

Tenant Topics

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Nola sees her poems in print

Talented Nola is delighted to finally see her poetry collection in print.



It may have taken over quarter of a century to achieve it, but Nola Gardiner is thrilled to bits to finally see her poems in print.

'*The Ferryman and Other Poetry*' is a collection of verse written over many years and now this compilation of mainly humorous rhymes is printed, bound in paperback and on sale in Nola's home town of Lydney.

Readers will find more than 60 verses to choose from, but Nola's firm favourite remains one of the first she wrote and which gives its title to the book. The Ferryman is based on a true story told by her father-in-law, and she admits it still gives her shivers every time she reads it!

"After that one, I wrote a few more bits and pieces just for my own enjoyment and found I could spin them off in no time," explained Nola.

"I had four children and a factory job and was so busy, but that was when I did my best writing. I would shut myself away to write and it gave me a real lift."

Nola, who lives at The Springs, took her writing style from Pam Ayres and her inspiration from friends, family and everyday life.

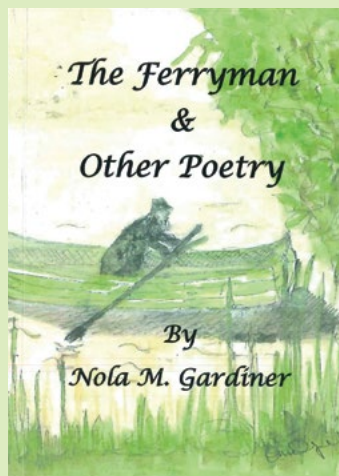
"I always wanted to get them published but I never had the money," said Nola. "Last year there were two things on my bucket list. This was one of them, and I achieved them both. I'm absolutely thrilled with it."

The Ferryman and Other Poetry is on sale at Willowdean Gifts in Lydney, priced £6.99.

Read one of Nola's poems on page 2.

An ode to springtime

Nola Gardiner has published more than 60 poems in her book 'The Ferryman and Other Poetry' and here's one of them, specially-selected to get you in the mood for spring!



Spring holiday

*It's nice to be in England
Now that spring is here
And dodge the raindrops falling
As thunderstorms draw near.
We have to dress up smartly
In fluorescent plastic hats
And see-through pert galoshes
With ankle-warming spats.
We enjoy a day at the seaside
With brightly-coloured brollies.
Heads held high defiantly,
While sucking ice-cold lollies.
Paddling in the puddles
Where it's rained from dawn
to dusk,
Trying to get a sun tan
To cover up the rust.
Yes, it's nice to be in England
When the sap begins to rise
And mingles with the moisture
That descends from dull,
black skies.*

Forest of Dean baby bank

Help with baby items



We're all familiar with foodbanks, but did you know the Forest has its very own 'Baby Bank'?

The bank is designed to help struggling families with supplies such as nappies, wipes, milk, equipment and premature baby clothes. It also provides breastfeeding support and a 'hearing ear' for new mums.

You need a referral to be able to use the FoD Baby Bank, but there are several ways you can do this: from The Forest Foodbank, Rivers Children's Centre in Lydney, St James' Church in Bream, GreenSquare, social services and any healthcare professional.

You can find out more on Facebook (@fodbabybank) or email yourbabyfod@outlook.com.

SAVING TIP

Looking for ideas of tasty meals to cook on a budget? Then go to www.theforest.foodbank.org.uk/get-help/budget-recipes-by-leading-chefs for some great recipes.

TwoCan spreads its wings

Our estate agency TwoCan is attracting more customers, earning new money to invest in Two Rivers services.

TwoCan sells homes for private individuals and is now selling properties on behalf of other social housing providers, including WM Housing in Birmingham, United Communities in Bristol and Lincolnshire Housing Partnership.

TwoCan was created in 2015 and, by offering this service, we keep precious

revenue within the housing sector, making sure it goes back into building more affordable homes and supporting communities.

If you know anyone looking to sell their house, please ask them to contact TwoCan estate agency (www.twocan.estate) for a free valuation.

twocan
estate agents

Homes are springing up

Affordable homes are taking shape across Gloucestershire and we're working with a new builder on two of the larger schemes.

Bellway is building 68 homes for us at Tutshill and Newent, where residents will be able to choose between low-cost rent and Shared Ownership homes at both locations. This will be the first time we have worked with the developer.

