

Benenden Magazine

October 2021




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Editorial



It would be just plain wrong to say that we've reached a point beyond Covid, because aspects of the pandemic will be with us for a while yet, but at this year's village fete, with all our friends and neighbours gathered together in the sunshine, lapping up the Indian summer and the feelings of bonhomie, it seemed for a while as though life was back to normal.

Missing a year had been a blow, but thanks to a superhuman effort from organisers and helpers, this year we enjoyed the kind of communal shot in the arm that can be every bit as beneficial as any booster jab. Perhaps vaccination plus cow pat bingo and a beer tent is the answer Boris Johnson has been searching for, as you'll see from the array of pictures on our back cover.

But if the fete - along with the monumental sum raised (page 15) - was just what the doctor ordered, then there was another September happening that promised even greater long-term benefits for the parish, as you'll read on page 12: the Benenden Neighbourhood Development Plan has just been passed with flying colours by an independent examiner, who praised it for its thoroughness and sensitivity to the far-reaching needs of our entire community.

It has taken a gargantuan amount of effort and expertise from an army of workers, but we've arrived at a point where the official business is done, objections have been smoothed over and all of you now have the opportunity to support the NDP at an upcoming referendum. Victory at the ballot box would ensure a bright future for Benenden, so please use your vote wisely. We'll keep you informed about the date.

Peter Thomas, Co-Editor

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Church Calendar

St George's Church

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

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 or Churchwardens if you, or anyone else, is ill.

Each 10am service from St George's will be live-streamed. The Zoom link to the service will be available on the church website, www.benendenchurch.org

Sunday 3 October	8am Communion at St Nicholas, Sandhurst	11am Harvest Service followed by lunch in church
Sunday 10 October	8am Communion	10am Communion at St Nicholas, Sandhurst
Sunday 17 October	8am Communion at St Nicholas, Sandhurst	10am Communion
Sunday 24 October	8am Communion	10am Communion at St Nicholas, Sandhurst
Sunday 31 October	8am Communion at St Nicholas, Sandhurst	10am Communion

Mission Church, Sandhurst

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

Every Tuesday 10am Communion

Iden Green Congregational Church

Pastor: Tobin Bird 240027 www.idengreen.org.uk

Sunday Services 10am Morning Worship 5.30pm Evening Worship

For those shielding the 10am Morning Worship service is also broadcast on our YouTube channel: search for '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

Weddings
11 September Melissa Diebel and Ian Douglas
12 September Jess Hewett and Josh Shanmugam
25 September Sophie Bullimore and Jake Lambert

Funerals
3 September Cicely Collins Interment
10 September Patrick Conway Funeral and burial
17 September Neville Crouch Memorial Service
19 September Maureen Clayson Interment
26 September Charles Lenox-Conyngham Memorial Service
28 September Stella Penny Funeral and burial

Rector's Letter



An Almighty task to please everyone

As I write this, we've not yet had our harvest festival services in either parish, and we've not had 'the Benenden village fete in support of St George's Church', but both are occupying a lot of my attention right now. By the time you read this, however, we will have had the harvest service in Sandhurst; we will have had the village fete in Benenden; and we will be just about to have the harvest service in Benenden. So, for two out of three, we'll know if they've been really successful events. I would like to say a big thank you, though, to everyone who has worked behind the scenes, and on the day, to make these village events happen. Your hard work is really appreciated.

Like so many outdoor events, the success is significantly influenced by something completely outside of the organiser's control: the weather. We've just had the final planning meeting for the fete, when someone asked what the weather forecast was like for the day. There then followed a discussion on what we wanted: no thick cloud, we'd like it nice and sunny, please, but not too hot, and not too cold either. No rain, and definitely not the thunder, lightning and the hail we had a few years ago, please. Oh, and not too windy either, that's not good for the gazebos. God has his work cut out that day to please everyone!

I suspect it is going to be the same sort of thing when we consider the type of service pattern we want as we start to come out of all the Covid-imposed restrictions on our worship, and what we should and should not do in church. A few months ago, I asked members of the church family for their input regarding some aspects of our services. I was completely surprised, but delighted, by the number of people who responded - so thank you for taking the time to do so.

It has also meant a lot more time than expected was needed to consider all the suggestions - hence the service pattern not having changed yet. One thing is for certain: like God with the fete weather, whatever we decide to do, it is not going to satisfy everyone. We will consider everyone's wishes (but some of these are diametrically opposed); we'll consider the variety of services offered; we'll consider the resources we have available (to lead and preach and preside and play the organ, and all the other things involved in a service). Oh, and we'll be listening to what God might want us to do, too. He usually has some good ideas when we take the time to listen.

I hope that by the time of next month's letter, we'll have had three great community events, and we'll know what we are doing moving forwards. Watch this space.

Revd David Commander, Rector

Village Calendar

October

Friday 1	Iden Green and Benenden WI, Social Afternoon with Peter Batty - 'Hidden Gems of Kent', Memorial Hall, 2pm	p.15
Sunday 3	St George's Harvest Lunch, St George's Church after 11am Harvest Service	p.9
Friday 8	The Music Scholars of Benenden School, St George's Church, 7.30pm	p.11
Saturday 9	Grierson Galleries Art Show, Benenden Village Hall, 10-5pm	p.27
Saturday 9	Darts, St George's Club, 8.15pm	
Sunday 10	Grierson Galleries Art Show, Benenden Village Hall, 10-4pm	p.27
Monday 11	Benenden Village Trust, AGM, Iden Green Pavilion, 7pm	p.9
Saturday 16	Churchyard Working Party, St George's, Benenden, 9.30-12noon	
Saturday 16	Benenden Bowls Club, Coffee Morning, Memorial Hall, 10-12 noon	
Monday 18	Parish Council Meeting Benenden Hospital Quinlan Centre, 7pm	
Tuesday 19	Village Lunch, Benenden Village Hall, 12.30pm	p.9
Tuesday 19	Iden Green and Benenden WI, 'That's Entertainment - The Glory of the MGM Musical', Memorial Hall, 2pm	p.15
Saturday 23	Quiz Night, St George's Club, 8.15pm	
Tuesday 26	Merry and Bright, Memorial Hall, 3pm	
Saturday 30	Stephen Message, Art Exhibition, Memorial Hall, 10-5pm	p.29
Sunday 31	Stephen Message, Art Exhibition, Memorial Hall, 10-4pm	p.29

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

The Village Calendar is starting to fill up. Until we emerge fully from the trials of the pandemic, we'll carry on sharing David Commander's list of guiding principles to steer us all through until normal service resumes.

Our approach to making decisions about specific events, services or issues can be guided by these principles:

Be calm and trust
Protect the vulnerable
Continue to love our neighbour
Be transparent and open
Be creative

Parish Council



What is BNG and why is it important? BNG stands for Biodiversity Net Gain and it is an ambition our own Neighbourhood Development Plan embraces for its potential to protect and improve the local environment.

Biodiversity is the natural world around us, all of the organisms, insects and ecosystems which live on our planet. Natural ecosystems are vital to life on earth, we rely on them to provide us with food and clean water, for medicines, to clean the air of carbon dioxide, and to prevent flooding and other extreme weather effects. If we continue to trash these ecosystems or remove a species, we are at risk of collapsing the support system for human and animal life.

Biodiversity is crucial to our future survival.

