



Benenden
Magazine
December 2021

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Editorial



I joined in with the parish council's autumn litter pick again this year, and what a rewarding experience it was. Obviously the main reward comes in the shape of free coffee and cake from the community shop, but there's also the socio anthropological benefit of being able to view people's detritus up close and work out who dropped it and the thought process that led them to do so.

It's not hard to work out that they're motorists - in fact, some of them actually leave behind pieces of their cars for good measure - but I also pieced together a profile of the average offender and their movements in the hours leading up to their littering.

The cardboard cups tell me they started the morning by visiting a petrol station and enjoyed their morning coffee on the move; then they stuffed their faces with a Co-op egg and cress sandwich for breakfast, washed down with a can of cheap cider, followed by a restorative puff on a Lambert & Butler king size; after which they downed a tin of Red Bull to help them muster the energy to throw the whole lot out of the window. Classy.

I've come to accept that these people are vermin and as such will never be wholly eliminated, so I've learned to take solace in the fact that for every one of them, there's a small army of decent Benendenians who are happy to don the high-vis waistcoat, pull on the regulation gloves and tidy our verges with their trusty picking stick; just as for every vandal, defiler of public conveniences and leaver of dog poo, there are a hundred citizens who are determined to keep the village at its best.

As we head into the festive season, that's surely a good message to carry with us. Life in Benenden is good, and it will stay that way as long as most of us continue to care - about the parish, its people and everything it has to offer. Happy Christmas to our village and to all of you who cherish living here.

Peter Thomas, Co-Editor

The Benenden Magazine is published monthly as a joint venture by Benenden Parish Council and St George's Parochial Church Council. It is distributed free to all residents of the parish. Opinions expressed are not necessarily those of the publishers. Responsibility for accuracy of information rests with contributors and advertisers. Neither the publishers nor the editors shall be held responsible for or endorse any opinions, products or services printed in the magazine or directory.

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Church Calendar

St George's Church

Rector: Revd David Commander 240658 revdavidcommander@gmail.com (day off: Thursday)
Curate: Revd Ylva Blid-Mackenzie 01233 820100 rev.ylva@gmail.com (Sunday, Monday and Tuesday)
Churchwarden: David Collard 241944 julia.collard@btinternet.com
Churchwarden: Sue Fisher 241907 sue@undaunted.co.uk
www.benendenchurch.org 850849 benendenchurch@gmail.com
Please inform the Rector, Curate or Churchwardens if you, or anyone else, is ill.

Sunday 28 November	8am Communion	10am Morning Worship	5pm Advent Service of Light
Sunday 5 December	8am Communion	10am Family Communion	
Sunday 12 December	8am BCP Communion	10am Morning Worship	
Sunday 19 December	8am Communion	10am Sung Eucharist	
Tuesday 21 December			7.30pm Parish Carol Service
Christmas Eve		3pm Crib Service	11.30pm Communion
Christmas Day	8am Communion	10am Morning Worship followed by Communion	
Sunday 26 December	9am Communion		
Morning Prayer	8am Mondays and Fridays		

Mission Church, Sandhurst

Rector: Revd David Commander 240658 revdavidcommander@gmail.com (day off: Thursday)
Morning Prayer 8am Tuesdays and Wednesdays
Mid-week Communion 10am Tuesdays

Iden Green Congregational Church

Pastor: Tobin Bird 240027 www.idengreen.org.uk
Sunday Services 10am Morning Worship 5.30pm Evening Worship
The 10am Morning Worship is broadcast on our YouTube channel: search 'Iden Green Congregational Church'.

The Roman Catholic Chapel of Our Lady and St Joseph TN17 4EL

Fr Barry Grant 713364 www.sttheodore-cranbrook.org
Masses 9am Sundays 7.30pm Holy Days

From the Parish Registers

Funerals 4 November Alan Pickett Thanksgiving Service
12 November Hilda Kemp Interment

Rector's Letter



Christmas cheer behind the mask

Last month I wrote about the joy of some normal things returning. We hope, of course, that this will continue, as we have some lovely normal things planned this coming month at St George's Church and around the village to mark and celebrate Christmas together. I dearly hope and pray that many of these things that we have missed will go ahead as usual this year.

We do, of course, have to be careful because (as we keep being reminded), the virus has not gone away. We are now living in this strange and often confusing time when many things have returned to normal but Covid infection rates are very high. I am aware of more people right now who have tested positive for Covid than I was throughout last year. So, the issue is still there, but so too is the need (and the want) to get back to some normal things.

For our church and the community, these normal things include: the Advent carol service (Advent Sunday is the 28 November); the switching on of the star on the church; the carol services for various local schools at church; 'Carols in the Café' for the shop volunteers; the candlelit parish carol service; the Toddler Group Christmas event; the crib service; the 'midnight' service; and the Christmas Day services. All these things we dearly hope will go ahead. Cast your mind back 12 months, though; do you remember the disappointment (and upheaval) of the last-minute cancellation of so many Christmas events and the imposed travel restrictions? I sincerely hope we do not have to go through that again.

One thing that we have decided still cannot go ahead this year - regrettably - is the village lunch in the Memorial Hall on Christmas Day. Those it is predominately for are, in many cases, in a vulnerable category themselves, so, we see this as too big a risk. However, if you are going to be alone on Christmas Day, and would like a visit, give me a call and we will see what we can arrange.

In order to ensure that we, as a village community, can join together in the annual events and services (that perhaps in the past we have taken for granted) and in order to be able to go ahead with these things, then we may each need to take responsibility now to reduce the spread of the virus locally. Perhaps for the next month there is a benefit for all of us in respecting social distance once more; of wearing face coverings once more in confined spaces; and to continue to respect the wishes of others - who, for all we know, may have unseen vulnerabilities. It is all about respect and valuing everyone in our community.

If I see you before Christmas, it may well be behind a face covering; but there will be a smile behind the mask, and also a wish that you are able to enjoy a happy, healthy and peaceful Christmas. God bless.

Revd David Commander, Rector



Village Calendar

November

Sunday 28 Advent Carol Service: The Service of Light, St George's Church, 5pm p.9

December

Thursday 2 Volunteer Day, Beacon Field wildflower meadow, 11am p.25

Friday 3 Benenden Primary School Christmas Market, Benenden Primary School, 3.30pm p.11

Saturday 4 Benenden Pre-School Christmas Fair, Benenden Village Hall, 2.30pm p.11

Wednesday 8 Benenden's Community Shop Volunteers' Evening, Benenden's Community Shop, 6.15pm p.15

Saturday 11 Wines from the Rhone, Benenden School Café, 7pm p.17

Monday 13 Parish Council Meeting, Memorial Hall, 7pm

Tuesday 14 Merry and Bright, Christmas Party, Memorial Hall, 2pm p.9

Saturday 18 Christmas Quiz, St George's Club, 8.15pm

Monday 20 Preparing the Church for Christmas, St George's Church, 9.30am

Tuesday 21 Christmas Village Lunch, Benenden Village Hall, 12.30pm p.17

Tuesday 21 Parish Carol Service by Candlelight, St George's Church, 7.30pm

Thursday 23 Christmas Draw, St George's Club, 9pm

Christmas Eve The Crib Service, St George's Church, 3pm p.13

Iden Green Toddler Group

Tuesdays during term time in Iden Green Congregational Church, 9-11.30am

Wednesday Coffee Mornings

Wednesdays in the Memorial Hall, 10-11.30am

Benenden Bowls Club

Thursdays, April-September, on the recreation field, practice night, 6.30pm

Cakes & Chaos: Cafe and Toddler Group

Fridays during term time in St George's Church, 9-11.15am

Parish Council



Following on from our chair Nicola Thomas's introduction last month, I would firstly like to say a huge thank you to all on the parish council for welcoming me as the newest Benenden parish councillor. It's a complete privilege to stand beside you to support the interests of our community. Through my time with the Benenden Action Team and getting to know so many amazing people over the past five years of living here, I felt a position on the council was a natural step to take and I look forward to the challenges that arise.

