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Editorial



The swing of the seasons in our rural setting provides an underlying natural rhythm to our lives. Spring has already been ushered in by daffodils and bluebells. The weather has been kind to the blossom on the trees. Soon we shall see horse chestnuts in bloom. Our farming community have been busy preparing the land, sowing and planting. The sight of lambs in the fields lifts the spirits. The cricket season has begun. All is as it should be in nature, and now we're now looking forward to other regular events: St George's village fete will soon be with us and the Benenden Players are marking the 80th anniversary of VE Day with a concert.

This last item puts me in mind of our 50th anniversary commemorations. Thirty years ago there were still many amongst us who had seen active service; some contributed photographs, artefacts, documents and memories to an exhibition in the Memorial Hall.

We experienced memories of the Russian Convoys, North Atlantic anti-submarine operations by Coastal Command, and of one whose wartime experience lasted well beyond May 1945 as he suffered the privations of a Japanese POW camp. We've numbered amongst our residents a secretary to Winston Churchill; we've commemorated Jean Maridor's sacrifice and Ronald Kellett's achievements with 303 Squadron RAF; we commemorate all who have fallen in battle and those villagers killed by flying bombs.

In this issue Robin Dalton Holmes provides us with an extract of his father's written account of his experiences. Elsewhere Sara Tidy reminds us of the contribution and sacrifice of 'the few' in the skies above us in the summer of 1940. The lighting of the beacon on 8 May will mark the occasion.

Also in this issue we continue the story of the historic house called Coggers. Ruth Clark focusses on Marion Cran, a pioneering gardener, writer and broadcaster, who lived there. Enjoy the May edition.

Paul Leek, Guest 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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Village Calendar

May		
Thursday I	Kent County Council Election Voting, Benenden Village Hall, 7am-10pm	p.9
Thursday I	Hug in a Mug, Benenden's Community Shop, 10am	p.15
Saturday 3	Churchyard Working Party, St George's, Benenden, 9.30-12noon	
Saturday 3	Parish Annual Assembly, Benenden Village Hall, 2pm	p.9
Saturday 3	Hemsted Park, Thank You for the Music - The Ultimate Tribute to ABBA,	
	Benenden School Centenary Hall, 7.30pm	p.19
Saturday 3	Skittles, St George's Social Club, 8.15pm	
Sunday 4	National Open Garden Scheme, Balmoral Cottage, Benenden, 12noon-5pm	p.17
Tuesday 6	Mobile Library, bus stop outside Benenden Village Hall, 10-10.30am	
Tuesday 6	Mobile Library, Benenden Hospital, 10.40-11.10am	
Tuesday 6	Iden Green and Benenden WI, Lunch at The Peacock, Goudhurst, 12.30pm	p.21
Thursday 8	VE80 Day Lighting of the Beacon, Beacon Field, 9.30pm	p.9
Saturday 10	Benenden Bowls Club, Open Day, Recreation Field, 12noon	p.21
Saturday 10	VE Day Celebrations, St George's Social Club, 8.15pm	
Sunday 11	Christian Aid Week starts	p.13
Sunday II	VE80 Celebration Concert, Benenden Village Hall, 2pm	p.9
Sunday 11	Hemsted Park, NT Live: The Importance of Being Earnest, Cinema Screening	g,
	Benenden School Theatre, 3pm	p.19
Tuesday 13	Village Lunch, Benenden Village Hall, 12.30pm	p.17
Saturday 17	Quiz Night, St George's Social Club, 8.15pm	
Monday 19	Parish Council Meeting, Iden Green Pavilion, 7pm	
Tuesday 20	Mobile Library, bus stop outside Benenden Village Hall, 10-10.30am	
Tuesday 20	Mobile Library, Benenden Hospital, 10.40-11.10am	
Tuesday 20	Iden Green and Benenden WI, AGM, Memorial Hall, 2pm	p.21
Saturday 24	Bingo, St George's Social Club, 8.15pm	
Sunday 25	The Angry Whelk Fresh Fish Stall, Benenden Village Hall, 12-2pm	
Tuesday 27	Merry and Bright, Sheila Hume: British Flower Movement and Growing	
	for Cutting, Memorial Hall, 2pm	p. I 3
Thursday 29	Hemsted Park, Dad's Army: The Radio Show,	
	Benenden School Theatre, 7.30pm	p.19
Saturday 31	Cornhole Tossing, St George's Social 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, 6pm

Cakes & Chaos: Café and Toddler Group

Fridays during term time in St George's Church, 9-11am

Parish Council



As a parish councillor it always fills me with dread when a colleague sends through a link with the message: "Have you seen this?" It happened a few weeks ago when Kentlive.news reported: "Unduly prominent phone mast in gorgeous Kent village has been granted permission at appeal". We were initially shocked at the journalistic efficiency of getting hold of an appeal decision in our "sleepy Benenden" before we had been informed, but once we had delved deeper, we realised it was FAKE NEWS! Not only was the article factually incorrect, the caption photo was not even of our "pretty little village". Shoddy or what?

Thankfully, a couple of weeks later the official appeal decision was issued by the Planning Inspectorate, with the appeal dismissed for the installation of a 20m high telephone mast in the centre of the village. The Inspector stated: "The mast would ... comprise a distinctly stark, utilitarian and modern element in the historic, rural surroundings ... strikingly incongruous and harmfully at odds with the character of the area." And so say all of us in our "quintessentially English place where cricket is played on the Green", as Kentlive gleefully highlighted in their erroneous news article.

In other news: our annual assembly takes place at 2pm on Saturday 3 May in the village hall - all welcome to hear updates from parish and borough councillors as well as village organisations and groups. Tea and cakes for those who want to stay and chat afterwards.

We will be lighting the beacon at the top of the wildflower meadow at 9.30pm on Thursday 8 May as part of a shared moment of celebration for the 80th anniversary of VE Day. Please join us to mark this poignant day.

Thank you to all who took part in our village clean-up at the end of March - great to see some new faces joining the team.

Finally, I would like to thank our county councillor, Sean Holden, who is retiring before the elections on I May. I'm sure being our go-between with Kent County Council has not been easy, and Sean has dealt with various issues for us over the years, not least his sterling work as part of the team that brought the building of our new primary school to fruition. Thank you, Sean.

Nicola Thomas, BPC Chair nicolat@benendenparishcouncil.org

Caroline Levett, Benenden Parish Council Clerk
07593 226462 clerk@benendenparishcouncil.org
For more information see our website www.benendenparishcouncil.org or find us on Facebook

Parish Council Meeting Monday 19 May, Iden Green Pavilion, 7pm

Church Calendar

St George's Church

Rector: Revd David Commander 240658 revdavidcommander@gmail.com (day off: Thursday)

Associate Priest: Revd Ylva Blid-Mackenzie 01233 820100 rev.ylva@gmail.com

Churchwarden: David Collard 241944 d.collard49@btinternet.com

Churchwarden: Sue Fisher 241907 sue@undaunted.co.uk

www.benendenchurch.org 850849 benendenchurch@gmail.com

Please inform the Rector, Associate Priest or Churchwardens if you, or anyone else, is ill.