Angharad Hodge, our Development Team Leader, said: *"Bellway is building in areas where we know there is great demand from tenants. The company is well-established and has a reputation for building quality homes, and we are confident in the success of these two schemes."*

Mark Tunstall (Frank Timothy Associates Ltd), Angharad Hodge, (Two Rivers Housing) and Tim Sergeant (Newland Homes) at the site of seven new homes being built in Toddington.



We have also recently signed contracts with Newland Homes, which is building a total of 56 properties for us in Toddington, Hempsted and Willersey.

Two Rivers is building more than 100 new properties each year in order to address the shortage of affordable homes.

SAVING TIP

Pay your rent by Direct Debit or standing order so that you don't forget. It will be paid automatically, as long as you have enough in your account to cover it.



Helping to keep order

We hear the term 'anti-social behaviour' used a lot, but what does it actually mean?

As far as we are concerned, this is where someone is causing nuisance or annoyance to another person not of the same household, and we have two Tenancy Compliance Officers who deal with complaints of ASB involving our tenants.

Anything that goes against the terms of the Tenancy Agreement is a breach and can lead to action being taken against the tenant, regardless of who was responsible. For example, a breach is where a tenant won't allow us, or our contractors, access to their home to carry out vital safety checks.

Some issues are generally dealt with by other agencies, eg the Police will address drug-dealing and Environmental Health with statutory noise nuisance, but our two officers

— Julia and Angeline — work closely with these organisations to achieve a good outcome.

Most cases we are involved with concern complaints of noise, abuse or threats, matters relating to homes or gardens, drugs, domestic abuse and intimidation.

If you witness any suspicious behaviour or need help dealing with a nuisance issue, please get in touch with our Tenancy Compliance Officers. But if the matter involves criminal activity, please make the Police your first port-of-call by dialling 101 or 999 if it's an emergency.





Tree survey

Tree experts are surveying all the trees in our open green spaces, to check their condition.

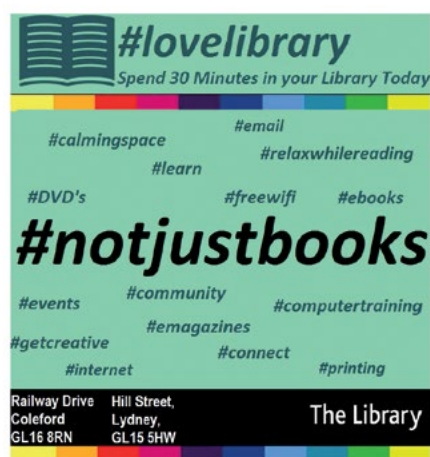
A team of people from a company called Treework Environmental Practice are recording the trees we have, where they are and identifying those which can be regarded as 'high risk'. They will

then recommend the work needed to manage them and keep our tenants and the general public safe.

This survey only focuses on the trees which are growing in open spaces, and does not include any in our residents' gardens.

Once this work is complete, it will be followed by a more in-depth survey to document our medium and low-risk trees, and all the information gathered will help us to put together an overall policy on managing our trees in the future.

More than just books



If you thought libraries were just about books, then think again. The modern library is so much more, offering something to entice people of all ages and interests.

They provide computer training and hire, help with mobile phones, offer free wifi, provide community space for hire, issue bus passes and host children's events. You can read copies of The Times newspaper online, dating back to 1752, research online reference guides, pick up an audio book, hire a DVD, electronic book or magazine.

All of this is either free, or available for a very nominal charge.

The library in Coleford also has an exciting 'Innovation Lab' with a 360-degree camera available for hire (£5/day), virtual reality goggles, a Raspberry Pi for teaching basic computer science and a 3D printer.

Oh, and the libraries also lend books!

Prepared for the worst

Two 4WD vehicles joined our fleet in January, giving us a head-start on reaching tenants if we had a repeat of last year's heavy snow.

Happily (at the time of writing Tenant Topics), they weren't needed for emergency service, but they were ready to be relieved of normal duties and used to reach tenants if the weather made travel difficult.

Last March, many of our operatives walked miles in deep snow and ice to reach tenants when their heating broke down. We wanted to reduce the chances of that happening again, and the two four-wheel-drive vehicles were



With shovels and 4x4s at the ready are, from left to right, Garry King (Chief Executive), Nick Lane (Lead Operative), Peter Stoate (Director of Operations), Lewis Frazer-Holland (Lead Operative) and Gareth Vincent (Operations Manager).

hired to get us through the worst of the winter weather.