The Environment Bill is expected to be enacted later this year and will create a mandatory requirement for property developments of all uses and all scales to create a 10% net gain in biodiversity when compared to the biodiversity of the site to be built on prior to development. Green enhancements could be the creation of woodland, species rich grassland, woodland pastures, or wetlands, to name but a few. All developments must have an overall positive impact on biodiversity.

The aim is to go beyond mitigation to create extra habitat for wildlife, thus achieving a measurable net gain in biodiversity and contributing to nature conservation and environmental priorities. BNG has the potential to bring benefits to both people and wildlife and is vital for reversing the effects of years of habitat destruction.

The essence of the Benenden NDP is the protection and enhancement of our landscape, environment and wildlife, and the BNG process will force developers to engage in the assessment of a site's biodiversity at the beginning of the planning process.

Peta Grant, Parish Councillor

Caroline Levett, Benenden Parish Council Clerk
01580 240371 clerk@benendenparishcouncil.org

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

Parish Council Meeting

Monday 18 October 2021,

Benenden Hospital Quinlan Centre, 7pm

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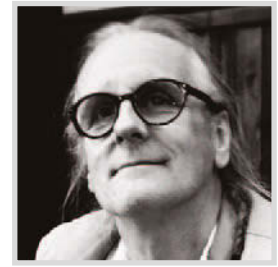
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Talking Point



Road closed. Is it though?

Let's face it, our local road network was never designed to take the weight of traffic to which we subject it. No wonder there are degraded carriageways and failures of the services that lie beneath them - pipes, culverts and cabling - which (again due to increased demand), require constant maintenance and often drastic overhauling. The works are an irritation for many of us but, of course, no fun either for those carrying out the work, so we quite understand when temporary traffic lights are needed to protect them and accept that for some jobs, it is essential to close the road.

Local authorities are bound by strict rules when it comes to road closures. They must provide advance notice of a closure and there should be announcements in the local press and, of course, further information can be found on council websites. No contractor may close a road without a licence for each separate closure. However, the fact is that local authorities sub-contract the work and those sub-contractors will also sub-contract. It would come as no surprise that along the way, some things might well be overlooked.

We have all encountered diversions that either don't provide a suitable route around the works or that seem to run into diversions from other works. Contractors are meant to undertake a full assessment of diversions, suitability of roads and access, before laying them out. If there is more than one diversion, some indication should be made (such as a common symbol) to ensure drivers follow the appropriate ones. The diversions should be checked several times throughout the day to ensure they are operating correctly and safely. Kent County Council are supposed to inspect contractors' compliance, but again, things don't always work out.

'Road Closed' signs without any diversions being indicated can and do happen. Frankly, unless there is an emergency, it shouldn't. If you come across this, the local authority may not yet have been informed. It's unusual but not unknown for contractors to close roads without informing the authority. If you suspect this, check on the website.

Road Closed (Access Only) signs without any indication as to the point at which access is no longer possible are another bone of contention, as is the philosophical conundrum that is the 'Road Ahead Closed' sign. Which road is closed? Is it the one you are travelling along and, if so, how do you get off it? Is it another road, off the one you are on, or one of the forks ahead, maybe? Who knows?

A lot of the problems created by road closures can be mitigated in the same way most things can, I reckon, through better communication. Road users need notice and they need information: what the job is; how long it's likely to take; who the contractors are; who to call in the event of problems and, just simply, more details to inform what is already likely to be (knowing the roads around here) a stressful journey.

For more information see www.kent.gov.uk/roads-and-travel

Russell Cruse



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Benenden Village Trust

A reminder to members of the Benenden Village Trust that the 2021 annual general meeting will be held at 7pm on Monday 11 October in the Pavilion, Iden Green (Covid permitting). We hope as many Trust members as possible will join us, and welcome applications to join as members or trustees.

The Trust owns and manages important recreational facilities in the parish, including Benenden Village Hall, the Pavilion, St George's Hall and the playing fields and children's play areas in Benenden and Iden Green.

Our activities over the past year have been severely impeded by Covid, but significant developments include the successful re-opening of the village hall, following the lifting of pandemic restrictions, the construction of a new, much-welcomed children's play area in Iden Green, and the planting of new trees to enhance the playing fields in both villages.

The Trust is managed by trustees elected by members. Membership is free and is open to all aged over 18 living in the parish, as well as representatives of organisations and businesses within the parish.

For latest information, including details about eligibility for BVT membership, please go to the Trust's website.

Martin Dickson, Benenden Village Trust
www.benendenvillagetrust.org

Village Lunch

The village lunch will take place on Tuesday 19 October 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 15 October, so we can plan and shop, as well as cook.

Sheila Hume 854627

St George's Church Harvest Lunch

will follow the 11am Harvest Service in St George's Church on Sunday 3 October

Covid restrictions mean that this year's celebration will be limited to a simple Ploughman's Lunch served at the back of the church with only 40 places available.

The cost is a minimum donation of £7 per person payable on the day - this will include lunch and a glass of wine or soft drink.

Places must be booked in advance by adding your name to the list in church or by contacting:

Sally-Ann Marks 243141 sallymarks100@hotmail.com

David Commander revdavidcommander@gmail.com

Places are limited and will be issued on a first come first served basis, so please book early.

Everyone Welcome

Arnold Cole Trust

The Arnold Cole Trust would like to invite applications for its annual disbursements from those clubs and societies within the parish in need of funds. Dr Arnold Cole was GP in the village from 1930 until his death in 1960, after which his daughter, the late Joan Weston, set up the Trust in 1968. The aim of the Trust is to apply its income for the "general benefit for the Parish of Benenden with special consideration being given to both the elderly and young".

All applications in writing please to:
The Secretary, Arnold Cole Trust, Scribbins, Benenden, Kent TN17 4DT. Please note applications must be received no later than 30 November 2021.

Afghan refugee appeal

We have received a huge quantity of beautiful clothes and children's toys in response to our plea on behalf of Afghan refugees. Thank you again, Benenden, for your unquestioned generosity and for your swift response, with which we hope to bring some comfort to those who have nothing.

Maggy Hoyt

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Remembrance events

On Thursday 11 November, the Benenden Branch of the Royal British Legion will, as usual, invite the senior form of the primary school to join a gathering of local residents at the war memorial at 10.55am to remember the armistice that took effect at 11am on that date in 1918.

This brief assembly is open to all. On 14 November, we hope to resume the normal format of the annual Remembrance Sunday parish church tribute to those who lost their lives in the two world wars. That morning service will start at 10.45am at St George's. Members of the Legion's branch committee, the parish council, Benenden Hospital, and Benenden School's Combined Cadet Force will attend and lead the congregation to the war memorial after the service for the laying of wreaths. Trumpet calls will be sounded in church and at the memorial.

If you wish, please gather around the war memorial in Walkhurst Road as soon as you can after the church service. All those with service medals are invited to wear them for this special act of Remembrance. As, unavoidably, our house-to-house collections for the Poppy Appeal will be somewhat curtailed, we shall place Poppy Appeal collection boxes at the community shop, Wards the butchers, the Benenden Hospital, St George's Club, the Primary School, Benenden School, and the Bull and Woodcock Inns from Saturday 30 October.

This year we have once again set up an arrangement to make contributions through the JustGiving system, which will be recorded as part of our total collection. During the mornings of Saturdays 6 and 13 November, we shall establish an authorised street collection post outside the community shop and will offer a wider range of poppy items, including this year's enamel badges.

To link your JustGiving contribution to the Benenden Branch of the Royal British Legion, search www.justgiving.com/fundraising/jane-dalton-holmes4. This can take account of the gift aid system.