Sunday 4 May 8am Communion 10am All-age

Communion

Sunday 11 May 8am BCP Communion 10am Morning Worship Sunday 18 May 8am Communion 10am Sung Eucharist

Saturday 24 May 4pm Connect Four

at Mission Church, Sandhurst

Sunday 25 May 8am Communion 10am Morning Worship

Thursday 29 May 7.30pm Ascenion Day Service

Morning Prayer 8am Mondays and Fridays (not on Bank Holiday Mondays)

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 I0am Morning Worship is broadcast on our YouTube channel: search 'Iden Green Congregational Church'.

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Fr Barry Grant 713364 www.sttheodore-cranbrook.org

Masses 9am Sundays 7.30pm Holy Days

From the Parish Registers

Baptism 6 April Lara Stoughton

Funerals 12 April Roy and Pamela Clarke Interment

Church Letter



Even the quiet months seem to end up busy

As you will have seen from my piece last month, April and Holy Week and Easter were all pretty full on. As I sat down to write this month's letter, I wondered what I was going to write about; I started to make a list of things happening from the end of April and through May; then, all of a sudden, things seemed busy once again!

On Sunday 27 April at 5pm, we will be holding a Choral Evensong service celebrating our patron saint, St George, for the first time in many years, giving thanks for the past, present and future of our parish church. This will be followed by a social time at the back of church with refreshments, nibbles, wine, tea and coffee. There will be an opportunity to learn more about the project for St George's Church: 'Restore, Renew, and Rejoice!' If you are interested in your parish church, please do come along to the service and the social.

Then we have two annual parish meetings and annual parochial church meetings (APCMs) taking place - one in each parish. (St George's APCM is on 12 May.) Again, if you are interested in what has happened, and what is going to happen in your parish church, you really need to come along and be a part of it. (There is also the annual meeting of the Friends of St George's Church on 28 April.)

We have two Bank Holidays coming up, which are a blessing - they give us a break from work - but they also take two working days out of the month, which, ironically, makes everything feel even busier. And we have two concerts in the benefice this month, both at St Nicholas Church, Sandhurst. On Saturday 3 May, the Invicta Wind Orchestra presents a concert of 'Music for VE80' - commemorating the 80th anniversary of VE Day with film music and popular songs of the time; and on Friday 30 May there is a concert of Nordic choral sounds.

Also in May we have a Pilgrimage Walk, heading off from St Nicholas Church, on the morning of Saturday 17, and a 'rogation service' in both parish churches on Sunday 25 (think 'harvest', but a service of blessing for the coming year's harvest rather than a service of thanks for the harvest!). On 29 May we have a service to mark Ascension Day (Jesus's leaving the earth and ascending to heaven) and then into June we have: Teas on the Churchyard at St Nicholas on Sunday 1; Pentecost on Sunday 8; the St George's/Benenden Fete on Saturday 14; a Sandhurst Celebrates event on Saturday 21; and Revd Vicki Young's ordination service as a priest on Saturday 28.

Why was I concerned about what I was going to write about in a quieter month?

As I said last month, your parish church has been an important and central part of village life down through the centuries. Let's all ensure that continues. Please come along and get involved.

Revd David Commander, Rector and Area Dean







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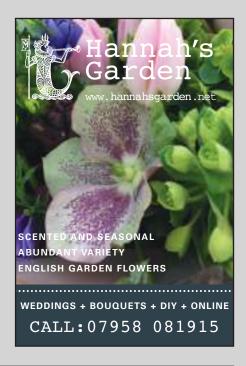
Dealing with life can be difficult, including:

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Talking Point



Poignant memories that still tell a tale of heroism

Benenden will be taking part in the national commemoration of the 80th anniversary of the end of World War II in Europe. We know that the last few living survivors of the conflict are passing away from us, but what remains is the first-hand testimony of those who lived through those fearful and heroic days. I am fortunate to have my father's written account of his wartime experiences, and here I am extracting part of his account of the critical retreat to Dunkirk and evacuation to England after winter in the trenches:

"In late May I only got about four hours sleep in a week of retreat. We were finally going to withdraw to La Panne, a 24-mile formal march in ranks of three. Short of the coastal perimeter we saw an indescribable mess of bombed vehicles and some of the ammunition wagons, with their horses. A few were on fire. I dropped back with some of my men and we got all the horses out of their traces. We then got on to the sands at about 4.30am and apart from sunk boats, not a single vessel was in sight.

"It was rather surprisingly cold in the early morning, so I caught a French grey horse and then galloped up and down on the sands until I got a bit warmer. At about 9am, boats and ships of all descriptions began to come into sight. The French rushed for the sea. 'Hami' (my brigadier) lined up what was left of our Brigade, and fixed bayonets. They then marched on the French and made them get into some sort of order. Then started the longest bathe of my life.

"The sea was very shallow, and we had to walk out and collect boats put in the sea by sailors. I and some of my men got a rather heavy whaler. We loaded up at the nearest deep enough points, but most of the day we had to stay in the water pushing when they grounded. At about 4.30pm I reported to Hami that all the Brigade was safely off. He said: 'Get on a boat and go home.'

"We decided to row out to a British destroyer. We tried hard to get to it but whether the tide had gone out a bit or what else it was, I do not know, but the boat kept grounding on the sand. So I said, 'to hell with this, let's get on the Dutch boat'. We were lucky in more ways than one; the destroyer was bombed and sunk. Meanwhile we climbed on board the Dutch boat, where we were welcomed by the Dutch captain who took us to his cabin. He produced a bottle of whisky and some Dutch gin and told us to help ourselves. He also produced dressing gowns, and he suggested we took off wet clothes; these were taken down to the engine room to dry. We dressed again and I threw the two grenades in my haversack overboard and we were told to report to Margate's 'Dreamland'."

Six weeks later my parents had met and were married and soon were separated for five years. Apart from France and Belgium my father served against French troops in Madagascar, chased the Italians out of Ethiopia and performed duties in much of the African continent, returning in 1945 when he and I, aged four and a quarter, met for the first time. It is this story, and my wife Jane's loss of her father at Anzio, that has encouraged us both to give time to the work of the Royal British Legion.

Locally, 18 'V' bombs fell in our parish. Benenden School's buildings were requisitioned and staff were given seven days' notice to make way for a military hospital in May 1940, only returning in 1946.

Robin Dalton Holmes 7

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News and Events

Saturday 3 May THE PARISH 2pm Benenden Village Hall 1 Apologies 2 Parish Council Chairman's Report 3 Presentation of KALC Community Award 4 Parish Councillor Reports: ANNUAL ASSEMBLY OF Highways. Wildflower Meadow. Planning. Village Tidy 5 County and Borough Councillors 6 Benenden Village Trust 7 Benenden Magazine 8 Community Shop 9 Village Hall 10 Allotment Association 11 Bonfire Society 12 Iden Green Pavilion 13 Gibbon and Buckland 14 Gardening Club 15 Almshouses Parishioners are invited to hear reports from the Parish Council and village organisations. Refreshments will be available.

