelly. The play is currently part of the GCSE and A Level English Literature Syllabus and is set in a modern context.

The young cast handled the challenge of this play extremely well under the guidance of Director, Sarah Collins and Assistant Director, John Parnham. The play is about a group of teenagers who believe they have killed a classmate. In order to avoid suspicion falling on them they devise a plan to create a suspect, which results in the Police arresting and charging an innocent man for the "murder".

The quality of the acting by the cast showed how hard they have worked over recent months to produce such performances. Particular praise is due to one of the leading players, Lucy Saunders, who must have spent hours learning her lines and delivered them faultlessly. There were a number of challenging themes in the play, not only for the young actors, but also for the audience.

Many congratulations to all the cast and crew and for the team of volunteers who have supported this production.

Friday, November 22nd Tesco, Long Street, Atherstone

We were very pleased to be in attendance at Tesco with Community Champion, Claire and Store Manager Vicky to receive donations to the St. Giles Hospice Charity Raffle that we are holding at The Mayor's forthcoming Civic Reception. This will be held at The Red Lion on Saturday November 30th, to coincide with the ever-popular, annual Dickens Event in the town. Many thanks to Tesco for their generous support for our local community.

Friday, November 22nd, Charity Quiz and Curry Evening, Galanos House Community Hub, Southam

We were greeted by the Mayor of Southam, Councillor Angela John and having been showed to a table found ourselves in a Quiz Team called All Councillors Together, with the Mayor of Warwick, Councillor Dave Skinner and the Mayor of Shipston-on-Stour, Councillor John Dinnie accompanied by his wife Consort Bryony Dinnie.

The quiz consisted of 10 rounds with 10 questions in each round. Subjects covered included General Knowledge, Art, Literature, Science and Nature, Geography, Food and Drink, Sport, Music History and Films. Halfway through there was a break during which curries were served to participants. An additional quiz was distributed to the many quiz teams taking part, based on advertising slogans. We were sitting on a table next to The Mayor of Coleshill, Councillor Sue Wallace, the Deputy Mayor, Ian Tomkinson with his wife Jan, former Mayor of Coleshill Councillor Tony Battle with his wife Jayne. There was friendly competition between our teams as we marked each others' quiz sheets between rounds. It was very interesting to discover the range of knowledge that our team possessed and some of the gaps that were highlighted. I don't think I will now forget that back in 18th century Manchester was nicknamed Cottonopolis, or that in 1670 Thomas Blood tried to steal the Crown Jewels!

Our team came a respectable joint third in the main quiz and agreed to donate the small monetary prize to the Southam Mayor's charities, which are Galanos House and Warwickshire Young Carers. We were all delighted that we were announced as the winners of the interval quiz. Our other team members kindly agreed to donate the prize, a tub of sweets, to the raffle in aid of St. Giles Hospice, which is being held at the Civic Reception on the afternoon of the Dickens Event.

A very enjoyable evening, testing the grey matter and helping to raise funds for worthy Warwickshire charities.

Saturday November 30th, Dickens Event Civic Reception at The Red Lion, Atherstone and Christmas Lights Switch on

We were very pleased to host a Civic Reception at The Red Lion, for invited guests including our MP Rachel Taylor, Atherstone Town Councillors Dawn Wilkinson, Jacky Chambers, Martin Short, Keith Barnett and Rick Collins, North Warwickshire Borough Councillor Denise Clews together with husband Tony former Atherstone Mayor, former Mayor Ashley Wickham-Young and guests. Civic dignitaries included the Chair of Warwickshire County Council, Councillor Chris Mills with his Consort wife Sue, The Mayor of Hinckley and Bosworth, Councillor Robin Webber-Jones and his Consort, daughter Amelia, The Deputy Mayor of Alcester Councillor David Henderson and his Consort wife Lesley, and the Mayor of North Warwickshire Borough Council Colin Hayfield. Also in attendance were representatives of Inner Wheel, Leading Players, Honorary Citizens, White Hart Volunteers, Ruby's Yard, Atherstone Hockey Club. Thank you to For taking photos for us.

Thank you to Siobhan, Nina and Kate for organising the raffle to raise money for St Giles Hospice and thanks to all who bought tickets. Local businesses were thanked for their generous contributions to the raffle prizes.

Thank you to Anthony, Manager of The Red Lion and the staff for all their help and support. After our buffet lunch guests were invited to join us for the Christmas Parade, led by a drumming ensemble. Father Christmas was in his sleigh at the rear of the parade as we walked from the Memorial Hall, along Long Street to The Market Square where crowds of children with families were eagerly waiting for him to arrive at his Grotto.