"Our staff were brilliant last year," explained Centigen's Operations Manager Gareth Vincent. "Even though conditions were extremely challenging, they did all they could to reach our

tenants, keep the service running and help as many people as they could.

"These 4 x 4 vehicles gave us confidence to be able to deal with the situation much more effectively if we experienced similar conditions this year."



Charity knit

Those nifty knitters at Parkside have been at it again – crafting woollen garments and raising money for charity.

A group of seven ladies from the busy Coleford scheme got together for a 10-hour knitting marathon and collected a superb £900 in sponsorship in return for their efforts.

Ian Cannoni collects the £900 cheque on behalf of Great Western Air Ambulance, from the Parkside knitters.

The money has been presented to the Great Western Air Ambulance, which is a favourite charity of the residents.

Gwyneth Jacobs, who worked on a jumper and baby clothes during her 10-hour stint admitted: "We were a bit numb by the end and ached a bit."

Stay alert

Gloucestershire Police is warning people to be on their guard against bogus and distraction callers.

Most callers are genuine, but some are not. Burglars won't bother to break in if they can be invited inside, so always be wary of unexpected visitors of all ages.

- Beware of anyone who says they're in a hurry.
- Check who's at the door by looking through a window before you open it – and use the chain as a barrier.
- Keep your back door locked as it could be used by an accomplice while their colleague keeps you talking at the front.
- All utility companies use password schemes which you can set up by calling their customer services team. Their staff will use the password, your unique customer number and produce an ID card when they call.

Remember, if the caller is genuine, they won't mind waiting while you call their company to check the identity.

If you would like to receive alerts from the police regarding events or suspicious activity in your area, register at www.yourcommunityalerts.co.uk.

Nicola Smith, Frankie Beard and Julia Watson, with Daniel Quinton from the Chill Out community café, in Newent.

Hands are helping

More than 20 'acts of kindness' were carried out by Two Rivers staff last year, and the last one of 2018 saw colleagues helping a local children's charity to prepare for a major fundraising event.



Margaret Highton, Chairman of the Chill Out Management Committee, said: **"I would like to say a very big thank you to the team at Two Rivers. With their help, we will have a fresh, clean space where people young and old can come if they want to play pool, have company, relax or need to talk to one of the staff members."**

A team of seven joined the James Hopkins Trust in Gloucester to prepare items for their 'Extravaganza' and make up hampers for sale.

The Helping Hands of Two Rivers continue to support community groups this year, and one of the first activities saw three people spending their day giving a fresh coat of paint to the Chill Out community café and youth service in Newent.



Emma Mifflin and Angeline Bailey set to work at the James Hopkins Trust.

Award finalists

Two Rivers is in the running for two top honours at this year's national ASCP Safety and Compliance Awards.

Emma Mifflin, Alina Tatar and Kim Cornock, who look after day-to-day home repairs, maintenance and improvement projects, are finalists in the 'Women in Safety and Compliance' category, which recognises women who have gone above-and-beyond in their roles and will inspire women in their sector.

The second category is 'Gas Safety and Compliance Initiative of the Year' which involved Alina and Kim working with their IT colleague Joel Norris to improve our systems for carrying out mandatory safety checks in tenants' homes.

We're hoping for great news when we find out the winners' names in April.



Sharing memories



Our 'I know where that is' events continue to be a great success, offering the opportunity to recall and share memories.

One of the recent Lydney get-togethers benefited from the contributions of local author and artist Roger Drury, who brought along his ukulele to add a musical flavour to the recollections.

These events are designed to help reduce impact of loneliness and isolation. If you would like to be involved, please get in touch with our Community Engagement team to find out more.

SAVING TIP

Make a list before you go shopping and stick to it, so you're not tempted to buy things you don't need.



Herefordshire homes

Changes to the way people apply for affordable rented housing in Herefordshire will be launched in June.

This will give customers a better experience and more choice over the type of housing they can apply for. At the same time, Herefordshire Council

will be introducing a new policy to assess housing need for those applying to the council's housing register.

The new system will replace Herefordshire HomePoint and will offer an independent customer search portal, although HomePoint will remain in place until the new online service is launched.

For more information about these changes, please visit Herefordshire Council's website or follow it on social media (@HfdsCouncil).

Top month for Otis



January was our best-ever month for tenants using 'My account' to report a repair.

We had a 100% increase in the number of jobs raised through the online portal at the beginning of 2019, compared with the previous January.

All our tenants can report a non-emergency repair via our website, day or night. The system is really easy to use, with a series of pictures to help identify

the issue, and a calendar to select the preferred day and time for the repair to be carried out.