Beacon lighting

VE80 Day takes place on Thursday 8 May to commemorate 80 years since victory in Europe was declared. At 9.30pm beacons and lamp lights of peace will be lit across the UK and beyond, symbolising the strength of communities and honouring the sacrifices made to secure our freedom.

Benenden's beacon sits at one of the high points of the village, located at the top of the field immediately to the left (east) of Benenden Primary School. You can reach it through the gate opposite Leybourne Dell or the pathway at the southeast corner of the Glebe Field.

Benenden Parish Council and Benenden Bonfire Society will be lighting the beacon and everyone is invited to come along and join this community event. Please bring a torch and wear stout footwear as the area of ground surrounding the beacon is uneven.

If you are able to help with marshalling during the evening please contact me:
Graham Beveridge
grahamb@benendenparishcouncil.org



VE80 celebration

Benenden is marking the 80th anniversary of the end of World War II in Europe with a celebratory showcase on Sunday II May in the village hall. From 2-4pm a wonderful line-up of talented village songsters will be singing hits from 80 years ago and memories of the time will be shared. Come along, bring a picnic and join in the fun. There will be a bar, tea and coffee, as well as a raffle in aid of the Army Benevolent Fund.

If you have memories of VE day we can share please contact me. We are especially keen to hear from people living in the area at the time. See above advert for ticket information.

Peter Ellis 07860 941139

KCC election candidates

The nominations for the Kent County Council election taking place on Thursday I May are: Lucie Gavrilova Reform UK Gregory James Holder Labour Dan Littlechild

Independents for Tunbridge Wells
Ellen Neville Tunbridge Wells Alliance
Claudine Jane Russell Conservative
Vivian Alice Widgery Liberal Democrats
Helen Claire Yeo Green

You may vote between 7am and 10pm at Benenden village hall.

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Weald Table Tennis Club

The Weald Table Tennis Club has continued to grow and meets at the village hall on Thursdays at 7-9pm and also Sundays at 6.30-8.30pm. If you haven't tried the game before, then come along and have a go. The club welcomes players of all standards and the first session is free of charge, with all kit and training provided.

Barry Bassett

Merry and Bright

Our Merry and Bright club is doing very well at the moment - we have around 20 members and are still growing. We hold our meetings once a month (2-4pm) in the Memorial Hall and the committee arrange our annual programme at the start of each year. In the past we have visited the Pilot at Dungeness for fish and chips, Hawkhurst Fish Farm and Cranbrook Museum. Every meeting we have a speaker and afterwards enjoy our Victorian tea. Later this year we will have a garden party and tea and a visit to Benenden Bowls Club for a relaxing afternoon with a game of bowls.

Please do pop along to visit us. Your first visit and Victorian tea will be free, then if you feel that you would like to join us, pay for your membership. You will receive a membership programme for this year and be told of any 'extras' as they are organised. We would love to meet you - no age limit, anyone welcome.

Our next meeting is on 27 May with Sheila Hume, who will talk to us about the British flower movement and growing for cutting. If the weather is good we will be visiting her garden, so please contact myself or Julia to arrange a lift for you from the Memorial Hall. Laraine Penny 241763

Julia Collard 241944



Christian Aid Week

The climate crisis is destroying many lives, lands and livelihoods. Please give generously during Christian Aid Week 11-17 May, to help those battling intense heatwaves, deadly droughts and savage storms, to adapt and build their resilience. You can donate easily online using the secure Christian Aid JustGiving site. Please either scan the QR code above or go to www.justgiving.com/page/deborah-jenkins-1. Envelopes will be available in St George's Church and collecting tins will be in the village shop. Let's help make a difference. Many thanks for your support.

Deborah Jenkins

Wednesday coffee mornings

We would love to see more people at the coffee morning in the Memorial Hall every Wednesday between 10am and 11.30am, to catch up with old friends and make new. We look forward to seeing you soon for a hot drink and a biscuit.

Gilly Walton 242855 gilly.walton@gmail.com



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Talking shop

Benenden's is ushering in some new products which we hope will match the sunshine (and encourage it to stay fine). A new menu in the café will be offering charcuterie boards, ploughman's lunches, deep fried brie and a mozzarella salad. All this, from May, can be washed down with a glass of red, white or rosé wine. Sounds interesting? Do come and try it. We are also offering a variety of smoothies and milkshakes.

We recently had a great volunteers' evening where several members of the committee, as well as Jules, our manager, gave some explanation of how the shop is doing and how we are tackling the day-to-day problems of keeping everything on an even keel. If you missed it, don't worry, we will organise another one.

We have some great new volunteers who have joined the team recently and we would like, as always, to thank you all very much. From time to time we have a situation where a volunteer is unable to do a shift so we would be really grateful if any of you would be prepared to be on a WhatsApp group to be called upon in times of real need? There is absolutely no expectation that you would have to do a shift, but if you happened to be able to, it might just save the day, so to speak.

Please let the shop know if you're happy to be included in the group.

On two Sundays in March, many of our volunteers turned up to help with the deep clean in both shop and café. Our heartfelt thanks go to all of you and very special thanks to Ken Anderson for his fantastic organisation of it.

The trial 'Hug in a Mug' session by all accounts went very well and a good number attended. It will happen on the first Thursday of every month at 10am and is aimed to bring together all those who are in the position of caring for someone, along with the person they care for. Caring can be lonely at times and all are warmly welcomed to come and relax and have a good chat over a coffee.

Finally, please check again our new opening hours, which begin on I May. Of special interest may be the trial opening of the café on a Sunday morning from 9-12.30pm. If this is popular, it will be kept. Also, shop opening times will be extended to 6pm on Thursday and Friday.

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





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Village lunch

All Benenden villagers are invited to join us for lunch in the village hall at 12.30pm on Tuesday 13 May. If you would like to come and haven't written your name down already, then please ring me by Thursday 8 May if possible. It costs just £5 and lifts can be arranged. We look forward to seeing you.

Sheila Hume 854627

Classic car owners

Don't forget to bring your classic or interesting car to the fete on Saturday 14 June to show it off. The cars make a great display and get a priority parking space on The Green. They will be supervised throughout the fete and any clambering or 'sitting in' will not be allowed. We need your car for another stunning display this year.

Richard Stubbings 854992

Balmoral Cottage open garden

Charlotte and Donald Molesworth's Balmoral Cottage garden is open to the public as part of the National Garden Scheme on the following Sundays from 12-5pm: 4 May and 5 October.

Varied, romantic and extensive topiary forms the backbone for mixed borders and the whole garden is organically managed. Particular attention to the needs of nesting birds and small mammals lends this garden a rare and unusual quality. Entrance is £7 for adults and £2 for children. Dogs are welcome. The garden is just down the track to the right of St George's Church, Benenden. Parking is available.