Royal British Legion, Benenden Branch

The Friends of St George's Church
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THE MUSIC SCHOLARS OF BENENDEN SCHOOL

Friday 8 October 2021
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Tickets available at the door

Music Scholars concert

The Friends of St George's are delighted to host once again a concert by the talented Music Scholars of Benenden School, to be held in St George's church on Friday 8 October at 7.30pm. Tickets, £8 for adults (under 16s free), include refreshments and a glass of wine/soft drink and are available at the door.

The musical programme will include mostly classical, but also more up-to-date pieces, performed on a variety of musical instruments. The value of these concerts is not just in the enjoyment of the performers' undoubted talents, but also in the fact that we can see them advance year by year. Their performances are greatly appreciated by all and provide the scholars with the valuable experience of appearing in public.

Proceeds are used by the Friends to support and enhance the fabric of St George's church and churchyard.

Neighbourhood Development Plan

Examination passed with flying colours - now for the referendum

I'm very pleased to announce that after a very thorough process, we have now passed the Independent Examination stage - a review by a fully qualified and accredited independent examiner to ensure our Neighbourhood Development Plan meets Local and National Planning guidelines. He scrutinised our plan closely and held a public hearing specifically to look at the proposed development sites at East End. And his verdict? A big thumbs-up.

He recognised the hard work and professionalism of the NDP team, saying: "I congratulate Benenden Parish Council on producing this locally distinctive neighbourhood plan. It is clear that a lot of hard work has been carried out by a group of volunteers who have taken on what some may feel has been a thankless task."

He approved all four sites that were allocated for housing in the plan, satisfied that the NDP had adopted a robust and objective assessment of the sites that were put forward: "I have found the basis for the decisions taken have been robust and based on sound planning principles, particularly the extent concentrating development on brownfield sites ..."

This was a major hurdle cleared, but the final obstacle will be a local referendum, organised by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, at which you will have your chance to vote. Of course I will urge you to vote 'Yes'. Many of you, and your friends and neighbours, have worked on the NDP, or have read the material and provided feedback. You may not be happy with every aspect of it, but we believe it represents the best balance of the parish's wishes with the planning rules and guidelines from local and national government.

Being left with no plan is not a good option. Biddenden has no Neighbourhood Plan, and now it faces the same foe as Sissinghurst. The same development promoter has applied for permission for over 60 houses at North Street, on a field just north of the main junction, east of the A274. Biddenden Parish Council is now busily considering its own NDP. I hope they can get it done in time.

Sissinghurst fought hard against the building of around 65 new houses on Common Road. The development promoter first applied for planning permission in 2010, and following a long, hard legal battle, planning permission was finally granted in 2015. As the fields opposite the new primary school in Sissinghurst gradually disappeared under houses, Benenden Parish Council opted to create the village's own NDP, because without one, our local fields and views are at risk to speculative developers.

Local authorities must have an up-to-date plan for a five-year housing supply and must be able to show that they are consistently delivering against that plan every year. If not, national planning guidelines presume that applications for new housing should be supported. TWBC is updating its Local Plan, but our parish council felt it better that we get on with our own plan sooner rather than rely on TWBC. Our NDP would count as legitimate planning policies and be given due weight in future planning decisions.

THE BEGINNING

We started work in autumn 2017. We formed an NDP Steering Group including parish councillors and sought volunteers. Around 25 people from Benenden, Iden Green and East End stepped up. With an experienced planner on board we gathered information and opinions from residents through

workshops, exhibitions and drop-in sessions. We commissioned work from children at Benenden Primary School, surveyed local employers and employees. We met landowners and developers, and local lobby groups. We talked to key public bodies, notably the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) management unit. We walked footpaths, assessed views and prospective development sites, and surveyed housing styles across the parish. Above all we read, discussed and digested huge volumes of Government planning guidelines.

The parish council determined to allocate sites for potential development. This is rare amongst NDPs: recommending sites for housing is frequently controversial. Over 20 sites for housing were submitted by Benenden's landowners (vs four sites at Goudhurst, and none at Bidborough). Allocating our own sites means that we retain some control rather than leaving decisions to people who live and work in Tunbridge Wells.

We've been able to keep you up to date with the process and ask for your feedback throughout. We used the Benenden Magazine, posted material on our website (www.benendenneighbourhoodplan.org), and built a 500-plus email subscriber list. Once the first phase was complete we held a public meeting to share our thinking and launch a six-week consultation on our 'Rough Draft'. Over 140 residents attended the meeting in early 2019 or provided feedback. We conducted our first phase of formal consultation later that year. A sub-committee of the Parish Council and NDP Steering Group reviewed your feedback and made appropriate changes. In the midst of the pandemic we held further consultation from October to December 2020. Your further input was again crucial in honing the plan.

SO, WHAT DOES THE NDP PROPOSE?

Policies to protect 11 important local green spaces and 20 fabulous views across the High Weald. Policies to safeguard our precious dark skies, the local habitat, and support for local employment. Policies to ensure that any new development respects and reflects the distinctive look and feel of buildings across the parish. Policies that secure a mix of affordable and market housing, in line with residents' input. Development of up to 100 homes in four sites over the plan period to 2038, which means roughly 1% growth each year.

I will leave you with the words of the examiner: "Overall I am satisfied that the plan will contribute to the delivery of sustainable development within the Benenden Parish. The scale and type of housing will meet the social objective of ensuring sufficient homes for the present and future generations, providing for high quality design, which is in keeping with the character of the built environment set in a wonderful landscape, whilst seeking to protect existing businesses and commercial areas and providing for the necessary infrastructure, whilst at the same time making best use of brownfield sites, minimising the use of greenfield sites, protecting the landscape and the parish's fine views, especially from the ridgelines, and protecting the green spaces that are valued by the community".

Paul Tolhurst

Chair, Benenden NDP Steering Group
www.benendenneighbourhoodplan.org



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MP for Maidstone and the Weald

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Village Hall

It's spooky season and the days are getting shorter, but there's plenty of activity at the village hall. Throughout the weekend of 9 and 10 October is the magnificent Grierson Galleries Art Show, so be sure to put that in your diaries and wander over to take a look at all the wonderful pieces on display. Perhaps it might even be an opportunity to get some rather lovely Christmas gifts!

On Friday 15 there is a great 'Think Pink' event raising money for cancer research, hosted by the fabulous Rockit Choir, and Ami Piper is running another holiday workshop during the half-term break. Our regular classes are also up and running, and we now have a great selection of things to take part in, including yoga, pilates, dance, fitness, and the much-loved village pantomime. Feel free to get in touch if there's anything which sparks your interest, or if you would like to start a club of your own. We're always happy to hear from you and welcome new ideas.

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

Iden Green and Benenden WI

On Tuesday mornings at 9.30am online, the WI Wanderers are doing chair exercises (seated zumbacise) for the less mobile. Please get in touch if interested.

It's so nice to be able to settle down to a semblance of routine again and we thoroughly enjoyed listening to Sheila Farmer talking about 'What women wore'. Also, our lunch at the Cherry Tree was very successful.

We are very fortunate to have a diverse range of ages and talents amongst our members and are pleased to welcome Lisa as our new secretary and Marilyn as temporary treasurer.

For diary dates refer to the Village Calendar.
Jackie Liffen 752232 WI@daisystar.co.uk

Fete accompli

The fete committee and I wish to thank everyone who attended and volunteered at the Benenden village fete, in aid of St George's Church, on 18 September. They say the sun shines on the righteous and it certainly did! In the words of Lou Reed it was a 'just a perfect day'. The photographs on the front and back of this magazine capture just some of the highlights.

