

A photograph of a magnolia tree in full bloom, with numerous white and pink flowers. The tree is in the foreground, and a house with a red-tiled roof and white window frames is visible in the background under a clear blue sky. The text 'Benenden Magazine April 2026' is overlaid in the upper center of the image.

Benenden
Magazine
April 2026

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Editorial



We've lost too many good friends of the magazine lately, so it's with heavy heart that I pass on the news that Charles Trollope passed away recently. Charles was our 'accountant', long-standing guardian of our finances, but perhaps better known as the 'Birdman of Benenden', writer of many fascinating articles detailing his ornithological journeys to far-flung parts of the globe, as well as his love of bird life locally.

His life touched and was touched by many aspects of the village and its organisations, and we remember him as a cheerful and uncomplaining soul, a lovely man who was happy to admit that he would only turn up to our monthly editorial meetings if there was a guarantee of biscuits. We shall all miss him.

On a more prosaic note, I know you all enjoy reading the gory details of the bi-annual village clean-up, so here is what I scooped off the roadside in the latest round of hard-core litter picking last month: seven Costa coffee cup lids (no cups); three vodka bottles; two gin bottles; nine beer bottles (seven San Miguel, one Moretti and one Hobgoblin); one bottleneck (possibly an anti-social blues guitarist); one plastic tray of pine nut and pesto pasta (Co-op, uneaten), two pairs of pants and two handy wiping rags (in the same place, don't ask); one umbrella (broken); two large handsaws (rusty); one traffic cone; assorted car parts; two cigarette packets; one cigarette butt; and one dead squirrel (although technically this may not count as litter).

If there's a social message to be gleaned from all this, I have yet to decipher it. Suffice it to say that I waver between contempt for the litterers and great admiration for the pickers. At least our roadsides are spotless for a few weeks every year.

Peter Thomas, Co-Editor

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

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

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

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

Postal address: c/o Community Office, Benenden Village Hall, Benenden, TN17 4DY 07593 226462

Printed by Wealden Print, Flimwell, Kent 01580 466442 info@wealdenprint.co.uk

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: Sue Fisher 241907 sue@undaunted.co.uk

Churchwarden: Cathy Presgrave 07500 119189 cathy.presgrave@gmail.com

www.benendenchurch.org 850849 benendenchurch@gmail.com

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

8am and 5pm services will be in the chancel of St George's Church, accessed through the Bishop's Door to the east end of the church. The 7.30pm Reflective Services on 1 and 4 April will also be in the chancel.

10am services will take place in the hall of Benenden Primary School

Wednesday 1 April

7.30pm Reflective Service

Maundy Thursday 2 April

7.30pm Communion

at St Nicholas, Sandhurst

Good Friday 3 April

10am An Hour at the Cross

at St Nicholas, Sandhurst

Saturday 4 April

7.30pm Reflective Service

Easter Sunday 5 April

6.05am Sunrise Service

at St Nicholas, Sandhurst followed by breakfast, Mission Church Sandhurst

8am Communion

10am Communion

Sunday 12 April

8am BCP Communion

10am Morning Worship

Sunday 19 April

8am Communion

10am Sung Eucharist

Saturday 25 April

4pm Connect Four

at Mission Church, Sandhurst

Sunday 26 April

8am Communion

10am Morning Worship

Morning Prayer

8am Mondays and Fridays at The Rectory, Benenden, but not 6 and 10 April

Mission Church, Sandhurst

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

Morning Prayer

8am Tuesdays and Wednesdays, but not 7 and 8 April

Mid-week Communion

10am Tuesdays

Iden Green Congregational Church

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

Sunday Services

10am Morning Worship

5.30pm Evening Worship

The 10am Morning Worship is broadcast on our YouTube channel: search 'Iden Green Congregational Church'.

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

Fr Barry Grant 713364 www.sttheodore-cranbrook.org

Masses

9am Sundays

7.30pm Holy Days

From the Parish Registers

Funerals

7 March David Barnes Interment

29 March Malcolm Smith Interment

2

30 March Charles Trollope Funeral and Thanksgiving Service

Church Letter



The joy of Holy Week and Easter is here. Alleluia!

The main part of St George's Church building may be closed for the Restore, Renew, Rejoice project (see recent archeology finds below), but the work of the church and variety of services continue.

The year continues to move on at a pace; and here we are in April, Lent is almost over and we're into Holy Week. It is a very busy week in the church year and so significant. It is such a powerful time and meaningful time if you immerse yourself in it. Across the benefice - the two parishes of Benenden and Sandhurst - we have 12 services in the week between Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday.

We begin with the celebration of Palm Sunday, on 29 March. Being a fifth Sunday of the month, the main act of worship is a benefice service - both church families worshipping together - this time at St Nicholas in Sandhurst. We begin with a blessing of the palm crosses and a short procession from The Triangle to St Nicholas Church. To make it even more of a celebration, we have a baptism too!

We continue the week with Reflective Services on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday evenings helping us draw towards Easter Sunday ready to celebrate once again. These services move between the chancel in St George's and the Mission Church. On Maundy Thursday, we gather for that most special commemoration of the Last Supper. This year we do for the first time in front of the beautiful wood carving in St Nicholas Church. On Good Friday we gather again at St Nicholas, for the solemn remembrance of Jesus going to the cross for us all. (He did it whether we believe in Him or not.) Holy Week finishes with another Reflective Service on Easter Eve (Saturday evening) in the chancel at St George's. This final, quiet service prepares us for the joy and celebrations of Easter Sunday.

Consider coming to our Sunrise Service on Easter Sunday at St Nicholas Sandhurst. It starts at 6.05am, which is later than some years! Once we've seen the sunrise and celebrated what this day means, come and have breakfast with us at the Mission Church in Back Road. Then there are 8am and 10am services in Benenden and a 10am service in Sandhurst. A joyful day, and a powerful week.

May you find time to hear the wonderful gospel ("good news") of the Easter story. God bless.

Revd David Commander, Rector



Village Calendar

April

Saturday 4	Golf Game, St George's Social Club, 8.15pm	
Tuesday 7	Mobile Library, bus stop outside Benenden Village Hall, 10-10.30am	
Tuesday 7	Mobile Library, Benenden Hospital, 10.40-11.10am	
Thursday 9	Benenden Bowls Club, First Practice Night, Recreation Field, 6pm	
Saturday 11	Cornhole Tossing, St George's Social Club, 8.15pm	
Tuesday 14	Village Lunch, Benenden Village Hall, 12.30pm	p.17
Wednesday 15	Iden Green and Benenden WI, Lunch at the White Hart, Newenden, 12.30pm	p.19
Saturday 18	Quiz Night, St George's Social Club, 8.15pm	
Sunday 19	Hemsted Park, Sleeping Beauty - The Ballet, Benenden School Theatre, 3pm	p.11
Monday 20	Parish Council Meeting, Benenden Hospital Quinlan Centre, 7pm	
Monday 20	Friends of St George's, AGM with Geoff Piper's talk on Jim Hayter and the Battle of Britain, Memorial Hall, 7.30pm	p.9
Tuesday 21	Mobile Library, bus stop outside Benenden Village Hall, 10-10.30am	
Tuesday 21	Mobile Library, Benenden Hospital, 10.40-11.10am	
Tuesday 21	Iden Green and Benenden WI, Annabel Lear: Planning a Summer Border, Memorial Hall, 2pm	p.19
Friday 24	Hemsted Park, Voces8, Benenden School Centenary Hall, 7.30pm	p.11
Saturday 25	Bingo, St George's Social Club, 8.15pm	
Sunday 26	The Angry Whelk Fresh Fish Stall, Benenden Village Hall, 12-2pm	
Sunday 26	Hemsted Park, NT Live: The Audience, Cinema Screening, Benenden School Theatre, 3pm	p.11
Tuesday 28	Merry and Bright, Visit to Tenterden Garden Centre, Memorial Hall, 1.30pm	p.15
Wednesday 29	Spring Pilgrimage, Goddard's Green Road car park, 9.45am	p.9

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

Cakes & Chaos: Toddler Group

Wednesdays and Fridays during term time at the Mission Church, Sandhurst, 9-11am

Benenden Bowls Club

Thursdays, April-September, on the recreation field, practice night, 6pm

Parish Council



Last month we welcomed two new parish councillors, Phil McMillan and Mike Taylor, but sadly Russell Cruse resigned after 10 years of service; we will miss his lively discussions.