BENENDEN FETE 2025

DONATION TIMES & INFORMATION

WHAT Good condition bric-a-brac, tools, clothes, jewellery, books & toys

WHEN into our cars from 8.30-9.30am on:

- Saturday 24 & 31 May, 7 June
- Wednesday 28 May, 4 & 11 June Please DON'T leave donations outside these times

WHERE Car park area outside the public toilets, adjacent to The Bull

WHO If you can't make these dates call: Maggy Hoyt 07485 051265 (bric-a-brac)

Amanda Garratt 07766 000064 (bric-a-brac & tools)

Mary Parkinson 388402 (chic boutique)

Ruth Clark 07767 261883 (books)

Ally Lambert 07515 495388 (toys)

Benenden Village Fete

The countdown begins. Donation drops open on Saturday 24 May between 8.30-9.30am and will be at the same time every Wednesday and Saturday thereafter. As ever, we are grateful for your generosity in donating items ready to be rehomed and re-loved, while raising funds for St George's Church - a perfect recycle for our community. Penny's plant stall is also a favourite, feelgood, cornerstone of our fete which needs plant donations from any green-fingered parishioners and friends. Please email chicken.penny@hotmail.co.uk to arrange.

At this point each year the inevitable committee 'contingencies chat' comes into play. Regulars to the fete will know that in the past we've managed all sorts: lightning storms, water, heat, wind, more water, no water. Those regulars will also know that the mantra 'the show must go on' could well have been written for Benenden parishioners. Bonfire or fete, the community comes together brilliantly. And, you know what? We have a hoot doing it! Do join us, as part of the extensive volunteer team giving as little or as much time as you want? The more the merrier and it really is jolly.

David Commander and Cathy Presgrave cathy.presgrave@gmail.com



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www.westkentmind.org.uk 01732 744950

Information given, volunteers welcome and donations needed.

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All volunteers will need to provide two references and will be DBS checked.

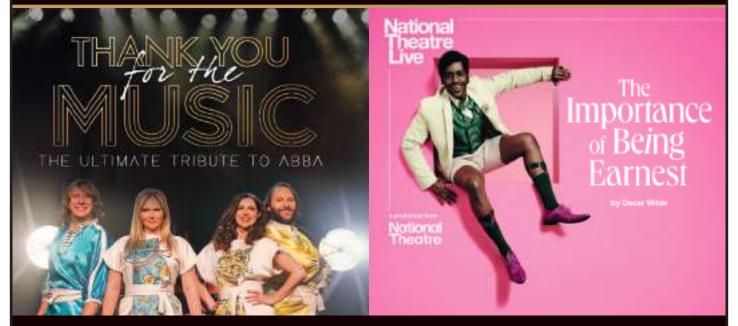
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Benenden School

I am writing this having just left the Lower School production of Alice in Wonderland, which was a truly stunning show, set against a 60s backdrop and inspired by that decade's vibrant energy. The girls' performances were incredible and it is wonderful to see their confidence on the stage shining through.

Other recent stage success has come from our debating teams, who have demonstrated exceptional skill and persuasion, securing places in three national finals - a reflection of their critical thinking, articulate expression and powers of persuasion.

Our academic departments have continued to put on standout events for students. We have hosted the impressive Classics
Symposium, in which we were joined by other schools to hear from experts in the field, while the Humanities Conference welcomed a selection of graduates of humanities subjects discussing their experiences and careers.

These immersive sessions devoted to particular faculties are invaluable in helping the students to cement their knowledge and passion for their subjects.

It is this passion for learning that drives curiosity and helps students engage deeply with the curriculum and understand concepts rather than just memorising facts. As we look ahead to the start of public exams, this intrinsic motivation will play a crucial role in their performance and I wish them every success.

Separately, I wanted to make you aware that the school flagpole will not be in use for the foreseeable future while roof repairs are carried out on Hemsted House. We will look forward to this prominent village landmark flying the flag once again when the works are completed!

Rachel Bailey, Headmistress

Benenden Bowls Club open day

The season has now begun and practice night is Thursday from 6pm. Please come along as we are looking for new members - you will find us behind the village hall. We are a small friendly village club and we welcome all. Bowling is a gentle form of exercise for all ages. If you'd like to try us out, we are holding an open day on 10 May at 12noon. There will be a few stalls, a barbecue and of course a practice rink.

Glenda Marshall, Bowls Club Secretary and Treasurer

Iden Green and Benenden WI

A select few of us met Nancy Warne at a recent social afternoon. She showed us some interesting pictures, her special ruff and chain and talked about her time as mayor. What an extremely pleasant and approachable lady, certainly someone to whom we could relate.

It was also great meeting up at the Trough, Charity Farm for lunch. Then on 15 April Ros Maggs came to our meeting and helped us with the intricacies of making very attractive cards. It was great fun and a real tonic to those of us who are not normally at all artistic.

On 6 May we are planning to meet for lunch at the Peacock at 12.30pm. Members please let Shirley know if you would like to come. Our AGM is on 20 May; another enjoyable experience as around the regular business, we will be having our plant and produce exchange stall, and raffle.

We are a very friendly group and love meeting new people. We would especially like to welcome someone who could act as secretary for us. We are able to pay her membership fee as a thank you. The role is currently covered by three of us and we are all happy to help in any way. Please get in touch if you can help. We face the threat of closure if we can't find anyone.

Jackie Liffen 752232 WI@daisystar.co.uk





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Planning Matters

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

- 25/00467/FULL Benenden Girls' School.
 Proposed re-roofing, raising of roof finishes to allow insulation, renewing & adjusting of lead valleys, addition of overflows to parapets, renewal of flat roofs, rebuilding of dormers to allow timber repairs & insulation, replacement roof hatches, renewal of lead sheet roof, addition of ventilated ridges, addition of man-safe system & reduction in length of terrace wall.
- 25/00468/LBC Benenden Girls' School.

 Proposed re-roofing, raising of roof finishes to allow insulation, renewing & adjusting of lead valleys, addition of overflows to parapets, renewal of flat roofs, rebuilding of dormers to allow timber repairs & insulation, replacement roof hatches, renewal of lead sheet roof, addition of ventilated ridges, addition of man-safe system & reduction in length of terrace wall. Lining of walls, firestopping in roof & floor voids, upgraded wall linings & addition of fire doors, introduction of fire lobby & adaption of existing screen. Additional smoke detects & lights in roof voids.
- 25/00580/FULL Apple Pie Farm, Cranbrook Road. (Retrospective) Change of use of car parking area to the stationing of shipping containers for ancillary storage to units 10-12 and 14-16.
- 25/00646/LBC Springhill Farm, Standen Street. Listed Building Consent - Alterations to internal layout of property (works commenced).
- 25/00726/FULL Owlgate House, Mill Street.
 Erection of detached replacement outbuilding with carport.
- 25/00679/FULL 6 Pullington Cottages. Roof extension and addition of new rooflights.
- 25/00706/FULL Stable Cottage, Nineveh Lane.
 Conversion of existing incidental building to both incidental & ancillary use to main building (Alternative to 23/02274/FULL).