With amazing initiatives such as starting on the transformation of the Beacon Field as a tribute to the Queen's Platinum Jubilee, our stunning new village sign, the ongoing updates to signage to improve awareness of local speed limits and the important work going into maintaining our village assets, I have walked into a busy environment full of people who care for our gem of a village.

From a community point of view, I have been involved in the push to support the Catching Lives and Nourish charities that offer invaluable support to our wider community, as these dark nights roll in. I would ask you all to take a moment and read the article in this magazine to gain a further insight into the great work these charities do. Any support you can provide will be hugely welcome and my sincere thanks go to the amazing individuals in our parish who give their time so willingly to support these vital causes.

From village litter picks to planning permissions, the parish council is here to support the community in matters that affect us all. The meetings are open to members of the public and I would encourage you to get in touch with any concerns or comments you may have.

May I be the first to wish you all a very merry Christmas and a happy new year.

Guy Hagan, Parish Councillor

Caroline Levett, Benenden Parish Council Clerk

01580 240371 clerk@benendenparishcouncil.org

For more information see our website www.benendenparishcouncil.org or find us on Facebook

Parish Council Meeting

Monday 13 December 2021,

Memorial Hall, 7pm



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Talking Point



When a knock on the door is no treat

By the time you read this, Christmas will be fast approaching, with all the joy that entails, but I suspect I'll still be recovering from the trials of Halloween, which I'm sorry to say has in recent years become one of my least favourite times of the year.

I love Halloween, with all its spooky connotations, and remember, as a child, enjoying fantastic family parties with games, dressing-up and ghostly themed food, such as 'ghoulash' and Bull's Blood 'wine' cocktail! What I do not like, however, is this latest trend from across 'the Pond' of 'trick or treat'.

I am sure many will think me an old grump, but I can't help the way I feel. I dislike the implications of trick or treat: the way young children are encouraged to knock on doors and suggest that to avoid something nasty happening to the householder, they could be appeased with a sweet or similar. What a life lesson.

Our own experience of this year's trick or treat was interesting; neighbours with young children informed us that they would like to pay a visit and when I responded that I wished them well but would not want to take part, I was met with kind understanding. I hoped that all their youngsters would have a lovely time and, indeed, I made some little ghostly meringues for them all, to show I wasn't quite the misery guts I may have sounded.

However, we did have another four visits from children who did not live in our road but whom I congratulated on their costumes and who all - very politely - moved on when I told them that we didn't 'do' trick or treat. Unfortunately, one of these visits involved two young chaps (one of them a fairly tall teenager) fully dressed in full army camouflage, complete with tin hats and blackout make-up. One of them, who was closest to our front door, stood as if ready to do combat, with a rifle pointing at me.

I quickly realised the rifle was a rather simple wooden replica, but for the life of me I couldn't work out the connection of their costumes with Halloween. It's just lucky I wasn't someone of a nervous disposition.

I would dearly love to support another sort of Halloween event - maybe a walk through the village with lanterns, ending up in the village hall with drinks and sweets or something similar. But let's get rid of the threats of menace: it just isn't British. Or is it?

"Discuss," as my old English teacher would say. And in the meantime, Happy Christmas.

Sally-Ann Marks

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Queen's Platinum Jubilee

Many will remember the special weekend in 2012 for Her Majesty the Queen's Diamond Jubilee. We hope to match this with a series of special events for her forthcoming Platinum Jubilee on 2 June 2022.

For this once in a lifetime event, the highlight of the long bank holiday weekend will once again be the lighting of the beacon on the night. The beacon lighting will follow a celebration themed around 'a life of service' in St George's Church. The Benenden Players will, in their inimitable style, be hosting a revue on the Saturday night in the village hall which will be a riot if previous performances are anything to go by.

There are other events planned for the jubilee weekend and we will announce these over the coming months. Whatever you do though, please save the date.

Peter Ellis

Poppy Appeal 2021

The Poppy Appeal collection in Benenden and Iden Green has raised the excellent amount of £5,019 to date, including a very generous church collection of £661.46p on Remembrance Sunday, contributions through JustGiving, and from several particularly benevolent donors and organisations. We are most grateful to those who gave so unselfishly, and to the those who volunteered their time to undertake house-to-house collections, which were unavoidably curtailed due to restrictions.

Jane Dalton Holmes

ADVENT CAROL SERVICE

The Service of Light



ST GEORGE'S SCHURCH FLOWER FUND

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Merry and Bright

Our Halloween meeting with decorated tables and lit pumpkins went very well. It was lovely to see new faces and thank you to all who came along. We played bingo, had a raffle and enjoyed an excellent afternoon tea. We look forward to seeing you at our next meeting which is our Christmas party on 14 December from 2-4pm.

Dawne 240548 and Joan 240672

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Parent, Teacher and Friends Association

We are excited and ready for a magical outdoor Christmas Market. Do come join us on Friday 3 December from 3.30pm until 7pm in the courtyard of our wonderful Benenden C.E. Primary School. It's time to come together and enjoy some festive spirit. Remember to bring cash and coins along as we will not have card readers and we look forward to welcoming you for carousel magic, santa story time, mulled wine, hot chocolate, food and much more. Special shout out goes to The Benenden Bell Ringers who will be there and our children choir.

From our previous fundraising efforts we were able to help cover the costs for a fun animal experience for the smallest at our school, the reception class, together with the children from Year 6 as part of their EYFS / Buddies programme. They had so much fun. The success from our activity stalls at the village fete in September has given us the opportunity to give each of our seven classes at school £200 each to spend on enriching class projects. What an achievement. Thank you to all. Some classes will spend money on school trips, some on gardening, drama workshops and much more.

We've launched Amazon wish lists for each classroom. If you go onto our PTFA website under 'events' you can access each list anytime throughout the year and are able to choose [an item that will be delivered directly to the classes. You get to choose and delight the children. Thank you.