Oh, what a difference a developer can make. There are many developers of land; some are respectful of the community within which they are to build; some, not so much.

Last month, Nicola Thomas reported the outcome of an appeal decision for the site in New Pond Road. Three members of the parish council attended a meeting with the head of planning at Tunbridge Wells Borough Council. This was our opportunity to make our dissatisfaction clear, mainly about the lack of communication by the planning officers with the parish council, and the apparent disregard of our Neighbourhood Plan policies.

When a development site is declared unviable by the developer because they are not achieving 15-20% profit on the scheme, the whole game changes. If planning obligations cannot be met, such as affordable housing, whether on or off site, the developer can sit tight and rely on the viability, Local Plan exclusions and national planning policy loopholes.

This particular developer, Hestia Homes, resisted any change to the scheme to achieve profitability to include affordable housing and threatened an appeal because of the lack of determination of the application within the permitted time frame.

All developers are not the same though, and this has been proved by Esquire Homes at the hospital site and Canham Homes at the almshouses site, both of whom were keen to meet the planning obligations and worked with the parish council throughout the planning process. What a difference, as I say.

Peta Grant, BPC Vice Chair

Caroline Levett, Benenden Parish Council Clerk

07593 226462 clerk@benendenparishcouncil.gov.uk

For more information see our website benendenparishcouncil.gov.uk or find us on Facebook

Parish Council Meeting

Monday 20 April,

Benenden Hospital Quinlan Centre, 7pm

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Talking Point



Will a tutor help my child reach their true potential?

Tutoring can be a powerful way to support a child's education, whether they are struggling with a specific subject or looking to build confidence and improve overall academic performance.

Many parents first consider tutoring when they notice their child falling behind at school, but it can benefit learners at many different stages.

One of the clearest signs that tutoring may be helpful is a noticeable drop in grades or increasing difficulty keeping up with homework. A child may also become frustrated, anxious or reluctant to attend school when they feel they do not understand the material being taught. Other indicators include a lack of confidence in class, avoidance of certain subjects, or teachers suggesting that additional support would be beneficial.

Gaps in foundational knowledge, poor study habits, or trouble concentrating can all lead to falling standards. A skilled tutor can identify these challenges and adapt accordingly. They may revisit earlier material to strengthen core understanding, teach effective revision strategies, break down complex ideas into manageable steps, or simply provide steady encouragement. Often, progress comes from hearing an explanation delivered in a different way, having the pace slowed down, or being offered a chance to consolidate what has already been taught.

The benefits of tutoring extend well beyond improved grades. With one to one attention, a tutor can tailor their explanations and teaching methods to suit each child's learning style. Just as importantly, tutoring helps boost confidence. When students begin to grasp concepts that once felt out of reach, they often grow more motivated and capable in the classroom. Those light bulb moments can be truly transformative.

Despite these advantages, some children feel nervous about starting tutoring. They may worry it means they are 'behind' or fear that lessons will feel like extra schoolwork. These concerns can usually be eased by explaining that tutoring is simply additional support. An effective tutor will build rapport, create a relaxed environment and ensure sessions feel positive and encouraging. Finding the right tutor-tutee match is essential.

Parents often wonder how many sessions are needed. While every child is different, many families begin with one session per week. Some children benefit from short term tutoring to address specific topics, while others require longer term support for exams or ongoing learning. Consistency is key. One student of mine attended every other week for an hour, but the lack of routine held her back. Switching to 30 minutes weekly made a remarkable difference. Short, consistent and engaging.

Of course, before pursuing tutoring, your child should make the most of existing support at school. Ultimately, tutoring is not just about catching up academically. It is about equipping children with the tools to become independent, confident learners. The goal is to help children 'live lighter' and to use their strengths to overcome challenges and move forward with confidence.

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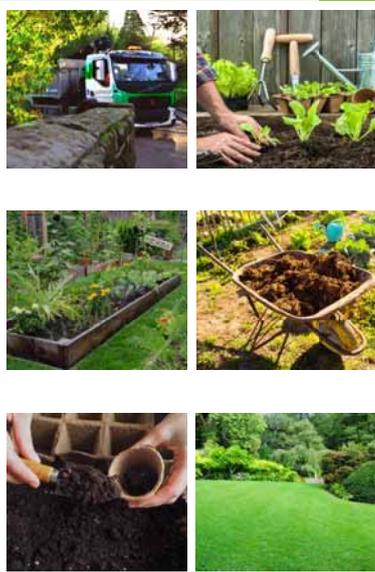
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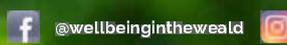



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Benenden Tennis Tournament

Time to start thinking about and preparing for this year's tennis tournament on 21-24 July (juniors) and 25-26 July (adults) at Benenden School. Last year over 150 children and 100 adults took part and we raised over £10,000 for local charities.

There is something for everyone and this year we are introducing a new event: the Two Generation Tournament for children and parents/ friends/ grandparents/ older siblings. Full details will be published in the May issue of the magazine and, in the meantime, can be found on our website along with the online registration form, which is live from 1 April.

Georgina Wixley

juniorbenendentennistournament@gmail.com

www.benendentennistournament.com

Spring Pilgrimage Walk

We are happy to announce that we are planning a local pilgrimage walk on Wednesday 29 April, taking in the beautiful woodland with all its wonderful trees, plants and animals in Hemsted Forest, stopping for reflection and connecting with nature, each other and the Spirit.

We will gather in Goddard's Green Road car park at 9.45am for a 10am start. The circular walk will be around three and a half miles. Please bring a flask of your favourite beverage and we will provide our traditional offering of cake. Please be aware that there are no toilets in the forest.

We would love to walk with you. If you have further questions please get in touch with one of us.

Rev'd Ylva 07766 711957 rev.ylva@gmail.com

Lyn Hayes 07792 332904 lindapin@aol.com

FRIENDS OF ST GEORGE'S

Swift completion of AGM business followed by refreshments.

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Let's help make a difference. Thank you.
Deborah Jenkins

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 - Wednesday 27 May, 3 & 10 June
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Fete bric-a-brac and vintage

We have a lovely new team of volunteers ready to make this year's bric-a-brac and vintage stall at the fete the best yet, so this is the perfect time to have a good sort out. Like last year we will be collecting your donations from the village hall car park (see details above). However, if you have items that you wish to donate now please contact one of us to arrange collection. We are collecting all things vintage and general household contents, including kitchen and dinnerware, household linens, baskets, pictures, decorations, small portable items of furniture and unwanted gifts.

Amanda Garratt 07766 000064

Sorrell Insua 07960 416513

Angela Marshall 07901 798808

Fabulous fete raffle

The fete raffle tickets have arrived. They sell fast so get yours early. Find them in the Bull, community shop, village hall and at the 10am Sunday church services in the primary school. Look out for pop-up sales at primary school pick-up time. Lots of fabulous prizes to win including a hot air balloon ride, cash, beauty treatments, garden entries, bottles of wine, a brewery and tasting tour, and much more.

Pippa Sarton

Fete books

The May drop off dates for all donations to the fete are listed on the advert above but if you want to get a head start and donate any books earlier, then I am offering a collection service throughout April. Please email or text me to arrange a pickup time. We really appreciate your donations. Thank you.

Ruth Clark 07767 261883

ruthbclark55@gmail.com

Fete tools and DIY

Time to tidy up your garden sheds, garages and forgotten cupboards. We are now collecting tools and any DIY items for our stall at the fete, to include garden equipment and furniture, garden pots, hand and power tools, household electrical gadgets, painting and decorating items, crafting equipment, along with any other items that fit the bill (good condition only please).