If you haven't already tried it, please register for 'My account' and give it a go when you next need to report a repair. Our Customer Service team is here to help if you have problems registering, and once logged on, you'll meet Otis, our Online Tenant Information Service expert, who can guide you through the repairs system.



Tech trials

Thank you so much to everyone who responded to our invitation to get involved with some new technology home trials.

We're excited by the opportunities these present to improve the efficiency of our properties, and to make life more comfortable – and possibly even cheaper – for our tenants.

Now we know the people who are interested in being involved we are working out how to take this

project forward, and will be providing further information to all those who volunteered.

We expect to have some really interesting results from these trials in due course, and we'll be sure to let you know what we learn.

Bothersome bamboo!



Now that spring is here, some of us will be thinking about our gardens. But if you're thinking of planting bamboo, please read on...!

Although the fast-growing grass looks harmless and is often the 'go to' choice for rapid privacy screening, it can be

a menace and you may be getting more than you bargained for!

Bamboo is capable of causing severe damage to walls, cavities, bricks, concrete, tarmac and paving slabs, not to mention nearby underground structures and building foundations.

Its underground stems (rhizomes) spread quickly and it can take years and vigorous mowing and digging to remove unwanted plants. If you are trying to remove a plant, you'll need to dig out the root mass and the rhizomes. Keep repeating this process throughout the year, and in the years to come, until you can't see any more shoots.

If this hasn't put you off, make sure you opt for a 'safe' clump-forming variety and put it in a large container, rather than planting directly into the ground. Root membrane can also be used as an extra precaution.

Your neighbours will be very grateful if you take these steps to contain, what can be, a bothersome plant.

Let us help

We have a team of experienced advisors who provide free and confidential advice to tenants who are struggling to manage their money.

Between them, Rebecca, Gwyn and Martin have many years of knowledge that means they can help you juggle your income and outgoings, claim benefits and manage debts. They can also help you set up a workable household budget that you can stick to.

All three of them have strong track-records of supporting our tenants, with great success.

If you think our advisors could help you, please get in touch and have an initial chat over the phone or arrange to meet them in your home. Call 0800 316 0897 or email **WBDATeam@2rh.org.uk**.

SAVING TIP

Energy-saving lightbulbs are more expensive to buy, but they last much longer and are cheaper to run, saving money long-term.





Bright sparks

If you need an electrical repair, you know you are in safe hands with our properly-trained, and professionally-certified, electricians.

The team has recently been accredited by the nationally-recognised NICEIC following a period of rigorous testing and assessment, in order to prove they meet the highest professional standards.

It is a great achievement to be on the national register of approved electricians and our team certainly has its work cut out, carrying out repairs on 4,000 homes across Gloucestershire and Herefordshire.

Time to swap?



If you'd like to move home, but don't want to wait for a transfer, you might consider swapping homes with someone else.

As long as you find someone who wants to live where you do, it can often happen quite quickly and it won't cost you anything to arrange it.

The process is called 'Mutual exchange'. First, you need to register

on the Homeswapper website (www.homeswapper.co.uk) and you'll be automatically matched with potential swaps. Once you have found a match, we will then need to approve your application.

There's some extra information and an application form on our own website (under the 'Find a home' tab), or you can call our Lettings team to find out more.



Dementia care

Are you looking after someone with dementia?

If you have concerns about what will happen if they go missing, the Herbert Protocol might help.

This is a scheme which enables police to have quick access to a range of relevant details about the missing person which may help to locate them, such as previous addresses, special locations, hobbies and regular routines.

It is named after war veteran George Herbert, who sadly died whilst missing and trying to return to his childhood home.

If you would like to sign up to the Herbert Protocol, you just need to download a form from the Gloucestershire police website: www.gloucestershire.police.uk/staying-safe/the-herbert-protocol/, complete it and keep it somewhere safe where it can easily be found if it is needed.

This simple action could save precious time and help to save a life.



Mark Harper with Yvonne Leishman (Chair of our Board) and Garry King (Chief Executive) discussing plans for one of our current housing developments.

MP's visit

Forest of Dean MP Mark Harper came to see us recently to discuss local issues impacting on social housing and to see our plans for building more affordable homes.

We currently have 13 new schemes across Gloucestershire, with around 300 homes at different stages of progression.

Mark commented: "I am always keen to support organisations like Two Rivers Housing, which provide my constituents with the opportunity and security that comes with a good quality home."

