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# Editorial



It's taken until December, but there's a feeling in the air that the village calendar has finally set itself straight again. Covid is consigned to, if not the dustbin, at least the backburner; life has got back to being as normal as it ever was; and we had a bonfire. Hurrah!

After a couple of firework-free years, we were back to burning effigies, eating fine chilli from a paper cup and drinking pints of Harvey's from a beer tent; for which many thanks to the Benenden Bonfire Committee, whose efforts have been a huge asset to the community. I know a couple of the mainstays are standing down after this year's shindig, so heartfelt thanks to them and a warm welcome to whoever assumes the mantle.

On a personal note, it was rewarding to welcome a (very) full house to the Benenden Wine Committee's recent Tracy Claridge Memorial Tasting. To tempt in over 70 keen tipplers in a village this size was quite something, although we did have the advantage of celebrating a man whose unstoppability and sheer hard graft on behalf of those less fortunate endeared him to so many.

Committees have got themselves a bad name - you know, along the lines of a camel being a horse designed by committee - but there are plenty in Benenden, along with a council or two and plenty of clubs and organisations, that bind the village together, make it stronger, more resilient, better equipped to protect what's good about it, or just better able to stay sane and have a good time.

Joining these bodies in their efforts is possibly the best way to make the most of what a community like ours has to offer, whether you're helping to incinerate Guy Fawkes or aiding the cause of drinking convivially. Perhaps that might be a suitable New Year's resolution, but in the meantime, a merry Christmas to you all from all of us at the Benenden Magazine.

Peter Thomas, Co-Editor

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

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# Church Calendar

## St George's Church

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

Curate: Revd Ylva Blid-Mackenzie 01233 820100 rev.ylva@gmail.com (Sunday, Monday and Tuesday)

Churchwarden: David Collard 241944 julia.collard@btinternet.com

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

www.benendenchurch.org 850849 benendenchurch@gmail.com

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

Sunday 27 November 8am Communion 10am Morning Worship 5pm Advent Service of Light

Saturday 3 December 4pm Connect Four

at Mission Church, Sandhurst

Sunday 4 December 8am Communion 10am All-age

Communion

Sunday 11 December 8am BCP Communion 10am Morning Worship

Sunday 18 December 8am Communion 10am Sung Eucharist

Tuesday 20 December 7.30pm Parish Carol Service

Christmas Eve 3pm Crib Service 11.30pm Communion

Christmas Day 8am Communion 10am Morning Worship

followed by Communion

Morning Prayer 8am Mondays and Fridays

### Mission Church, Sandhurst

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

Morning Prayer 8am Tuesdays and Wednesday

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

Funeral 4 November Adrian Betts Memorial Service

# Church Letter



#### Building upon tradition

So just where did 2022 go? They say the years go by faster the older you get and here we are starting to prepare for Advent, and then preparing for the excitement and busyness of Christmas. Celebrating once again at St George's Church the birth of baby Jesus over 2,000 years ago. Celebrating as folk have done down through the centuries in our beautiful church.

As we gather, as the community in Benenden, we remember and are grateful for those who built this church and who have worshipped here; who have used the building for many different gatherings and events through the centuries, not just for worship. Those who have ensured the church building remained here, in good condition, for future generations, each building upon the work of previous generations. In my study, I have a picture of the inside of the church taken in December 1891 (131 years ago); the candelabras in the photograph are the same ones we will get out, polish and use for our candle-lit parish carol service again this year. There is something important about that tradition and the continuity.

Each generation has played its part in keeping St George's alive. Each generation has adapted the church as worship, technology and their needs changed. We are grateful to our predecessors who put in electric light, warm-air heating, and a beautiful organ (this instrument was considered the work of the devil at one stage in our history - how things change). We carry on their tradition of keeping our church building alive and relevant in the community, to hand it on for future generations to use and enjoy.

While I have been away on sabbatical - and prior to it - there has been much talk of a 'project' in the church. There has been a display at the back with some drawings, sketches and outline proposals. This was the start of a consultation process to gather thoughts and ideas; I am aware that in some quarters this display has been viewed as a fait accompli and not a consultation. This was not our intention and I apologise if you feel you have not been heard. We have obviously got the balance wrong between having something to present to generate discussion, and it being seen as decisions already set in stone. This is not the case.

I (we, the PCC) would like to hear what people need and want from their church building now and into the future. My motivation is for a sustainable and environmentally responsible church; a church fit for the 21st century; a church that is good to hand on to future generations, so people can continue to worship and encounter God here as they have for centuries. I therefore invite everyone who wants to, to come to an open meeting on Sunday 22 January 2023, in the church at 11.30am, chaired by The Ven. Stephen Taylor, Diocesan Secretary and formerly Archdeacon of Maidstone.

At the meeting I want people to share their concerns and hear others' wishes and aspirations for St George's. Come and join us as we build upon the tradition and continuity of our church.

# Village Calendar

November		
Sunday 27	Advent Carol Service: The Service of Light, St George's Church, 5pm	p.9
December		
Friday 2	Benenden's Community Shop Volunteers' Carol Singing Social, Benenden's	
	Community Shop, 6.30pm	p.19
Fri 2-Sat 3	A Christmas Carol, Chapterhouse Theatre Company,	
	Benenden School Theatre, 7.30pm	p.21
Saturday 3	Ladder Toss, St George's Club, 8pm	
Thursday 8	Iden Green and Benenden WI, Christmas Lunch, The Bull, Benenden, 12.30	pm
		p.21
Saturday 10	Christmas Market, Benenden Primary School, I-4pm	p. I 3
Saturday 10	Len Phillips Swing Orchestra, Benenden School Centenary Hall, 7.30pm	p.21
Saturday 10	Darts, St George's Club, 8pm	
Sunday II	Len Phillips Swing Orchestra, Benenden School Centenary Hall, 3pm	p.2 l
Monday 12	Parish Council Meeting, Iden Green Pavilion, 7pm	
Tuesday 13	Merry and Bright, Christmas Party, Memorial Hall, 2pm	
Wednesday 14	Benenden Horticultural Society, Memorial Hall, 7pm	p.19
Friday 16	Christmas Crackers, Benenden Players, Benenden Village Hall, 7.30pm	p. I 5
Monday 19	An Evening of Ghost Stories, The Bull, Benenden, 6.30pm	p.2 l
Tuesday 20	Christmas Village Lunch, Benenden Village Hall, 12.30pm	p.19
Tuesday 20	Parish Carol Service by Candlelight, St George's Church, 7.30pm	
Friday 23	Christmas Draw, St George's Club, 8pm	
Christmas Eve	The Crib Service, St George's Church, 3pm	p. I 7
Christmas Day	Christmas Lunch Memorial Hall 12 30pm-4 30pm	ь 17

#### Iden Green Toddler Group

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

#### Wednesday Coffee Mornings

Wednesdays in the Memorial Hall, 10-11.30am

#### Benenden Bowls Club

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

#### Cakes & Chaos: Cafe and Toddler Group

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

# Parish Council



The business of Benenden Parish Council is documented in the minutes of meetings going back to December 1894, when parish councils were first created. Minutes of that time were handwritten (badly) and recorded in Minute Books, which are quite large, leather-bound tomes. They are much more interesting in this physical form than the type-written A4 stapled paper minutes that took over. Progress does, though, make them much easier to read.