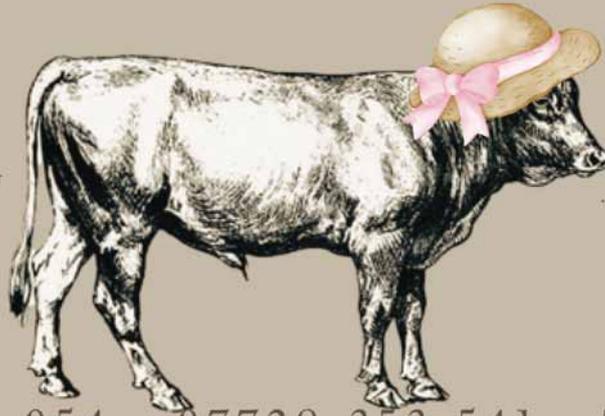
Items can be donated at the village hall car park during the collection mornings prior to the fete but for those who cannot make this, please call me on 07905 118994 to arrange for collection. We are also looking for volunteer helpers on the day. If you are free on Friday 12 and Saturday 13 June, please call:

James Garratt 07905 118994

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Merry and Bright

Bonny Sullivan came along to our last meeting to talk about Slide Away, a charity that helps children of all ages deal with bereavement. It's such a worthwhile thing to do and Bonny is really passionate about what she does.

Someone recently said to me, "Well done on making Merry and Bright the club it is today". I would like to thank the committee for all their hard work to make it a great success and thank you, our members, for all your support as we would not have a club if it was not for you. We are hoping to see the sun for future meetings and outings.

Our next meeting is on 28 April to visit Tenterden Garden Centre, gathering at the Memorial Hall at 1.30pm. Lifts can be arranged, just contact me.

Laraine Penny, Chair 241763

New choir for youngsters

Hubbub Rising Stars in the village hall is a place for young voices aged 7-16 to sing loud and shine bright, with two after-school sessions on Tuesdays to choose from (3.40-4.40pm for Years 2-6 and 4.45-5.45pm for Years 7-11). We sing uplifting songs, explore harmonies, play musical games and feel the magic of singing together. Expect a mix of big singalong favourites and exciting new music in an inclusive, supportive space where young voices can grow in confidence.

Whether they love belting out tunes in the kitchen or humming along on the school run, they'll fit right in. New voices are always welcome. No auditions, no pressure. Come and try a free, no-obligation taster.

For further information, or to book a free taster session, visit www.hubbubvocals.com.
Lauren Gill hello@hubbubvocals.com

DINGLEDEN OPEN GARDENS

Peter & Sylvia Kellett, Judy Williams and Steve & Angie Lambert will be opening their gardens in **Dingledden, TN17 4JU** to the public on **9 & 10 May, 10-4pm**

Come and see ...

a stunning collection of standard wisteria in bloom at **The Laurels Nursery & private garden**

a special garden & vegetable patch at **Barnhill Cottage**

the secret spring gardens at **No.3 New Buildings**

We are fundraising in aid of St George's Church, Restore, Renew, Rejoice project & the deaf health charity SignHealth.

Entry is £5 & under 18s are free.
Parking & refreshments available.

Dingledden Open Gardens

If you were able to help with teas or cakes for our garden openings on 9 and 10 May (details above), I would be so pleased to hear from you. Please contact me:

Judy Williams 07553 175024
redjudy42@outlook.com

Benenden Pre-School

Last November the children planted daffodil bulbs in pots. They watched as the shoots appeared in February and grew, some even flowering by the time they decorated the pots with moss, wrapped them in brown paper and green ribbon and presented them to their mothers in celebration of Mother's Day.

The rhythm of the seasons really does inspire awe and wonder. The pre-school garden is dancing with daffodils at the moment and the children created their own daffodil cards for their mothers. Looking at the colours and shapes of the stem and the flower, they glued a variety of textured pieces - paper, felt, tissue paper - in different tones of green and yellow to represent the daffodil. The results were all different, all beautiful and all lovingly made.

Lucy Oakley, Supervisor
supervisor@benendenpreschool.co.uk

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Benenden School

Here we often talk about the long-term impact that education can have on a young person's life. While opportunities, academic programmes and facilities are all important, it is teachers who truly bring education to life. A great educator can spark curiosity, instil confidence and open doors that a student may never have imagined possible.

Recently, we were delighted to welcome around 80 early career teachers from across the South East to Benenden for our annual professional development conference. It was a pleasure to host so many educators at the beginning of their journeys in the profession and to reflect together on the profound influence teachers can have over the course of a student's life.

In my remarks to the group, I spoke about the privilege and responsibility that comes with teaching. The impact of an educator is often not immediately visible. A moment of encouragement, a thoughtful challenge in the classroom, or a teacher who believes in a student's potential can shape the way a young person sees themselves for years to come. Many of us can still name a teacher who made a lasting difference to our own lives.

At Benenden, our aim is to inspire future generations of visionary women through our Complete Education model. This means not only delivering academic excellence, but also fostering creativity, resilience, leadership and a strong sense of purpose. Teachers are central to this mission.

Hosting so many early career teachers was therefore both energising and hopeful. If the enthusiasm and commitment shown that day is any indication, the future of the teaching profession, and of the students those teachers will inspire, is in very good hands.

Rachel Bailey, Headmistress



Benenden Cricket Club Invite New Members

Traditional Village Green Cricket

The season is in full swing • We invite new players of all standards • We play friendlies on Saturdays • All equipment is provided

To join the Cricket Club, contact Peter Newman
07810 658981

Village lunch

All Benenden and Iden Green parishioners are invited to join us for lunch in the village hall at 12.30pm on Tuesday 14 April. If you would like to come and haven't written your name down already, then please ring me by Thursday 9 April. We are a bigger group now which is wonderful but means the cooks need longer to prepare. It costs just £5.

Sheila Hume 854627

Weald Table Tennis Club

After a successful late summer coaching course for young people, supported by the Benenden Bonfire Committee, the Weald Table Tennis Club is continuing Sunday sessions for children and young people (9-17 years) in Benenden village hall. These hourly sessions, from 5.30-6.30pm, cost just £3, are run on up to five tables with bats and balls provided and are led by top Table Tennis England coach Ken Muhr.

Ongoing club sessions (£6 for adults and £4 for juniors) take place on Thursday at 7-9pm and on Sunday from 6.30-8.30pm. Newcomers to the club of all standards are welcome. For further information contact:

Diccon Gray 07970 757285

Ken Muhr 01580 752676

Barry Bassett 07966 531182

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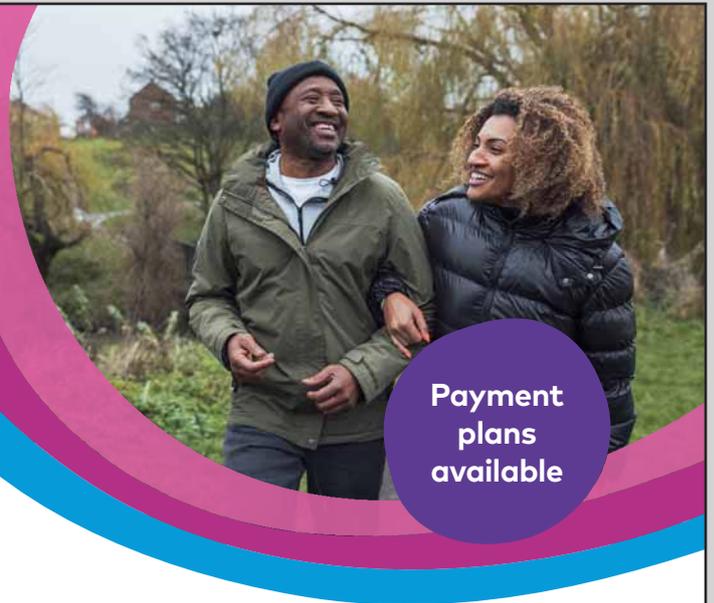
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Talking shop

It can't have escaped your notice that there are often new products appearing in Benenden's. Some of these you might welcome and some might not seem so necessary. We have a wide range of customers and everyone has an opinion on what we should stock. We ensure that basic provisions are provided for everyone and we would always welcome any requests if any of those items are missing.