Wishing everybody a peaceful and wonderful festive season and may the New Year be filled with happiness, good health and joy for all. Thank you for your continued support for our PTFA and school. For more details on initiatives, please scan QR code or visit our website www.tinyurl.com/2bpyw54h

Astrid Miller, Benenden CEP, PTFA Chair



Christmas Market

Benenden C.E. Primary School
Friday 3rd December 2021 / 3.30-7pm

Outdoor Market
in school courtyard, wrap up warm!
Vintage 1912 carousel
Children's Choir & Santa Storytelling
Food, sweets & treats, 20x hampers to win, games, fun, mulled wine
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Benenden Pre-School

There is lots of excitement about our fundraising Christmas Fair in the village hall from 2.30-4.30pm on Saturday 4 December. Come along for lots of festive fun and browse a fantastic selection of local business stalls, enjoy delicious refreshments, take part in our craft corner and sing along to those classic Christmas songs. The event will offer some much-needed Christmas cheer after a long break from group gatherings, bringing the community together this winter.

Rachel Tinker

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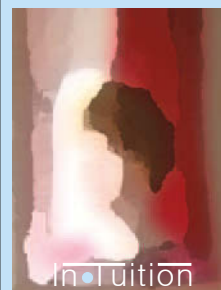
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Everyone is invited to ...

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It would be lovely if everyone - young and not so young - could come along dressed as a character from the Nativity story: Mary, Joseph, Shepherd, Inn Keeper, Wise-men, Angel, Star, Cow, Sheep, Donkey ... anything appropriate you can think of! This will enable us to bring to life the story of the nativity in a way that will be meaningful and fun for all.

We look forward to seeing you as we create the nativity tableau together.

David and Helen Commander



**IDEN GREEN
CONGREGATIONAL
CHURCH**
CHRISTMAS SERVICES

15 December at 6.30pm
Carols in the Car Park
Followed by mince pies
& warm drinks

19 December at 5.30pm
Service of Lessons & Carols
Tea at 4.30pm – All welcome

25 December at 9.30am
Christmas Morning
Family Service
Everyone welcome

**HAPPY CHRISTMAS FROM ALL
AT IDEN GREEN**

Benenden Pre-School

World leaders and well-known figures including David Attenborough and Greta Thunberg have attended COP26 in Glasgow and pledges are being finalised on levels of methane and deforestation, among others.

How can we support the youngest members of our village community to be ecologically aware and environmentally responsible? At Pre-School we are reading a page a day from a beautifully written and exquisitely illustrated book called *It's Up to Us: A Children's Terra Carta for Nature, People & Planet*. The simple yet thought-provoking text reflects the fact that children have a unique curiosity for this amazing, fragile planet we call home.

Staff and children have enjoyed discussions about air, earth and water; the creatures we find in the sea, the birds we see as we play outside and the fruits and vegetables we grow in the soil of the Pre-School garden. The children have also looked at the toys we play with - the lovely wooden blocks from Community Playthings, the cardboard jigsaws and the plastic Lego - and thought about the materials they are made from and what we could do with them should they break.

The Pre-School children are very used to the concept of recycling, using the food waste

bin daily for peel and cores after snack, which then goes to feed our wormery in the garden. They know to wash out their yoghurt pots after lunch and place them in the recycling along with any kitchen foil. We are grateful that our understanding parents send ever decreasing amounts of single-use plastics in their children's lunchboxes. Our milk comes in glass bottles from our lovely local Hinxden dairy.

And, perhaps most importantly of all, the children put on their splashsuit trousers (and even the tiniest quickly learn to do this independently), their coats and their wellies and play daily in the garden, experiencing the beauty of each earthly season firsthand.

Lucy Oakley, Supervisor

supervisor@benendenpreschool.co.uk

Service of Thanksgiving

Philippa (Pippa) Hare, loving wife of John and much-loved mother and grandmother of Charlotte, Hetta and Emily and five grandchildren, died peacefully at Larchmere Nursing Home on 22 October. A Service of Thanksgiving for Pippa's life will take place at Cranbrook Church on 26 November at 2.30pm.



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This Christmas we will be offering all that you might expect from your favourite village store. Watch out for mince pies; they will appear soon and so will the hamper for which it will be well worth buying raffle tickets. Christmas cards are on display nice and early, including those with winning designs by the Primary School children.

For all those wonderful volunteers who have helped keep us going and those who would like to join this merry band there is a social evening of singing carols and general enjoyment on 8 December, starting at 6.15pm. I can promise a jolly musical evening accompanied by festive libation and nibbles. If any of you are thinking about volunteering, please sign up and join us. It is the best way to meet people in the village.

Finally, we would like to thank all our suppliers for keeping us stocked throughout a testing year. Special thanks too, go to our staff and volunteers who continue to keep everything running as smoothly as possible. We wish all of them, as well as all our customers, a very Merry Christmas and a happy, healthy New Year.

Bev Beveridge info@benendens.co.uk
www.benendens.co.uk

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Thursday 30:	Shop and Post Office open 7.30am-5pm Café open 8.30am-4.30pm
New Year's Eve:	Shop and Post Office open 7.30am-3pm Café open 8.30am-2.30pm
New Year's Day:	Shop closed
Sunday 2:	Shop and Post Office open 9am-1pm Café open 9am-1pm
Monday 3:	Shop closed
Tuesday 4:	Return to usual shop opening hours

Village Hall

We had a lovely response to last month's column in which we listed many of the classes available at the hall, so I want to take the opportunity again this month to highlight more of what's on offer. The marvellous Jane Taylor is back on Monday nights with her fitness classes. Her sessions come highly recommended by those who have attended in the past, and spots can be booked directly with Jane via email jane@taylormadefitness.biz or call 07734 748269.

Most of our regular classes are continuing to run right up towards Christmas and returning after a short break in early January, and there is still space during school holidays for your parties and family get-togethers. Don't forget that the village panto is approaching in January so don't miss out on your tickets.

Holly Clayson, Manager 07419 989830
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www.benendenvillagehall.org

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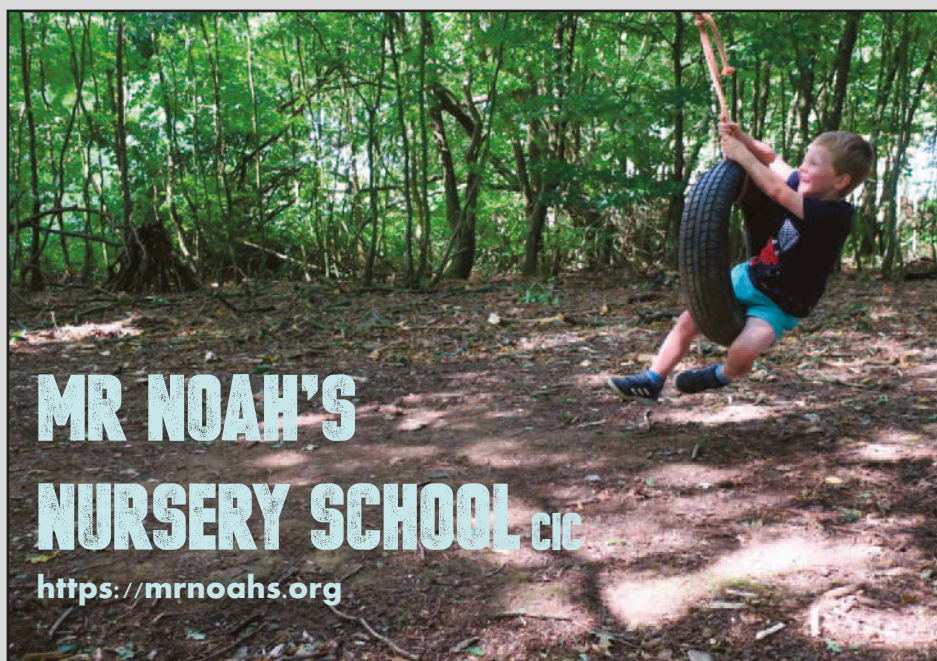
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We have recommenced our regular monthly lunchtime meetings at The Bull, Benenden.