I spent most of the afternoon on the entrance, directing car parking and rattling donation buckets, and it seemed more people than ever before attended. As a result, £14,000 profit was raised: a record achievement. Every year, part of the profit goes towards mission. The bigger the profit, the more goes to mission. Ten charities in this country and around the world receive an allocation of funds from the mission allocation committee. In addition, donations on the gate raised £630 for the Sam West Foundation www.samwestfoundation.org.

Having had to cancel the fete in 2020, there was a huge demand to run it this year, albeit a few months later. The traditional June date has been set in stone since I've been involved and it was a huge challenge to change it to September. Two years' worth of books, bric-a-brac, clothes and tools built up by villagers all landed in the scout hut which was full to bursting! But valiant volunteers worked hard to sort it all, and what was not good enough quality was collected weekly in the run up to and on the day by All Recycle Ltd.

A huge thank you to Jan Hemsley who kindly allowed us to use the scout hut in the run up to the fete and a collective thank you to the hundreds of people who helped make this event happen - you know who you are!

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Parent, Teacher and Friends Association

We have been back at school for one month now, and it has been a total delight to see the smiling faces of the children at Benenden Primary School back with their friends enjoying the last of the summer sun in the playground together, free from social bubbles and restrictions. A welcome sight and an indication that we are all getting back to some semblance of normality after so much uncertainty.

Autumn is now upon us and as our countryside colours mellow into a beautiful display of golden hues, we remember all the fabulous things we have achieved this past month, like Colourful Sock day, when all the children sported their most colourful socks and tights to brighten up the classrooms, and in exchange, they each brought in a sweetie jar to go on the stalls at the village fete.

As always, a momentous effort was put into the fete this year. Thanks so much to all for their unwavering dedication, hard work and generosity. The PTFA is working hard on Christmas activities now, so please check out the QR code or our website, <https://tinyurl.com/2bpyw54h>, for upcoming events for everyone to enjoy.



Anneli Hukins, Benenden CEP, PTFA

Primary School

On our return from the summer break, it was an absolute joy to be able to welcome all our families back and once again be united as a school community. Following the Government's decision to lift many of the restrictions imposed during the height of the pandemic, the restrictions that schools had to impose in the last two academic years have also been eased. The 'bubble' system has gone and we can all meet together as a whole school and the children can work/play with children outside of their class group.

Indeed, it is so lovely that we are now able to greet everyone once more on the playground before and after school and to see the children's happy smiling faces and hear their voices and laughter fill the classrooms, corridors, hall and playground every day, as they are able to mix freely in and around school.

I am proud to say that the children have taken all the changes in their stride and they have conducted themselves impeccably. Moreover, the staff and I are very pleased with how the children have adapted easily to their new classrooms, routines and teaching teams. We have had an excellent start to a new academic year and we are very much looking forward to what will hopefully be a 'normal' year.

Please do look at our website to keep up to date with everything that we are doing: www.benenden-cep.kent.sch.uk. Additionally, you can follow us on Twitter @benendenCEP
Lindsay Roberts, Executive Headteacher
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Benenden School

The sun shone on our students as they returned to school and we are now all ready for what we hope will be a great year (in fact we installed a banner at the top of the drive declaring as such).

Of course, the pandemic is far from over, but we are aiming to operate as normally as possible. As you may have seen reported in the media, we have decided to keep some measures in place for the time being, such as mask wearing in communal areas and asking students to wipe down desks at the end of lessons. We feel it is important to continue to take sensible precautions.

I have the privilege of being president of the Girls' Schools Association for this academic year, so this will be a good opportunity to raise the profile of Benenden and to discuss some important sector-wide issues which will include reviewing GCSE/A Level examinations and the current university application system.

It has been a busy summer on site for maintenance projects, including the transformation of two of our boarding houses as part of our refurbishment programme, with one of these having been reconfigured as our new dedicated boarding house for Year 7 pupils. I know they will be delighted when they see the superb new facilities we have created for them.

We are pleased to be making another piece of history at the start of this term, as we welcome day boarders to Benenden for the first time. We announced last year that we would be integrating a limited number of day boarders to the school and we are delighted that a handful of local day girls have joined us in Years 9 and 12. They will be fully integrating into Benenden life and we look forward to welcoming more day boarders in the coming years.

Looking ahead to the coming year, we have numerous exciting plans, including an expanded festival, BenFest, in late June, during which we hope to welcome many of our friends from the village to join us. The weekend will include an opportunity to see our new school hall and music school. We will be sharing more details about BenFest in due course.

Samantha Price, Headmistress

Benenden Pre-School

Pre-School staff have very much enjoyed welcoming our new children and supporting their settling in. It is such a delight to get to know these two- and three-year-olds, who are all remarkable young children, each with a unique and engaging personality. Our older children are doing a great job, offering a helping hand and invitations to share their play.

What all the children have in common is a love of playing in the garden. Our trustees generously agreed to invest in our garden over the summer and our very bare front area, which was simply earth and tufts of grass, now boasts a lush lawn of hard-wearing sports turf. In addition, we have had a raised sandpit, built so our golden sand now remains golden and dry when it rains, no longer flooding. We also had the border of our lovely raised bed in the back garden reconstructed.

Parents also kindly invested with enthusiasm and creative energy and planted mini vegetable gardens in tyres, constructed a music wall, a blackboard and a bug hotel, jet-washed and oiled the slide and painted the shed. The children, and staff, love the open-ended nature of our outdoor resources and the natural materials they are made from. Story and song time take place on a circle of tree stumps which can then be used for practising balancing or rolling skills before being incorporated into an obstacle course.

Our new-look garden is a magical environment for some of the youngest members of our community. The children have an inviting and exciting space in which to explore and investigate, one which inspires awe and offers endless possibilities, starting with a roll on the lush lawn then lying back and listening to the birds.

Lucy Oakley, Supervisor
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Talking Shop

It's great to see so many of our valued customers returning to the café as restrictions have lifted, and lots of takeaway orders have helped to create some healthy balance sheets. Grateful thanks to the volunteers who are coming back to offer their assistance. Keep coming as that 'Benenden's buzz' is a pleasure to hear.

We were sad to hear about the death of Alan Pickett, who passed away on 31 August. As many may remember, Alan was key to the creation of Benenden's, encouraging Benenden School to purchase the premises, thereby creating another staff house and granting a lease to the proposed community shop. He also introduced the start-up committee to the Plunkett Foundation, whose guidance proved invaluable to the processes involved in such an ambitious scheme.

He remained an enthusiastic member of the committee throughout the creation of the shop, showing remarkable energy for one in his 80s, but he did manage to forget the official opening day, marked by the visit of the Countess of Wessex, on 1 November 2016, and only remembered as he passed the celebrations on the way home from walking his beloved dog in Hemsted Forest. Alan and Angela, his partner of 30 years, stopped and joined the group, much to the chagrin of Angela, who was still in her dog-walking clothes.

Alan was a stalwart, active and much respected resident in Benenden for many years and there will be a full article about his life in the November issue of the magazine.

Bev Beveridge info@benendens.co.uk
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Tribute to our very own superhero

Not many know that Darth Vader and the Green Cross Code Man had a connection to Benenden. Both were played by David Prowse, who was a frequent visitor to this village to see his brother Bob and have lunch and a drink at his favourite table in the Bull.