However, we do get many requests for other items (e.g. dumplings!) especially from our younger customers. Whilst, to some, this might seem an unnecessary product for a village community shop, it is set against a backdrop of demand and a very great need for the shop to make enough money to survive, especially in such difficult times. When enough requests come in for certain products, a few are brought in to see how they go. If they don't sell well, they will not be offered again.

Easter is now approaching and we are offering Easter eggs, as chocolate is pretty important! Hannah's flowers are also looking gorgeous. Our sandwiches, now made on the premises, are proving a big hit and frequently selling out. There are also encouraging orders coming in for balloons, as local suppliers are limited.

An improvement in what we can offer in the café will be facilitated by the installation of the new chiller (scheduled for the Easter weekend). This will open up more space for preparing food and enable us to extend the menu for summer. The café continues to be a popular hub and there is regularly a really great atmosphere there. Our staff and volunteers work hard to keep it buzzing and long may it continue. It is great to see so many customers supporting our precious shop.
Bev Beveridge info@benendens.co.uk
www.benendens.co.uk



The Rhythm Of Life Community Choir

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Mission Church Sandhurst Thursday 10-11.30am during term time

ALL WELCOME

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Iden Green and Benenden WI

Spring flowers and birdsong bring promises of warmer days and flower-filled gardens. We'll be welcoming this magazine's gardening writer Annabel Lear to our meeting on Tuesday 21 April (Memorial Hall, 2-4pm) and we look forward to her talk on planning a summer border. Her regular piece in this magazine is always an interesting read.

In March Nick Rendall spoke about the history of Benenden School and sixth-form students told us about their A Level projects. We have been invited to visit the school in June, and we look forward to meeting students and hearing about their studies.

On Wednesday 15 April there will be a lunch outing to the White Hart, Newenden at 12.30pm, and next month a craft and social afternoon is planned for Friday 8 May (Memorial Hall, 2-4pm). Bring any items you've made and enjoy tea and cake while you chat. We'll be visiting a local garden in September. This comes well recommended and we are looking forward to it.

All meetings are open to members and non-members.

Jackie Liffen WI@daisystar.co.uk



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Consultant orthopaedic surgeons Mr Alex Chipperfield and Mr Matthew Oliver were joined by members of the hospital executive, our theatre, pharmacy, private patients and marketing teams and representatives from developer and manufacturer Contura Orthopaedics for a presentation and cake cutting.

Alex, medical director, said: "I have been in orthopaedics for 30 years and do not recall another treatment that has resonated this much and triggered such interest from both clinicians and patients."

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There was a buzz about our hospital atrium in March when we hosted a brilliant Book, Bakes 'n' Craft Fair. A huge thank you to our catering team, bakers and stallholders for making it such a success. Our bake sale, supporting Alzheimer's Research UK, raised an amazing £717 in under three hours. A percentage of proceeds from the book and craft stalls will support our charity of the year which is The Big Wrap.

Claire Harley, Hospital Director



Benenden Primary School

It is our great pleasure to share our school hall with St George's Church every Sunday morning while they have their work carried out. This not only strengthens the links within the community but is also enabling us to be a little more creative as we cannot go to the church for our usual end-of-term service.

So we are preparing to take the whole school on a pilgrimage around the village. This will be focusing on the Easter story and what it means for us. The children will be walking to stations where there will be an activity or task to complete before moving on. This will include a 'sorry station' using a campfire, a 'silent station', and of course an easter egg-related challenge!

This term has also included a science fair, where the children displayed their STEM knowledge and skills. We also welcomed parents for an afternoon tea and parents' evening, not forgetting our incredible Benenden Showcase.

I thank every member of the Benenden wider community for supporting our school by coming in to read, pray for us or support us financially. If you have never visited and would like to have a look around the school, please contact the office and I would be glad to arrange a tour.
Alison Brook, Headteacher 240565
office@benenden-cep.kent.sch.uk
www.benenden-cep.kent.sch.uk

Planning Matters

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

- 26/00360/FULL and 26/00361/LBC
Benenden Girls School, Cranbrook Road.
Replacement of 1no. timber casement window with a slim double glazed metal window
- 26/00362/FULL Wealden Heights, Cranbrook Road. Erection of new gym & garden storage outbuilding
- 26/00320/FULL Bikkel, Goddards Green Road. Removal of outbuilding and construction of dwelling
- 26/00451/FULL School Farm House, Cranbrook Road. Variation of Conditions 2, 3, 4, 5, 7 & 10 of Planning Permission 25/00196/FULL - (Discharge of Conditions 3, 4, 5, 7 & 10; alterations to the external fenestration & installation of 3no. rooflights to the main house; alterations to the roof, external fenestration of the outbuilding & relocation of the solar panels)
- 26/00440/LBC Hurstdene, The Street.
Internal alterations to annexe ground floor
- 26/00439/LBC Hurstdene, The Street.
Internal reconfiguration of first floor bathroom and en-suite
- 26/00550/TNOT56 Telecommunications
Consultation: Installation of a generator; alterations to perimeter fence; new AMF panel; replacement battery blocks and ancillary development Existing Base Station, Land At Beacon Farm, Benenden Road
- 26/00452/FULL Culpeppers, Coldharbour Road. Variation of Condition 2 of Planning Permission 23/01223/FULL - Changes to lower ground floor roof lights and fenestration. Ground floor window changes and size increase of bi-fold doors. Additional windows added to first floor and adjustments to roof lights

More planning matters at:

benendenparishcouncil.gov.uk

Sheep invasion

The Benenden Allotments faced a small and woolly invasion early last month as sheep from a nearby field smuggled themselves over a fence and into our field. Faced with a choice between grass, or chard, parsnips and garlic, garnished with tulips, they plumped for variety and novelty. Much as I'd endorse their focus on getting at least five types of veg a day, in line with latest health advice, we allotmenters were dismayed at the degree of nibbling our produce endured. Thankfully the shepherd managed to round them up quickly and has improved the fencing to prevent further escapes. Any further sheep caught on motorbikes leaping across the wire will face the cooler, or more probably the freezer!

Nancy Tolhurst

Exhibit at the Benenden Art Fair

Benenden Art Fair is a local event that occurs every October in Benenden village hall. Our mission is to showcase the abundance of artistic talent in the southeast, most of whom are right on our doorstep. We are looking for artists to join us for our third year this autumn from 2-4 October. We welcome artists from Kent and Sussex at any stage in their career, working in any medium. Whether you've been creating for years or just starting out, we'd love to hear from you.

If you're interested in taking part, applications will be open on our website www.benendenartfair.com from 2 March-24 April. If you'd like to be notified when applications open, please get in touch by emailing benendenartfair@gmail.com or sign up to our newsletter via our website.

We look forward to hearing from you.
Hannah Buchanan and the BAF team
@benendenartfair www.benendenartfair.com

Rude Mechanicals returns

The ever-popular Rude Mechanical Theatre is returning to Sandhurst on 16 July with a fabulous new production of 'The Wife', inspired by Chaucer's The Wife of Bath.

The show starts at 7.30pm. Seating is on the grass so bring warm clothing and low-backed folding chairs. Arrive from 6pm with a picnic as seating is unallocated. Plenty of parking available. The play is aimed at adults but is suitable for mature children able to sit for the full performance. In line with Chaucer's original tale, the play is bawdy in places and includes a brief, stylised depiction of violence. For tickets, tour dates and information visit www.therudes.co.uk or contact me if you would like to know more.

Shirley Wiggs shirleywiggs60@gmail.com

Open Gardens season

Take the opportunity to visit some of the 28 most attractive and interesting private gardens in West Kent and East Sussex as owners open their gates this spring and summer to raise funds for Hospice in the Weald. Each garden provides a different experience - from the formal gardens at Tonbridge School, to the cottage garden at the 18th-century thatched cottage at Little Walkhurst, Benenden; from the three-acre garden at the magnificent 14th century Long Barn, Weald, to the nine gardens at the Tunbridge Wells in Bloom event. New this year is Bailiffs House in Hever, with its wonderful arts and crafts garden.

