



Benenden Magazine

May 2022

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Editorial



At this time of year, Benenden is shaking off the cold and winds and the sun's warmth is starting to make itself felt - finally. The cherry trees at The Grange and the new cherry trees by the playground are flowering and the cyclists are out in force taking advantage of the café - I know after serving 19 in one bunch the other day!

But it wasn't until the curtain went down on the panto that I felt I could properly look forward to summer. Delayed from January to early April (due to you-know-what) the Benenden Players pulled off another original masterpiece, even overcoming a power cut almost at the end of the final show (page 32). It seems that overcoming the slings and arrows of adversity is fast becoming a habit for many of us.

We are starting to welcome Ukrainian families locally and they and their hosts will need a great deal of help and support during their stay. Tunbridge Wells Borough Council has swiftly set up a lot of practical initiatives, provided useful information online and is in regular touch with our parish council and the Benenden Action Team (page 31).

I don't know about you but I'll be trying to relax in May while preparing for the social whirl across the parish in June, when we celebrate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee with four days of activities (page 23), followed by the village fete on 18 June, open gardens galore and a safari around the open studios of local artists.

While interviewing Jane Dalton Holmes (page 27) to mark her 30 years of fund raising for the Royal British Legion, she mentioned that she will be adopting 'No Mow May'. Now that's another great idea. So don't be surprised if you catch me chilling out amongst my long grass and opportunistic weeds this month. I'll be a lot busier in June, I promise!

Ruth Clark, 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.

Editors: Ruth Clark, Peter Thomas

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Contributions to: benendenparishmagazine@gmail.com by the 10th of the preceding month.

Advertising orders or queries to: advertising.benendenmag@gmail.com.

Distribution queries to: dd.rhill@btinternet.com.

Postal address: c/o Community Office, Benenden Village Hall, Benenden, TN17 4DY 01580 240371

Printed by The Wealden Advertiser Ltd, Cowdens Close, Hawkhurst, Kent



Village Calendar

May

Thursday 5	Kaffeeklatsch, Benenden's Community Shop, 12.30pm	p.21
Thursday 5	Iden Green and Benenden WI, Lunch at Petals Garden Centre, 12noon	p.19
Saturday 7	Churchyard Working Party, St George's, Benenden, 9.30-12noon	
Saturday 7	Skittles, St George's Club, 8.15pm	
Tuesday 10	Village Lunch, Benenden Village Hall, 12.30pm	p.17
Saturday 14	Cribbage and Dominoes Knockout, St George's Club, 8.15pm	
Sunday 15	Christian Aid Week starts	p.9
Monday 16	Parish Council Meeting, Memorial Hall, 7pm	
Tuesday 17	Iden Green and Benenden WI, AGM, Memorial Hall, 2pm	p.19
Saturday 21	Local Pilgrimage, St Nicholas Church, Sandhurst, 9.45am	p.15
Saturday 21	Ladder Toss, St George's Club, 8.15pm	
Sunday 22	An Afternoon in the Garden, Beacon Hall House, Benenden, 2-6pm	p.13
Tuesday 24	Merry and Bright, Memorial Hall, 2pm	p.20
Saturday 28	Quiz Night, St George's Club, 8.15pm	

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 the recent uncontested Parish Council election, we currently have a vacancy for a Parish Councillor. Some of our responsibilities include: statutory consultee on all planning applications in our parish, now ensuring all applications comply with our recently made NDP; control of litter through our bi-annual village clean-ups (n.b. our next clean-up is on 30 April); maintenance of the war memorial, parish wells, public toilets and the village green. We also represent the views and concerns of residents to either the Borough Council or our County Council, whichever is relevant.

We work closely with organisations within our parish, such as the Benenden Action Team (please see their latest initiative for support for the people of Ukraine on page 31), the Benenden Village Trust and our many other local charities and organisations.

So, if you feel that you would like to join our team of volunteers, please do get in touch with either myself or our clerk, Caroline Levett (see contact details below). I was surprised to realise that I have stood on the council for nearly ten years, so either I enjoy it, or I'm just a glutton for punishment! Seriously, though, I am happy to have an informal chat with any of you who are interested in joining us.

I completely understand that the war in Ukraine is taking up our thoughts and concerns right now, but could I just finish with a plea to contribute to our fundraising for the restoration of our wells - work will be starting in August. Please see our website page, kindly hosted by the BVT, www.wonderful.org/fundraisers/502#charity.

Thank you for your donations.

Nicola Thomas, BPC Chair
nicolat@benendenparishcouncil.org

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 16 May 2022,
Memorial Hall, 7pm

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 1 May	8am Communion	10am All-age Communion	5pm Choral Evensong
Saturday 7 May			4pm Connect Four at Mission Church, Sandhurst
Sunday 8 May	8am BCP Communion	10am Morning Worship	
Sunday 15 May	8am Communion	10am Sung Eucharist	
Sunday 22 May	8am Communion	10am Morning Worship	
Thursday 26 May			7.30pm Ascension Day Service
Sunday 29 May	8am Benefice Communion at St Nicholas, Sandhurst	10am Benefice Communion All-age 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

Wedding 23 April Juliette Challenger and Neil Lagden
Funeral 23 April Marie Orson Interment

Rector's Letter



Today is a new day

I trust that you were able to enjoy the Easter holidays, and to engage with all the services of Holy Week and the celebrations on Easter Sunday. If you didn't manage to get to any of the services, I hope you may have been able to use your parish church for your own private quiet time and prayer. Apart from regular Sunday worship, and baptisms, weddings and funerals, that is what the church building is there for - for you to use whenever you want to, whenever you need to. Please just come in; make use of the space for some quietness, away from all the busyness of life. Everyone needs to do that from time to time.

Right now, it feels like the whole world, and the whole of our society, is in need of prayer. There seems to be so much 'bad news' around at the moment, on TV, hearing about people we know, from things that are affecting loved ones, to things that are affecting us individually. There are many people in our communities who are anxious about so many things.

We are so fortunate, though, in where we live. If you are feeling anxious about something, take the time to notice the beauty of the countryside in which we are living. I know it doesn't pay the bills, it doesn't put fuel in your car, it doesn't put food on the table, or warmth into our homes, but there are signs of new life everywhere we look in nature, which is encouraging. It can give us hope. It can help us to put things into perspective when we see the plight of refugees and see harrowing pictures from Ukraine.

However hard things can seem at times, a new sunrise or new growth in the garden, new-born lambs out in the fields, a smile and a kind word from a friend, neighbour or even a stranger, all these show that this is a new day, with new opportunities, with new hope. "This is the day that the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it." The times are hard right now; but take time to notice the good things and rejoice in them. And provide that smile yourself for someone else, too; they might really need it. God bless.