Currently there are vacancies for new members. If you are retired and would welcome friendly, relaxed company at a lunch, with interesting speakers, then please contact the Hon. Secretary on 01580 211814 for more information.



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Christmas village lunch

The village lunch will take place on Tuesday 21 December in the village hall at 12.30pm. £5 each and all welcome. Please could you let me know if you would like to come by Thursday 16 December, so we can plan and shop, as well as cook.

Minnie Garnier 240506

Benenden Village Trust

We would like to thank Lorna Elliott and her family for replacing a hawthorn tree on the verge by the bus stop outside the village hall. The tree had been donated by Miss Elliott many years ago but had not survived.

Martin Dickson, Benenden Village Trust
www.benendenvillagetrust.org

St George's Club

Every (non-Covid) year, we play a hotly contested skittles competition in November and the winner receives the impressive Cyril Moore Memorial Cup. Cyril loved skittles and his son-in-law kindly built a bespoke alley for us. This year all three of Cyril's daughters attended the competition and one of them, Sue Spicer, presented happy (second time) winner Sally Cheeseman with the cup. Funds raised on the night were donated to the Poppy Appeal.

John Marshall

Benenden Bowls Club

At a 2021 season presentation event we awarded the following skilled players: Malcom Gregory won the Memorial and Bambridge Trophies; Clive Watts won the Bull Shield and Kenward Trophy; Diane Gregory won the Pop Horton Cup and Sally Cheeseman won the Ladies Rose Bowl and shared the Fred Reid Pairs award with John Marshall.

John Marshall

Richard Household at Benenden School Café



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Planning Matters

For full details of the Parish Council's comment please see minutes of meetings.

- 21/03444/FULL Field Farm House, Coldharbour Road. Erection of proposed single storey outbuilding.
- 21/02327/FULL Hopehouse Hens, Hopehouse Lane. Excavation works to pond (Retrospective).
- 21/03552/FULL 1 Claremont Place, Chapel Lane. Single storey rear extension and Side porch addition with storage.
- 21/03599/FULL The Barn House, Cranbrook Road. Alterations to fenestration of house and replace existing garage/log store.
- 21/03588/FULL Stable Cottage, The Green. Demolish existing rear lean-to and replace with similar size rear extension for ancillary use (utility and shower room), internal alterations including addition of bedroom/office on ground floor, addition of small balcony to serve master bedroom, replacement and upgrade of some windows and porch.
- 21/03581/FULL Plum Tree Cottage, Halden Lane. Proposed garden outbuilding.



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Benenden Panto

After a panto-free 2021, it's wonderful to be busy rehearsing and preparing for the next Benenden Players' panto, which will be on 27-30 January next year in the village hall. Once again, the talented Bev Beveridge has created another world first, 'The Comicals of Narna' (with apologies to CS Lewis), packed full of fun, dance and song. Tickets go on sale online at the start of December for two matinees and three evening performances, so book early to get the seats you want.

Be assured that we will adhere to the Covid guidelines at the time to maximise the safety of all. We are as confident as we can be that the show will run but if it has to be cancelled due to government requirements then we will refund you - unless you wish to make a part/full donation to help cover costs we are incurring in the run up to the event.

In the meantime, if you walk by the village hall on a Thursday evening or Sunday afternoon, don't be surprised if you hear music and laughter as our 30-strong cast from 9-70+ years old rehearse, rehearse, rehearse.

Ruth Clark

www.benendenplayers.co.uk

Benenden School

The second half of term got off to a great start with the first of our two New Parents' Dinners at Ironmongers' Hall. This gave us the opportunity to catch up with the parents of girls who joined us in September 2020 in the beautiful surrounds of the Ironmonger's Dining Hall and enjoy performances from some of our outstanding musicians.

At this dinner we were pleased to have introduced parents to our ambitions for our bursary provision, and this is a vital issue that we have also shared with students when some of our recent alumni who received bursaries returned to Benenden for this very special discussion event.

There is a great deal going on already, as is always the way with life at Benenden, and this was evident during this first week. The Fourths got straight into their Enquiry Week, during which each lesson focused on the girls exploring their own identity, and the Upper Fourths followed suit the following week as they learnt about food processes and sustainability.

The subject of sustainability could not be more topical, with COP26 being held in the UK. Our Eco-Committee have led us all in understanding the issues surrounding COP26 and inspiring the entire community to work together to make Benenden as sustainable as possible.

I am looking forward to heading up to Manchester next weekend for the Girls' Schools Association Conference where the theme will be 'Girls - the Voice for Positive Change' and we will be discussing the role that girls' school play in developing the next generation of female leaders, particularly considering topics such as sustainability, diversity and inclusion, scientific research and finance and even farming. Naturally, no leader can be successful if they do not develop effective listening skills and we will therefore also be thinking about how this generation ensures that they are heard whilst also effectively listening to differing views. It will no doubt be a thought-provoking couple of days.

Samantha Price, Headmistress

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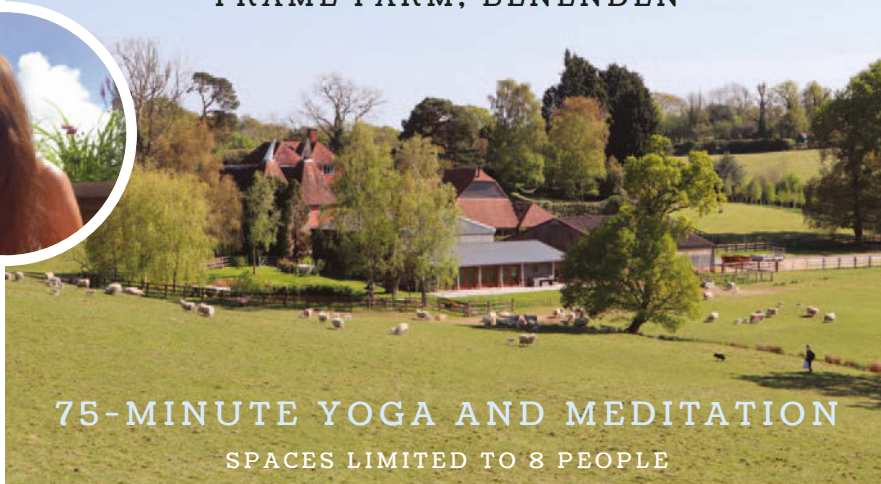
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Primary School

Last term we were delighted to be able to hold our harvest festival again in St George's Church. This was our first whole school community event and it truly was a joyous occasion. We also held a very successful Dress Down Day in support of Mental Health Day. Everyone came into school wearing something that gave them comfort and the children engaged in creating a 'happy place' in school.