The first garden opens on 19 April and it lasts until 8 September. All funds raised help us to support adults and children with life-threatening or life-limiting illness when they need it most.

For full details of all participating gardens, opening dates and times, and to book tickets, please visit the events section at hospiceintheweald.org.uk. Alternatively, email fundraising@hospiceintheweald.org.uk or call 01892 820533.



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Spring Festival

Bridgepoint Music is a charity with two branches, Benenden Strings, an ensemble for local school-aged children who meet once a week in the Memorial Hall to rehearse for local performances, and the Bridgepoint Ensemble, a collection of leading professional musicians who give concerts and pass on their knowledge and experience to the next generation through side-by-side performances and workshops with young musicians.

Now, Bridgepoint Music is presenting a four-concert Spring Festival from 17-19 April at Fairlight Hall in Hastings. The music has been carefully chosen to celebrate the joys of the season, and celebrated violinist Mathilde Milwidsky will be taking a leading role, playing Beethoven's Spring Sonata and the first concerto from the Four Seasons. Also on the programme is Schumann's vivacious Piano Quintet and Mozart's String Quartet in G major, entitled 'Spring'. The Saturday evening concert features renowned soprano Bibi Heil and her duo partner Stephen Barlow giving a concert entitled 'Memory and Desire', a mouth-watering feast including repertoire from Mozart and Schubert to Berlioz and Quilter.

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Restore, Renew, Rejoice

Unearthing history and building our legacy

If you've walked past the church recently you've seen the flurry of activity by BW May and our archaeological team. Beneath the old floor, history has been uncovered. While we expected to find the grand Victorian engineering of 1861, we've been met with some truly breathtaking surprises. We have uncovered ancient grave slabs dating back to the 1700s, hidden tomb vaults, and even scorched foundations - silent witnesses to the Great Fire that swept through the church in 1672 (see photographs on page 3). The graves have all been carefully documented by the archaeologists and will be covered with a membrane to remain beneath the floor.

Perhaps most exciting of all are the medieval artefacts emerging from the dust. We can't wait to put these treasures on display, honouring the incredible craftsmanship of those who stood where we stand today.

Leaving our mark for 2191

As we peel back the layers of the past, we are also looking 165 years into the future. What will people find when they next 'reorder' the church? We are thrilled to be partnering with Benenden School and our primary school to create time capsules. These snapshots of our lives today will be nestled deep within the foundations of our new underfloor heating - a gift from our generation to the Benenden of the future.

Our builders are making fantastic progress and we are on track to open our doors at Christmas. Imagine a warm, restored, and vibrant St George's, ready for carols by candlelight.

We need your spark

To get us across the finish line, we need your help. The current economic climate has made securing grants more competitive than ever. Do you have a lead? If you have

links to grant-making trusts or brilliant fundraising ideas, please contact us at fundraising@stgeorgeschurchbenenden.co.uk.

Please remember our 'Payment Holiday Challenge'. If you enjoyed a break from council tax in February and March and your account is looking a little healthier than usual, would you consider 'paying it forward' to the appeal? Every pound is another step towards our goal of a warm, welcoming community space for us and for future generations to enjoy. You can make a one-off or regular donation here: www.givealittle.co/c/restorerenewrejoicebenenden. If you are a UK taxpayer, please select Gift Aid. It adds 25% to your donation at absolutely no extra cost to you.

A huge thank you to everyone who participated in our community consultation in January. We're currently diving into the data to see how we can best serve you, and we'll share those insights soon. We are also excited to announce that the winner of the half-case of wine, generously donated by our friends at Mudwall Wines, was Rickie Bishop. Peter Brook, Restore, Renew, Rejoice Community Liaison

Find out more and follow progress:

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Event Preview

The Bull at Benenden Music Club on Tour

Mark and Lucy have supported local bands for over 35 years by giving them space to perform in their pubs in Robertsbridge, Hawkhurst and, since 2004, at the Bull in Benenden. Over the years they have featured some outstanding up-and-coming local musicians during their open mic nights, Sunday sessions, and special jam nights and have taken several into recording studios and even onto BBC playlists.

Now, on 2 May, they are collaborating with Hemsted Park for the first time to showcase some of these exceptional up-and-coming young musicians in its theatre. The evening features four acts, each performing their original music with one curated cover song, culminating in a unique encore.

Primrose with her captivating soulful moody sound will be unveiling some of her new music, fully backed up with her experienced session band. Mark and Lucy's daughter, Primrose is an exceptionally talented young singer/songwriter and it's no surprise that she finds herself in great demand, with her 2026 festival diary filling up fast. Her performances reveal a rare, magnetic charm that captivates every crowd, with lyrics expressing deep emotions, and bewitching story telling encompassing a genre of R&B, jazz and soul. Listen to a selection of her music on Instagram @primrosebrmusic

Going Postal are a four-piece rock band from Tonbridge who pride themselves on a casual, indie and humorous approach to music mixing rock, metal, blues and jazz. Their sound is full of driving riffs, shredding solos, and a raw edge that keeps audiences guessing. Playing live is where they're most at home, often adding a bit of improv to keep things fresh and the crowd rocking. Listen to their debut album 'Boxed In' on Spotify



Camber are an indie-rock talent beyond their years, exuding cheeky charm and raw energy. The boys combine deep lyrics, vocals, skilled bass and drums with an easy chemistry and a compelling edge.

Having served a brief but intensive apprenticeship, the band have started to turn heads and ears, leading to studio collaborations with musical director/ drummer producer Sebastian Sternberg (Goldfrapp, Jack Zovaretti, Imelda May) and Grammy winning Matt Lawrence (Mumford & Sons, Adele, Beyonce).

Listen to their debut EP 'What would you Do' on Spotify

Michael Bird (spotlighted on page 29) brings his soulful folk and jazz-infused music, navigating songwriting with thoughtfulness and honesty. His recent EP Evergreen received support from BBC Introducing Kent, which helped push his music to national radio stations. His single Roots has been played on BBC Radio 1 and Radio 6. Michael will be sharing some of his latest compositions at the show, offering a captivating blend of intricate harmony, textured melodies, and heartfelt storytelling that commands the listener's full attention.

Instagram: @bullbenenden

Tickets: www.hemstedpark.com/events

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From the Bull to the Bullring: Finding My Sound

Whenever I'm returning home and chatting to new locals at the Bull, I'll introduce myself as the son of the farmer over the glebe. They usually look blank, so I clarify ... the farm with the pig. Of course, their faces then light up. It seems my claim to fame in the village is being Ethel the pig's farmer's son.

Aside from that, I'm also a musician and songwriter, currently based in the city of dreams: Birmingham. I moved there in 2016, following my (now) wife when she came to study at the University of Birmingham. Honestly, it wasn't high on my list of places to move to, but there was a passage from Jeremiah that I held close during the transition: "Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare." Jeremiah 29:7

In a world that feels increasingly unrecognisable, Jeremiah 29 has been a grounding passage for me. It reframes circumstances in a way that turns your perspective outwards and encourages positive initiative.

Birmingham wasn't quite 'exile', but there weren't a huge number of musical opportunities compared to other UK cities. Still, I've

been honoured to play a part in growing its music scene. I founded a jam night called Neighbourhd, which has become the biggest regular gathering for musicians and creatives in the West Midlands. Through it, I've seen artists pass through who have since gone on to play international stages.

Pioneering this event has blessed me with deep friendships, musical collaborators, experience in event logistics, and the chance to influence life in the second biggest city in the UK.

Living in Birmingham has also meant doing life closely alongside people from completely different backgrounds to my own. It's made me realise what a privilege it was growing up in a village like Benenden, on a sheep farm. The times I've been able to retreat to the farm to escape the grey, look up at a sky full of stars, and breathe in the country air are moments I never take for granted.