Friends of Benenden Primary School

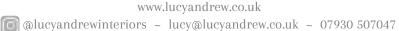
Our 'Whodunnit' Easter trail was a great success and we even had bright skies and sunny weather to accompany the fun. The children scattered across the Glebe Field to find ten hidden riddles, each revealing a suspect's name to eliminate. After lots of searching and solving, it was revealed that Mrs Basket was the rascal who stole the Easter eggs, and each child was presented with a delicious sweet treat, courtesy of the lovely Jan at Tesco. The event raised just under £300 for our children. A big thank you to everyone who came along and supported the Friends of Benenden. A special thanks to those in particular who helped set up and run the day - we are so grateful.

Next, with the village fete on Saturday I4 June, we will be collecting sweetie jars and bottles in school for the tombola. Evie Banfield and Jane Mason, Friends of Benenden CE Primary friends@benenden-cep.kent.sch.uk www.benenden-cep.kent.sch.uk/PTFA/





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Benenden Cricket Club

With pre-season nets concluded and the weather finally warming up, we are looking forward to the 2025 season and have no fewer than four home games scheduled for you to enjoy. Our first game is on Saturday 3 May against Detling, so please come along to show your support.

Saturday 3 May vs Detling at 1.30pm Saturday 10 May vs Wittersham at 1.30pm Saturday 17 May vs Teston at 1.30pm Saturday 31 May vs Richard Gairdner XI at 1.30pm

Barry Bassett



We have been busy as usual this month. The Squirrels were working on their 'Story Time' and 'Let it Grow' badges. They experimented with different seeds and also had time for a day out at the County Activity Centre.

The Cubs found interesting ways to look at healthy eating, local history, and the environment, and spent time playing games, while the Scouts were working on their photography badge, learning how to edit photos. They also entered the Sissinghurst Flower Show photography competition - James came second, so well done to him. There was a meeting at the County Activity Centre to try out the 'bouncy stilts', and a Gold Chief Scouts Award to present - the top award for the Scout section. Well done to Charlie.

Unfortunately our Beavers are still not meeting due to a lack of adult volunteers. Please consider forming a team to run this section. We'll help. If you are experienced or would like experience in running an adult team for your CV, then please consider putting yourself forward and offer to run our scout group. We need a group lead volunteer. Jan Ashley

enquiries@sissinghurstscouts.org.uk



Benenden Pre-School

The sun is shining these days and so we are spending even more time daily in our lovely garden. Our apple tree is beginning to blossom and the daffodils, primroses and hyacinths are in bloom, giving outdoor play a colourful background. The children enjoy the responsibility of watering the plants and will soon be planting sunflower seeds, labelling their individual pots with their name and monitoring the growth of the sunflower, measuring its height and counting the number of leaves as they multiply.

The children use their imagination and their physical skills in the garden as they build their own obstacle courses from the tyres and stumps. These activities encourage taking risks and test resilience, as they practise their climbing, balancing and jumping skills.

Traditional games such as Hide and Seek and What's the time Mr Wolf? are firm garden favourites which support listening and attention and turn taking. Outdoor learning is above all lots of fun!

Lucy Oakley, Supervisor supervisor@benendenpreschool.co.uk



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Benenden Hospital

May celebrates National Walking Month, which raises awareness of the importance of walking. I wholeheartedly agree with the ethos of the organisers, Living Streets, who are on a mission to promote walking to not only improve our health but to stay connected to our communities, which in turn can help combat feelings of loneliness and isolation.

On the theme of community, May also sees Local History Month, offering the opportunity to reflect on the heritage of our hospital and, importantly, the Benenden village community that surrounds it.

As many of you likely already know, Benenden Hospital was opened in 1907 by the National Association for the Establishment and Maintenance of Sanatoria - to treat postal workers suffering from tuberculosis. To aid recovery, patients walked what was known as the 'Benenden Loop', a countryside route around the hospital. When a TB patient could successfully complete the walk, they'd be discharged.

We've certainly created our own walking community here at the hospital; I love seeing our staff following in the footsteps of patients from over 100 years ago by walking this path during their break times.

I understand that not everyone can participate in walking due to disability, illness or long-term injury, but starting somewhere, whether it be gentle knee lifts or increasing our steps in the home might be the thing that leads on to better confidence and fitness. If stiff joints are a limiting factor, our medical director and consultant orthopaedic surgeon, Mr Alex Chipperfield, advises to keep active for Arthritis Awareness Month: "The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence now advises that physical activity, and non-potent painkillers, be the first line of treatment. Regular exercise helps maintain healthy body weight, a key factor in controlling pain. Strong muscles and supple ligaments around a failing joint can help support the joint and alleviate some symptoms."

I hope we can all take inspiration to put on our shoes and just walk.

Claire Harley, Hospital Director

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Hospice in the Weald musical dates

The 17th annual concert events in Sandhurst will begin with Daniel Grimwood playing Liszt, Von Fladt, Henselt and Widor Carnival on Saturday 26 July at 3pm. The second recital is earlier than usual, on Wednesday 27 August, when Florian Verweij will be coming from Holland to make his Kent debut playing Schubert, Prokofiev, Henselt and Brahms. His driver is none other than Leslie Howard, who has agreed to play an encore duet with Florian, so please book early.

Tickets, by donation, are available from me:

Gillian Davis 850384 27

Local History

In Benenden skies: the living memory of the Battle of Britain

In the cloudless pale blue above, a hawk swoops silently across the fields, scanning for prey. An early summer bee dives and sputters around a nearby blossom tree. On a day like today, it's hard to imagine that 85 years ago, throughout the summer of 1940, these tranquil Kent skies rumbled with Messerschmitts and shrieking Spitfires as the aerial conflict between the Royal Air Force and the German Luftwaffe raged overhead.

The Battle of Britain was crucial to the war's outcome: the first major military campaign fought entirely in the air. The RAF's victory thwarted Hitler's plans, known as Operation Sea Lion, to invade Britain.

"Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few," Churchill famously said, paying tribute to the enormous efforts, courage, and sacrifice of fighter pilots and bomber crews who established air superiority over England.

As we celebrate VE Day on 8 May this year, remembering those brave young pilots feels especially important. The last surviving pilot of the Battle of Britain, John 'Paddy' Hemingway, passed away peacefully on Monday, 17 March 2025, at the age of 105. With him, the living memories of those remarkable men fade, making it vital for us to continue remembering them.

Just outside Tenterden, there's a fantastic pub called the Red Lion on the road to Snargate, a place virtually unchanged since the 1940s. Kate, daughter of Doris Jemison - who first came to the Red Lion in 1947 when she was a land girl - now runs the pub, just as her mother did: the

walls plastered with faded wartime photographs perfectly capture the nostalgia.