I was looking for a history of our parish wells in these tomes, that was my mission, but I kept getting side-tracked with matters such as the dangerous crossroads in Iden Green and speeding cars (in the 1930s!). Oh, and did you know that the sign at Coldharbour Road in Iden Green used to point the way to Staplehurst was removed because it was considered to be an indirect, inappropriate route; the installation of a pavement on the north side of the village street, in view of the increasing motor and bus traffic, was deemed necessary by the county surveyor; there are even plans stuck to the inside front cover of the 1894 minute book showing the layout of the allotments in 1918 on the 'Old Post Office Field', now Rothermere Close, and of the allotments in Woodcock Lane, Iden Green, now part housing, part grazing.

Parish councils perform a recognised function and so it is no surprise that there are similarities in the topics discussed in the minutes of 1899 and 2022. But parish councillors were once lords and gents, land and business owners, now we are everyday folk, and women are councillors too!

So, now I've completely digressed off topic ...

Peta Grant, Parish Councillor

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

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# Talking Point



## Ready, steady, there's a recession coming

We're bombarded with news of the approaching recession yet the politicians dither. I can't tell you what's going to happen to all the businesses around Benenden, but I can share what I've used to get through the past two recessions.

In 1990 I saw John Harvey-Jones pass on his hard-won advice for business during recession. For those who don't know him, he was an early TV star, going into businesses and advising them what to do. As the former head of chemical giant ICI (whatever happened to them!) he had some wise words to share. He'd been a submariner in his past and had an analogy about managing in recession. I pass it on now:

- Don't wait until the waves wash over your ship, batten down the hatches when you see the storm coming. Act in advance of the recession. (Having written this a couple of months ago, I couldn't have guessed just how quickly the storm would arrive!)
- Work only for profit, i.e. don't chase prices down to the bottom, don't work for nothing just to keep staff busy. Cost savings cannot keep your head above water or bring you out of recession, but income can.
- Cash is king, so don't work for people who don't pay or can't pay. You need cash like you need oxygen. Businesses mainly don't go bust for lack of profit, they go bust for lack of cash.
- If you are going to cut back, cut deeper than you would wish, so you only cut once and build back up. Make it clear that's what you are doing. You lose the positive morale and your best staff when those that remain are waiting with the sword of Damocles over their heads, waiting for the next cut.

If you are not running one of Benenden's many businesses, then how can you take this advice into your personal life? 'Battening down the hatches' might look like reviewing your spending, direct debits and standing orders to see what's going out that you don't need anymore. It might look like cost effective investments such as insulation and double glazing. And whilst you're about it, bring the whole family in on those choices, considering how you can make your world more sustainable. It might also look like giving your 'staff' a pay rise (care worker, baby sitter, grandparent providing child-care duties on a pension, cleaner or gardener etc). Their pain is likely to be worse than yours and they will remember how you behaved when the chips were down.

Look at your income, not just your costs: Talk to your employer and find out how they are planning to move through the recession and what that means for your work and income. Try not to be caught out by their plans. Help them to see how you can help. As recession approaches, the choices you make about how to deal with it will become stark. Especially if you haven't prepared. Good luck and let's be careful out there.

Peter Massey



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## News and Events

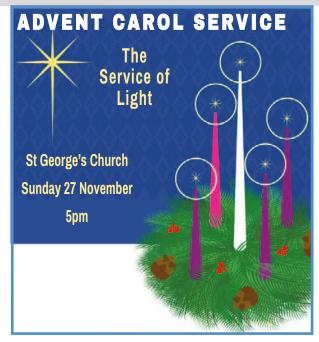
# All the fun of the fire as Guy Fawkes makes a spectacular return

At our first event since 2019, a terrific fire was followed by a spectacular display with oohs and aahs galore. Thanks to Robert Greenwood, Master of Lighting and his apprentice Sue Littlelights, the entrance and actual site had a special feel. The guy, provided by the Pre-School, sat proud until, with a rousing cheer, he finally toppled into the flames.

Several of us are now standing down after over ten years at the helm and I would like to say special thanks to several members of the committee: Hannah Miles-Watson, whose veggie chilli is now the stuff of folklore; Sue Penny, who has had the often thankless task of cajoling volunteers then juggling their needs; Adam Penny, a true workhorse who does so many things you wouldn't believe me; Michaela Baker, who has each year managed the advertising and marketing; and Genevieve Greenwood, who has 'owned' the gate as well as managing the team that cut 900 bread rolls - plus a few more for our breakfast!

To the other committee members and all of you who have volunteered in the past or were a new face this year, thank you. We need 70+ people, and it is true to say the event would not happen without you. It is also true to say it will not happen next year without some new committee members. This is, in my experience, one of the better committees to be on, so please contact Tom Cripps if you would like to discuss what is required (email mr.tpcripps@gmail.com or call 07825 460290)

Our thanks, as always, go to our regular supporters Benenden Hospital Trust, Tate Fencing and Jubilee Hire, together with Benenden School for the opportunity to hold our event on their land and agreeing to share their display with us.





The aim of Benenden Bonfire Society is, when funds allow, to distribute monies within the parish and surrounding area. We focus, although not exclusively, on youth groups and/or projects. This year there will be a surplus and application forms for funding will be available in the village shop from Monday 5 December 2022.

**Grant Matthews** 

Chair, Benenden Bonfire Society info@benendenfireworks.co.uk www.benendenfireworks.co.uk

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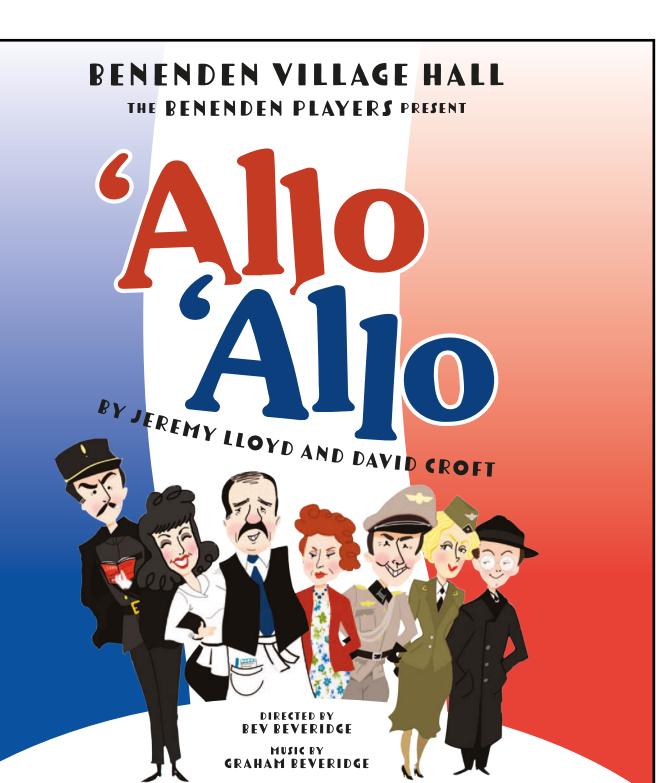
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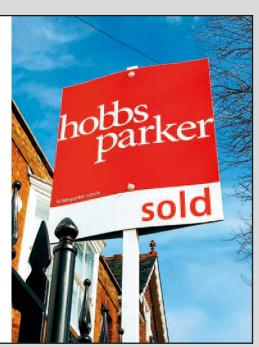
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#### Benenden Pre-School

The children enjoyed a special visit recently from one of the dads, Nick, who came to spend the day with us. One of our eight curricular goals is to make a model at the woodwork bench and Nick put his carpentry skills and his patience to work supporting the children in pairs.