Revd David Commander, Rector



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info@benendens.co.uk

Tel: 01580 279808

Talking Point



How does it feel to be free?

In the light of the terrible events in Ukraine I was thinking, to paraphrase Nina Simone, 'How does it feel to be free?'. The song was played recently on Desert Island Discs and the subject of the programme, threatened with rape, had to leave Uganda in a hurry. She came, unexpectedly, to Manchester University to study aeronautical engineering. The revelation to me was how it felt to her to be free. It's an extraordinary thought for most people brought up in Britain, where we can generally make our own choices without penalty or sanction. For her it was liberating to be without the constraints of culture, religion or society and she could be her 'true self'.

I think most people are impressed, awed, blown away by the bravery and tenacity of the Ukrainians fighting a hugely superior force of Russians. That Ukrainians from all walks of life, from brickies to ballet dancers, and of every age were grabbing a gun and prepared to give their lives for their country. For freedom. To be able to think and say and do what they liked. For me, the picture of a prima ballerina in fatigues with a gun was particularly poignant. Here, we are, lucky enough not to be occupied during or after the last war and therefore maybe finding it hard to comprehend the dead hand of communist oppression over decades. Lives curtailed, ambitions thwarted and imagination discouraged. Ukrainians know they don't want to go back there. Perhaps the opposite is also true, in that, to begin with at least, there seemed to be a lot of very uncommitted Russian soldiers who didn't know what they were fighting for and were not very keen on dying for 'the Russian way of life'.

From my own experience teaching English to children, generally teenagers, from a variety of countries, the Russian students often didn't live in Russia. Their presumably well-off parents - no oligarchs' children, sadly! - had moved to neighbouring countries, such as Estonia or Moldova, where they lived in a kind of Russia-away-from-Russia. When I asked them if they spoke Estonian or Moldovan, they sniffed and said "of course not". They were not interested in the 'natives' but said Russia was "impossible" or "dangerous" to live in and they had a much nicer life in Estonia. The richer ones, of course, lived in London, until recently, where they knew they and their children could be completely free.

Perhaps we who do know what it feels like to be free should appreciate it more.

Minnie Garnier



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Benenden Village Fete

Preparations for the fete on 18 June (12-4pm) are well underway. This wonderful village event brings everyone together to enjoy traditional stalls, fun games, food and drink and we have already booked the sunshine! Once again, there will be the ever-popular bric-a-brac, chic boutique, Tools-R-Us, books, jewellery, plant and cake stalls; lots to entertain children; a delicious BBQ next to the Hop Inn, ice cream and milkshakes; cow pat bingo (with thanks, this year, to Northiam Dairy for the cow) and, of course, a fabulous raffle with lots of great items to win, including an exhilarating flying lesson and big cash prizes.

This year's royal theme celebrates the Queen's Jubilee, so we are inviting children to make and decorate a crown to wear in the opening royal procession. During the afternoon enjoy the dancing in the arena, climb the church tower to take in the stunning views, bring your dogs to take part in the Arena Dog Talent Show (or take them to the dog's royal photo booth for their own Jubilee fun) and relax with a drink while listening to live music. Full details will be published in next month's magazine.

If you would like to donate good quality clothes, bric-a-brac, tools, toys and books, please drop them off at the Scout Hut (opposite the shop). Absolutely no broken or unusable items please. We always need lots of cakes to sell, so if you feel in the mood to bake, it would be very much appreciated. Please let Helen Jewsbury know (helen.jewsbury@talk21.com). Labelled plant donations are very welcome, too, and these can be dropped off on the morning of the fete. Athena Cripps athenacripps@gmail.com



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Benenden Almshouse Charities

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Those interested should request an application form and explanatory notes from The Chairman at The Old Vicarage, The Green, Benenden, Kent TN17 4DL.

Robin Dalton Holmes robin.dh@virgin.net

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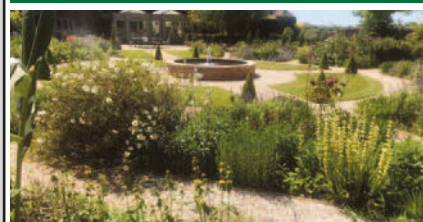
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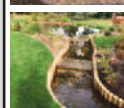
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Parent, Teacher and Friends Association

Just before we all went off on our Easter holidays, the PTFA delivered over 200 bunches of beautiful daffodils to each classroom so that each child was able to go home ahead of Mothering Sunday with flowers to surprise somebody very special. Some of the children got creative at home during the break and crafted Easter gardens. We ran a competition across all classes with great art prizes to be won. Congratulations to the winners and thank you to Revd Ylva for supporting the judging.

The children also enjoyed a fun home clothes day in exchange for bringing in an unloved gift item that the PTFA will help make "loved again". The focus is on regifting, reusing and recycling an item versus buying something new for one of our future school fundraising activities.

Use the spring to clear out at home and donate any like new or good condition toys, children's costumes and games, or bric-a-brac you no longer need for our school stalls at the summer village fete. Please drop off at the designated area at the scout hut.

We are still seeking support to help fundraise towards outdoor learning resources such as playground markings, outdoor furniture and play equipment. No matter how small or large the amount you can give via our charity donations page, thank you for your support. Just use this link to donate:

www.wonderful.co.uk/pay?ref=1042725

For more details on activities or how to support, please scan QR code or visit our website www.tinyurl.com/2bpyw54h

Astrid Miller, Benenden CEP, PTFA Chair





**IN
AID OF**

An Afternoon in the Garden

Sunday 22 May 2-6pm
Beacon Hall House, Benenden TN17 4BU

All are welcome to join us for an afternoon offering tea & cakes, Pimm's, beer & Prosecco, plant stall, classic cars, tennis court to enjoy a game, raffle, whack the rat, bric a brac, BBQ and our garden to enjoy ...

Please join us to raise money for this amazing charity. This is very dear to our hearts as a very special young lady has been battling bone cancer this past year and Bone Cancer Trust has been wonderful.

DONATIONS AT GATE AND ALL FUNDS RAISED WILL GO DIRECTLY TO BONE CANCER RESEARCH TRUST

Primary School

What a way to end the term. Year 5 classes from both Benenden and Goudhurst & Kilndown CE Primary Schools took part in the Shakespeare Schools Festival at Benenden Girls' School. Benenden performed 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' and Goudhurst & Kilndown brought us 'Twelfth Night'. The plays were very different but both were incredible.

The children had to learn traditional Shakespearean language as well as fully choreographed dance routines, which they performed to an audience of nearly 250 people. Needless to say, everyone at the 10:10 Primary Federation was very proud.

