

100 editions and 17 years of events and changes in Towcester

Since the first publication of **Focus Towcester** back in 2008, this historic market town of ours has seen significant growth, both in terms of population and infrastructure. From huge housing developments, new road structures and commercial growth, we have seen many changes and familiar sights that have come and gone.

There are too many changes to mention them all and a few will have more relevance to some than others, but we have looked down memory lane to remind ourselves what a thriving community we live in, so perhaps you would like to join us.

The launch of Focus Towcester magazine in 2008, formerly known as "The Best of Towcester" landed through letterboxes for the very first time in December 2008.

In 2012, our local police station on Watling Street closed. The building, constructed in the 1930s and owned by the Northamptonshire Police and Fire Commissioner's office, was later granted Grade II listed status following a campaign to preserve its "imposing, symmetrical" architecture. In the same year, a brand-new Aldi superstore came to town making a total of four stores to shop for our weekly groceries.

Something which deserves a mention is Towcester Racecourse, which has seen many changes over the years.

The World Hovercraft Championship was held at Towcester Racecourse in 2010. The event included competitors from around the world, racing in various classes. In 2014, we saw the opening of the Greyhound Stadium, the first in Britain since 1995, it was built inside the existing horse racing track at Towcester Racecourse. Unfortunately, in 2018, this historic venue ended 90 years of thoroughbred racing due to financial pressures. Of course, we must mention the

Food Festival, which had spent 10 years in residence at the site from 2014.

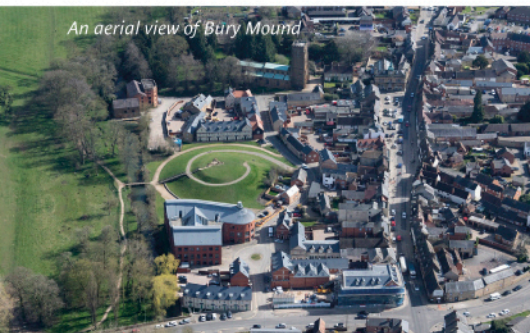
South Northamptonshire Council relocated to a brand-new purpose-built building named The Forum on Moat Lane in 2015. The original council offices at the junction of Springfields and Brackley Road were demolished as part of the Moat Lane regeneration scheme, which included a new housing development

alongside a new library, council offices, and retail spaces. This scheme aimed to revitalise the area by replacing the old offices with new homes and other amenities. Since this time South Northamptonshire Council was abolished and the local authority merged into the new West Northamptonshire Council structure.

In addition to all that, we have also had many new clubs and associations formed which have added some new leisure opportunities for the local community.



An aerial view of Bury Mound



The Towcester Mill Brewery building

One of these was the opening of Towcester Mill Brewery, in what is said to be the oldest building in Towcester, a Grade II listed building that dates to 1794.

Two groups were formed, Towcester Youth Coffee House, a safe social space created for young people in partnership with local churches and the University of the Third Age (U3A) held its first meeting in May 2010, attracting 100 people.

We had the LEJOG (Land's End to John O'Groats) Charity Ride pass through Towcester in 2009. The charity event raised £25,000 for Alzheimer's and Macmillan.

Lord Coe, Olympic champion and the man who led the London 2012 Olympics visited Towcester to support charity partnership PSPA HQ, (Progressive Supranuclear Palsy Association) in 2010 which was originally in Watling Street before it relocated to Milton Keynes in 2018.

Crowds of Towcesterians celebrated Royal weddings with street parties in 2011 and 2018, for the weddings of Prince William and Kate Middleton and Prince Harry and Meghan Markle.

In 2015, Towcester resident and charity fundraiser, Tony McMurray (inset, right) survived a 7.8 earthquake at Base Camp, Everest and whilst we waited for news, Sharon (his wife) was featured on BBC News.

Towcester is reputed to be the oldest town in Northamptonshire. Its origins can be traced back to the Middle Stone Age and could it be said to be as old as any community in Britain.



Evidence of this was discovered at an archaeological dig at Belle Baulk, in Towcester, during December 2011, after building-site land excavations uncovered items of interest. Amongst the finds were pottery dated to be from the mid-first to mid-second centuries.

Who knows how Towcester will look in another 17 years' time. Certainly not the town we know today.

We can't talk about the last 17 years without mentioning the pandemic. Towcester residents played their part during the crisis, forming the COVID-19 Community Response Hub in 2020. Local volunteers coordinated food and medicine supplies, and support for vulnerable residents.

As we are all more than aware, Towcester is still undergoing significant expansion with several residential and commercial developments already underway or planned. This includes the Towcester Grange sustainable urban extension, which will add over 2,750 homes, along with schools, local centres, and employment land. Additionally, a large business park called Towcester Park is being developed north of the A43 bypass.

Who knows how Towcester will look in another 17 years' time. Certainly not the town we know today. I wonder what those early Stone Age settlers would make of their 'village' today. Indeed, what would residents from the early 20th century make of the changes to their market town?



The Forum on Moat Lane

Share your memories and old photographs of Towcester on our Facebook page. We would love to hear from you... www.facebook.com/FocusMagazineGroup