Some children are at the stage of exploring the tools and learning how and when to use the hammer, the screwdriver, the hand drill and the saw. Others have had repeated experiences at the woodwork bench and are now able to use the tools with increasing confidence. They are thinking about what they are creating, how they will join pieces of wood and how they want their finished product to look. All children are developing hand/eye coordination through woodwork, as well as their creative, design and critical thinking skills.

To finish on a seasonal note, I warmly invite you all to our Pre-School Christmas Market on Saturday 10 December from 1-4pm in the primary school grounds. It promises to be a wonderful festive event for the whole community.

Lucy Oakley, Supervisor supervisor@benendenpreschool.co.uk

#### Nourish food bank

Many people have been very kind in giving food to Nourish, a food bank in Tunbridge Wells. The need is now greater than ever since the increase in the numbers of people getting food delivered has led to a decline in the amount donated in supermarkets.

The village shop is unable to accommodate a donation bin, but the church is still collecting items and you'll find the Nourish bin inside at the back. The church is usually unlocked from about 9am until dusk.

Chris Parkinson



# Parent, Teacher and Friends Association

With fireworks behind us the PTFA are humming carols and in the final planning stages for our Christmas Market. This year we are excited to be combining it with the Pre-School fundraising team and together we will be offering an assortment of local business stall holders, live entertainment with performances from our local residents, food, drinks, face painting, raffles, tombolas and more, along with a visit from Santa and his elves in our Winter Wonderland area.

The event will be held on Saturday 10 December from I-4pm and we invite all of our local community and surrounding villages to attend this festive family fundraiser. Events like these can only go ahead with volunteers and support, so if you are able to help us, your efforts would be very much appreciated. Please email all queries to benendenfundraiser@gmail.com

We are also pleased to announce PTFA Christmas cards, designed by the children, are now on sale in the village shop. All money raised will be going towards our outdoor learning project and reflection garden.

Rachel Tinker, Benenden CEP, PTFA Chair





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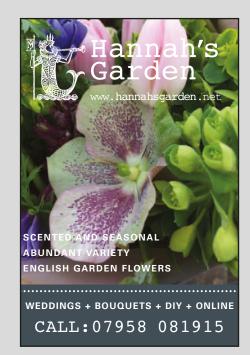


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We have recommenced our regular monthly lunchtime meetings at The Bull, Benenden.

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

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#### **Primary School**

Year 4 and 5 enjoyed their Kidenza music trip hosted at Benenden Girls' School. The children loved learning about a 14-piece professional orchestra, in an interactive concert that blended performance with spoken content and digital animation in just the right balance for the primary audience.

I am delighted to inform you that we were once again awarded Music Mark Status for the coming year, recognised for the continued value that we place on music and our dedication to offering and delivering a broad and balanced curriculum. This is an amazing achievement.

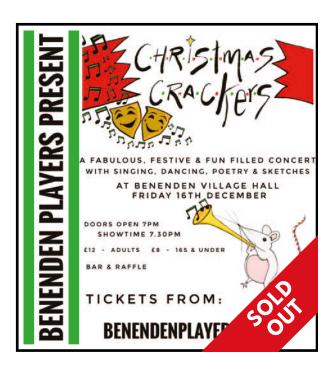
We are also very proud of our sporting achievements and already this term, despite the rain, our girls' football team enjoyed some friendly football fun at Dulwich Prep School. All the teams played four matches and ours lost one game and won the other three. Fantastic play from all the girls involved: Ellie, Penny, Violet, Florence B, Leila, Annabel and Issy. Our Upper Key Stage 2 footballers finished second in their group. They then went on to the quarter-final, where they fought very hard but were knocked out I-0. Well played Domantas, Austin, Toby, Charlie, Harry, Max R, Jasper and Toni.

Well done to our very own Mrs Brook, who ran in this year's London Marathon, raising an amazing £2,500 for Asthma and Lung UK.

On Armistice Day we remembered those who have lost their lives in war; the whole school, with the exception of our Year 6s, gathered in the playground, where they heard Miss Maynard play the Last Post and observed two minutes' silence. Our Year 6s visited the Benenden village war memorial, joining the community in paying their respects.

Finally, we are very grateful to Tom and Trish Scott, who generously donated the piece of land on which our school is built. In their memory, their daughters have kindly given the school a beautiful bench so that their legacy can always be remembered.

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



### Poppy Appeal 2022

Our Poppy Appeal collection in Benenden and Iden Green has raised the substantial amount of £5,250 to date. The interim total includes a very generous St George's church collection of £490 on Remembrance Sunday, as well as contributions through the JustGiving site, Benenden School, the Hospital, the Primary School, our shops and pubs, and also from several particularly benevolent donors and organisations. We are most grateful to those who volunteered their time to undertake house-to-house collections, which, at a particularly difficult time for all fundraising, helped us to exceed last year's total.

**Jane Dalton Holmes** 

#### Merry and Bright

For nannas that natter, and grandpas that grumble, Join us for afternoon tea and cake - sadly, no crumble! We meet every fourth Tuesday throughout the year, [except August]

Come meet new friends, share laughter and cheer, Over 60s are ideal, but we may bend the rule. New committee and members are both cool Benenden Memorial Hall is the place to be, From 2-4pm for a jolly good tea

We would love you to join our committee.

Joan Hagens, Chairman 240672

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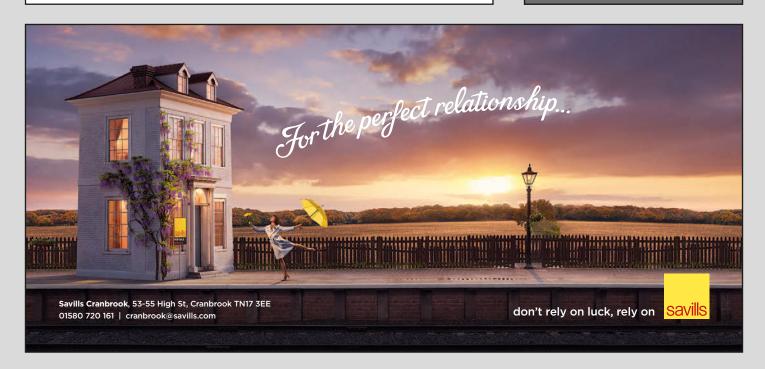
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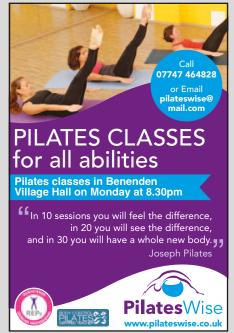


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It would be lovely if everyone - young and not so young - could come along dressed as a character from the Nativity story: Mary, Joseph, Shepherd, Inn Keeper, Wise-men, Angel, Star, Cow, Sheep, Donkey ... anything appropriate you can think of! This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

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

Pavid and Helen Commander

# Christmas lunch for singles or couples on their own

Don't be alone on Christmas Day - please come along to the Memorial Hall at 12.30pm for a lovely festive lunch. It will be free, although donations will be welcome, and transport will be provided if you need a lift. Offers of help to cook, drive and clear up would be much appreciated. Please call or email me if you would like to come or can help, so we can plan.