There was time then for us all to browse the stalls on the Market Square, enjoy the entertainment on offer, visit the Church where there were other stalls and entertainments. The Memorial Hall was also packed with Christmas stalls and there were numerous stalls, and rides to be found along Long Street leading to the funfair on Woolpack Way Car Park. Many of our retailers, café staff and licencees entered into the spirit of the Dickens Event by dressing up in Victorian costume.

It seemed that in no time at all it was time for the Christmas Lights Switch- on. I was invited by Mark Jordan, Chair of the Dickens Committee to mount the platform outside The Red Lion to begin the count down to press the button to turn on the lights. Long Street was packed with people who had come in to town to join in the festivities. I felt very proud and privileged to be asked to take part in the ceremony. The town was full of people who had also come in to see the firework display which lit up the skies later and started the Christmas season with a bang.

Well done to all the Dickens Committee and their band of volunteers that make this such a wonderful annual event for the town.

Monday December 2nd, Coleshill Civic Fundraising Dinner, Rajrani Indian Restaurant, Coleshill

We were amongst invited guests to attend the Civic Dinner hosted by The Mayor of Coleshill, Councillor Sue Wallace, who announced that her chosen charity was Father Hudson's Caritas.

The charity provides a range of services to people across the Catholic Archdiocese of Birmingham, an area encompassing Oxford, Stoke-on-Trent, Coventry, Warwick, Worcester, and Wolverhampton. It works with people from all walks of life, offering friendship, care, and support.

Its work spans across five themes, Homelessness, Disability, Refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, Older people, and Children, families and schools.

The food and service in the restaurant was excellent. All the diners were asked to make a cash contribution to the charity and one envelope was chosen at random to win a prize. The lucky winner was Mrs. Sheila Hancox wife of The Mayor of Nuneaton and Bedworth, Councillor Bill Hancox

Wednesday, December 4th, Open Hands CIC, The Arcade, Long Street, Atherstone

At November's Town Council Meeting an application for a Community Grant for a £1000 was received and proved to be successful. So I was very pleased to meet with Sarah King and Gracie Ford who run the Open Hands CIC's services out of one of the units in the Council-owned Arcade on Long Street to present the cheque for £1000. And to hear about what they are doing to help our community.

Open Hands Community CIC are dedicated to fostering an inclusive and supportive environment for everyone in Atherstone and its surrounding villages. Their mission is to engage with the community, offering support, and creating a welcoming space where every voice is heard and valued. From support with form-filling to advice about navigating the multitude of systems to access benefits or housing support Sarah and Gracie are there to offer a helping hand.

Sunday, December 8th Concert on behalf of Atherstone Friends of St. Giles Hospice St. Peter's Church, Mancetter

We were very pleased to be invited to attend the concert at St. Peter's by Michael Emscot on behalf of the Atherstone Friends of St. Giles, particularly as the chosen charity for my mayoral year is St. Giles Hospice.

The Arden Ensemble, resplendent in their dark green, sparkly choir outfits, performed a varied programme of Christmas themed music, much of which was arranged by Michael, himself. In addition, Philip Emscot, not only provided the keyboard accompaniment to the choral pieces but also performed several specially arranged compilations of well-loved Christmas music. There were several solo performances and duets of note. Particularly memorable was a very entertaining choreographed piece called Fruitcake. There were also a few carols included in the programme for the audience to join in with.

A very enjoyable afternoon raising money for a very worthwhile charity.

Sunday, December 15th Christmas Carol Service at the Church of St. James, Newbold Verdon, Leicestershire

We were invited to the Civic Carol Service by the Mayor of Hinckley and Bosworth, Councillor Robin Webber-Jones, with the advice that we should wear Christmas jumpers to the event. We were welcomed at the Church door by Robin, the Mayor of Hinckley and Bosworth, in his Santa jumper, together with his Consort, daughter Amelia, in reindeer attire. The service was led by Rector Johnny, with contributions from various members of the community, including a reading by Mayor Robin himself. A number of other Civic dignitaries were in attendance including the Mayor of North Warwickshire Borough Council, Colin Hayfield and his Consort Denise, both wearing their Christmas attire. Also at the service was the Lord Mayor and Lady Mayoress of Leicester, Bhupen and Usha Dave.

At the end of the service we were invited to join the congregation for mince pies and mulled wine. All the money raised by donations to the collection will go to a number of charities supported by Mayor Robin this year, including

Twycross Zoo, Hinckley Homeless Group (Lawrence House) and The Alzheimer's Society.