David was impressive, at almost seven foot tall. As a young man he was a bodybuilder and won multiple national weightlifting titles, including three years as undefeated British champion from 1962-1965. Many will remember him on the TV as the superhero Green Cross Code Man in the 1970s, promoting road safety to children. He toured many schools in Kent and around the country promoting road safety and his contribution to significantly reducing child fatalities led him to be awarded an MBE in 2000.

David appeared in over 70 films, including the original Star Wars trilogy as Darth Vader, in the first Casino Royale as Frankenstein, and in Stanley Kubrick's A Clockwork Orange. His bodybuilding expertise led him to train Christopher Reeve for his role in the 1978 Superman film, become a fitness consultant to Harrods and open a series of gyms.

Sadly, David died late last year aged 85, but his life was recently celebrated by Bob and friends in the pub where you can find a tribute to him in a corner by the fireplace.



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Topical health

Many people say they find the long winter nights with the increased hours of darkness difficult, which is true as many of us do, while for others, the dark winter months can cause a recognised and recurring form of depression. Seasonal Affective Disorder, or SAD as it is often known, impacts about 20,000 people in the UK each year.

SAD causes people to feel depressed, lethargic, fatigued and generally sluggish. Its onset coincides with the end of autumn, or early winter, and generally lasts into the spring or early summer. Perhaps predictably, SAD is triggered by alterations to the body's biological clock, the circadian rhythm, accompanied by a fall in natural serotonin levels and alterations in the ability to balance melatonin brought on by the changing levels and length of daylight.

People most at risk of developing SAD have a family history of it or other forms of depression and may have a personal history of depression themselves. For many of us the winter blues are a normal situation and something we manage to live with, but people affected by SAD invariably need medical help. Because SAD shares many signs and symptoms with other diseases, the GP would usually need to exclude things like a thyroid disease and anaemia, so blood tests are a usual part of the process of diagnosis. Once a physical cause has been excluded, the diagnosis would rely on a psychological evaluation including the use of diagnostic questionnaires.

Again predictably, part of the therapy is exposure to more light, such as sitting near a window or taking walks outdoors during daylight. Some people get relief from using a light box which simulates natural daylight. In common with other forms of depression, some sufferers need antidepressants, while others gain help from the talking therapies, especially cognitive behavioural therapy, as well as from mindful pursuits such as yoga and meditation. Sufferers should contact the Seasonal Affective Disorder Association for support and advice (www.sada.org.uk).

Peter Ellis

Benenden Hospital

Originally, Benenden Hospital opened in 1907 to treat postal workers with tuberculosis. When the TB cases began to decline, the hospital expanded its treatment options and shortly afterwards built an operating theatre, surgical wards and an x-ray department. Today, I am proud that all three of our well-equipped operating theatre suites at the hospital are laser enabled. In addition to this, two have laminar flow technology, which produces a continuous stream of bacteria-free air to minimise the risk of infection.

As well as theatres, we also have a purpose-built Ambulatory Care Unit (ACU), with one procedure room and one endoscopy unit, which is Joint Advisory Group accredited. After surgery, patients are moved to our spacious eight-bay recovery area, where they wake in a quiet and calming environment. I am pleased to say that 70-80% of our hospital's surgeries are classed as day cases, meaning our patients can recover in the comfort of their own home.

From recovery practitioners to anaesthetists, only the most appropriately trained and highly skilled staff work in our accredited theatre department and ACU. Lead Anaesthetist Simon Brooks talks about our Anaesthesia Clinical Services Accreditation: "Proudly, we are the first independent hospital in the country that has received this prestigious accreditation. Benenden Hospital has one of the best anaesthetic departments I've ever worked in."

Working alongside the theatre department are our on-site Decontamination Services team, who guarantee that clean surgical equipment is available, and our housekeeping staff, who ensure the hospital's rigorous hygiene standards are maintained. I believe this accounts for the fact that we have had no cases of Clostridium difficile or septicaemia related to MRSA since 2002, which is as far back as our hospital records go.

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Jane Abbott, Hospital Director and Chief Nurse



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Planning Matters

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

- 21/02571/LBC I Corner Cottages
Cranbrook Road. Listed Building Consent -
Temporarily remove the existing brick floors in the dining room and lounge, dig out 270mm of soil, place a concrete underlay of 100mm, a damp proof membrane, 50mm of rigid insulation, underfloor heating pipes and 75mm of screed, and then replace the bricks on top. the dining room bricks will be relaid in the currently existing stretcher bond, while the lounge will be re-laid in the currently present herringbone pattern.
- 21/02862/FULL Barnhill Dingle den Farm Road. Single storey side extension; two new canopy porches; and new rooflight.
- 21/02714/FULL Land Adjacent To Standen Street. Material change of use of land to mixed use for agriculture, equestrian and to include stationing of caravans for residential occupation with associated operational development, additional hard standing, repositioned manure store (Part Retrospective).
- 21/03012/FULL Little Nineveh, Nineveh Lane. Erection of veranda to the front of the property and boot/utility room extension to the rear.

Open garden success

Many thanks to all those hardy souls who braved the atrocious rainswept conditions for our open garden tea party at Little Walkhurst. Despite the weather we still managed to raise £900 for the Hospice in the Weald. Fingers crossed for better weather next time.

Peter Stennett and Sara Rowan

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Saturday 2 October 2021 at 7.30pm

Programme

Beethoven Sonata op.31 n.3 in E flat
Beethoven Sonata op.31 n.2 in D minor
Schumann Symphonic Etudes op.13

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

Gold award for Marlborough House

Marlborough House School has been given a gold award by the Woodland Trust for getting involved in green activities including tree planting, visiting local woodlands, reducing carbon emissions and recycling.

The Green Tree Schools' initiative offers the opportunity to bring the great outdoors, wildlife and green issues into the classroom and schools can win awards for taking part in a range of green activities. Over the past ten years, Marlborough House has participated in Green Tree Schools activities and earlier this year planted over 200 new trees, creating a woodland walk in their school grounds, and securing the gold award after winning silver and bronze. The trees will create a microforest of dense, fast-growing native woodland, designed to support carbon capture, local wildlife and provide an additional outdoor learning environment for pupils. Corrina Lowe, Head of Eco at Marlborough House, said: "As a school we are so proud to see the accumulation of all our hard work and we look forward to watching the development of our microforest."