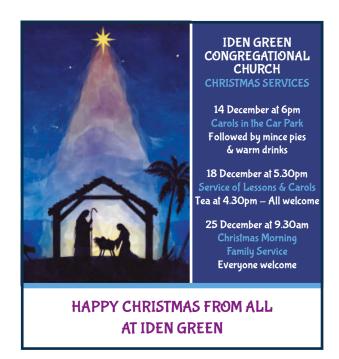
Chris Parkinson 388402 cfgparkinson@gmail.com

# Benenden Hospital reflects on achievements of 2022

As we prepare to close our doors to allow our hardworking staff to enjoy a restful festive period, I'd like to reflect and recognise our hospital's achievements from the past year.

Two successful in-person recruitment events were held in February and September. I'm proud to say that 10 attendees from these recruitment events have now secured jobs with us.

The work of our endoscopy unit was once again recognised by the Royal College of



Physicians when we received our Joint Advisory Group (JAG) Reaccreditation. Being the only private hospital in Kent to have this accreditation is testament to the high-quality patient care we deliver. Additionally, we were also accredited with the Investors in People 'We Invest in Wellbeing' silver award.

In September, we were delighted to be awarded as a National Joint Registry (NJR) Quality Data Provider for commitment to patient safety. The NJR monitors the performance of hip, knee, ankle, elbow and shoulder joint replacement operations to improve clinical outcomes.

This year has also seen the launch of our female health hub, new clinical services such as cosmetic and fundoplication surgery, and the opening of our wildflower meadow by MP Damian Green. We have celebrated our employees throughout the year, including Continence Specialist Nurse, Kathy Howard, who was shortlisted for the Nursing Times Award as Nurse of the Year. I am immensely proud that we were able to come together on 7 October to recognise our staff in person at our seventh annual Best of Benenden Awards.

I wish you all the best happiness and health for the new year.

Jane Abbott, Hospital Director and Chief Nurse



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## **Helen Grant MP** for Maidstone and the Weald

I am here to help you in any way that I can. If there is an issue of concern to you, where you believe I can assist, or if you would like to arrange a meeting with me, please email me at helen.grant.mp@parliament.uk or telephone 020 7219 7107.



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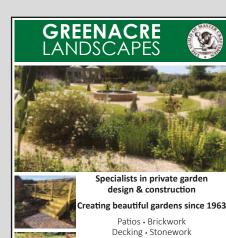




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#### Talking Shop

The news is dismal and the weather not much better, but the good folk of Benenden somehow make the best of things and nowhere is it more apparent than in our shop. So many new visitors to Benenden's ask about its origins because they are so impressed with the ambience of the place.

There is often a sense as they leave that they would like a Benenden's in their own neighbourhood.

The essence of its success is that we are lucky to have the numbers of community-minded people willing to contribute not only to its inception but to its successful continuance. Yes, I'm talking again about the great volunteers who turn up every week to give their time and energy to making it work. Thank you all. Please don't forget that in grateful recognition for all you do, we are inviting you to come and sing your hearts out whilst imbibing and nibbling a little of what you fancy at the Carol Singing Social evening on Friday 2 December, starting at 6.30pm. Sign up at the shop so we know numbers, please.

We have all the usual festive goodies to buy, including some exceptionally tasty mince pies. You won't find those in Tesco's. Come and enjoy the great atmosphere, drinks and food in our café. Have you checked out the cakes lately? There is a real buzz about the place at the moment, with our friendly managers working hard to create a festive atmosphere. To ease the workload, we are pleased to announce that we have a new manager starting. Her name is Sue and you will soon see her working in the café. Bev Beveridge info@benendens.co.uk

### Christmas village lunch

The village lunch will take place on Tuesday 20 December in the village hall at 12.30pm. £5 each and all welcome. Please could you let me know if you would like to come by Thursday 15 December, so we can plan and shop, as well as cook.

Sheila Hume 854627



# Benenden Horticultural Society

We were delighted that the initial get-together of this new group saw about 20 people attending with more unable to come due to other commitments. We are therefore keen to get the ball rolling. The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 14 December in the Memorial Hall at 7pm.

We invite anyone who might be interested in this new society to attend and join us for a festive glass of mulled wine and a mince pie. There will be a brief meeting to choose an initial committee from those who have already volunteered so that we can get on with organising the programme for 2023. Afterwards, we will have a short gardening quiz and we hope people may want to do a 'Seed Swap or Share', so do bring spare seeds with you.

Please let Sally-Ann or Ron Marks know if you wish to come to help us with numbers. There will be a small fee for this Christmas meeting.

Sally Ann and Ron Marks 243141 sallymarks100@hotmail.com ronmarks1946@gmail.com

Warm up at the pub! Now taking bookings for festive lunches, suppers, family parties & gatherings. A warm welcome & roaring fire awaits!







Father Christmas will find the time in his busy schedule to make a fleeting visit to The Bull on Christmas Eve at 4pm after The Crib Service.

To save any disappointment, if you would like your child to receive a simple gift from Father Christmas, please book your ticket a the pub by Sunday 11th December!

Carolling, Mince Pies & Mulled Wine in the bar for the grown ups. Merry Christmas



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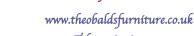
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#### Benenden School

We were incredibly proud to support, once again, the village's bonfire night celebrations, for which 2,000 hardy souls turned out in pretty miserable weather, enjoying a great firework display and creating a lovely atmosphere. I hope everybody enjoyed the evening.

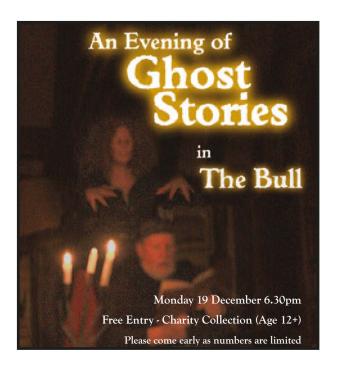
We were also delighted to welcome members of the community to a stunning lunchtime concert by violinist (and former Benenden head girl) Freddie Flintoff last week, which showcased her outstanding talent as well as the exquisite acoustics in our new Centenary Hall.

We have just returned from our half-term break and I told the students that they were starting what I think is probably the most enjoyable half of term of the year, with lots of events and activities to look forward to. At the time of writing we are about to welcome about a dozen local schools to Benenden for our STEM Convention, a special day featuring expert speakers, workshops and student-led presentations; rehearsals are going well for the school production of Chicago later this month; and we are looking forward to our first dedicated Giving Day, which will raise money towards our Be the Change bursary and partnerships campaign. Finally, attentions are turning towards Christmas, with the choir practising hard ahead of our traditional carol services.