It's in this little time capsule that I meet Colin, whose passion for aircraft began as a boy when he watched the iconic Battle of Britain film at Ashford Cinema in 1969, ten times in one week! "I'd always liked aeroplanes," he says over a pint of real ale, eyes sparkling with enthusiasm, "because in Kent, you know, we were at the epicentre of the Battle of Britain, really, weren't we? It was all happening in the Kent skies above."

"When I got older, my friend Andrew and I started metal-detecting. Mostly, we found little bits and pieces - then we struck lucky and discovered the wreckage of a Messerschmitt at High Halden. One eyewitness we talked to remembered seeing the pilot eject and frantically kicking off his burning boots as he parachuted down."

Colin and Andrew joined a growing community of aircraft archaeologists who combed through archives, interviewed eyewitnesses, and searched fields with metal detectors. "We'd find engines, propeller bosses, identification plates," Colin explains. "Then we'd match them to official records, weaving together eyewitness accounts with combat reports to piece it all together." They relied on a well-known book called The Battle of Britain - Then and Now by Winston G Ramsey for location information, all recorded in detail.

Colin tells me one particularly moving story about Sergeant John Stanley Gilders, a young Spitfire pilot from Chilham. Gilders flew in and survived the thick of the Battle of Britain but tragically, on his last sortie on 21 February 1941, his plane dived through the cloud at 7,000 feet and struck the ground, exploding on impact, scattering debris across a wide area. Gilders was assumed to have baled out and was recorded as 'Missing, believed killed'. His family believed, however, that Gilders was still in the aircraft -



buried beneath a ploughed field. It was through tireless effort, working closely with his family, and with great sensitivity, that Andrew, Colin and their colleagues finally recovered the remains of Sgt Gilders from his crashed Spitfire. He was laid to rest with full military honours on 11 May 1995, at Brookwood Cemetery, Surrey, 54 years after his death.

"It was about giving dignity and closure to his family," Colin says, a quiet pride in his voice. "It's really nice to help people to remember the sacrifices those boys made."

By chance, I also meet Nina, born and bred in Hawkhurst, and her husband Hamish, a former Benenden resident, in the same pub. They've overheard my chat with Colin, and Nina wants to tell me another remarkable RAF story about her father, John Nesbitt-Dufort. "Dad was 27 when the war started - he was considered too old to fight in the Battle of Britain - instead, he was training the 19-year-old pilots who became 'the few'."

But his role in the war soon took a far more dangerous turn. Nina's father flew Special Operations Executive (SOE) secret missions into occupied France in a black-painted Lysander aircraft. "He'd navigate completely alone, landing in isolated fields at night to drop off or pick up spies and resistance fighters," Nina recounts.

One mission ended dramatically when, unbeknown to him, a farmer had ploughed the landing field earlier that day. His Lysander crashed on landing. "He survived, just," Nina explains. "Hidden by the French Resistance for months, eventually another plane flew in to bring him home." Nina's father later documented his experiences in a book titled Black Lysander. "Reading it,"

These incredible tales - and many others shared around the pub - remind us just how close we are still in Benenden to the drama of the war.

Indeed, Benenden itself witnessed some dramatic incidents. On 15 September 1940, a German Heinkel bomber was shot down by the RAF, crashing at Trafford Farm. Two crew members died, and three became prisoners of war. Four years later, on 3 August 1944, a French Free pilot, Capitaine Jean Maridor, flying with the RAF's 91st Squadron, sacrificed his own life intercepting a V-1 flying bomb ("doodlebug") headed for Benenden School, which was serving as a military hospital. Maridor's heroic action destroyed the bomb, preventing a catastrophe but tragically costing him his life. His bravery is commemorated with a plaque at Benenden School and a memorial in St George's Church.

As the afternoon fades into a golden earlyevening light, I look around this little pub, a true heart of history and remembrance, which continues to remind us that Benenden and the surrounding areas are woven deeply into the fabric of WWII history.

On VE Day 2025, as we celebrate the freedom won 80 years ago, let us never forget how much we owe to the courage, ingenuity and sacrifice of those whose lives were lost right here in the skies above us. As Churchill reminded us, so many owe so much to so very few.

Sara Tidy

Credits: With thanks to Colin Brollin and Nina Walker for their stories. Aeroplane Monthly, May 1995. The article explores the excavation by Mark Kirby and the ramifications thereof.



Benenden Nature



'Swifts
are in
serious
trouble and they
badly need
our help'

The Common Swift
is a spectacular and
remarkable bird but
its numbers are in steep decline.
Here, Cheryl Mason, a trustee
of High Weald Swifts, explains
what we can all do to give them
a home in the parish.

High Weald Swifts is a charity working to raise awareness of the incredible Common Swift - one of our most remarkable summer visitors - and to encourage action to boost their numbers locally. Unfortunately, surveys from the High Weald reflect a worrying national trend: Swift populations in the UK have declined by a staggering 66% between 1995 and 2023. Now classed as a bird of conservation concern, the Common Swift has joined Sparrows and Starlings on the British Trust for Ornithology's 'red list'. Swifts are in serious trouble - and they badly need our help.

Climate change, the decline in insect populations and the shortage of suitable nesting sites have all contributed to the dramatic fall in Swift numbers, but despite their rapid decline, they are a species we can help. By offering them just a small corner of our homes to nest in, we can play a vital role in their survival, while inspiring others to get involved and make a difference too.

These iconic summer visitors make the hazardous 3,500-mile journey from Africa every year, reaching our shores in early May. Their only objective on arrival is to nest and raise their young before making the long return journey to Africa in early August. It's only when nesting that these incredible birds land; the remaining nine months are spent on the wing, eating, sleeping and breeding. Once young Swifts leave the nest, they won't touch down again until they're ready to breed - around the age of three.

Swifts are loyal to their traditional nest sites, typically gaps under tiles, cavities behind soffit boards or brickwork, often with us unaware that they are there. Modern homes are well insulated, whilst older houses are being renovated, soffits replaced and gaps sealed, leaving these special birds homeless. Being long-lived, Swifts may have used the same nest site for many years, unbeknown to us. They're quiet and leave no mess.

The good news is that Swifts will adopt specially designed artificial nest boxes. By installing these boxes and using a simple call system that plays pre-recorded Swift calls, we can attract them to new nesting sites and help reverse their decline. There are plenty of different nest boxes available, to suit all budgets and aspects. Head over

to www.highwealdswifts.co.uk to see some of our favourites.

Swifts are insectivores, which is why they migrate during our cold winters, heading south to warmer climes in the Congo, where insect life is abundant. When they return to the UK in late April/early May, they rely on a steady and plentiful supply of insects to raise their young. A single swift can consume up to 20,000 insects a day, but with insect populations in decline, food is becoming scarcer, forcing adult Swifts to travel long distances every

day just to find enough to eat.