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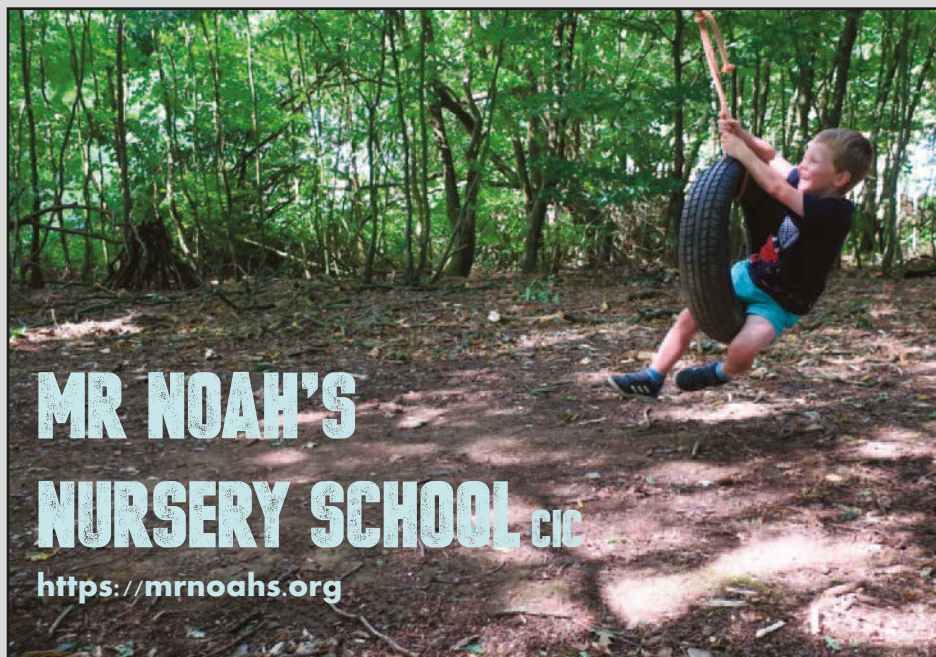
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Event Preview

Art on Show

A Covid fact of life resulted in two Benenden Art Shows being cancelled, but Grierson Galleries is thrilled to be back and showcasing the work of 28 Wealden artists again on 9-10 October in Benenden Village Hall.

We're hoping that the new autumn date will bring sunshine and definitely something for everyone with a variety and mix of colour, texture and creativity.

In 2019 more than 600 visitors came through the doors to support, buy and thoroughly enjoy the huge variety of different artists from across the region, featuring a vast diversity of oils,

pastels, watercolour, abstract, portraiture, glassware, jewellery, mosaics and ceramics and this year featuring Grierson Galleries' Cranbrook-based art restorer and consultant, Nick Hampshire. Nick, with more than 45 years' experience,

will be working up on the balcony, showing how he restores oil paintings to their former glory. Pop up and maybe have a go yourself.

Some of our artists have

exhibited internationally, all are from the Weald or slightly further away, and we are delighted to be welcoming some new faces this year.

These include the hugely talented Kate Baker, business founder and maker behind

Kate Baker Mosaic Muse, whose creative focus is to make visual, tactile, unique and inspiring, colourfully vibrant pieces of mosaic and glass fusion artwork, all predominantly capturing the beauty within the natural world.



Andrew Dixon is a superb 'plein air' artist, and Cheryl Bell is a graphic artist, painter and printmaker, whose work often features wildlife, especially birds. She is a versatile printmaker in all mediums and often prints on

organic materials. The vibrant, Rochester-based newcomer abstract artist Adele Love is on board to wow visitors with her astonishing colours.

Many artists are old friends, others are new. The wonderfully atmospheric water colours of the renowned David Aspinall return, and Benenden residents Mike Unsworth and Helen Jewsbury are again present this year along with Scarlett Woodman and Amanda Averillo. Just a few examples of what exciting art to expect.

The show is once again organised and presented by the team from Grierson Galleries, now firmly established as an exciting contemporary set-up based at the Old

Brewery in Cranbrook, working with Sustainable Print and FramePlace to create Cranbrook Arts' Quarter.

Enjoy the show, with free entry and free parking, from 10am to 5pm on Saturday and 10am to 4pm on

Sunday. We look forward very much to welcoming you.

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7

4

1 Carole Aston, Benenden Art Show, 2019

2 **Sienna Landscape** Carole Robson

3 **Pink Harlequin Moon Jar** Jane Bridger

4 **Untitled** Adele Love

5 **River Scene 2** Mike Unsworth

6 **Glass** Beverley Bunn

7 **Tear** Scarlett Woodman

Event Preview

Talent that bore fruit in the hedgerows of Benenden

Peter Thomas talks to renowned bird artist Stephen Message

We can all look back on moments in our lives that, although we may not have known it at the time, were pivotal; moments upon which our futures turned. For Stephen Message, renowned bird illustrator and painter, one of those moments came when he was eight years old and beginning to think that art might be his way forward, looking for some kind of validation of his talent. The moment did not end well.

“I sent a picture of a ringed plover to Tony Hart at Vision On and they didn’t show it,” he recalls some 45 years down the line, the trauma still apparent. “I was devastated. My prospective career was nearly shattered. And they never returned the picture. I wonder where it is now.”

Viewers of a certain age will feel Stephen’s pain, the sting of rejection by the heartless Hart and his wicked sidekick Pat Keysell, but in truth it

was just a small bump in the road towards recognition as one of the country’s finest bird artists - a career that had its roots in the gardens, fields and country lanes around Benenden, where he was born and raised.

He excelled in art at the village primary

school and Angley before moving on to colleges at both Hastings, where he studied graphic design, and Bournemouth & Poole, where the focus was natural history illustration, and a long and well-regarded career was on its way. The beginning, though, came when, having been born at the Messages’ general stores and cycle



parts shop at the bottom of The Green, he was taken as a youngster on strolls that fuelled a youthful fascination.

“Walking in the countryside was the main family pursuit,” he remembers, “and I’d be up on my father’s shoulders looking into blackbirds’ nests. At first it was local village and woodland walks, but then he started taking us to the coast and different habitats and my passion for drawing birds began, although my ambition as a youngster was to be a wildlife photographer.

“I’d make a hide out of beach windbreaks, painting them to cover the gaudy colours, which was a bit of a disaster. I just didn’t have the equipment and I was doing well at art at Angley, with a great teacher called Mrs Reynolds, so that was the road I went down.”

Fortunately, the Vision On moment wasn’t the one that defined Stephen’s professional life. As he gears up for his annual exhibition in the village this month - only the pandemic prevented last year from being his 20th consecutive - he freely admits that his success in the field hasn’t been solely down to his great gift.

“You’ve got to have a certain amount of talent but mostly it’s lucky breaks,” shrugs the keen cricketer and snooker player. “I graduated from Bournemouth but only three of us carried it on as a career. I won a few competitions, most notably Bird Illustrator of the Year at the Mall Galleries in London, and publishers were there. I got a break doing t-shirt designs, then RSPB greeting cards and calendars.

“Then, while I was working on a book on waders, I was asked by the RSPB for a lapwing



on the front cover of one of their handbooks, and I ended up doing all five covers of books that have sold half a million copies. My work is on a lot of bookshelves!"

There are two distinct facets to Stephen's work: the scientific illustration he learned at college and the fine art that you'll see at his village show, and he has found a way to combine the two in a way that both pays the bills and satisfies the soul.

"Life as a pure artist is quite precarious," he says, "so I've done 50-50 through my career and it's been kind to me over the years. I've got another book deadline at the end of January [as sole artist for the RSPB's Pocket Guide to British Birds], but when I spend half a year on book illustration I start to miss the fine art side, so I'm looking forward to getting back to painting my landscapes from life."

Stephen's favoured birding locations are Rye Harbour and Dungeness, but "Hemsted Forest was a godsend during lockdown", while today we've been on a walk round the village and are

now drinking coffee outside the community shop, where I spot a whitethroat eating blackberries on top of the hedge across the road. It's the first bird we've seen all morning. "We've been talking too much," says Stephen, who is happy to offer up a few tips for local bird watchers. "Hemsted is a niche habitat for coniferous woodland, where you'll see mostly coal tit, goldcrest and crossbill. The nightjars seem to have gone, like the nightingales from Parsonage Wood, and I haven't seen a tree sparrow in the village for 20 years, but the firecrests are doing well, there are egrets everywhere and ravens have colonised the area, which ten years ago would have been very rare."