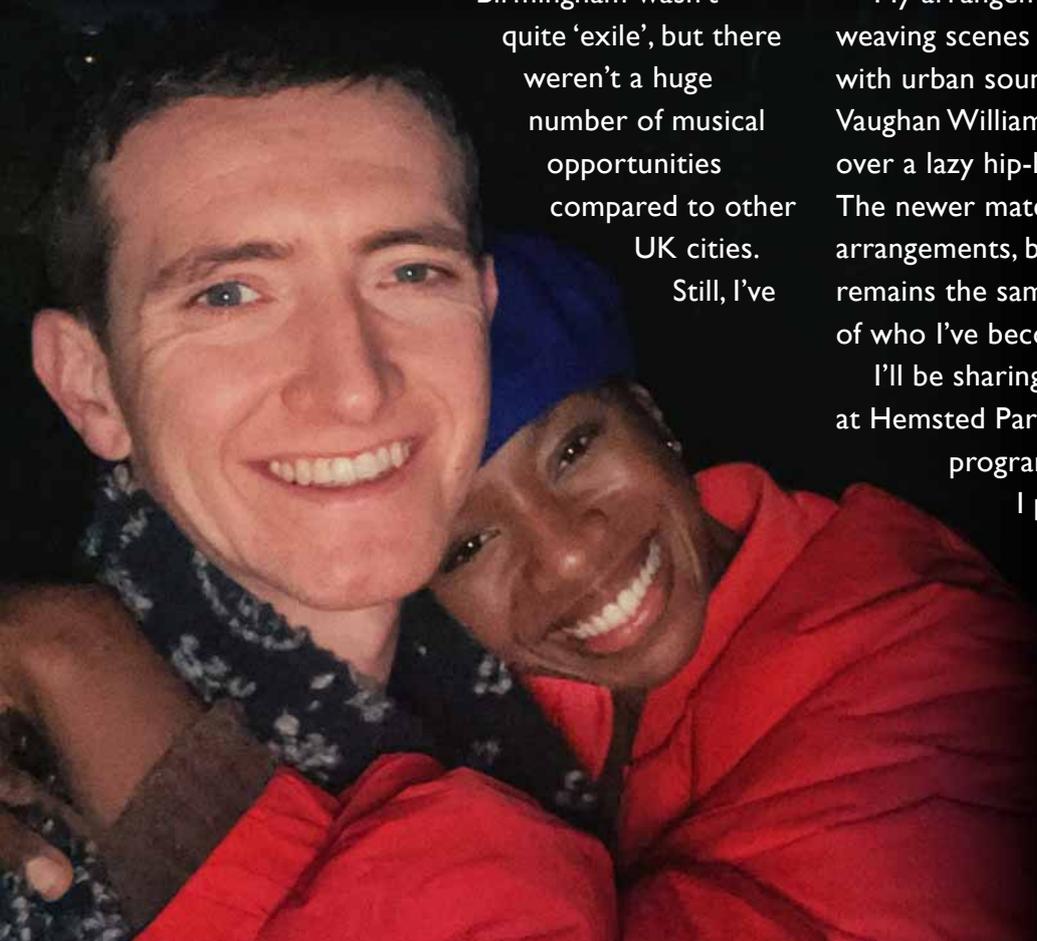
I still carry the woody Weald with me in my writing. I have a record called Bluebells, where I explore trying to share nostalgia with a partner who had a very different childhood. I also have unreleased material: one song using the metaphor of the dawn chorus, referencing the wood pigeon's tune, and another that reflects on the blissful simplicity of a sheltered upbringing, and how that can unravel later in life.

My arrangements reflect that same journey, weaving scenes and sounds from the countryside with urban soundscapes. In Bluebells, you'll hear Vaughan Williams - inspired string parts layered over a lazy hip-hop drumbeat and R&B chords. The newer material leans into darker arrangements, but the fundamental approach remains the same: bringing all the different parts of who I've become into the music.

I'll be sharing old and new material on 2 May at Hemsted Park, alongside some great acts programmed by the Bull Music Club.

I played my first ever gig at the Bull when I was 13, and I still love dropping into their Tuesday night open mics whenever I'm home. The new Hemsted Park venue looks gorgeous, and I'm very excited to share the stage with some fantastic artists.

Michael Bird



Spotlight

Handy hints to smooth the way for happy campers

After two months travelling around Europe in a motorhome with her husband, Helen Gray shares some invaluable advice for fellow adventurers

Have you ever dreamed of setting off on the road and letting the wind take you where you fancy? Being newly semi and fully retired respectively, Diccon and I finally took the plunge to go away for eight weeks in a 6x3m motor home. We



returned to Benenden, 13 countries and 3,750 miles later, having had the most magical time. We also learned a lot, so here are some tips for other Benenden residents who may be thinking about a similar adventure.

Consider a framework Stating the obvious, Europe is a huge continent and I'd read about people getting to Calais and then

deciding whether to turn left or right. This was not for us as we had three fixed points: two table tennis competitions that Diccon had entered in Germany and Serbia, and an opera booking in Verona, which provided the skeleton upon which to build. I put together a flexible itinerary that ensured Diccon (as the main driver) wouldn't get tired and also enabled us to take our time to enjoy the scenery. After all, our aim was to stop and see as much as possible and it's important to cater for any unplanned changes. For example, we detoured to the lovely Croatian Island of Murter after a recommendation from other campers and ended up at the beautiful Jezera Bay, enjoying swimming in crystal clear water in a location we would otherwise have missed.

Pay attention to the detail It's worth reading the small print of your travel and vehicle insurances.

We knew that our insurance did not cover the van in Montenegro so sourced additional coverage. We also kept a close eye on our Schengen allocation (post-Brexit rules specify an allowance of 90 out of 180 days for stays within the Schengen zone) and used an app that counted the days for us. We did however fall foul of failing to purchase a vignette (toll payment system) for Hungarian motorways, resulting in some hefty fines on our return home. We also got clamped in Bosnia as we couldn't work out the parking meter.

Use local knowledge and transport In towns and cities we got into the habit of going to tourist information offices to get a detailed map and pick up any top tips, including where to get the best coffee/gelato/pizza! When we visited the beautiful old city of Zadar, northern Croatia, we only had a few hours and the local experts at the tourist office helpfully circled all the buildings for us to see in a logical order, including the impressive installations of the Sea Organ and the Greeting to the Sun. We also found that public transport in Europe is extremely cheap (completely free in Belgrade) and that campsites have copies of the local timetables. Think about taking bikes, too. Once you are camped up it's a pain to have to pack everything away and use the van for a local trip, only to return to the same campsite.

Keep an eye on costs The cost of petrol and campsites quickly mounts up. We did bigger shops from cheaper supermarkets and ate 'in season' vegetables, resulting in a large consumption of white asparagus in Germany and lots of organic courgettes elsewhere!

One big saving is to stay overnight for free, which is a real option in Europe, where camper vans and motorhomes are well catered for. We had apps that detailed such options and stayed in a few car parks, including next to a (very quiet) cemetery in Augsburg.

Our best find was a farm in the Dachstein mountains, Austria, which offered two spaces to stay for a small fee. When we reached the farm up a mountain road we were delighted



that one space remained, with stunning views over the mountain range. It was one of many 'wow' moments we experienced as we looked out over the magnificent view whilst eating our evening meal and breakfast the following morning, having bought fresh eggs and cheese from the farmer's wife.

We are also big fans of free walking tours, which are easy to find on the internet. You normally have to book your place in advance and at the end of the tour are expected, although not obligated, to tip the guide. Our top



experience was a historical walking tour of Budapest, led by an incredibly knowledgeable and passionate local.

We did pay for some visits which were costly, such as the spectacular Plitvice Lakes National Park, Croatia, but having paid €40 each for a day ticket to enter we were blown away by the beauty of the opaque lakes and stunning waterfalls and concluded that the visit was worth every euro.

Be prepared for weather extremes We started the trip in mid-May in cagoules and warm clothing, given the inclement weather in Belgium and Germany, but by mid-June we were in the middle of a heatwave and campsites with shade and located by the sea or a lake for swimming were a real bonus. Travelling during the autumn would go some way to avoiding such extremes.