At the end of the term we awarded a variety of cups:

KS1 Merit Cup: Isabelle Hughes (Year 1)

KS2 Merit Cup: Dexter Walden (Year 6)

Buddy Cup: For the best Year 6 and EYFS buddy combination, won by Tilli Rolf Heather, Isabella Fry and Ida Sims.

Values Cup: The children nominated were: Elyott Button, Lillie-Lou Aistrup, Pippa Cox, Ella van Den Boomen, George Gray and Sophie Watkins, with George winning for his compassion for others.

We are in the process of evaluating how eco-friendly and sustainable the school currently is, and have set ourselves steps to make positive changes. We have created reminders for every class to switch off their lights as they leave, we have recycled our food packaging into a display, we have been litter picking and have challenged each class to make bird feeders in order to increase the biodiversity in our outside areas. A huge thank you to Mrs Brook and the Eco Warriors for their continued efforts.

Finally, amidst the challenges that we have already faced this term, I am delighted to inform you that the school was once again awarded Music Mark Status 2021/2022, for the continued value that we place on music and our dedication to offering and delivering a broad and balanced curriculum. This is an amazing achievement, well done to everyone.

For the Year 2022 reception intake, please contact the school office on 01580 240 565 or via office@benenden-cep.kent.sch.uk to make an appointment to view the school.

Lindsay Roberts, Executive Headteacher 240565
office@benenden-cep.kent.sch.uk
www.benenden-cep.kent.sch.uk

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geoffreywhitehead@vinehallschool.com

Iden Green and Benenden WI

WI representatives were at COP26 to make sure that decision makers knew how strongly WI members across the country feel about tackling climate change.

We all had a brilliant time at our winter party in November when we enjoyed delicious food and great company. As usual, a varied programme of events, visits and speakers is being arranged by our inspirational committee for next year and we also look forward to hearing about the wide range of hobbies, interests and skills amongst our members.

We are hoping that members and visitors may be able to find outdated, unfashionable clothes to wear at our first meeting on 18 January. These will provide a light-hearted theme to the afternoon when we shall have fun making plans for the new year and have plenty of opportunities to hear everybody's news and views.

Meanwhile, we would like to wish all our members and friends a very happy and peaceful Christmas and a prosperous New Year.

Jackie Liffen 752232 WI@daisystar.co.uk

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Topical health

Among the tinsel and glitter of Christmas, it is easy to forget that this time of year holds some hidden dangers for the mental wellbeing of many people. It's simple enough to remember that a large turkey requires a lot more cooking than the usual Sunday chicken, and that that extra glass of Christmas sherry might result in a festive hangover, while ignoring some of the other impacts which the festivities might have on us.

Mind, the mental health charity, reminds us how many people find Christmas challenging, an issue perhaps magnified as we emerge from almost two years of restrictions. For many people Christmas is a challenge as we remember people no longer with us and our year draws to an end, and we review what we have achieved. Among the strategies Mind identifies for managing Christmas anxiety is to be honest with ourselves, don't over commit to things and take some time out just to relax and for some self-care; this applies to all of us.

With all the hype around Christmas it is easy to upset ourselves if our Christmas is not perfect when, in reality, no one's really is. One of the biggest challenges this and any Christmas is loneliness. Loneliness is often exacerbated by age and not having people we once loved around us still especially at times of reflection and when things we usually engage with are not running. If lockdown has taught us nothing else, it is that being with others is more important than achieving any unrealistic ideal, so be gentle with yourself, enjoy the moment and stop chasing that illusive Facebook moment. Perhaps one of the best salves for our collective mental wellbeing this Christmas is remembering who our neighbours are and making sure they aren't spending it alone for the want of an invitation.

Peter Ellis

Benenden Hospital

In times like these, fuelled with uncertainty and worry, I believe it is important to raise our spirits by highlighting a few of Benenden Hospital's 2021 achievements.

Firstly, the Rising Mercury (RM) Society - a member's group of former Benenden patients - donated an astonishing £40,000 to us this year. The RM Society donations are used to enhance and support the ongoing patient experience, such as the vibrant photographs seen on our atrium screens. Overall, these features create a feeling of warmth for patients; our hospital is a home away from home.

I have observed a rise in patients worrying about entering hospitals for fear of becoming poorly with an infection, but I am proud to announce that our surgical infection rate for 2021 was 0.3%. In comparison, healthcare associated infections in England are estimated to affect 6.4% of patients, with surgical site infections averaging at 15.7% (Health Protection Agency). I hope this statistic gives everyone confidence in the commitment we have to cleanliness and infection control.

Our Best of Benenden awards recognised 450 years of long service this year, which is a testament to our staff's loyalty. The awards, which were held virtually, celebrated the great work that individuals and teams have produced since 2015. Throughout the past 18 months there have been many challenges and our staff have continued to provide support and expert advice to patients. Without our family of staff, we simply couldn't do what we do.

As we near the end of 2021, I want to wish you all a very merry Christmas. I hope that you can spend more time with those you love and seek to find the positives moving forward.

Jane Abbott, Hospital Director and Chief Nurse

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Benenden Neighbourhood Plan

Benenden's NDP cleared another hurdle when it was passed by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council's Planning and Transportation Cabinet Advisory Board.

It will now go in front of a TWBC Cabinet meeting on 2 December, with the final referendum scheduled for 3 February.

In the meantime, here is another look at the benefits a strong NDP will bring to the parish.

Peter Thomas

STRONG PROTECTION FOR OUR OUTSTANDING VIEWS

Benenden's undulating ridges and valleys, peppered with irregular fields, woodland and characterful houses, create a landscape that is rich in beautiful views. These can be both far-reaching and panoramic, looking out across the Weald, or of more intimate character, connecting us to the individual features of the landscape and the activities that take place within it. They all help define the landscape we live in.

The primary ridges run east to west, through the main village itself and along Goddards Green Road, loosely following original ancient routes. The height of the ridges hovers around 100m above sea level and, unsurprisingly, many of the notable views originate from these.

The Neighbourhood Development Plan's Landscape & Environment volunteers looked to identify key views that represent the parish, and beyond. After sharing these through NDP events and various drafts of the plan, we ended up with 23 specific views to be included. One could always add more, but it is already a comparatively large number and any further additions ran the risk of making the list unwieldy and lacking the specificity required.

National Planning Policy places great weight on conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, as well as emphasis on the historic environment. Nominating views provides a way to help encapsulate the character and beauty of the area.

In the most recent draft of the plan, there was a specific policy: Policy LE2 Distinctive Views. However, the independent examiner highlighted that distinctive views are already set out as part of Policy LE1 Protect and Enhance the Countryside, and therefore LE2 was unnecessary duplication. This change need not affect the overall effectiveness of the policy, as the appropriate wording has been incorporated within LE1.