We were delighted to see media coverage reporting that Spear's, the wealth management media company, recently included Benenden in its list of the world's best schools - one of just 20 schools in the UK to appear. Naturally, we don't pay too much attention to the noise around such lists but it is always reassuring when the quality of the education and students' experience is corroborated by third parties.

We are delighted to be welcoming two professional touring companies in December: Chapterhouse's A Christmas Carol in the theatre on 2-3 December and the Len Phillips Swing Orchestra in Centenary Hall on 10-11 December. Full details and booking at www.Benenden.school/events.

Samantha Price, Headmistress



### Christmas ghost stories

Join us for a night of spooky stories in The Bull on Monday 19 December at 6.30pm. No charge but there will be a retiring collection for local charities. There'll be time for your own ghostly anecdotes, too. Age 12+. Look out for more details in the shop and pub.

Mary Cruse

#### Iden Green and Benenden WI

As usual the food was delicious and the company scintillating at our winter party. Everything went with a swing when we were joined by the Even Numbers, a very talented group of singers who all volunteer at the Hospice in the Weald. Some of us were pleased to purchase a copy of the CD, which was produced to contribute to hospice funds.

We are looking forward to celebrating Christmas by meeting up on Thursday 8 December in The Bull, where we know we shall be treated extremely well. Tables are booked for Ipm but please arrive earlier from 12.30pm.

We won't be meeting in the Memorial Hall in December but would like to take this opportunity of wishing all our members, friends and readers a very Happy Christmas and a prosperous New Year.

Jackie Liffen 752232 WI@daisystar.co.uk 21





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#### Topical Health

It is all too easy during the festive season to forget that there are some hidden dangers lurking among the festivities. Last year we identified that for some Christmas is challenging for their mental health as they struggle with loss or loneliness; while these issues remain, this year I want to highlight some of the other issues which, if managed, need not mar our celebrations.

The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) cautions about three Christmas-related hazards: choking, falls and fires. While shopping for children, ensure what you buy is age appropriate. Some toys have parts which, if swallowed, could easily choke a child. The Office for National Statistics records around five deaths a year from object-related choking in the under fours, and, with diseases such as dementia on the rise, something like three times this in the over 70s (the figures for food being significantly higher). Of concern is the fact that, because they are not classed as toys, the same age-safety rules don't apply to Christmas decorations. The advice is if you have people in the home who are at risk, hang your decorations out of reach.

Falls are a hazard to the older population year-round, with trailing wires, darker days and winter weather increasing risk. The simple advice is to be careful about the siting of Christmas light cables and to always carry a torch when out in the dark.

People are 50% more likely to be killed in a fire at home over the Christmas period than any other time of year. The hazards are obvious and take only a little thought to manage. For example, keep cards away from fires and other heat sources, don't leave candles unattended, and fit, or check, your smoke alarm. Have a merry, healthy and safe Christmas.

Peter Ellis



#### **Planning Matters**

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

- 22/03137/FULL Beacon House, Rolvenden Road. Conversion of single storey stable barn into a 4-bed dwelling.
- 22/03070/FULL Pympne Farm Cottage,
   Pympne Road. Demolition modern
   agricultural infill between the Cottage and
   parallel outbuilding to reinstate the enclosed
   yard, Remove and rebuild utility area,
   Reinstate original openings to consist of new
   glazed elements.
- 22/03019/FULL School Farm, Cranbrook Road. Partial conversion and extension of existing part office, part residential building with associated garage, garden land, parking, landscaping, and biodiversity enhancement.
- 22/03149/FULL Trafford House, Dingleden.
   Installation of x20 solar panel array on a ground mounted frame on gravel base.
- 22/02295/FULL Wycherleys, Iden Green Road. Erection of single-storey pitched roof rear extension.
- 22/02850/FULL 5 Cherryfields. Removal of damaged cracking pathway and replacement in permeable block paving from boundary to front door.

More planning matters at: benendenparishcouncil.org

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## Food and Drink



# An unforgettable night of wine that stirred memories of Tracy

Tracy Claridge was, among many other things, the village's 'wine expert', but while he was a master of his subject, there was nothing academic about his love of wine. He was an enthusiast and a keen imbiber, but he could always tell you what it was you were both drinking and why you should possibly have another glass.

All of which is why I'm sure TC would have approved heartily of the first annual/perpetual Tracy Claridge Memorial wine tasting held in his honour last month. It wasn't the most sophisticated tasting ever held - in fact it turned a bit lively towards the end - but it was very much in the spirit of the great man, and it raised a tidy sum for two of his favourite charities.

None of us at the Benenden Wine Committee ever imagined we'd have any problem filling the room very kindly offered to us by headmistress Sam Price at Benenden School, but even we were amazed by the speed with which tickets sold out. The village was onside from the very first, and that positivity pervaded the entire evening.

It was the busiest evening we'd ever hosted - with more than 70 squeezed in - and a real challenge to organise, but with an impressive flight of wines donated by Tracy's old wine

industry colleagues Nick
Hillman (Wine Service) and
Peter Franz (Sensible Wine
Services), plus a modest
contribution from myself and
three excellent clarets from
his long-term employers
Maison Sichel, the crowd was
soon in high spirits.

Benenden School teacher (and committee man) Alfred Nicol hosted proceedings in his characteristically dynamic fashion, leading us through three lovely whites (I'm biased, but I thought my

Louis Sipp Muhelforst Riesling was the pick of the bunch) and into a superb cassoulet and cheese board prepared for us by the school's outstanding chefs, accompanied by a Californian Cabernet Franc that exceeded all expectations.

Into the fray stepped the excellent Richard Household (of Brompton Wines), by now a regular at our tastings, to bring a welcome touch of gravitas to the occasion as he presented the Maison Sichel clarets. The 2019 Angludet Margaux was already drinking hugely well, and stood up manfully against the 2017 Fonplegade St Emilion, which brought down the curtain with a flourish.

Among all the eating and drinking, Alfred hosted an auction featuring even more donations. It's possible that the alcohol wasn't to blame, but the bidding was vigorous, spirited and generous, and by the time we'd done all the calculations, we'd amassed a little over £2,000, which will go to two of Tracy's most heartfelt causes, chosen by his loving partner Deborah (a committee woman through and through and a mainstay of the evening): Hospice in the Weald, where the great man spent his final days, and Catching Lives, a charity helping the homeless in Kent.

Rest assured, after this roaring success, the Tracy Claridge Memorial tasting will be back next year. In the meantime, there will be other evenings designed to keep the TC legacy alive, so watch this space.

**Peter Thomas** 

## Clubs, Sports and Recreation







# Happy bees the key to a happy life: a brief introduction to beekeeping

The joke about beekeepers is like the one about people who are gluten free: "How do you know if someone keeps bees? They'll tell you!" There must be quite a few beekeepers around the village who I don't know, but bees are a great conversation topic with anyone (although watch for friends stifling yawns!).

My wife Siobhan and I have just started on the journey and here's our top tips, which we've learned in the first few weeks.