The act of camping is as important as the activities We quickly deduced that we preferred smaller, quirkier campsites rather than the bigger commercial sites, some of which we had no



alternative but to book as they gave us access to key cities such as Split and Verona. We found some gems, the standout being in southern Hungary



where, after driving down a tiny sandy lane in the middle of nowhere, we found a campsite that the owner had set up in his front garden. He waved us in with a friendly smile and we quickly noticed that no-one else was there, which seemed odd but meant we had the small swimming pool and the one shower to ourselves, although it was the only campsite we had been on that didn't have fresh running water, and the supply was drawn from a well and left a rather unpleasant taste. What became very important was having access to a washing machine, which some sites offered for a few euros.

Be prepared for breakages We didn't experience any mechanical failures but things did break inside the van, such as cupboard catches and the loo door handle. Three days in, the hinges broke off the under-seat storage cupboard, which meant that we couldn't walk through the van as the door was 'flopped' on the floor. Diccon found a garage outside Maastricht that thankfully said they would repair it the next day. We coupled this with a sobering visit to an American cemetery with immaculately kept graves that had been adopted by local families since WWII.

Finally, pace yourself Being away for two months, we were happy to focus on one activity per day. It's worth considering how much energy one has to realistically expend week in, week out so that each moment can be enjoyed. For us, returning to the campsite late afternoon to relax was an essential part of each day.

Wishing any fellow travellers a great trip.

Following the village roads that lead us back into history

The third in our series of revisited - and occasionally updated - walks around the parish, as originally brought to life by local historian Ernie Pollard in the 1990s.

TRAIL 3

Walkhurst Road and the Beacon

Duration: 1hr 30min

Start: Grid reference 810328



Fig.1

Start at the Bull, facing the entrance to Walkhurst Road (1). Cross over passing the beautiful Grade II listed war memorial by Albert Toft (Fig.1) and walk northwards along Walkhurst Road.

Soon on the right are Rothermere Close and Harmsworth Court. Lord Rothermere of Hemsted gave the land to the village, originally for allotments, in memory of his sons Vere and Vyvyan Harmsworth, who died in the First World War.

On the right are the new Benenden Almshouses, which offer housing to those in need and with a strong Benenden connection. Next pass by Feoffee Cottages, which was the Benenden Workhouse from 1732 to the 1830s, when the Cranbrook Union Workhouse opened. A feoffee is a trustee and those referred to here were the trustees of the workhouse.

Parishioners who were old or infirm or otherwise could not support themselves, and children who were orphaned or abandoned, were cared for in the workhouse. It was run by parish overseers and paid for by a tax on property owners.

Brick Kiln house, on the right, was first a farmhouse and later the home of the Munn family of brickmakers. A tile stamped 'Thomas Munn Benenden' was included in a collection of Wealden tiles on display at Iden Green Fair in 1999. The clay used for the bricks was probably

from pits near the house. The kilns are shown on the first large-scale Ordnance Survey maps of the 1870s and around that time Walkhurst Road was known as Kiln Lane.

Next door to Brick Kiln is The Oast, unusual in its low roundel. It was once the workshop and home of the village saddler and harness-maker. In the springtime, common spotted orchids proliferate in the verges beyond.

Just before Walkhurst Cottages on the right are new (2023) allotments gifted to the village by Pat Thoburn, who lived at Pypme Manor until her death in 2017. At Number 2 Walkhurst Cottages is a large cherry tree (Fig.2), the last of eight gifted to the cottages by Collingwood 'Cherry' Ingram.

It is now about 80 years old but continues to flower profusely in April.

Somewhere along the road is the den of Walkhurst, one of

the old dens. Walkhurst belonged to the manor of Eastry, east of Canterbury, 35 miles from Benenden and a great distance to drive pigs. Some land in the den, mostly woods, was owned directly by the Dean and Chapter of Canterbury. A document of 1290, recording the division of Walkhurst between the church and men of Walkhurst, can be seen in the archives of Canterbury Cathedral.

The Munn family of Brick Kiln included a black sheep, another Thomas Munn, the highwayman. His autobiography, a copy of which survives in the British Museum, was written in jail in 1750 while he awaited execution for robbing the Yarmouth Mail. On the title page he is styled the 'Gentleman Brickmaker'. Local tradition is that he built the house known as Little Walkhurst, on the west side of Walkhurst Road.

The hedges each side of the road are rich in woody species and have woodland herbs such as primroses and dog's mercury in their banks, suggesting a woodland origin. Beech, unusual



Fig.2

in Benenden hedges, is quite common on the east side.

Continue down the hill into the wooded gill where the stream is crossed by Walkhurst Bridge. One of the Canterbury woods, Little Walkhurst, lies beyond the bridge to the west of the road.

Turn right just past the bridge on footpath WC349 (2) through the woods (Fig.3). The footpath



(which can be muddy in winter and early spring) follows an old road for over a mile to Stepneyford Lane, although the path is left before then. The road was closed, together with three others, by order of the parish vestry in 1859.

The land falls away on the right to a stream, which can be turbulent in spate, and the name Devil's Race was used for a field along its banks near here. The trees are mostly old coppice stools, with hornbeam especially abundant, but with some fine standard oaks.

Woodland herbs, such as wood anemone, ramsons, primroses and bluebells are common, with sedges where it is especially wet. Follow the footpath around tight bends, left and then right, forking right at a junction with another (private) old road from Goddards Green. On the right are extensive pits, perhaps where marl from the Wadhurst Clay was dug to spread on the lighter land of the Tunbridge Wells Sands immediately to the north of the road.

Beyond the woods, the old road becomes a hedged green lane. Look out for wild service in the hedge on the right. The leaves are rather like a maple but are alternate along the stem whereas those of the maple are in opposite pairs.

After a right-angle bend to the left take footpath WC349A on the right (3) running due south across the grass field. The entrance can be hard to spot as the hedge around is quite grown over. Continue down to a wooden bridge

and cross over Handwell Shaw stream (Fig.4).

Early Ordnance Survey maps mark stepping stones across the stream here and one seems to have



survived to the right (west) of the modern bridge, clearly on the line of the original track. This 'stepping stone ford' almost certainly gives the Stepneyford stream its name. The path takes



a sharp left turn (Fig.5) shortly after crossing the stream. The wood to the right is American Wood, perhaps because of

the conifers, and on the left is David's Wood. The path is extremely muddy and leads uphill. It remains muddy even in the summertime and would not be suitable for young children or those with mobility difficulties (Fig.6).

The stream is bordered by



a narrow strip of old woodland, but we soon enter a large, managed conifer plantation on land which was farmed before the trees were planted some 80 years ago. The fields were known in 1777 as Lower and Upper Hempdown.