The protection of views is not as specific as Local Green Spaces, which have a special designation within National Planning Policy. It does not prevent development which may occur within a view. However, the inclusion of the views within the development plan with an appropriate policy allows us to ensure that any development should not adversely impact a view. Whilst this is always going to be open to interpretation, it strengthens our ability to protect our beautiful surroundings.

More details, the final draft plan and the independent examiner's report can be found on the parish council website at benendenparishcouncil.org.

Charles Pope

NDP Steering Committee Member

www.benendenneighbourhoodplan.org

Wildflower meadow news

Another volunteer day has been planned in conjunction with the Bumblebee Conservation Trust to develop the Beacon Field wildflower meadow. Our intention is to strim the area previously strewn with green hay, rake to expose the soil, and then sow yellow rattle seed. We are also hoping to plant some perennial wildflower plugs to give the meadow a kick start for next year.

If you have a strimmer, a rake (or even just a pair of gardening gloves!) you will be very welcome. So, if you can, please join us on Thursday 2 December from 11am to 3pm, even if you can only spare an hour.

Peter Driver



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Village Charities

Winter charity campaign

The pandemic has presented new challenges for all of us, not least for the homeless and the hungry in our local community. The good news is that the government has allocated more funds to addressing these issues; the harsh reality is that homelessness and hunger have not gone away and are going to get worse as wintry weather and inflation bite. That is why St George's is organising a Winter Charity Campaign to generate support for two local charities: Catching Lives, an independent charity for the homeless, based in Canterbury, and Nourish, a food bank based in Tunbridge Wells supporting the surrounding areas, including Benenden.

Nourish is a lifeline for people who have experienced unfortunate events. Most people who receive a three-day emergency

supply of food from Nourish are working people who are experiencing a temporary financial hardship because of a change in circumstances, such as domestic violence, sickness, or an unexpected bill. With their support, people have a chance to work through the underlying issues and tackle the problems that are causing their crisis. Most referrals only need a stopgap to get them through - 58% of clients received three or fewer food parcels.

St George's has worked closely with both charities to understand their specific needs, detailed below. By focussing your support - through donations of either specific items or money - the church aims to optimise our impact in helping alleviate hunger and homelessness in our midst.

Paul Hewitt

CATCHING LIVES has requested:

- Good quality sleeping bags - 2 season
- One and two person tents in good working order, ideally with a collapsible frame and a waterproof fly sheet
- Rucksacks - all shapes and sizes and must be in good working order
- Power Packs/USB chargers or donations of money to buy these items new. This can be done either:
 - via the QR code below,
 - or via their website www.catchinglives.org,
 - or a cheque made out to 'Catching Lives' and left in the wall safe to the left just inside the church door.

A collection point has been set up outside the Scout Hut opposite the Benenden community shop and will run until 31 December. Please do not leave any other items.

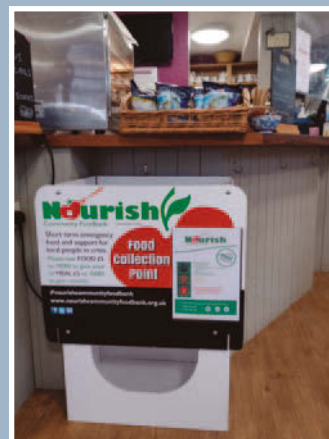


NOURISH have specifically requested:

- Tinned potatoes
- Tinned hot dogs
- Pasta 'n' Sauce sachets
- Tinned soup
- Sugar or donations of money to buy food.

This can be done via their website www.nourishcommunityfoodbank.org.uk

A Nourish collection pod for food has been set up in Benenden's community shop and in the church. No fresh food please.



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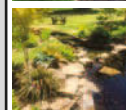
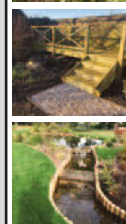
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Clubs, Sports and Recreation



A call to the village to ring in the new

At the Kent County Youth Striking contest in November, held at Farningham Church, half the winning team from the Ashford District of the Kent County Association of Change Ringers were young Benenden ringers Jack Gardner and brothers Ben and Will Dellow. In contest with other ringers several years older, they took the fine trophy, which will be shared with Frittenden, which provided the other members of the band.

Their success is in no small part due to the practice they were able to have on Benenden bells, the 'middle six' of which are similar in weight to Farningham bells. We are grateful to neighbours for their tolerance of special practices for this event which, due to multifarious after-school activities, had often to be arranged at short notice; and to the Rector and Parochial Church Council for their strong support of the band and permission to hold these practices.

We hope and intend that, if possible, the same band will go on to ring for the county at the National Youth contest at Exeter next year. As they will still have several years to go while

eligible by age for the contest, they should further build up in skills and ability to very impressive levels indeed. It was an honour to coach such enthusiastic young ringers in their preparation for this success.

While it is a privilege to be tutoring and coaching such fine young ringers in this ancient and unique musical craft of English change ringing on our magnificent ring of bells, there are not nearly enough of them - or of volunteers of any age - to sustain the ringing of Benenden bells in the years to come. Even with these three, we do not have enough ringers to ring our 12 bells on a Sunday and can only do so for practice with the help of visiting ringers. All bands inevitably lose a few

ringers every year, from moving away, or medical, professional, personal or family reasons. We have to be continually recruiting and training new ringers every year to maintain our band number.

For over 300 years, people of Benenden have come forward to keep the tradition of ringing these superb bells alive in the only church in Kent with a full ring of 12 bells other than Canterbury Cathedral. We already know we shall be losing more ringers in the next few years and, unless we can train new volunteers, this great village tradition will die out and our bells will fall silent, as have so many other churches in the area because there is nobody willing to ring, or with the skills to train anyone in the art. It would be a huge tragedy if Benenden, too, fell into silence. So, I would ask all readers to think about taking up this wonderful pastime, open to anyone from school age to pensioner, or if there is anyone you know who might like to do so.

Please contact Rod Lebon and come and join Jack, Ben, Will and the rest of us on Wednesday evening or Sunday. You will be warmly welcomed and invited to have a go under our highly experienced guidance.

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Daisy Barron-Bligh: finding her voice

Benenden has been Daisy Barron-Bligh's home since she was five and, although she has travelled far and wide over the years, it's to this village she regularly returns. Her stepdad Mark and mum Lucy own and run The Bull and you can often find her there working behind the bar.



On leaving Claremont School in 2016, Daisy worked at The Bull for five months while saving up to explore Australia's east coast with a friend before striking out on her own to America. "It was a big step as I had never travelled alone before," she says, "but I was never really alone as I met lovely people in the hostels. My parents were worried, of course, but I 'Facetimed' them every week. It was a learning curve for us all, but I learned to be properly independent. Surprisingly, the biggest challenge was learning how to use buses, trains and tubes. It was not something I had done before - I had only visited London about five times before I set off."

On her return, Daisy had initially planned to take a degree in Media Communications and Creative Writing at Bath Spa but, after a year spent writing a diary and becoming deeply interested in films, she changed this to Film Studies with Creative Writing at Roehampton University. "I really struggled as there was very little interaction with, or guidance from, lecturers and I had very little in common with the other students straight out of school. I felt very lonely and seriously considered dropping out.