So, keep an eye out for local birds next time you're out and about, or alternatively take the easier option and head along to Stephen's latest exhibition, all details below.



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That magnificent man in his flying machine

Peter Thomas talks to Jim Newman about his life-long fascination with aeroplanes and why we will soon be seeing him in the skies over Benenden in his 'new' 75-year old biplane. For those of us used to cruising at 30,000ft with a bag of salted peanuts and a little bottle of wine for company, the idea of going up in an aeroplane made of wood and cloth may sound unwise in the extreme. For most, the situation would not be improved if it were an aeroplane we'd made ourselves, like an extreme version of Blue Peter, albeit not using old coat hangers and sticky-back plastic.

Aeroplanes, as we know, should be made of metal by someone else and be flown by a man in a peaked cap with plenty of stripes on his shoulders. Benenden's own Jim Newman, however, doesn't see it that way.

In his defence, in his professional life he's Capt James Newman, a pilot who has flown countless different planes for countless different airlines in a long and distinguished career and now teaches others to fly on state-of-the-art simulators costing millions of pounds. In short, he knows what he's doing, which makes it all the more strange that his ongoing ambition is to restore and fly a 75-year-old biplane that probably sounded like a good idea back in 1946 but now



the same kind of thing, treated with many coats of 'dope' [a kind of varnish], which gives you something to paint on, and then tautened using an iron."

When you put it like that, it sounds almost safe, and at least when Jim finally takes to the skies in his Stampe, we'll see him coming. "It was originally a French military colour," he explains, "but it'll be lemon yellow with a dark blue sunburst, which should be visible from space!"

The project is the culmination of a lifelong fascination with aeroplanes. Jim loved them (not to mention sports cars and motorbikes), built models of them, dreamed of going up in them, and when he couldn't afford to actually fly them, he took a many and varied series of jobs, from cement marketing to a long, cold winter with the Merchant Navy in the north Atlantic (not to mention as a typewriter mechanic and on a

sounds well beyond the bounds of health and safety.

"It's a pre-war Belgian design built in France," he explains. "It's made of wood, and in the old days they were covered

with Irish linen, because wood and cloth were all they had. Nowadays we use man-made fibres, but it's still

fairground boating pool), to raise funds.

As a lad from Bromley, he started learning to fly on Tiger Moths (the British counterpart of the Stampe) at Biggin Hill, rustling up the cash for half an hour a month in the air, and steadily





progressed to working for the flying club and living and sleeping at the airfield.

"I was absolutely skint, living on two cheese rolls a day," he remembers, "but it was great fun," and in time he earned his commercial pilot's licence became an instructor and launched himself into a career in the air.

He began working life by flying single crew on De Havilland Doves ("they're museum pieces now"), flew day and night all over Europe on his

own, ended up with Gulf Air in the Middle East, met Kim, an air hostess, and married her, and their two children James and Sara were born in Bahrain, before the family moved back to Britain and set up home in Frittenden for 25 years.

The kids were educated at Dulwich College Prep and Cranbrook, with James going on to become a pilot himself and Sara settling down in Biddenden, where she now sits on the parish council. "She did a short spell as a 'hosty' [air hostess] and even flew with me a couple of times, which is the only time in her life that she's been legally obliged to do what I told her to do," reminisces her father fondly.

Which is where Benenden comes into the story. Jim and Kim downsized to a house in the centre of the village, from where - due to several collapsed airlines and a correspondingly reduced pension pot - he carries on (Covid permitting) training pilots on the simulators at Boeing and keeps himself fully occupied with the Stampe project.

Having flown an aircraft nicknamed the Whistling Shoebox for a living back in the day,

Jim is used to a lack of mod cons in the sky, which is just as well, because the Stampe will be longer on thrills than it is on luxury. It'll be ready in a little under 18 months, after two years of toil already, and the excitement is mounting.

"The bottom wings are at Southampton, having some woodwork done to them, and the top wings, tail and fuselage are being painted at Challock airfield [near Ashford]," he explains. "Then we can put the undercarriage on and start putting it all back together.

"I've done 95 per cent of the stripping down and the fabricing, but when it comes to the more complicated bits, like putting the engine back together, I'll leave it to somebody who knows what they're doing.

"It's fun but it's a lot of work and it seems to take forever. The big bits are fine but the little bits that have



to have the paint stripped off, be cleaned, rubbed down and painted again, can be very tedious."

In the meantime, there's also the 1940 Piper Cub, which serves as his second project: "It's been used for pyrotechnics, crazy flying and trucktop landings, but we'll be called Sky Circus and I'm going to fire coloured smoke from it."

So, if you see a man in a flying machine made of wood and cloth, or spinning acrobatically and trailing garish plumes across the sky, it may well be Jim Newman. Magnificent or just mad, you be the judge, but never less than exciting.

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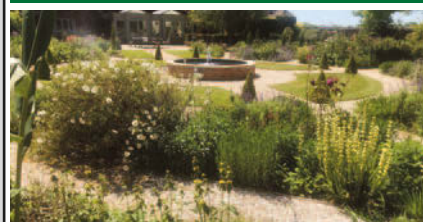
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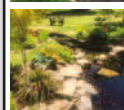


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Stella Penny: matriarch who served the village

Stella Penny lived in Benenden for 65 years until her death recently, shortly after her 91st birthday. She raised seven children here, most of whom live locally, and was the much-loved grandmother of 16 and great grandmother of 14. Ruth Clark met with her daughter Charlotte and granddaughter Laura to celebrate her life. Stella grew up in Hythe and she and her two older sisters were raised by her father after her mother died when she was only six. This experience undoubtedly influenced her decision to work with children and to go on to have a large family.

She was training to become a children's nursery nurse at St Christopher's Nursery College in Tunbridge Wells when in 1947, aged just 17, she met the man she would later marry. "The nurses were short of men for a dance, so they rang around for a few trainee doctors and that's where my mother met my father, Gordon Penny," says Charlotte.

Stella worked as a nursery nurse for several years before marrying Gordon in 1953. They moved to Benenden in 1956, where Gordon became assistant to Dr Cole, and they never left, living in a variety of houses around the village, both becoming an intrinsic part of village life. When Gordon succeeded Dr Cole in 1960 and was busy looking after over 1,000 patients, Stella was equally busy raising her seven children: Sarah, Adrian, Claire, Fiona, Charlotte, Adam and Justin.

"She loved having her family around her," says Charlotte. "She was always at the centre of our lives and her grandchildren and great grandchildren always knew they could pop in to see her for elevenses. She had four biscuit tins with a never-ending supply of KitKats and biscuits."

As dinner lady at the primary school, which was then based at the old Gibbon building at the bottom of The Green, Stella was also a big part of many of the village children's lives. At the time, school lunches were prepared and served by village ladies. "She didn't really enjoy cooking,

probably because she had to make such large quantities - not just for her own large family, but school children too," says Charlotte.

Stella was very much involved with the primary school, which is currently teaching a third generation of Pennys. One year she was part of a successful fundraising event where children donated pennies which they laid in a complete circle around The Green. She also fondly remembered a sponsored walk from Benenden to Rye to fund the building of a swimming pool at the school.

Aware that her family needed good local facilities and the opportunity to buy affordable housing in the village, Stella was fully behind the building of the new and improved primary school, which eventually came to fruition, and the current Neighbourhood Development Plan for new houses in the village.