In addition, there was an evaluation by a member of the Shakespeare Schools Foundation charity, who called Benenden's performance "magical, mysterious and mischievous", as well as "cheeky and fun".

A huge thank you must go to Benenden Girls' School for allowing us the use of their theatre and for providing all the delicious refreshments during the interval.

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

Pilgrimage is not just something for intrepid wanderers, willing to cross borders and endure hardship, but can be for just about anybody, willing to explore and discover something new about themselves, about the landscape, about the spirit and the earth.

This year we are offering a series of guided walks of differing length and complexity through the beautiful and tranquil landscape of the surrounding countryside. All the walks will offer ample opportunities to stop, contemplate and connect with our deepest selves and with the natural world and the universe. We will do this via poetry, short readings, silence and other creative and imaginative invitations to discover something new or unexpected.

We will start with a 4.5-mile Spring Pilgrimage on 21 May, starting from St Nicholas Church at 9.45 for 10am, taking in babbling streams and ancient oaks, hop fields and vineyards, as well as a windmill, and finishing with coffee/tea, cake and your own packed lunches in the churchyard at around 1pm. We will also look in at the Historic Exhibition of old Sandhurst photos and memorabilia in the Mission Church on our way.

Walking pace will be leisurely, but some of the ground might be uneven. Stout footwear, a good coat and a small folding chair or shooting stick, if you are in need of support while stopping for a rest, is all that is needed.

We would love to walk with you.

Lyn Hayes and Revd Ylva Blid-Mackenzie
07766 711957

Spring Pilgrimage on Saturday 21 May

starting from St Nicholas Church, Sandhurst
arriving at 9.45 for 10am

A 4.5-mile walk taken at a gentle pace and finishing back at the church at around 1pm for tea, coffee, cake and your own packed lunch.

Stout footwear, a good coat and a small folding chair or shooting stick, if you are in need of support while stopping for a rest, is all that is needed.

We would love to walk with you.
Lyn Hayes and Revd Ylva Blid-Mackenzie
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Benenden School

We have just taken formal possession of our new school hall and music school from the lead contractor. The fitting out period will take about half a term so we are working hard to get these wonderful new facilities in use during the second half of the summer term. I know everybody is very excited to get in and start using them.

In the final week of the spring term, we held our Benenden Society Ball; it was an extremely enjoyable evening and we raised a wonderful amount on the night towards our important Be the Change campaign, which is widening access to Benenden through partnerships and bursaries, so we are incredibly grateful to everybody who attended and donated.

In school, we enjoyed a very fulfilling final two weeks of term. STEM Month offered a wide range of excellent activities, including workshops and fascinating discussions with industry experts. Students have led all these talks, which has involved them interviewing politicians, bankers and global entrepreneurs live in front of their peers, and I have been deeply impressed by their confidence and professionalism.

There was also a bumper final week on the sports field and courts, with netball tournaments, the National Schools Squash Championship finals and the four-day Lacrosse Nationals, where all our teams did us proud.
Samantha Price, Headmistress

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Benenden Pre-School

We held a cake sale among the spring flowers of our garden to raise money in support of Ukraine. We are all too aware that our children are blessed with a beautiful, engaging and safe environment in which to explore, play and grow while access to education and care has been severely interrupted for many children in Ukraine.

Pre-school parents co-ordinated the event and they and the trustees supported us brilliantly by making an amazing range of delicious cakes and other baked goodies. The children contributed, too, icing cupcakes in the blue and yellow of the Ukrainian flag. One of our grandparents kindly visited with a basket full of Easter bunny and chick-shaped biscuits, which the children really enjoyed decorating. As you can imagine we sold almost everything, saving just enough for a treat for the children's mid-morning snack the following day.

We are happy to have raised £300 to contribute to the Disasters Emergency Committee Ukraine humanitarian appeal. As the conflict continues in Ukraine, young children in our lives may want to talk about what is happening and Unicef has put some practical tips together to help adults respond to and support children's questions and worries, visit www.unicef.org.uk/what-we-do/emergencies/how-to-talk-to-children-about-the-conflict-in-ukraine/

Lucy Oakley, Supervisor
supervisor@benendenpreschool.co.uk

Village lunch

The village lunch will take place on Tuesday 10 May 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 5 May, so we can plan and shop, as well as cook.

Sheila Hume 854627

Village Hall

There's lots going on to get excited about at the village hall this month. On 1 May is the hugely popular teak garden furniture sale, which is definitely worth having a look round in anticipation of the warmer weather. There are some lovely high-quality items, and some great bargains to be had. On 15 May is the second mindfulness and meditation session - a new addition to the regular activities at the hall. These sessions are aimed at reducing the effects of depression, anxiety, insomnia and other general stresses of everyday life. The mind, body and spirit integration of the workshops are a key element in facilitating healing, health and wholeness.

If the mindfulness and meditation sound good, you may well be interested in a gong bath. Having been forced to postpone a few months ago, Dawn is back with healing sound baths once a month on a Friday evening, starting 20 May. The healing vibrations of the gongs can ease all manner of ills and leave you feeling more centred and relaxed.

If you are interested in any of these, feel free to contact us for more information, or simply turn up on the day; we'd love to see you there.

Holly Clayson, Manager 07419 989830
enquiries@benendenvillagehall.org
www.benendenvillagehall.org

Planning Matters

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

- 22/00021/FULL Redhouse Barn, Goddards Green Road. Conversion and extension of rural barn and its curtilage to residential use; demolition of three existing outbuildings and erection of new garage/stable building.

More planning matters at:
benendenparishcouncil.org

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Talking Shop

It is gratifying to see how Benenden's has bounced back after all the trials and tribulations of the past months. Many of our regular customers are to be seen sitting outside, braving the gales, rain and cold, cuddling their cups of coffee whilst supposedly walking the dog. Not that the dogs seem to mind; we keep some treats behind the counter to keep them happy, too.

We have some exciting new products as well. ChalkStream is a specialist trout producer based in Hampshire, where 95% of the world's natural chalk streams - heaven on earth to a trout - are situated. We have sourced from them, both hot and cold smoked trout and gravadlax, which will be on sale in the shop in May. It could be a wonderful summer treat with a cheeky glass of white wine.

We are also delighted to add a new limited edition 'light and bitter' to our Old Dairy Beer products. Jubilee Beer is made by blending best bitter with specially brewed light ale and is well worth a try.

If anyone is looking for a part-time job in a very affable environment, we are still seeking two managers to work in Benenden's. If it appeals to you, please come in and talk to our very friendly staff. Obviously if you are not seeking paid employment, volunteers are always very welcome. Don't be shy; training is given and customers are very friendly.