You can create a haven for Swifts
- and a wide range of other
wildlife - by making your
outdoor space more insectfriendly and offering
shelter. All it takes is
a little enthusiasm,
some creativity, and a
willingness to let part
of your garden grow

a bit wild. One of the simplest and most effective ways to start is by planting wildflower mixes, which provide vital food sources for pollinators. Here are a few easy ideas to help you get started: good wildflower mixes include Birds-foot trefoil (Lotus corniculatus), Common sorrel (Rumex acetosa), Hoary plantain (Plantago media), Cowslip (Primula veris) Greater knapweed (Centaurea scabiosa), Field scabious hoary (Knautia arvensis), Meadow buttercup (Ranunculus acris), Red clover (Trifolium pratense), Ox-eye daisy (Leucanthemum vulgare), Common knapweed (Centaurea scabiosa), Wild carrot (Daucus carota) and Yarrow (Achillea millefolium).

Most importantly, avoid using harmful insecticides in your garden. Instead, embrace organic gardening principles like companion planting, which naturally supports a balanced ecosystem. If you have the space, consider going even further by creating a beneficial insect meadow, a sanctuary for pollinators and creatures.

Remember, no wildflowers mean no insects means no food, so, let's celebrate Swifts and create a home for them to come back to.

HIGH WEALD SWIFTS What we do

Our aim is to halt and reverse the decline of the Common Swift by working to understand their numbers and distribution in our local towns and villages. We're trying to protect established nest sites and colonies and provide new nest sites for swifts to occupy. To achieve this, we:

- provide advice and support for people who would like to install swift boxes and bricks;
- carry out Swift surveys during the main breeding season;
- hold talks for local groups and societies;
- attend local events to educate and inform:
- encourage developers to consider including swift boxes and bricks in their plans.

We're also speaking up for Swifts when there are opportunities to influence local planning decisions, and we're contributing our voice to consultations on Local Plans and on the Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Kent. www.highwealdswifts.co.uk Follow us on Facebook: High Weald Swift Conservation

Photographs: Martin Garwood



Local History



Marion Cran: chaotic life of a pioneering gardener, writer and pigeon fancier

Marion Cran, who lived at Coggers in Benenden from 1922-1942, was the first

female gardening broadcaster as well as a highly successful garden writer. You can judge how well she was renowned at the time by her inclusion, along with the still 'famous' Beverley Nicholls, in a comic rhyme by Reginald Arkell in 1934.

'Beverley Nicholls and Marion Cran
Hadn't been born when the world began
That is the reason I must confess
Why the Garden of Eden was not a success'
During her life Marion travelled widely, writing

about gardens abroad as well as in Britain in 15 gardening books. She was also an expert on Siamese cats and bred baby pigeons (squabs), which were much in demand as a gastronomic delicacy at the time.

Marion created two interesting gardens, one of which was here in Benenden at her beloved house Coggers, where she lived from 1922 until her death. But she often had financial problems and her private life didn't run smoothly, with three husbands and a child out of wedlock.

Edith Marion Dudley was born in 1875 in South Africa, where her father Henry was a

missionary. She was apparently married at a very early age, although after the birth of her daughter Maidie, she was soon divorced and the baby handed over to her ex-husband's parents. She then trained as a nurse, but a second daughter, Lesley, was born in 1902 after an affair with a married man. Meanwhile she started contributing articles to magazines, before finding work at The Connoisseur, and then in 1903 as the first assistant editor at The Burlington Magazine. During this turbulent time she met George Cran,

a London solicitor, and they married in 1905.

They rented a flat in Sloane Square and bought Steephill, a weekend retreat near Farnham in Surrey. There Marion started to create a cottage garden out of the wilderness, as well as having a kitchen garden, an aviary, beehives and goats. She wrote about

her experiences in her first book (Garden of Ignorance) which describes her journey from ignorance of plants themselves, soil types and manures, planting aspects and pruning regimes, to hands-on expertise and wild enthusiasm. The book launched her horticultural career and she was elected a Fellow of the Royal Horticultural Society in 1913, a rare honour for a woman.

Unfortunately success in publication was not matched in her private life. After she and George divorced in 1919, she had to find somewhere else to live. Friends recommended Coggers and Marion fell for the 15th-century house as soon as she saw it, despite the terrible state it was in.

Her second horticultural book (The Garden of Experience) made her a household name in England and earned her enough money to be able to restore Coggers properly. It became her refuge from the world and a base from which to travel and write. Indeed the restoration was the subject of her next book (The Story of My Ruin), which was about the end of her marriage and the restoration of Coggers. "The book was a great



success," says
Arianwen Neve,
who lives there
today, "probably
because people
thought it was
more about her
rather racy life,

THE STORY OF MY RUIN

MRS. MARION CRAN FRH.S.

ADDITION OF THE GRANDES OF THE SQUABBLING GARDEN

Of her house

W MARION CRAN

than the restoration of her house and garden." Arianwen, who discovered an old copy of the book in the psychology section in a secondhand bookshop in Paris several years ago, adds: "After the horrors of WWI I think many appreciated the thought of an idyllic traditional English

country house and the fact that an 'ordinary' woman could create a beautiful garden."

While she was working on Coggers, Marion was offered the chance to do some radio talks about gardening on 2LO, which predated the foundation of the BBC. When the first of her Gardening Chats was broadcast on 6 August 1923 for a fee of five guineas, it made her the first gardening broadcaster. She also contributed to the new Woman's Hour, but these early years in radio were very much an experiment, with no fixed schedule or presenters. Nevertheless, Marion had popular appeal because she never patronised her audience, but always tried to speak as "a learner talking to fellow-learners", and she continued to make the occasional broadcast.

In 1925 she became garden editor for The Queen magazine while contributing to other publications. She then helped to establish the

Garden Club in Mayfair but it ran into financial troubles and closed in 1937.

Marion found herself in great demand, despite her constant assertion that she was no great horticultural expert, and it led to her becoming an early example of branding: everything from a Marion Cran bird table to garden dairies. Several flowers were named for her, including at least two hybrid tea roses, an iris, an orange-cupped daffodil, a crocus, a gladiolus and a delphinium. Sadly, only the iris introduced in 1923 by Amos Perry is still available.

In 1930, she switched to fiction with The Lusty Pal; a second novel Piper's Lay appeared in 1936, based on the life of her long-standing friend, the soldier, painter and sculptor Fergus Scott Hurd-Wood, who she married in 1933. She travelled widely and wrote more books

about the gardens she encountered. This woman was indefatigable! She loved Siamese cats, was on the committee of the Siamese Cat Club and a judge at the first Championship Siamese Cat Show in 1924.

But gardening books didn't allow her to live comfortably enough for her taste, so at the same time she was, with Fergus, trying

to set up a business breeding pigeons - the Premier Squab Farm - at Coggers, which led of course to two more books: The Squabbling Garden and Making the Dovecote Pay. Sadly Fergus died soon afterwards and within weeks she was advertising the business as "a going concern with orders in excess of supply" for £150pa or £1,000 investment.