Emerge from the plantation between orchards and Christmas trees (Fig.7) and turn right (4) along footpath WC352. In 1777 this was Footpath Field - an ancient track. To the left are a modern telephone mast and the shell of Beacon Windmill, built in the 1790s. This is Beacon Hill, which gives its name to several





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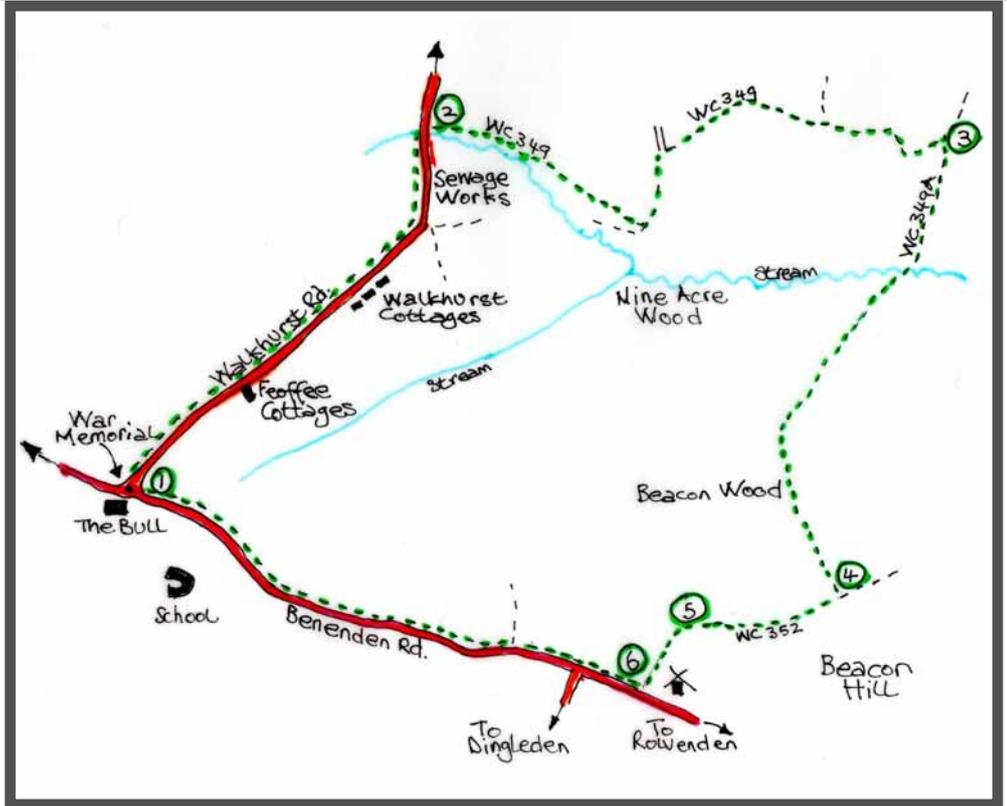
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Local Walks



Fig.7

→ farms as well as the mill. The beacon itself was one of a national network to warn of the approach of the Spanish Armada in the 1580s; the exact site of the beacon is not known, but it may well have been close to the modern mast as it shared the need for a prominent position.



Turn left by the route marker (5) and go



Fig.8

across the small bridge. Walk parallel to the drive and the footpath gate is on the right. Continue and then take the short grassy path to the road (Fig.8).

At the road turn right (6) and walk

back to Benenden along 450m or road before the pavement starts just after Pullington House.

To the left, beyond Athelsden House and its yard and pond, is an area of native trees, planted to mark the end of the second millennium. Pullington House on the right, with the large Irish Yew in the garden, was the home of Richard Neve, steward of the Hemsted Estate for Lord Cranbrook in the 19th century. The existing Victorian house was built by the Neves but must have been on the site of an ancient farmstead. The earliest record is 'Polontonnys' in a will of 1490. Opposite is a sunken road, long disused, leading to Iden Green; a footpath runs along its eastern edge. Beyond Pullington, the road is known as Grants Hill, after the Grant family.

A map of 1777 shows no houses between Pullington and The Green, but now the road is lined on the north (right) side by houses, small closes and flats for the elderly. Tudor Cottage was a late 19th-century toll house, as is suggested by its position close to the edge of the road, while Chequer Tree and Grants Hill cottages are attractive Edwardian cottages, presumably built for farm workers. The recreation ground in front of the village hall was a gift to the village from Lord Rothermere.

Coming down the hill on the left is Benenden Primary School (opened in 2019). The old school buildings, built in about 1873 by George Devey for the Earl of Cranbrook, can still be seen on The Green. Finally, on the bend back into Walkhurst Road, and set back from the road on the right, is an old village post office, now Walnut Cottage, with its lovely old shop windows.

Your walk ends outside the Bull, at the heart of the village, both literally and metaphorically. Explore Ernie's history articles at www.benenden.history.pollardweb.com Useful maps: Ordnance Survey Explorer 125, 136, 137 cover the whole Benenden, Iden Green and East End area, also the online KCC footpaths map

Photographs and walk check: Mary Cruse

In Your Garden

Dry spring is the perfect time to lift and divide

I have found myself in recent years using the early days of spring to lift and divide perennial plants. Usually I would do this in the autumn, before bulb planting, but as the latter seems to take place later and later each year - down to environmental

reasons rather than human error on my part - the task has been shifted to early spring. Perfect timing it would seem as the ground is now very workable - a week or two of relatively dry weather on top of the incessant winter rainfall has ensured we have at last some good ground to work with. Many bulbs are poking through so I can see where they are, before I replant fresh clumps of perennials around them.

The two propagation tasks I do now are division of grasses and herbaceous perennials, and the splitting and division of any snowdrops 'in the green'. In a large border at one of the gardens I maintain weekly I have been very busy moving a number of boisterous perennials around - persicaria and rudbeckia plus the sedums are in need (again!). I also have too many self-seeded anemone grasses, which can take over a border relatively quickly if not curtailed, but it is a very easy job to remove them. They are one of my favourite grasses but need regular maintenance before getting too large. Also, the persicaria were originally placed a little too near the front of the border and once they have finished flowering they can be untidy so they have been moved back to the centre and I will have to think what to put in the front sections now.



I usually divide plants while they are still in the ground, which I find easier, but you can dig the entire clump up and divide it this way. A sharp spade straight through the middle and then in half again is the usual way for me but it depends on how large the crown of the plant is. These sections can then be replanted straight away, into their new space. I should mention the persicaria here is a *P. bistorta* 'Superba', a great plant with pale pink bottle brush flowers in May. It is much easier to divide than

other persicarias, which can get very woody in the centre. Beth Chatto used this variety beautifully on woodland edges where the soil is damp but it will grow in full sun if there is sufficient moisture in the soil.

I have been very late dividing congested clumps of bearded irises. They should have been done last September, a while after flowering, but it would have meant dismantling a very large section of a border near to the terrace, which is very visible to the client. So I decided on a trade-off, as there were a number

of very nice late-flowering perennials that I didn't want to disturb - I have just divided these irises and they look a bit small and sad. I have never done this so late so I imagine I may have severely compromised on flowering this spring but we shall see! Magic often happens in the garden and they are otherwise vigorous and healthy plants.

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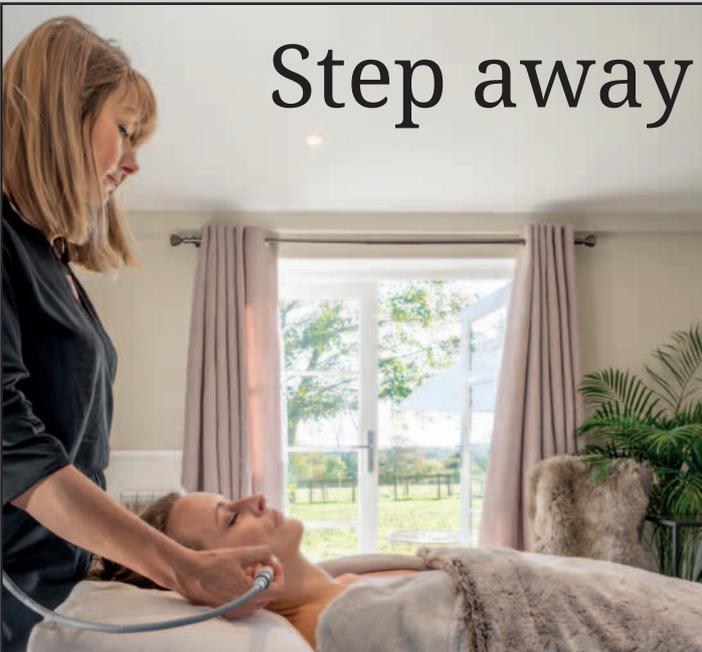
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Above: Busy: Bonny Sullivan talks to the WI about Slide Away; primary school children at the science fair; Rickie Bishop awarded Mudwall Wines by the Restore, Renew, Rejoice project; Benenden Hospital raise funds for Alzheimer's Research UK; Canham Homes donate a replacement bench opposite Benenden's; ready for World Book Day; sheep take advantage of the allotments
Front cover: Springtime: Putting the winter days behind us. Photograph: Ruth Clark