Make paying your rent easier

Did you know - you can pay your bills direct from your smartphone, by using the allpay app or allpay text payments?

The allpay app is available to download on Apple and Android devices. You can pay your rent and council tax, or use it to pay any outstanding fines or debt repayments, all at the touch of a button.

It is secure and free, and offers you the flexibility to make fast and simple payments anytime and anywhere.

To begin using the app you just need a smartphone, internet access, a valid allpay swipe card (or 19-digit payment reference number) and a current bank card. Simply download the app, follow a brief registration process and you're ready to go!

The app allows you to save your payment number, amounts, and any bank card details, so you don't need to enter the same information every time.

If you'd rather pay by text, this is a secure payment facility. Just register your details by going to **www.allpayments.net/textpay**. You will need your payment reference number.



Gifts pile up under the office Christmas tree to be distributed to families in need.

Festive flashback

With spring fully on the way, short days and Christmas are a distant memory for most of us.

However, before we consign it completely to the scrapbook, we want to give you a flavour of one of the many parties that took place at our schemes over the festive period – the one pictured right is at Deanholme in Coleford – and to tell you about the 250 presents staff donated to the Salvation Army Christmas Toy Appeal.

As the photo above shows, our employees gifted a huge array of books,

toys, DVDs, games and clothes to help local parents struggling over the Christmas period, and we were so proud of their generosity.



Deanholme residents share their festive good cheer.

Our new money manager



Barry spends time briefing Carol, before he hands over the reins.

The man in charge of our budgets will be stepping down in April, and heading for a welcome retirement.

Barry Thompson, our Corporate Director of Resources, joined us in 2005, having already completed a 28-year career in housing sector finance.

Now he is handing over the corporate calculator to Carol Dover, who has

also worked in housing for many years, but also brings varied experiences of commercial finance roles in leisure, drinks and manufacturing companies. She comes to Two Rivers Housing from Connexus Housing Group in Hereford, where she was Head of Finance.

Carol has a busy home life as she is married with four boys “to entertain

and provide a taxi service for”, but she is really looking forward to the challenge at Two Rivers.

Meanwhile, Barry has plans to enjoy his leisure time and hopes to cover thousands of miles travelling the globe, starting with Vietnam.

Welcome Carol, thank you Barry and good luck to both!

Moving on

If you're planning to move out of your rented Two Rivers home, we wish you the very best. But before you go, please remember there are some practical things we need to sort out.

Please make sure you give us enough notice of your decision to leave and provide us with a forwarding address and contact number. We'll also need the names of your utility suppliers.

For further information regarding leaving your home, please visit our website and go to 'Your home' – 'Moving on'.

SAVING TIP

Buy gifts throughout the year to help spread the cost and take advantage of deals.



On the move?



Please don't forget, you must give us **four weeks' notice** in writing of your decision to leave.



Can you spot the 10 differences?



A B C D E F G H



Name: _____

Address: _____

Tel number/email: _____

Grid
references

Spring tea break



Well done to Barbara Hammond, who was one of the many people who identified the missing word in our Christmas wordsearch as 'turkey', but was the only one to be drawn as our winner. A £15 gift voucher is on its way.

If you missed out last time, you might like to try our Easter-themed 'spot-the-difference' competition – either to be in with a chance of winning the gift voucher prize, or just for fun.

There are 10 differences between the two pictures and we'd like you to tell us which they are. If you're entering by post you can circle them on the picture, but if you prefer to enter by email, then you need to send us the 10 answers as grid references.

Email communications@2rh.org.uk or put your entry in the post to:

Communications team
Two Rivers Housing
Cleeve Mill Lane
Newent
Gloucestershire
GL18 1DS

Please make sure we have your entry by **30 April**. Good luck!

Changing channels

Changes to TV transmitters may mean you need to retune your set if you want to continue watching your favourite programmes.

Transmitters across the whole of the UK are being updated and some channels need to move to new airwaves. Freeview and other services based on terrestrial TV, such as YouTube, BT TV or TalkTalk **are** affected. Satellite and cable TV **are not**.

Locally, these updates are scheduled to take place in April and June 2019.

If you need advice, or you find you are missing services after retuning, you can visit the Freeview website at www.freeview.co.uk/tvchanges or call the Freeview advice line for free on 0808 100 0288.



Contact us:

Please tell us if you would like this in large print or on audio CD.

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Email
customerservices@2rh.org.uk

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