"Gran was the matriarch of the family and looked after us all," says Laura. "Her mission was to make sure we were all well fed and, until recently, made our favourite cakes for our birthdays. Her other task was to make sure we wore a coat when we went outside - even in the hottest weather! Her regular 'Have you got your coat?' comment has become a familiar saying in the family. Even when we grew up, we used to duck under her window so she wouldn't catch us without one!"

Stella's funeral will be held at St George's Church at 10am on 28 September





Oh hail the mighty oak

Strong, mystical, bountiful and an intrinsic part of the Weald landscape, the English Oak is celebrated by Russell Cruse

The 1944 Education Act sought to establish a school system to assist the nation's recovery following the Second World War. One of its aims was to explain to the young for what it was that their parents had fought and perhaps died for. Thus, many of us of a certain age will remember a primary curriculum comprising British history (the good bits, of course), British authors, the British countryside, British leaders, explorers, engineers, scientists and poets; not to mention, (shudder) country dancing.

So school children embarked upon what

everyone hoped would be the lives of Janet and John, or set in Ladybird Books, played out in clean, modern homes in thriving towns set in the sylvan splendour of glorious countryside, to the strains of Greensleeves and of patriotic songs.

Actually, I remember one of those songs perfectly. It was called 'Hearts of Oak' and it was about the British Navy. It was one of the ways we were introduced to the oak itself. The 'wooden walls' that beat Napoleon and destroyed the Spanish Armada were the harvest of the great forests planted from Tudor times throughout southern England to provide a bulwark against invasion from seaborne enemies.

No wonder the English consider the oak to be 'English', indeed is it not the very essence of



Englishness? Synonymous with strength, vigour, steadfastness, stability and timelessness in an ever-mutable world, what more could be looked for in a national symbol? What TV documentary about England is complete without the obligatory, soaring drone shot of a burgeoning oak woodland? All the director needs do is to crank up the Vaughan Williams and the job's a good 'un.

Of course, not all the oaks of England are English oaks. In fact, even the English Oak isn't an oak. It's a beech. Well, all right, it's a species of beech (*quercus robur*), which has been in these islands for about 300,000 years.

Bulgaria, Cyprus, Estonia, France, Germany, Moldova, Jordan, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Serbia, and Wales are just some of the nations (or principality) that claim the oak as their own and for pretty much the same reasons as do the English. Peoples of the ancient world were convinced that its nature meant that that it was steeped in magic and so was venerated by Greeks, Celts and Druids alike. It's thought that 'druid' derives from the Irish word 'dara' or 'duir' and means 'wise men of the oak'. Although the

Romans were not above burning sacred oak groves as a way of imposing their will over the druids, they also believed the tree brought good fortune. Oak leaf crowns were as likely as laurel when celebrating victory - a convention echoed in the US Army and Air Force Oak Leaf Cluster device used to enhance a military decoration.

There is no doubt that a great deal of England's relationship with the oak has been thanks to its use as a building material. Immensely strong, with close grain and possessed of a wonderful natural beauty, it has found its way into many lives and homes.

Eight Royal Navy vessels have been named HMS Royal Oak, the first receiving the name in 1664 in recognition of the tree that supposedly

sheltered Charles Stuart on his flight to France after the execution of his father. Some of Cromwell's followers expressed their own love of the oak in a less belligerent manner, a number of interregnum non-conformists being emboldened to hold their wedding ceremony in locations other than the church building. Echoing an ancient, Christianity-forbidden tradition, couples were known to plight their troth beneath the canopy of a venerable oak tree. Closer to home it is local lore that John Wesley, founder of Methodism preached from an oak tree in Rolvenden (Ranter's Oak).

Later, during the Napoleonic Wars, the oak rose to national fame once more in celebration of His Majesty's ships of the line. Oak has long been favoured as a ship-building material, largely owing to its properties of increasing strength over time and proof against saltwater. Henry VIII is credited with ensuring his navy was well supplied by arranging the planting of oak forests throughout the country and many believe we owe much of the present-day landscape of southern England to this fact.

Acorns are poisonous to horses, cattle and dogs and the plethora of oak trees meant that it was all too common for farmers to find their valuable animals succumbing to excess of the fruit. Saxon stockmen had been aware of this issue centuries before, when, each autumn, they would drive their pigs to forests to feed and, at the same time, clear them of deadly acorns. This happened extensively in the forests of the Kentish Weald. Known as "pannage", the right to graze acorns was in the gift of locals who in turn would benefit from the annual influx of the hungry swine and their minders. Occasional forced overwintering meant that the clearings (or 'dens') remained inhabited and eventually these became established settlements. In some ways, therefore, Benenden owes its existence to the oak woodland hereabouts.

I'll leave the last thought to American Naturalist Henry David Thoreau, to whom is attributed as fine a piece of wisdom as was ever uttered. "Every oak tree", he said, "started out as a couple of nuts who stood their ground."

In Your Garden



Putting on a show, naturally

Naturalising bulbs in your garden is one of those tasks that once you have made a start with it, and subsequently achieved results, you wonder why on earth you had never done it before. Carpets of bluebells, verges full of narcissi, woodlands brimming with anemones, banks of snowdrops increasing each year are probably what springs to everyone's mind when they think of a natural show, but you do not need an expansive woodland belt or acres of grass to naturalise bulbs and you can even use this method with tulips (albeit the smaller, species varieties).

A client of mine has the most wonderful display of naturalising bulbs underneath two large old apple trees. First come the snowdrops and crocus, followed by an array of narcissi. We leave the grass to grow long around the bulbs as this hides the dying foliage, and then it is strimmed around late May. It looks patchy for a while but at that time of year it recovers. I am considering adding some blue and white muscari, but apart from the strimming there is no other work to be done to the area and I look forward to the display every year.

Other bulbs that effortlessly multiply are alliums. We are all familiar with the rounded purple varieties but others to try are *A. caeruleum*, which resemble blue pom-poms and flower perfectly with *salvia nemorosa* in June, or the much smaller *A. cowanii*, which I like to plant with a pink lily-flowering tulip such as *T. 'China Pink'*. *A. sphaerocephalon* flowers a

little later in July and spreads to such an extent you could call them invasive, but it is easy to pull out the unwanted bulbs with a sharp tug. The spent flowers form a pleasing green globe which persists through the summer and adds a handy structural element to the otherwise frothy borders in July and August.

My one bugbear, however, has to be planting vast quantities of narcissi. These like to go in the ground early - preferably September - and in our climate the ground is rarely soft enough in September to plunge a long-handled bulb planter a couple of hundred times. Unless you have garden help, I would suggest planting what you can cope with, and since they naturalise anyway I would tend to let nature do the hard work for you and plant fewer bulbs.

Two new bulbs for me to try this autumn for naturalising are camassias and tulips. I always admire camassias wherever I see them - my mother grows them in her borders and they look good even before they have flowered. I will have to seek out a willing client with a lot of damp ground to try these.

Species tulips are also new territory - they are perennial, hardy and are not damaged by slugs or fire blight, so I am hoping to purchase *T. humilis* 'Persian Pearl' or *T. sylvestris*, which is a wild tulip. The latter is yellow and taller than 'Persian Pearl', which is a vivid jewel-like pink with a yellow throat. I am keen to see how they fare.

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Above: Community in action: the remarkable fete; the loyal churchyard working party; Angela Patrick and her grandchildren inaugurate her husband Michael's bench; Bob Prowse in the Bull with tributes to his brother. Fete photographs: Beth Ansell
 Front cover: Spectacular: the Benenden Fete viewed from St George's tower. Photograph: Amelia Thomas