- I) Go on a course to learn a few basics first. I went sceptically to a course which I bought my wife as a birthday present. It was near Monmouth at the farm of Kate Humble, of Springwatch fame. They do all sorts as well as bees www.humblebynature.com and it's a very beautiful part of the country.
- 2) The less you do, the better for the bees. This was my key takeaway from the course. You don't have to steal kilos of honey so the bees make more. You can just let them keep it, undisturbed if you want. Any disturbance to check in the hive should be treated like bomb disposal: gentle slow movements with great care not to squash any of your new friends. Then they won't get cross and you won't get pestered in your space suit. The structures they build and their activities are amazing close up!
- 3) Be prepared to visit the internet with your credit card day after day when you start, getting all the little bits you didn't know you

needed. It's worth getting help with what's needed and a better set of instructions than the ones that come with the self-assembled hives you can buy online. I had to dissemble mine and start again. A 'National' hive is the simple one to start with, where the bits are easy and most common to source. Weald Bee Keepers Association (www.wealdbeekeepers.com) is a great place to begin and also to source a colony for your hive, to start you off. Local colonies are used to local food types and so thrive more easily. You can do a taster visit to see if you like bees at all.

- 4) Bees are mesmerising to watch, both outside and inside the hive. For me, watching the bees come and go for five minutes is akin to watching a flame burn in a bonfire. Nothing happens but it hooks you, relaxes you and intrigues you. Must be something primeval in our brains.
- 5) Don't start collecting books. From every beekeeper there will be a different opinion, so any more than one good book will leave your head spinning. We have 'Bee Medicine for Vets', freshly written last year, and that pretty much covers all the bases and then offers several home runs to boot. They are classed as livestock in the US so vets get called in, apparently, even though for most vet degrees you only learn about insects as pests.
- 6) Oh, and honey is vegan. If you're vegan and don't believe in stealing the bees' labour that's involved in making honey, then stop eating fruit and veg - their labour pollinates them all.
- 7) There are apparently happy colonies and grumpy colonies. Get happy ones or get rid. As the course tutor told us: "Observe the bees before you do anything and if they're looking a bit grumpy, go and make tea instead." Luckily ours are very docile. Happy days.

Peter Massey

#### **DID YOU KNOW:**

- A colony of bees is called a super-organism because they collectively behave and act beyond the interests of the individual.
- Bees can kill invasive mites by surrounding them and heating them up.
- Bees don't have blood that carries oxygen. Bees breathe through their bodies not their mouths. A bee's 'heart' equivalent runs the length of its body and its 'blood' equivalent is pumped by its body and wing movements.
- Bees hiss when defending the colony. A queen can toot and quack!
- Bees forage up to three miles and go that far in about 15 mins, the equivalent of flying supersonically when compared to their size.
- Bees can count, measure distances, measure angles relative to the sun and tell other bees this and how good the food source is by dancing.
- The queen lays around 1,500 individual eggs per day into the cells in the wax comb. The worker bees seal the cells whilst the eggs and larvae develop.
- Bees are ruthless. If a queen stops laying eggs they
  will kick her straight out and make a new queen by
  feeding an egg differently from the other eggs in a
  special queen cell.
- Bees guard the hive entrance. Guarding duty is to stop wasps and mites entering. The guards are at the end of their lifespan so don't go back into the centre of the hive, so they can't transmit any viruses or bugs they've touched to the younger ones. The youngest bees stay in the centre of the colony on nursing and feeding duties for the brood (newborn, eggs and larvae); the slightly older ones store food and make honey in the hive; the next age group make more honeycomb to lay eggs or store food in as the colony expands, or go foraging for food; the next age stand guard. The transitions between roles occur according to the pheromones being released by the workers and the queen which let everyone know what the collective need is.
- Bees' bodies swell over the winter as they're full of poo because they don't go out.

Spotlight



# The worm does not forgive the plough

Looking after the earth beneath our feet is critical explains soil advocate Russell Cruse and there are ways we and farmers can and are improving soil quality

"If mama ain't happy, nobody's happy." In June 2020, Forbes Magazine quoted soil advocate

Holly Arbuckle's summary of the situation the world is currently facing with regard to the health of the planet's soil. Her implication is clear: that soil is degrading and according to the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, 33% of the Earth's soil is already degraded; meaning 'less fit for a specific purpose, such as crop production'.

Indeed, the FAO estimates that some 75 billion tons of soil are lost each year - Brazil alone losing 55 million tons of topsoil due to over-production of soy. As the FAO puts it, "only 60 harvests left", meaning viable topsoil will be virtually non-existent within 60 years as, unprotected, it blows away and washes into the rivers after rain. Nearer home, the European Commission has also said that "45% of European soils face problems of soil quality".

Whether we eat meat, vegetables or largely processed foodstuffs, every person on earth derives around 95% of their calorie intake -



directly or indirectly - from soilgrown crops; so if the soil is sick, it follows that people are going to be sick, since soil directly impacts upon not only food, but also the water we drink and the air we breathe.

The powers that be have known about these issues for many years but so far their response has been less than satisfactory. The goal of lower

prices for consumers and greater profits for supermarkets and mega-producers has meant that countries hoping to compete with cheaply grown food in Russia, the US and Brazil, amongst others, have pushed their soils to the limit. A study quoted in the Journal of Ecology (2014) states that 'modern agriculture, in seeking to maximise yields ... has caused loss of soil, organic carbon and compaction, impairing critical regulating and supporting ecosystem services'. It further asserts that lack of organic carbon (vital for soil health) in soils 'is now thought to be an important factor constraining productivity as many arable soils have suboptimal concentrations'.

Nearer home, the problem is no less serious. A report published by the UK Environment Agency in 2019 noted that nearly four million hectares of UK soil are at risk from compaction and over two million are at risk of erosion.

Considering the estimated hectarage of farmland in the UK is a mere 9.2 million, these figures are worrying. In addition, intensive agriculture has meant all arable soils have lost between 40% and 60% of their organic carbon.

Although it had taken successive UK governments far too long to come around to the importance of soil health, finally, after years of work by both scientists and enlightened farmers, the government very recently (2021) agreed that, for the first time, farmers were to be paid to take measures to protect and nurture soil. But, with just a £20 to £58 per hectare subsidy, campaigning groups believe this will barely, as it were, scratch the surface. Considering the loss of EU subsidies (for which, by 2024, the government will be compensating at just 50% of what they were pre-Brexit), such a figure seems token at best. Furthermore, at the time of writing, it is not clear if even those extremely modest payments will survive the latest chancellor's emergency budgeting round.

Will Steel is a local farmer who, for over a quarter of a century, has been engaged in farming practices that for many will sound revolutionary. A walk around Will's farm at Little Pix Hall, Hawkhurst is a real treat for anyone

hoping to learn about how soil management can play its part in improving the planet. Working with the land, rather than trying to beat it into submission; using and improving 'natural capital' - the minerals, sunlight, air, water, cover crops, beneficial insects etc - in

a way that chimes with the land and the food it produces and which, most importantly, helps to preserve its viability for future generations.

Will comes from a farming family, who have farmed in Staplehurst for generations. When he took over as manager of Little Pix Hall Farm, it was semi-derelict and the land was in a poor state. He knew there was only one way to save it, and fortunately the owner agreed. The first and most important thing to do was to revive

the soil, which had been all but destroyed by lack of organic matter, compaction and chemical fertilizers - the bane of soil health throughout the world. Indeed, Will maintains that no matter

how healthy a soil is, poor management can reduce its viability ("destroy it", in his words) in as little as two years by crushing, ploughing up and destroying the habitat of his "key workers" - the worms! Little Pix Hall Farm has between 12 and 25 million



of the little soil-tilling, composting machines per hectare and he takes very great care of them.