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

Benenden Cricket Club

Our home fixtures for May on The Green are:
Saturday 7 May v Wittersham at 2pm
Saturday 14 May v Egerton at 1.30pm
Richard Brunt, Club Captain



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Iden Green and Benenden WI

Our members reported that the West Kent Federation annual general meeting was a lively affair with, amongst other speakers, the national chair Ann Jones outlining plans to use wool from her sheep to knit a corgi to be presented to the Queen.

Our speaker on 19 April, Lynne Rees, sparked a great deal of interest as she told us about her voracious appetite for writing. She grew up with an enjoyment of books and very quickly noticed how food seemed integral to so many. She owned a bookshop and started writing seriously when she was 30. She wrote a blog, became a teacher and had a varied life, enjoying her writing all the time.

On 5 May we will be meeting at Petals Garden Centre at 12noon. Please contact one of us for further details or if a lift is needed.

At our AGM on 17 May, the use of the internet will facilitate our business. We are also looking forward to taking along all our spare plants and produce to exchange them for others, plus a bookstall.

We would like to encourage as many people as possible to join us. Please let us know if anyone thinks it might be useful to hold monthly, special meetings in the evenings in addition to our regular afternoon ones.

Jackie Liffen 752232 WI@daisystar.co.uk

VINEHALL INTERNATIONAL CLASSICAL CONCERT SERIES 33rd Season 2021-22

HEATH QUARTET and ALICE NEARY (Cello)
Saturday 7 May 2022 at 7.30pm

Programme

Haydn Quartet Op.50, No.1 in B flat major
Fanny Mendelssohn Quartet in E flat major
Schubert String Quintet

For full details, free mailing, tickets call 01580 883092
or write to A.G. Whitehead, Vinehall School,
Robertsbridge, East Sussex TN32 5JL
geoffreywhitehead@vinehallschool.com

Merry and Bright Club

In April we had a fun quiz, followed by everyone making banners and decorations for our upcoming Jubilee party. This will be held between 2-4pm on 24 May in the Memorial Hall, where we will sing along to old favourites with our delicious afternoon tea (only £2pp). Everyone is welcome to come along to celebrate, and we would love to see new faces, but please let us know before 19 May so we can plan the catering.

Also, we are inviting those with interesting stories, hobbies or skills to come along and speak at one of our meetings. Please contact us with details:

Laraine Penny 241703 and
Joan Hagens 240672

St George's Club

Keep the Jubilee celebrations going by taking part in the Right Royal Jubilee Quiz at the St George's Club on Saturday 18 June at 8pm. Teams of four to six. Only £2 a head and please bring a raffle prize. Proceeds to the club and the British Heart Foundation, for who John Marshal is doing the London to Brighton cycle race the next day.

Topical health

Most people are aware that cholesterol plays an important part in health and wellbeing, but many of us believe it is always bad for us. When you have a cholesterol test you will get a result that discusses five things: total cholesterol, HDL cholesterol, non-HDL cholesterol, LDL cholesterol and triglycerides. But what does it all mean?

Total cholesterol is a measure of the overall amount of cholesterol in the blood. A figure of less than five is generally accepted as okay. HDL cholesterol is also known as good cholesterol and is a measure of the type of cholesterol that helps keep arteries clear of fatty deposits. It is increased by exercise and a good figure is about 1.4mmol/L or more (although not everyone agrees higher figures are necessarily better).

Non-HDL cholesterol includes LDL and other forms of cholesterol of intermediate size which are not considered to be healthy for us. According to Heart UK, a reading of less than four is what we should aim for. LDL cholesterol, also called bad cholesterol, clogs up arteries and contributes to cardiovascular disease. You should be aiming for a reading below three. Triglycerides are essentially fats that are found in the blood. A good figure is less than 2.3.

These figures refer to the known risks for heart and blood vessel disease. The best protection from the worst forms of cholesterol comes from healthy eating - oily fish, unprocessed foods and fruit and vegetables - weight management, not smoking and a moderate alcohol intake. The promotion of HDL, the good, cholesterol, is achieved through regular exercise. Statins are widely used to lower levels of LDL, must be taken in the evening and are particularly important if you have a family history of heart disease and high cholesterol.

Peter Ellis

Benenden Hospital

Every year on 12 May, Florence Nightingale's birthday, nurses across the world come together to celebrate Nurse's Day. The theme for 2022 is to focus on the need to protect, support and invest in nursing to secure global health - ideas so important to Florence Nightingale herself. She also said: "I am of certain convinced that the greatest heroes are those who do their duty in the daily grind of domestic affairs whilst the world whirls as a maddening dreidel." Words so true today, as then, given recent events.

As a nurse myself, I have found it a privilege to see increased opportunities being offered to nurses across all sectors. Ali Holden-Smith, who works at Benenden Hospital, supporting patients through the process of breast reduction surgery, says: "It's so rewarding as I see the massive difference this surgery makes to women's lives. My role means that I build a good relationship with my patients as their main point of contact at the hospital. They come in hunched over, and with back pain, but afterwards they're sitting up straight and so happy."

Ali's mother was born with spina bifida and, as a child, she accompanied her on many hospital visits, which inspired her to pursue nursing as a career. "When I first joined the hospital, I worked on the wards caring for a range of surgical patients, but then breast reduction surgery was introduced. This new opportunity excited me as I was involved at the start of a service and could make the role my own."

I hope you'll join us in celebrating our hardworking nurses who ensure our patients receive the best possible care. Keep an eye on our social media channels and website to learn more about our wonderful nurses.

Jane Abbott, Hospital Director and Chief Nurse

VINEHALL INTERNATIONAL CLASSICAL CONCERT SERIES 33rd Season 2021-22

LONDON CONCHORD
Friday 27 May 2022 at 7.30pm

Please note the unusual day for this concert, arranged to avoid the Platinum Jubilee celebrations

Programme

Hummel Piano Septet No.1 in D minor Op.74
Beethoven Septet Op.20 in E flat major

For full details, free mailing, tickets call 01580 883092
or write to A.G. Whitehead, Vinehall School,
Robertsbridge, East Sussex TN32 5JL
geoffreywhitehead@vinehallschool.com

Deutsche Konversation

Sie möchten Deutsch sprechen? Im Dorfcafé beginnt ein neuer Kaffeeklatsch. Wir treffen uns Donnerstags um 12:30 Uhr. für eine Stunde freundliches Gespräch auf Deutsch. Wir sind eine gemischte Gruppe von Anfängern bis Fortgeschrittenen. Kommen Sie und üben Sie Ihr Deutsch und haben Sie Spaß im Kaffeeklatsch. Unsere erste ist am Donnerstag, den 5. Mai um 12.30 Uhr.