She suffered a heart attack in 1940 but managed one last book, Hagar's Garden, in 1941. It was, said the Telegraph review, "surprisingly intimate" because it also was honest about her financial problems and her failing health. She died after another heart attack in 1942 and is buried next to Fergus in St George's graveyard.

Thank you to Dr David Marsh whose blog about Marion contributed much to this feature. More fascinating articles: thegardenhistory.blog Ruth Clark

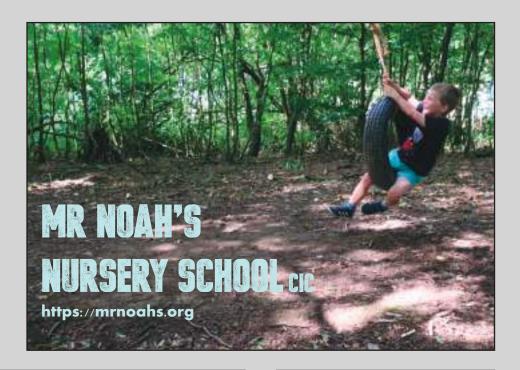
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Food and Drink

Spirit of Ward's bangers inspiring 'foodie' revival

Since I moved to Benenden I4 years ago, the restaurant scene in this neck of the woods has been a gastronomic roller-coaster, from the point where we had such celebrated gems as the Curlew and Apicius, to the closure of both, the reopening of both (the latter as the excellent Cloudberry) and then, sadly, the reclosure of both, along with, most recently, the café at Water Lane.

Fortunately, I am a recent convert to the charms of the Print House, which I often drove past when it was the Caxton, on the crossroads in Tenterden, but recently visited for the first time in its incarnation as a decidedly 'better than pub grub' venue, run by a convivial front-of-house team, reviving some of the fortunes of the area's eating scene.

Since then, word has reached me that another favourite, Birchwood (sister restaurant of the high-end Small Holding in Kilndown), is relocating from its base at Flimwell to the more convenient former Taywell site on the edge of Goudhurst.

Meanwhile, at the nearby Spratsbourne Estate, in a joint venture with owner Mel Streek, Small Holding chef Will Devlin has opened a butchery called 'Block' - using the old butcher's block and sausage machine from Ward's - which seems set to become the final piece of his 'field-to-fork' jigsaw (of which more in this magazine soon).

Perhaps we're on our way to becoming a 'foodie destination' again.

It's funny how certain areas of the country seem to become 'foodie' hotspots for no discernible reason. The latest unlikely conglomeration seems to be the east Kent coast, which has picked up the north Kent mantle of the Sportsman in Whitstable and carried it via Margate - and the excellent Angela's - all the way down to Folkestone.

Now, Folkestone is nobody's idea of the French Riviera, but parts of it are actually nice, not least 5 Church Street, home of the Folkestone Wine Company, which is actually

less of a wine company and more of a bijou restaurant - half a dozen tables and barely enough room to swing a cat, in case you were hoping to - where David Hart, formerly of the Sportsman, does the whole local, seasonal thing with flair on a menu every bit as small but well appointed as the room itself.

I went there recently and had a fine evening, sampling a lovely 'natural' red Tempranillo wine from Rioja called Gran Cerdo ('Big Pig'), which will soon be finding its way into the village shop.

Next up, for our wedding anniversary, my wife is taking me to Hide and Fox in Saltwood, Hythe, where head chef Allister Barsby - another evacuee from Whitstable, in this case Wheeler's Oyster Bar, followed by another Kent legend, Read's in Faversham - has just won his second star.

The extra award means that prices have been ramped up to the point where we'll have to save up for a year to go to the swanky Updown near Deal, but the fact that there are so many good places to choose from in the county is good for the soul if not the bank balance.

I'll have a half (half a bottle, that is)
Returning to the village shop's
food and wine offerings, a new
treat from the start of the month
will be lunchtime cheese and
charcuterie platters, which you'll
be able to enjoy with wine, by
the glass or maybe from our
new selection of half-bottles.

And with spring very much in the ascendant, we'll be bolstering our selection of rosé wines - some old favourites and a couple of new ones - ready for the fine weather, should it last longer than a week.

Remember, always drink responsibly, but also try to drink well.

Peter Thomas



In Your Garden

Spring into action as the weather plays ball

We are having great spring weather for gardening, allowing all us keen gardeners to get ahead with the various tasks we have on our lists at this time of year.

I was starting to panic slightly when very little rain fell in March - plus we had high temperatures which then dipped in April - but thankfully the rain came at a perfect time when the temperatures began to rise, so our gardens have now sprung into spring and it really is a joyous time to be working outside.

I have been digging up, dividing and moving quite a number of perennials since I wrote last month's column and the newly planted divisions are growing away very well indeed. It has since struck me how tempting it is to buy plants in the summer months when they are all in flower, and whilst this is helpful when selecting new plants for our borders, it is the worst time to put a plant in when it is in full flower.

This is the time when a plant is expending the most energy, so transplanting into a planting pit and expecting it to last longer than two weeks is wishful thinking. Having dug up some geums and astrantias in early March, i.e. just as the crowns were beginning to grow and I could therefore see what I was doing, they are all now growing away as well as if they had been sitting there all winter, dormant and waiting for the right conditions to grow away again.

I understand it can be tricky to put a plant in the ground with not a huge amount to show for it, but patience is most definitely a virtue here and rewards are trifold if we can plant either side of the growing season (i.e. late autumn and early spring - roughly November to March at the moment). I have also only had to water the plants in after planting, and at no





other time since having mulched around the crowns to mitigate moisture loss from the soil's surface.

Now, the geums and astrantias will flower away for a lot longer than had I planted

them in full flower. Of course, if you think perhaps a certain plant, once it is in flower, looks wrong in its place then earmark it for moving in the autumn. I take a lot of photos in a plant's first year in the ground, which really helps

to plan if they need moving - perhaps to better neighbours or simply to alter a colour scheme.

On the subject of mulching, after a good drop of spring rain is a great time to top up mulches in the borders. Do this wherever you can and when supplies of good rotted compost allows; plants which really benefit from this top up are roses, any newly planted trees or shrubs and hungry plants such as peonies or delphiniums.

If I have enough spare I also spread some near the border edges in any gaps as it makes these sections look neat, until nearby foliage grows over it. I also top-dress any containers which have more permanent displays in them - a few inches of compost is worth markedly more than any shop-bought fertiliser feed, in the same way that rainwater benefits plants more than tap. The difference in plant health is palpable and in turn will reward you with a splendorous display.

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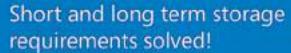
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Above: Learning new skills: John Burbridge shares his green wood-turning and pole lathe-turning skills with Merry and Bright; Sissinghurst Scout groups making the most of the wide opportunities to learn while having fun Front cover: Appreciating the Garden of England: Apple blossom. Photograph: Ruth Clark