Will, thankfully, is by no means alone. All over Britain, regardless of the government's position, farmers are starting to come to the aid of their beleaguered soils. Organisations with a variety of interests, from the Soil Association to the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England; from the National Farmers' Union to the Royal Agricultural Society of England, are working on schemes along the lines of those underway at Little Pix Hall Farm, to repair, strengthen and rejuvenate our soils.

Future articles on this topic will look at how we ourselves can play a part in this vital task but, in the meantime, perhaps think about how many of the WWF's tips for sustainability you are already following; such as eating more plants, cutting out waste, growing your own, and eating what's in season. None of which is particularly hard, and indeed some ideas are a positive boon for the lazy. How does not digging the garden sound, for instance? Or not sweeping up leaves?

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## Bird Notes

# Sightings to treasure on a walk to remember

Recently, I decided to walk the footpath at the bottom of Standen Street towards Sandhurst. The path descends to the old crayfish ponds, over the stream and up through the hop gardens and vine plantations. There are plenty of different habitats, which makes for a wide selection of species.

As I climbed over the stile to start the walk, a little Wren poked out of the bottom of the adjacent hedge, and I watched while it busied itself finding something to eat. At the bottom of the field there is a little spinney, where a Chiffchaff was singing a bit half-heartedly. Was this a late migrant or one of the increasing number now overwintering? At the lake I was scanning for ducks when a Kingfisher flew through my vision and its electric blue colour made it easy to follow, albeit briefly.

I was then alerted to some calls in a nearby ash tree and quickly spotted a few Long-tailed Tits, but it was another bird that caught my eye as it landed at the top of the tree in a vertical position and started pecking at the branch. I was quite excited, as it was so small it could not be a Great Spotted Woodpecker; then it turned, revealing horizontal white stripes across its back, which are the hallmark of a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker.

The decline of this species has been so severe that birdwatchers are encouraged to report every sighting, as this is the only way of monitoring its population, which nationally is only around 1,000 pairs. It always gives me a thrill to find one.

Continuing southward up the hill, now covered in vines, I noticed a bird in flight with white 'armpits', which I followed until it landed in an oak tree. It was a Mistle Thrush. A few moments later it was followed by six or seven smaller birds, which turned out to be Redwing - my first sighting of this winter visitor this autumn.

In amongst the hop gardens and vines is a field





of maize grown for feeding Pheasants, which often attracts buntings and finches. Today, however, all seemed quiet, until a bird popped up and settled on top of a plant. I was expecting to see a Reed Bunting or perhaps a Linnet, but then it dipped its tail, which is not a feature of those species. To my surprise it was a female Stonechat, a new bird for me for on this site.

As I continued my loop round, the sun was now behind me, and when a Green Woodpecker flew in its undulating pattern in front, I was able to see its colourful red and green plumage in excellent light. A gentle rain shower swept across, followed by another sunny period, resulting in a rainbow

arching across the sky, framing the hedgerow trees, which were now showing their autumnal colours. It was a beautiful scene.

My return route took me back past the lake, which, once quiet, now had a raucous collection of Crows and Jackdaws squawking overhead, with a Grey Heron joining in with its harsh call. Through the trees I could also see a Little Egret. By the time I got clear views of the lake, the pandemonium had died down. The heron had left and three Cormorants were swimming; might they have been the cause of the rumpus? The Little Egret was now engaged in a victory fly-past, perhaps having seen off its larger cousin. Its brilliant white plumage, black legs and bright yellow feet contrasted beautifully with the dark lake water.

I counted 32 species, which is good for this time of year, making it a walk that will last long in the memory.

Charles Trollope 240821 cetetal@btinternet.com

above: Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, male, *Dryobates minor*; below: Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, female,

Dryobates minor

Illustrations: Stephen Message www.message-wildlife-art.co.uk

## On the record

### Fishing through music past

It was during an impromptu chat at the café that Peter Massey, great friend of this magazine, revealed that a well-known veteran American guitarist was staying with friends in the village while on tour. It was Barry Melton, he said, and I almost choked on my Bakewell tart.

"It's funny you should mention it," I replied. I'd been rummaging through my record collection a while earlier and onto the turntable popped my original 1967 vinyl copy of the aforementioned Mr Melton playing guitar with Country Joe and the Fish on the album I-Feel-Like-I'm-Fixin'-To-Die.

It was recorded shortly after they'd played Monterey Pop with Jimi Hendrix and The Who (among others) and a couple of years before they played Woodstock, and it was a bit weird: a kind



of psychedelic folk-rock vibe with a sense of humour and a social conscience (the Feel-Like-l'm-Fixin'-To-Die Rag became one of the great anti-war protests of the Vietnam era), underpinned by Melton's dreamy and

mystical guitar work (notably on Pat's Song and Eastern Jam).

It reminded me of trawling through the racks at Honest John's and Cheapo Cheapo, two of Soho's finest second-hand record shops on 'educational' school trips to London. I scratched the price tag off at some stage, but I'd guess it cost me the princely sum of £1.50, and although

it sat unplayed for a couple of decades, it's still in great nick and stands up very well, 55 years on.

Anyway, Peter and I decided it might be a good idea to involve the village in a little musical crosspollination, so if you have a favourite album gnawing away in your ear, or even a single, and you'd like to tell us what it is and why, please email us at benendenparishmagazine@gmail.com. "Don't save it for your funeral," as he so neatly puts it.

To start the ball rolling, here are a few early contributions, including Peter's own.

Peter Massey
COWGIRL ON THE
SAND by CROSBY,
STILLS, NASH &
YOUNG (From 4 WAY
STREET, 1971)

My favourite track, Cowgirl on the Sand, introduced me to this



album. It was strummed by a French lad on the beach south of Bordeaux, whilst I was touring France and Spain with a Transit van load of school mates. It's a Neil Young classic from what was the first supergroup, each having been stars in their own right before forming. Try it.

Hannah Sampson (18), just off to Manchester Uni, and mum Antonia GIMME! GIMME! GIMME! (A MAN AFTER MIDNIGHT) by ABBA (From ABBA GREATEST HITS VOL.2, 1979)

Hannah: This song is my favourite and my mum's as we love to listen as we cook and dance





together. It's always a song to cheer up my mood!
Antonia: My parents bought me the Abba album when I was II and I've been a raging fan ever since!

Tim Maw (40-something) owner of Frame Farm wedding venue THE DOORS by THE DOORS (1967)

I listened to this endlessly through my college days when responsibilities were few and conforming to 1990 seemed mundane. The lyrics are thought provoking and although I was oblivious at the time, it is often hailed as the greatest debut album ever recorded. I had this

blaring out of my Volkswagen beach buggy during Run to the Sun, the mass convoy of V-dubs on the annual pilgrimage to Newquay; everyone else was listening to Nirvana.