Mary Cruse 240395

German conversation

Would you like to speak German? A new Kaffeeklatsch is starting in the village cafe. We will meet on Thursdays at 12.30pm for an hour of friendly conversation in German. We are a mixed group from beginners to more proficient speakers. Come and practice your German and have fun at Kaffeeklatsch. Our first meeting is on Thursday 5 May.

More information:

Mary Cruse 240395



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The Queen's Platinum Jubilee



Celebrate a right royal Jubilee

The Queen's Platinum Jubilee, to be celebrated from 2 June to 5 June, is a once-in-a-generation event. In her Accession Day message, the Queen reflected how she looks forward to the celebrations bringing together families, friends and communities. While the date of her actual accession has passed, the celebrations for the Jubilee take place over four days. As well as enjoying time with family and friends, why not, as Her Majesty suggested, join in the following celebrations in Benenden.

THURSDAY 2 JUNE

8.30pm: St George's Church: A celebration of a life in service

As we celebrate the Queen's life of service to the nation and the wider Commonwealth, join us for readings and singing to applaud those whose lives are dedicated to the service of our local community - often the same people who came to our attention during the pandemic. If you serve, or have served, locally or further afield in the country or abroad please come in uniform, wearing medals, badges or other items showing the service you are associated with.

9.30pm: Gather at the beacon

We will be joining thousands of other beacon sites across the Commonwealth who are lighting up at 9.45pm to mark the Jubilee. Once we have sung the national anthem, there is an opportunity to watch the beacon while listening to a special peal of bells from St George's. This event is supported by the Parish Council and the Bonfire Society.

SATURDAY 4 JUNE

7.30pm: Village Hall: A 'right royal' variety performance

Expect sketches, songs and the obligatory old-time singalong while sat around tables laden with your supper and lubricated by drink from the Benenden Players' bar. We will be holding a raffle and raising funds to help support our work introducing young people to some of the skills and knowledge needed to be part of a team.

Alongside your 'old' favourites, we'd love to feature new talent. The theme is Through the Decades, so this is your chance to dig out your bell-bottom flares, winklepickers, loon pants, pixie boots, bouffant hair, safety pins, fingerless gloves or goth gear and plan your performance.

Contact Nancy with your proposed act:
nancy.tolhurst@btinternet.com 07711 139218
Tickets on sale now: www.benendenplayers.co.uk

SUNDAY 5 JUNE

8am: St George's Church: Pentecost Service

11am: St George's Church: Jubilee Service

12.15pm: The Green / Village Hall: Village sharing lunch

The lunch is a great opportunity for the wider community to come together and share a meal either alfresco or in the village hall. Bring enough for your own needs and be prepared to share with friends and neighbours in the style of a traditional street party.

Please contact me if you can help with any event, especially looking for a bugler or bagpipe player and help setting up for the village lunch.
Peter Ellis 07860 941139 peteralanellis@aol.com





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We have recommenced our regular monthly
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Borough Council Elections

Your vote - your choice

The Benenden & Cranbrook Ward elections are being held on 5 May. We asked the four candidates standing for election as our local councillor to tell us a little about themselves and what their priorities are for this area.

Tom Dawlings, Conservative

I'm an active borough councillor and have been its leader since May 2021. Inevitably, much of TWBC's focus is on the town of Royal Tunbridge Wells where the main economic activity is and from where most of the business rates and council tax are collected. Establishing good relationships with parishes, however, is a priority so for me the Benenden & Cranbrook ward is centre stage.

In Benenden I have been involved with both parish and Neighbourhood Development Plans and the parish referendum giving the NDP such overwhelming support. I am a trustee of the Benenden Village Trust. In Cranbrook, I have helped secure £1.5 million of funding for new equipment and major improvements to the environmental efficiency of the Weald Sports Centre.

Please remember that these are local elections and I am a local councillor. My priorities are council services, the local economy, the climate emergency and protection of the AONB.

tom.dawlings@tunbridgewells.gov.uk 241750



Daniel Francis, Labour

I moved to Benenden in 1985, while working in the City as an Inspector of Taxes, and my family lived here for nearly 30 years. I volunteered as treasurer of the playgroup after my sons were born and they both went to the primary school. Since being widowed and moving to Southborough, I now chair the town council finance committee and have been deputy mayor since 2021.

On the borough council I want to be a strong voice for women, children and the elderly. For example, they are the main users of expensive rural bus services, which need a radical rethink. Labour will deliver affordable housing for those who can't buy or rent at market prices; rein in developers who try and put too many houses on greenfield sites; act urgently to



preserve our precious environment and reach the borough's carbon neutral targets; and stop taking residents' views for granted.

broomdenvilla@virginmedia.com 07516 091259

Lee Hatcher, Tunbridge Wells Alliance

I am pleased and proud to be standing as your local and independent Alliance candidate for the Benenden & Cranbrook Ward. I grew up in Cranbrook, attending schools in the town, and working in Cranbrook and Benenden before joining the Royal Navy. I now live in Cranbrook with my wife Annie and stepson Max and I work from home as a software developer. I care deeply about our local communities, and, as a Cranbrook & Sissinghurst parish councillor, I am working hard to deliver the things that matter to local people.

The Alliance already has six councillors on TWBC, including Nancy Warne in our ward. I feel strongly that it is time for councillors of all persuasions to pull together, putting party politics aside, and working with integrity to put residents first. If elected, I promise to do this.

lee@twalliance.com 07539 460571



Julie Simpson, Green

I'm married with children and grandchildren and have lived in Sissinghurst for nearly 40 years. Twenty years ago, I started a business in Cranbrook publishing Wealden Times and Surrey Homes magazines, as well as running Wealden Times fairs. I've recently retired from the daily running of the business to become more involved in my community.

I'm a trustee and volunteer with Cranbrook & District Age Concern, a Sissinghurst & Cranbrook parish councillor and a passionate believer that a thriving local community with a commitment to supporting everyone in it should be at the heart of everything that we do.

Tunbridge Wells council needs to prioritise protecting our countryside and building sustainable, affordable, low-impact housing. More green voices in the council chamber will ensure that the environment and sustainability are central to its decisions. If elected, I will fight to minimise the impact of development and work to promote strong, cohesive communities.

julie.simpson3025@yahoo.com





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Jane Dalton Holmes: Royal British Legion Poppy Appeal organiser for 30 years

It was a great pleasure to be invited to a special occasion recently when Derek East, chairman of the Royal British Legion (RBL) Benenden Branch, presented Jane with a Certificate of Achievement in recognition of her outstanding services to the Poppy Appeal.

For over 30 years and in all weathers, Jane has coordinated the Poppy Appeal team across the parish, raising an amazing £103,000 over that time. The much-needed funds help ensure serving and ex-serving personnel get the support they need to recover, physically and mentally, as well as helping veterans adjust to civilian life and providing care homes for older veterans.