"Instead, I decided that, because I had so much time on my hands, I would stay but get a job. I worked at The Bake House bakery in Putney, starting at 5.30am and finishing at 2.30pm. It was the best thing I could have done. I worked there all through my degree and made



many friends there, too. The course gradually improved in the second year when I took a screen writing module, alongside writing poetry and short stories and learning about the business of writing and publishing."

With the onset of Covid and lockdown in March 2020, Daisy's third year took an unexpected turn. "It was very scary. I brought just

two bags home, thinking that I would be back in a few weeks, but it was several months later." However, enforced time at home coincided with the need to write her degree dissertation - a film script - and of course very few distractions.

Daisy was awarded a first.

"For someone who is heavily dyslexic and didn't always find it easy to write it was a massive achievement," she smiles, justifiably proud.

Taking a master's degree in screen writing was Daisy's next step but she deferred it a year so that she could learn 'face to face and in person'. She made the most of that

year by taking a National Film and Television School course: 'Screen writing, finding your voice.' She started the master's in September, spending Monday to Wednesday in London and working at The Bull from Thursday to Sunday. "I love the combination of spending time with my family for part of the week and studying hard the other half. Many of my lecturers are producers and screen writers so the content is very relevant. It's an intense course but I'm going into a very competitive industry," explains Daisy. "The market is opening up and opportunities are growing. The BBC and Channel 4 are stepping up the amount of original material they are producing, particularly from British writers."

Daisy sets off to live in London full time next year. "I've found my voice," she says. "It won't be easy but I'm ready for the challenge."

Ruth Clark

Unwrapping the riddle of Christmas drinking

Some lovely wines across the price range to jolly along your festive season

For most of the year, matching food and wine isn't too much of a problem. Largely we eat from a tried-and-trusted menu of favourite meals and, after a few decades or so, we've pretty much cracked what 'goes' and what doesn't.

For most of the year, that works just fine. The trouble starts when we start to introduce the dreaded concept of 'accompaniments'; not in the sense of a string quartet to go with your cheese omelette; rather all manner of culinary fancies that sit on the table, competing for space and attention with the main attraction; and the worst time for that is Christmas.

Where once the question was, 'What wine do we drink with turkey?', all of a sudden we're presented with a complex series of conundrums; riddles wrapped in enigmas, you might say (if you wanted to misquote Churchill), the same way those funny little sausages are wrapped in bacon.

I have a friend who has a 'backstop' answer for just such occasions. When it all becomes too confusing, and often when it doesn't, you'll hear him say: "Whatever the question, good claret is the answer." Fish and chips with tinned mushy peas and tartare sauce out of a plastic sachet? Good claret. Braised armadillo with

pangolin fritters in a balsamic reduction? You guessed it.

Wine writer Victoria Moore has chipped in: "When you sit down at the Christmas table, the first duty of the wine is not actually to go with the food but to go with your mood: it must be festive and celebratory. The best advice is therefore to drink the wine you quite fancy at the time."

Personally, I like to trawl the websites, read what all the experts say, realise that they all say different things, then do what I was going to do in the first place. So, I pick my favourite bit of the meal, which is the turkey, and I wonder what I'd most like to drink with a plate of turkey, which is as good a pinot noir as I can afford, or maybe something from the bolder end of Beaujolais, or, if you're going white all the way, maybe a creamy Burgundy or full-fat chardonnay from one of the better bits of the New World.

Of course, just when you think you've got Christmas cracked, you remember that the turkey course is simply one face of a many-headed beast that will bite you on the backside if you give it the chance; you have to have a plan, get everything in the fridge or the decanter ahead of time, so that when the booze starts to kick in around 11am, you won't be left floundering.

First things first, you need a 'sparkler', to set the mood. It's always tempting to succumb to the supermarket special offers that promise the world, and some deliver handsomely - I've just been reading Moore's paean of praise for the Tesco Finest Premier Cru Brut NV (£21) -



but this year I've decided to buy 'local', so I'll either serve up the Biddenden Gribble Bridge from our own Benenden's community shop at £20.75 or, if I back a nice winner in the meantime, the superb Gusbourne Brut Reserve I sampled at the winery a few months ago, which retails on their website at an eye-watering but understandable £39.

At this point, may I say I make no excuses for putting forward a few wines from the upper end of my own price bracket. It's Christmas, after all, so surely the financial shackles can come off briefly, which is why in the Thomas household we may enjoy our smoked salmon with a flowery and citric Sancerre sauvignon blanc from Domaine de la Tonnellerie, from the community shop (£19.95),

with the trusty Chateau Argadens Blanc - a classy and good value Bordeaux blend of sauvignon and semillon at £12.95 - as an able deputy and the wonderfully mature Mitchell Watervale riesling waiting in the wings at £15.95.

Alternatively, make this the time to introduce

the chardonnay, perhaps starting with a bargain buy from Majestic, their Definition Macon-Villages at £8.99 if you 'mix six', and stepping up in body and 'oomph' with a Californian version from Bogle Vineyard, which is cheapest at £12.50 from the Wine Society and will give a good account of itself in an arm-wrestle with your crisp-skinned turkey and all its trimmings (if you don't fancy paying twice the money for nice white Burgundy).

Personally, I'll plump for red with the main course. My 'go to' wine from Benenden's is the Gouguenheim Blue Melosa malbec (£18.95), which is silky and classy enough to do pretty much any job, but I'll also be tempted by Waitrose's Mt Difficulty Bannockburn pinot noir (on offer at £20.99 the last time I looked) and, in case my claret-obsessed friend turns up, the excellent but not prohibitively priced Chateau Caronne Ste-Gemme, a cabernet-merlot blend from the Haut-Medoc (Majestic online, £14.99).

To go with leftovers as well? Majestic has a top-value Morgon from Chateau de Pizay at £10.99 (mix six), which would get on famously with turkey sandwiches and bubble and squeak.

Still a little room left for pud? The village shop does a cracking 'sticky' in the shape of Principe de Viana, a late-harvest chardonnay from Spain (£13.70 per 50cl), although I'm also a big fan of Majestic's Essensia orange muscat at (£11.99 per 37.5cl) to round off the meal.

Have fun with those or your own favourites, but whatever else you do at Christmas, drink (more or less) responsibly, drink well and enjoy.

Peter Thomas





Charles Lenox-Conyngham

Charles sadly passed away this summer at the age of 85, having lived in the village for over 30 years. His memorial service in St George's Church and the reception afterwards at

Yew Tree House were a joyful celebration of his very full life. As with many memorial services, a person's life is seen in its true perspective and not defined by the last years.

Charles was a highly able man. He was a scholar at Winchester and then won a scholarship to Magdalen College, Oxford. After National Service as an officer in the 13th Hussars, he had a very successful career in the shipping industry. He was a keen skier and walker; an ardent Liverpool supporter; father to five much-loved children and stepchildren.