Diccon Gray
ONCE IN A LIFETIME by TALKING HEADS
(From REMAIN IN THE LIGHT, 1980)

My favourite song brings back fond memories of college days: Once in a Lifetime by Talking Heads. It was 1980 and I was a fresh-faced, 'green behind the ears' young lad all the way from Millom, Cumbria, ready to embark on

my Human Movement Studies degree (a posh name for the forerunner of sports science/studies courses) at the magnificent and life changing Nonington College of Physical Education between Canterbury and Dover.

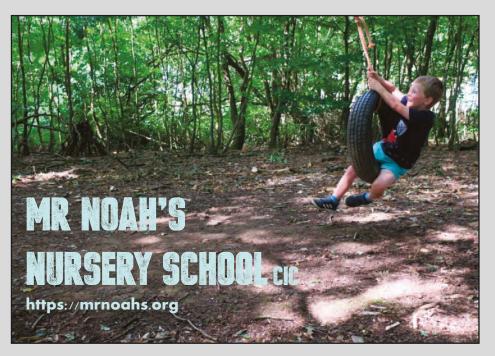
As the college campus was compact, yet with all sports facilities on site, splendid

buildings (not too dissimilar to the Benenden Girls' School main building) and gardens, I, unlike most students, lived all three years on campus and was a frequent user of the facilities: swimming



pool, gym, sports hall, occasional library visit, canteen of course and often the bar and Student Union. In fact it was only the famous 'listed' Swedish dance theatre that I didn't frequent ex-curricula!

The basic Student Union acted as a meeting area, really, with notice boards and one small hatch that served as a parttime shop that, as I remember, only sold sandwiches, pop and news (surely it had other items?). The Union was open long hours into the night with no-one in it. It had a jukebox, and seemingly it's default free record was Once in a Lifetime. Many a time, especially Friday night, I would pop by to check the football team sheet to see if I had been selected, and out of the blue, quite eerily, this song would pipe up.





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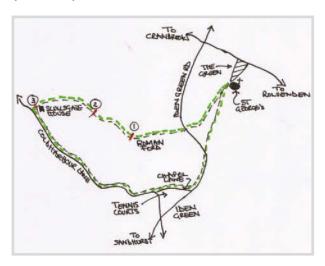
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## Parish Walks

# Discover a beautiful hidden valley

WALK 4: A CIRCULAR ROUTE VIA HILLY FIELDS, STREAM FARM, SCULLSGATE, COLDHARBOUR LANE AND IDEN GREEN (1-1.5hrs)



#### LET'S GO WALKING

From St George's church walk right, around to the back and enter Hilly Fields by the wide metal gate at the side. Cross the donkey field or take a diagonal across the next sheep field. You are heading to the right of the tennis courts and big white house on the hill where Steptoe actor Harry H Corbett used to live.

You pass through a gateway and drop through a short field to cross the Iden Green Road. There's a stile deep in the hedge across the road which drops into a green lane. In the brambles to your right is the quarry for the stone which rebuilt St George's church at a cost of £3,920 after lightning hit in 1672. At the bottom of this steep path there are two gates, which drop you slightly left into the Roman ford which crosses the stream. An old milestone is hidden in the undergrowth, which marks the boundary of three governmental areas, or hundreds, through Saxon, Medieval and later times.

Off to your right through a different gate is the Roman road up to Benenden School, its path clearly visible in the hollow between the trees to the left of the modern path.

But keep following the signposted footpath

through a gate after the ford, which keeps the hedge of Stream Farm to your right. You then hop over a stile on your right and continue between the hedge and the fence, alongside a horse field. (Fig. I) This route takes you through



several gates and Jocelyn's sheep fields along the bottom of a beautiful and peaceful valley, away

from any roads. (Fig.2). Just keep following the valley until you come to a double gate and short path behind Scullsgate Oast and House (Fig.3). It brings you out





onto a small

lane where you turn left with the stone barn wall on your left.

After 100m or so you join Coldharbour Lane.
Go left and continue on it

some distance, past Sarnden Farm and steeply uphill back to Iden Green, with views over the valley you just walked.

At the back of the tennis courts, when the road turns sharp right, go straight on and you're on Chapel Lane. This leads you through a cut through onto Iden Green Road, where you cross and turn left to follow the path towards Benenden. Go through the gate when the footpath runs out and you're now walking back up the steep path to the church through Hilly Fields.

This route includes quite a lot of roadway on Coldharbour Lane but it's worth it to experience the valley hidden below the Cranbrook Road ridge and the Roman Ford. Peter Massey

## In Your Garden

# Nature's magical power to calm a troubled mind

I had a long overdue catch-up recently with a gardening friend. Seven years ago, I was looking for a like-minded soul to take over a garden from me. My friend was not professionally trained but had gardened at home for some time and I could tell she was the man for the job.

To further her skill set she shadowed me in a large woodland garden and we went on to become firm gardening buddies. Fast-forward seven years and over a glitzy cocktail or two she told me she was now struggling with her approach to working alone and found it difficult to muster the enthusiasm required to get herself to work on cold, rainy mornings into muddy, damp gardens.

In recent conditions that could only be described as 'swampy', each day she would go through two sets of gloves, socks, boots and hats as each got soaked through, and she found

drying-off each night a chore she dreaded. She told me she regularly plugs into a podcast whilst she works through the borders, as she doesn't like to feel alone with her thoughts. Oddly, whenever we partner up on a planting project, you would never guess she struggled on her own as she is great company (her previous career as an air hostess for Virgin Atlantic would give a clue to her fun and

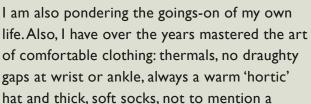
thoughtful manner).

We then discussed how I approached a working life outdoors and it occurred to me that I have rarely suffered in the same way. I cannot remember the last time I did not want to go to work in the cold, mud and rain, picking my way through a to-do list of bulb planting, leaf sweeping and rose-pruning as autumn turns to winter. I like to listen to the

many garden noises, birds being the obvious ones, but also the sound of grasses swooshing, rain falling, weeds being pulled, wood fires crackling.

To be plugged into a podcast would detach me from my own thoughts at a time when I do most of my thinking.

Not only will I be plotting my garden to-do list as I go but



durable layer of waterproofs, top and bottom, to keep out drafts and the wet. With my steel toecap safety boots to protect my feet from accidental damage, I can plough on with my work, safe in the knowledge I am comfortable, protected and warm.

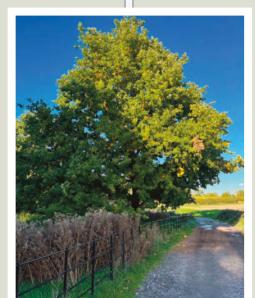
I realise I now garden professionally, without question, day in, day out, and I feel blessed to have found this sense of being. It is a

troubled mind that cannot be calmed by the natural world, its inhabitants and its weather patterns, so I hear my dear friend on this. Yet I remain content for being deeply connected to the gifts offered by our outdoor world and will always spare a thought for those who are not.

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Above: Marking village life: A trio of wine experts at the Tracy Claridge Memorial wine tasting evening in Benenden School café; the primary school girls' football team; paying respects at the village War Memorial on Armistice Day; Kathy Howard at the Nursing Times Awards; Benenden Hospital recruitment event and Best of Benenden Awards Front cover: Catching the early frost. Photograph: Ruth Clark