Raising funds for the RBL is poignant for Jane. Her father Captain AJ Williamson of the Sherwood Foresters (Notts and Derby Regiment) died in 1944 during the Anzio landings in World War II when Jane was only three. "It means a great deal to me to help raise funds for the Poppy Appeal. While I have no direct memory of my father, other than a photograph of me with him, and all that my mother told me of him, I do feel that this draws me closer to him."

Jane's links to this village began when she left her home in Nottinghamshire and came, with her ration book, to board at Benenden School in 1953. After she had left school, Jane's love of music took her to Italy to study singing before returning to apply for an English degree at Newnham College, Cambridge. "It was a wonderful time to be there" she says. "I immersed myself more in singing with the University Madrigal and Music Societies and the Opera Group, and performing in some wonderful venues, when I should have spent time studying. I graduated in 1962 by the skin of my teeth!"

Not surprisingly, the world of music beckoned,



and Jane embarked on a career in concert management. The early 60s were a great time to be working in London and Jane's first job was with the Festival of the City of London, which was strongly geared towards classical music. She then briefly worked in arts administration for the John Lewis

Partnership, whose flagship Oxford Street shop at that time contained a 150-seat theatre, before heading to Oxford to help manage the prestigious Bach Festival in 1963 founded by Lina Lalandi.

"Lina was an amazing musician," recalls Jane. "She was a Greek harpsichordist and singer and during the war had guided allied troops through Athens. At the time, the Bach Festival was Britain's most adventurous new festival. My role was to organise the performers and the venues. It was hard work as everything had to be exactly right - but so interesting. I met many of the 'greats' while working for Lina, including Igor Stravinsky."

In 1967 Jane married Robin, who worked for the Ind Coope Brewery. He had started as a trainee working his way up to managing 400 pubs before deciding to swap that career for one as bursar at Benenden School. So, 25 years after leaving the school, Jane returned to the village once more, raising their two children here: Charles and Camilla (who also attended the girls' school, followed by her own daughter Imogen).

Jane has no immediate plans to stop coordinating Benenden & Iden Green's Poppy Appeal and thanks everyone who supports the collection so generously. It continues to mean a great deal to her and the Royal British Legion.
Ruth Clark



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Clubs, Sports and Recreation

Immerse yourself in the healing power of sound

The relaxing and rejuvenating effects of the sonic vibrations of a gong bath have been recognised for hundreds of years. From May, you'll be able to experience it for yourself in the village hall. Here, Dawn McKelvie tells us what to expect.

A gong bath is a form of sound healing meditation where you are immersed in the vibrations of the gongs and a collection of sound healing instruments. It's a wonderful opportunity to unwind and de-stress and doesn't require you to do anything other than to bring a blanket, pillow and cushioned mat to lie on with your eyes closed for an hour and three-quarters, whilst the therapeutic effects of the vast array of sounds wash over you.

We begin with focusing on our breath and some of the smaller instruments are gently played to prepare you for the gong bath and to help take you down into a relaxed state. We finish with a very deep and profound silence before I gently bring you back by playing some of the other instruments. This is an important end stage of a gong bath, to really make sure that people are fully grounded before leaving at the end of the session.

We live in a vibrational universe where everything around us is vibrating and has a set frequency at which it vibrates. The same is true for us; every cell and organ has its own frequency. When we are in our optimum state of health and wellbeing, generally things are vibrating as they should, but when we become poorly or stressed, we then become out of balance or, as I would say, we become out of tune. When a frequency is played that we are

low in, we can lock on and build that sound back up, bringing us back into alignment, or back into tune.

Sound works on all levels: on a cellular level, a physical body level, emotionally, mentally and on our energy body. Because we are predominantly made up of water, we are naturally fantastic conductors of sound, so there really is nowhere that sound can't reach. Our whole bodies become a bit like a sponge

for us to absorb the frequencies, which is why sound is such a wonderful medium to work with.

The gong is said to be the most effective and transformative sound healing tool that we have. Everything around us is made up of vibration, including you.



This is why the frequencies of the gongs are able to retune you, bringing you back to your optimum state of wellbeing. Some areas that the gongs have been known to help with include relaxation, improved sleep, strengthened immune system, more clarity, enhanced creativity, stress and anxiety, physical pain and depression.

Please note that a gong bath is not recommended for those in the first three months of pregnancy or those with a pacemaker.

I look forward to seeing you every third Friday of the month, starting on 20 May. Exchange is £25. To book please contact me on 07554 069191.

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Support for the people of Ukraine

Ukraine: ways we can help those escaping the war

During this very troubling time, many people will want to help and show their support for the people of Ukraine. Benenden Action Team (BAT) and the parish council met recently with a representative from Tunbridge Wells Borough Council who is coordinating how towns and village across the borough can best help those arriving from Ukraine and how we can access the resources that TWBC is rapidly setting up. The website that has been set up is very helpful: www.tunbridgewells.gov.uk/news/ukraine. It provides a lot of useful information on how you can help, with advice for sponsors who would like to host a guest family until they can return to Ukraine. Since the outbreak of the war on 24 February, almost four million Ukrainians have been forced to flee their country, of which two million have found shelter in Poland. Some of those Polish families offering refuge have shared their lessons learned and hints and tips and these are included in the host pack to help those preparing to welcome Ukrainian guests.

TWBC has also prepared a welcome guide to help families settle in and find out how to access all the support they need. The guide lets guests know what they need during their first few days and provides key information that they will need over the coming weeks and months. Benenden parish council is preparing a localised version of this welcome pack for families who arrive here, and this will be available shortly. Currently only a few families are arriving locally but this is expected to rise over the next few months as visas are granted.

BAT is a wonderful group that united almost 300 parishioners when the first Covid lockdown hit to help each other and those across Benenden and Iden Green. Since then, BAT has continued to be a source of advice and support for a wide variety of issues and the team is on hand to now provide a support system to Ukraine sponsors and guests in the parish. Please let us know if you are about to welcome a family and what specific support you may need.

There are many established organisations providing humanitarian aid who would welcome any support you could give. Most organisations are now asking for cash donations, rather than clothing and supplies. These include British Red Cross Ukraine Crisis Appeal; Disasters Emergency Committee Ukraine and Save the Children Ukraine Appeal.

Useful links and emails

If the war in Ukraine is affecting you, your family or friends directly, please visit www.gov.uk for useful information about support.

For all queries:

ukraine@tunbridgewells.gov.uk

Facebook group: Ukraine Relief Group (Tunbridge Wells)

Guy Hagan, BAT coordinator 07515 275150
guy@rawfellconstruction.co.uk

REFUGEE

A haunting image fills the screen,
arresting me.