Here are some brief extracts from the tribute given at the service by one of his oldest friends and colleagues, Nicholas Barber:

"Charles was an original. His enthusiasm was infectious, always up for the next adventure, always making us laugh, always that marvellous sense of fun.

He was one of the most relentlessly persuasive people I've known. I'd been due to join BP but he insisted I would be far better off ditching it in favour of joining him at Holts' Blue Funnel Line.

So it was that in October 1964 I joined

Blue Funnel in Liverpool. Charles had recently returned from the Far East and had found a superb flat overlooking the Mersey. How about sharing? The location proved particularly helpful when we acquired a much better sofa than the cheapo job we'd bought the year before. How to get rid of the old one? Easy, tip it into the Mersey.

Charles usually wore bright shirts and bow ties, always 'keen to make a good impression'. To keep fit, he took up the Canadian Air Force's 5BX regime. He did this religiously for several weeks and was delighted with his rapid progress - until he re-read the instructions and discovered he'd been following the instructions for the over-65s.

He had a knack for getting the best out of strangers, whether dockers, publicans, shopkeepers, auctioneers. I only saw him beaten once, by an irate Welsh farmer. He always looked for an angle, some form of originality. As a sound Wykehamist he did not suffer fools and thought little of people who, however worthy, bored him. At the same time, he was always an enthusiast, always game for adventure. And generous to a fault.

Unusual turns of phrase were another of his characteristics. Some must have come from his family, others from Winchester and National Service, but others were his alone.

A slowcoach was 'someone who didn't rush into things';

A disaster like writing off a car was 'a second-rate experience';



In reply to 'how are you?', he rarely offered anything more positive than 'pulling through';



'You've been picked' was his flattering way of fingering someone for an unwelcome task;

Any kind of failure was 'best described as pitiful'.

One Wykehamist trait was an excess of logic. He could persuade himself that black was white, and then try to persuade others accordingly. If retsina was on offer, best buy a year's supply,

regardless of taste. Many years later when the company was poised to order four new ships, it seemed logical to improve the quantity discount by doubling the order to eight.

Charles had a gift for telling stories, often against himself and usually much improved in the telling. I was the butt of one of his favourites. In the early 80s we were on business in Singapore and our colleague, Khong Chai Seng, invited us to his home. His wife had prepared a special steamboat dinner with a huge garoupa fish sitting in the

middle of the table. Chai Seng reminded us that the Chinese considered the fish's eyes a special delicacy and invited us to eat one each. I was most reluctant but knowing that Charles was seriously squeamish about such things I said I would, provided he went first. I was sure I was safe. But no, he duly fished out an eye with his chopsticks and into his mouth it went. I was



trapped. No choice but to follow suit. At which point, with a wicked grin, Charles spat out the first eye, which he'd kept in his cheek all the time. Game, set and match to Charles!

The shipping industry entered the new era of containerisation and many people became redundant, including Charles in 1984. I was always impressed by his acceptance of the situation and how without recrimination he set about finding new jobs, including becoming chief executive of one of the leading ferry companies. That was when he and his family relocated to Benenden - much to his wife Gerrit's delight as Kent was far sunnier and so much nearer the Continent.

In 1999 we and our wives got together for a trip to France. We explored the market, ate and drank well, chatted and laughed, just like old times. 'We must do this again,' we said. Alas, we never did. Gerrit died only three weeks later.

Charles and the family turned her memorial service into a memorable occasion, which became more happy than sad. But a light had gone out of our lives. And now we grieve for Charles too.

Dear Charles, you were such fun. What a friend we've lost, but you've left us with so many happy memories."



In Your Garden

Dressed for Christmas

I usually have a plan in my head for Christmas, which falls somewhere between having planted all the spring bulbs for my clients (a momentous task in itself) and then moving on to preparations for Christmas in my own home. Having got only halfway through the bulbs so far this year, I have had to make a conscious decision to start Christmas early in order to get everything done.

Back in the day, when October and November were particularly chilly, conditions were perfect to plant bulbs as early as mid-September: the soil was nice and damp, any herbaceous had died back fully and could be cleared away, it was jolly cold and you had a clear run to get all the bulbs in. Nowadays it's hopeless: the ground doesn't even start to get workable until the beginning of November and we definitely do not have chilly days (my winter 'hortic hat' is still tucked away somewhere). Ideally, we need these cold temperatures to blitz any harbouring pests and diseases in the soil, particularly ones that can cause fire blight in tulips, so I find myself planting with caution and saying a prayer that all will be well in the spring.

With this ever-narrowing gap, my own Christmas preparations start much earlier, otherwise I simply do not have enough time.

I start with clearing up outside on the terrace - any garden furniture that needs to be over-wintered is put away and I am able to give the terrace a good sweep. I have a border running the length of my house up to the front door, so I have a tidy up in there,

too (geraniums, alchemilla and nepeta are all cut back leaving the evergreens and any interesting herbaceous stems in situ). I have some useful euphorbia wulfenii seedlings, so I pick my way through these, discarding any unwanted ones, leaving the long glaucous stems to fill any gaps.

I then make a list of what foliage I will have available to bring into the house nearer to Christmas - lots of lovely ivy, some bay and sarcococca, a prettily variegated pittosporum,

juniper - all of these will either go into a wreath or be tied into bundles around candles on the Christmas table. Ivy can be a contentious issue with some, especially if you are superstitious (which, largely, I am not) so ivy trailing around my house I love - it can crisp up a bit in the warmth but is very easily replaced.

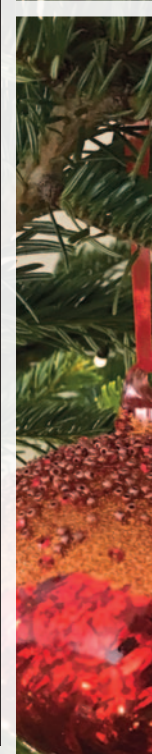
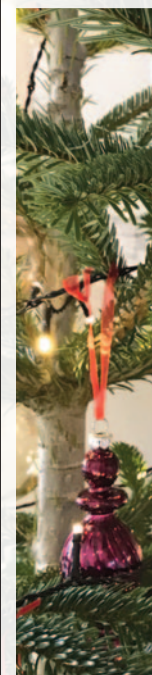
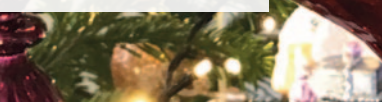
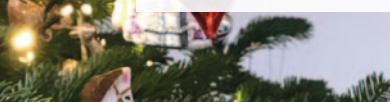
I cram some white scented viburnum flowers into small glass vases and pop in some eucalyptus for contrast. I do take a trip to the florist - it's a fun thing to do and I can pick up some sprayed foliage pieces if I haven't had time to do these myself, plus there are always tempting pots of white cyclamen and small hellebores to purchase. I also like those tiny conifers that can look perfect on a windowsill or table surrounded by tea lights and some twinkling decorations. My daughters tend to douse the trees with glitter!

However we get there, the Christmas period is a magical one and I always find time to slow down and enjoy the moment.

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Front cover: On our doorstep to explore: Hemsted Forest. Photograph: Peter Massey