A bundle of garments,
grey and crumpled.

Blonde wisps escaping
from a woolly hat.

Grubby hand raised
shading troubled eyes.

And a hesitant soft, slow smile
towards the camera,
before being turned away
in her mother's arms.

And I think of you,
of how maybe
that could be you.

If a dictator ruled us
with violence and hate,
so that we were condemned
to hardship and fear.

Or if we were the wrong colour,
race or creed.

The victims of ethnic cleansing
perhaps.

And if I had fled
bearing only innocence.

Rosemary Lloyd Jones

Event Review



Let there be light! The spirit of pantomime lives on after lockdown

There was a beautiful moment in this year's panto when the lights went out in the village hall and an ill-timed power cut thrust the stage and audience into near-silence and total

darkness. No lights, no music and no refunds! At this point many performers would have given up, apologised to the audience, and awkwardly shuffled off stage right - but not the Benenden Players. Natural light soon flooded the hall, and a



good old-fashioned piano was wheeled in to accompany the dogged actors on stage, with musical director Graham Beveridge riding to the rescue like Aslan himself. From the rubble of apparent disaster, the blitz spirit of the community rallied to make it a touching final act.

Extremely loosely based on the CS Lewis classic, 'The Comicals of Narna' sees two young boys, gamely played by Joe Tyler and Oliver Morris, disappearing through a magical door in the cellar of Benenden's shop. Their rescue, by well-established dame Ian Malaugh and the naturally funny Wilf played by Ian Aldridge, takes us to two warring kingdoms and provides for some nicely contrasting characters and colour schemes.

Narna, with its frozen theme, is where we meet bigwig Baron Chilly Willy, played by ad-libber extraordinaire Mark Barron Reid, and his frosty daughter Icy Flo played beautifully by the ever-wooded Tilly Milnes. We also meet frisky Poody Doodle, a fetching Bonny Sullivan, Garry Croucher's Oddjob and an assortment of weird and wonderful cameos.

From Narna we travel to the happy land of Dazzle, a French colony of sorts, presided over by Pierre Gautier's Flash Harry - dressed as



the lovechild of Rod Stewart and a satsuma. His love-at-first-sight meeting with Icy Flo takes over as the main narrative and leads us to the standout duet 'The Last Night of the World', which brought the house down.



The story rollicked along at a mighty pace with intermittent front-of-curtain narration to keep the story on-track and to allow for some very slick scenery

changes. The ball of pure energy that is Jemma MacDonald, as librarian Cynthia, was a particularly welcome addition to the cast,

with her talent for physical comedy increasingly apparent.

It would be criminal not to mention just how good all the children were this year; a stand-out performance by Olivia El Chamaa as a tuneful yet exasperated ice-cream seller had the audience

whipped up as she scooped 'best cameo'. The choreography, created and performed by young Lucy Freeman, was simple but very effective



and her seasonal transformation in the finale was gracefully executed.

It is impressive that writer/director Bev Beveridge and her troupe have shaken off the rust of lockdown and emerged, shiny and rejuvenated, in a very funny and original pantomime.

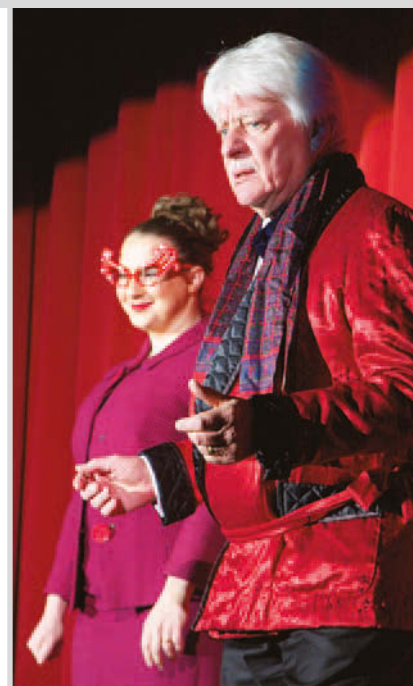
That this has been produced under difficult circumstances makes it more impressive and is testimony to the dedication and tenacity of all involved.

At its heart, Narnia has always been about

resurrection and renewal, children and adults, imaginative storytelling and the power of love: there are no apologies to CS Lewis required here.

James Conmy

Photographs:
Paul Woolwich





Is electric the way forward for the modern driver?

Thinking about buying an electric car? Peter Massey thought about it a lot before he finally picked one, so we asked him what you should consider before taking the plunge.

Quite simply, you buy an electric car because it's much nicer to drive than the old technology. Single-pedal driving comes naturally; they are smooth and quiet and, of course, they are green to run, too.

To learn the differences, rent the ones you consider or get an extended weekend test drive. There are a lot of significant options and a very wide set of functions you can configure, including the phone app. Don't get lost between options on an electric car versus the amount of technology possible on any car now. Most of the fiddly options are set on day one and never used again!

Remove the mileage and charging myths and learn what range you need. I found it surprisingly small for 90 per cent of the time, and easy to charge on the long runs. Charging at home simplifies life a lot, it takes seconds to plug in and you can use a safety-checked 13-amp socket more than you think.

Treat the quoted mileage range as hypothetical and divide by two-thirds. If you get great mileage out of a petrol/diesel, you can get great range out of a battery; if you don't, you

won't - your right foot makes most of the difference. The heater makes a difference of 15-20 miles but lights, wipers, seat heaters etc don't make any difference. Winter makes some difference to the batteries, too, as they need to be brought to temperature to perform best.

"Will you shut up and just buy anything!" - Siobhan Massey.

When you drive an old car, everyone asks: "What year is it?" Their second question is: "What does it do to the gallon?" When you drive a sports car, everyone asks: "How fast does it go?" When you drive an electric car, everyone asks: "How far will it go?"

But there are a million questions on a modern car you never dreamed of. Why do the doors lock themselves some of the time and not others? Why would I switch on the aircon remotely through my phone? What's 'dog mode' and why is it brilliant? Can I use a timer to automatically charge off peak? It's as endless as choosing and getting used to your first smart phone. And it's boring for some people and not for others, hence my wife's comment! So, I invested time in learning what I wanted versus what I needed.



What year? This is crucial. Buy one when the software has 'run in' for a few years and had the glitches removed and the usability improved. The phone app is part of using the car, so it matters, too.

What mpg? It's a lot cheaper than petrol or diesel. Miles per kilowatt hour is the new mpg. A bigger motor and a heavier right foot make a big difference to what you achieve. So does the heater and outside temperature. Overnight charging tariffs at home make a big difference to the running costs.



How fast? A lot faster than ordinary cars. Acceleration on some of the ordinary electric vehicles (EV) is at Porsche levels. And power is instantaneous, so you have to learn to be gentle and not to make your passengers throw up! Some cars give you alternative settings so you can adjust the responses.

How far will it go? Hereby hangs the big myth about electric cars. For example, I recently drove from Cheltenham to Hereford, then back to Benenden and charged once for 44 minutes - just long enough for a natural break, walk the dog, get a sandwich, check the emails over a coffee. The electric car concerned has a small range of 175 miles. In a diesel I would have stopped for 30 minutes anyway. And I

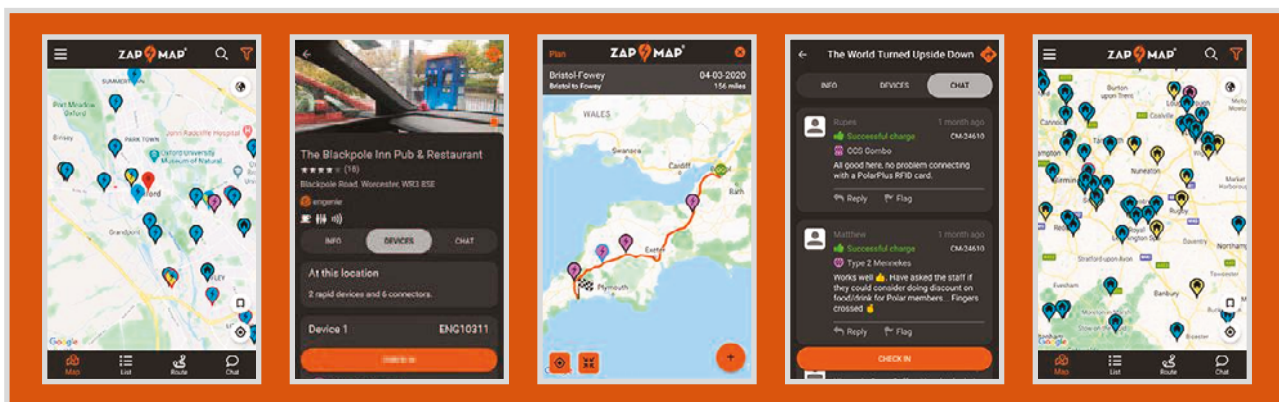
didn't have to stop to refill when I got home. There were plenty of charging points to choose from and you can check on your phone if they are working and if they are in use.

Is it cheaper? At the services I put in 32KWh at a cost of approx. £12.80. If that was diesel the 236 miles would have been approx. £52 at 40mpg. At home, on the cheap overnight tariff (which has tripled since last year), it cost me £5.88 to fill from zero to full. So that's 3.4p per mile. That compares with 17.5p per mile, even if you get 50mpg from your diesel - about the same as filling up on public electric chargers.

If you have or intend to install solar, then it's free, but that's probably another £5,000, plus the same again for storage batteries. The smart car chargers like Zappi, which I installed, takes care of that, optimising the use of solar and overnight cheap tariffs.

Is putting a charger in difficult? I found it very simple. All the quote sites use a standard questionnaire and as long as you can read on your fuse box that it's a 100 amp supply, then it is straightforward. I checked our local electrician in Tenterden and they were cheaper than online quotes. I chose the charger by reading the thorough online reviews. One site visit to check in advance. Then one morning to install. Now I have the added benefits of being able to see my home electricity usage and not have to faff with cables from the boot of the car.

In his next article, Peter shares his experience testing a variety of electric cars before deciding.



In Your Garden



My ten most reliable border plants

Sourcing plants for clients takes creative thought and an element of pragmatism, so it's a bit of a balancing act. Once I have left the scene, a new border needs to be relatively self-sustaining, but with periods of 'wow' too. Seeing as most of my

plans are built on an empty space, then about 30% of this has to be background structure, such as shrubs and trees. Somewhere in between the 'wow' and my 30% rule are my ten most used border plants.

I will start with foliage. *Artemisia ludoviciana* 'Valerie Finnis' or 'Silver Queen' would be my silver-leaved plant of choice. It's utterly easy to maintain and it threads through all the gaps as well as acting as good neighbourly support. Bronze fennel is my next contender, which does not always pass the client nod of approval as it is a prolific self-seeder, but its merits of colour, texture and height win major brownie points.

Sesleria autumnalis, a low to 50cm evergreen grass, is perfect for small areas at the front of a border when you just want a rest from the flowers, over-winters well and partners with emerging spring bulbs. Any euphorbia (in my book), but *characias* or its compact form

'Humpty Dumpty' always look good, although I have to leave detailed care instructions with these, otherwise they get out of control.

The remaining six contenders are flowering plants. *Hylotelephium telephium* (*Atropurpureum*) - 'Purple Emperor' (in simpler terms, an excellent dark-leaved sedum) - always goes in, although 'Jose Aubergine'

can take its place. Very difficult to pick a favourite sedum, but this genus probably ticks all the boxes for form, flower, ease and winter interest.

Penstemons are next and can make some clients wince a little. I push them on this and basically insist they use them. Once they start to flower, they keep on going and look immaculate and blowsy. 'White Bedder' works well for me, as does 'Hidcote Pink', but 'Blackbird' and 'Sour Grapes' also. They are also incredibly easy to propagate from. An achillea: 'Gold Plate' is a bit of a whopper but the foliage pushes up early and I do love a tall plant. I always advise to divide this one every few years to keep it in check. 'Moonshine' is better behaved and more compact but I also like some of the red varieties such as *A. millefolium* 'Red Velvet'.

I use *Geranium* 'Johnson's Blue' for its long flowering period and height. A blue geranium always works with either a pastel or vibrant scheme and I find blue flowers are often asked for. 'Orion' is also good and I really favour *G. pyrenaicum* 'Bill Wallis', but I can't always source this one. A *veronicastrum* gives height, good palmate-like foliage and a long flowering season. *V. virginicum* 'Diane' is a bright white, seems sturdier and partners well with tall grasses.

A peony is last but by no means least. I know diminutive *sanguisorbas* and *knautias* are lovely, but full-on peony glamour is hard to beat. Peonies are plants to last, as emerging foliage partners well with spring bulbs and looks good for the rest of the year, well into winter, but one cannot deny the bountiful crepe-like beauty of their flowers. I like to use 'Sarah Bernhardt', 'Coral Charm' and 'Shirley Temple'.

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Above: A terrific opportunity to take centre stage: the village pantomime coming to fruition after months of rehearsal and countless hours of hard work and dedication from cast and crew; the pre-school garden bursting into spring colour.

Front cover: The Comicals of Narna: a thrilling return to the stage. Photograph: Paul Woolwich