

Benenden Magazine

March 2023





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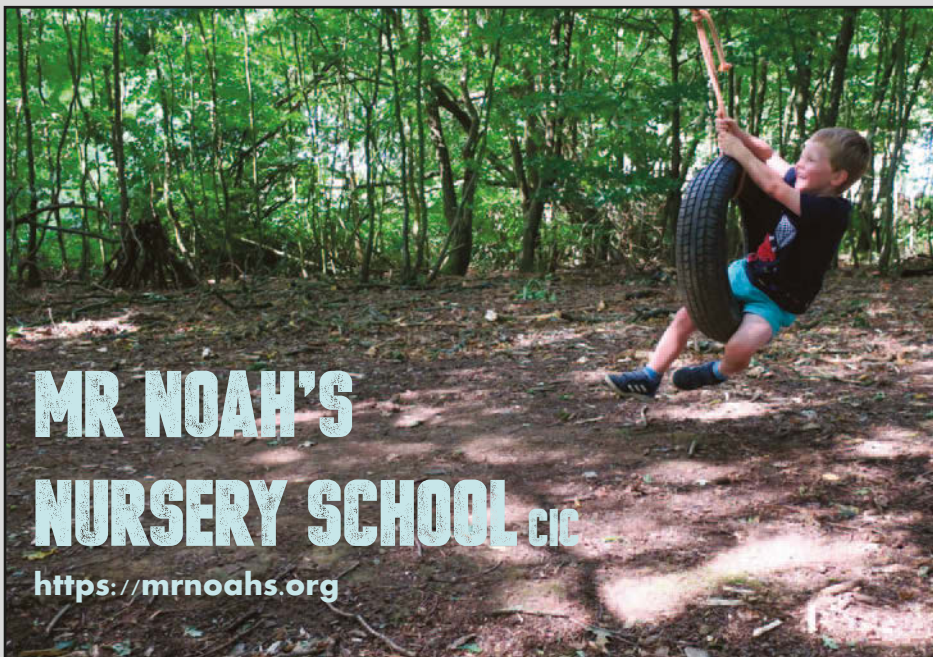
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Editorial



Regular readers will know that my co-editor Peter and I share editorial writing duties. Consequently, every other month I can be found strolling through the woods with the dog, hoping that the muse will descend. The fact that Peter is a pukka award-winning journalist in his professional life is not at all daunting (I lie!). I tend to draw inspiration from the news and articles in the magazine, invariably weaving a logical path through them and with the hope of encouraging you to delve further through the rest of the issue.

I thought I had found a way to 'cheat' the process this month by asking the artificial intelligence software application ChatGPT to write the editorial for me. Peter Massey admits a large part of the article on AI he 'wrote' on page 31 was generated by ChatGPT so I thought: job done! I asked it to write an inspiring editorial for me and it swiftly replied: "Editorials can be one of the most rewarding aspects of being a journalist - provided, of course, that you've got something to say!" That put me firmly in my place, but, of course, as those who know will agree, I usually do have 'something to say'!

Which is - how wonderful that the considerable funds raised by the Benenden Bonfire Society are directly benefiting schools and clubs for young and old in the village and close by (page 23). The committee are now looking for a new chair to step into Grant Matthew's sturdy boots to carry the flame forward and time is running out. No chair, no bonfire, no funds.

Finally, when I recently told someone I was working with in a local village that I had to take five minutes out to respond to an email about this magazine they said: "But it's only a village magazine". I was quite unprepared for my reaction, something along the lines of: "It's not any old village magazine, it's the Benenden Magazine." He was amazed that so many contribute to it, that it's monthly and freely distributed to villagers. So, fresh from winning the nation's 'second-best' village magazine and best editor, the bit is firmly between our teeth to keep standards high.

Ruth Clark, Co-Editor

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

Editors: Ruth Clark, Peter Thomas

Editorial Board: PCC Rep: Martin Pexton, PC Rep: Nicola Thomas,

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Distribution: Marilyn and Dick Hill, Layout Editor: Camilla Macdonald

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Village Calendar

March

Wednesday 1	In His Service, Lent Course starts, Mission Church, Sandhurst, 7.30pm	p.13
Saturday 4	Churchyard Working Party, St George's, Benenden, 9.30-12noon	
Saturday 4	Cornhole Tossing, St George's Club, 8.15pm	
Saturday 11	Quoits, St George's Club, 8.15pm	
Tuesday 14	Mobile Library, bus stop outside Benenden Village Hall, 10-10.30am	
Tuesday 14	Mobile Library, Benenden Hospital, 10.40-11.10am	
Saturday 18	Spring Village Clean, Benenden's Community Shop, 9am	p.3
Saturday 18	Benenden Bowls Club, Coffee Morning, Memorial Hall, 10am	
Saturday 18	The Wealden Consort, St George's, Benenden, 7.30pm	p.9
Saturday 18	Quiz Night, St George's Club, 8.15pm	
Monday 20	Parish Council Meeting, Memorial Hall, 7pm	
Tuesday 21	Village Lunch, Benenden Village Hall, 12.30pm	p.21
Tuesday 21	Iden Green and Benenden WI, Bringing up Baby the Victorian Way, Memorial Hall, 2pm	p.13
Friday 24	Wines from Burgundy, Benenden School Café, 7pm	p.33
Saturday 25	London Film Music Orchestra, Benenden School Centenary Hall, 3pm and 6.15pm	p.11
Saturday 25	Bingo, St George's Club, 8.15pm	
Tuesday 28	Mobile Library, bus stop outside Benenden Village Hall, 10-10.30am	
Tuesday 28	Mobile Library, Benenden Hospital, 10.40-11.10am	
Tuesday 28	Merry and Bright, Talk and Victorian Tea, Memorial Hall, 2pm	p.12

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: Café and Toddler Group

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

Warm Welcome Space

Fridays and Sundays in the Memorial Hall, 1-3pm

Parish Council



I understand that some of you attended the Esquire Developments consultation held in February in the Memorial Hall, regarding their proposed development of the former Benenden Hospital sites at East End. As this was a consultation organised by, and solely for the benefit of, Esquire Developments, the parish council agreed it would not be appropriate to promote it on behalf of a developer that is currently proposing a housing scheme for the sites at East End that does not comply with Benenden Neighbourhood Development Plan policies.

You can view details of the consultation on the Esquire Developments website here: www.consult-esquire.com/consultations/former-benenden-hospital-benenden, but before you do so, please read our statement issued in response to this proposal, which can be found on our website here: www.benendenparishcouncil.org/content/parish-council-response-esquire-developments-hospital-development-proposal. We have forwarded this statement to Esquire Developments, and we also handed this out to attendees at the consultation.

Please be assured that the parish council continues to work extremely hard in order to achieve the best possible development for these sensitive sites at East End.

Moving into spring, our next village clean-up has been organised for Saturday 18 March. Please come along to the village shop at 9am to register your assistance and get the safety kit required, and we look forward to seeing as many volunteers as possible to keep our village looking clean and beautiful.

We are also moving forward with the new facilities required for our public toilets. We have held an initial site meeting with a specialist contractor, and they have advised that only a small proportion of the existing building would be used for the upgraded facilities, with access only at the front of the building. This leaves a substantial area of the building that could be used for other purposes for the village, so please do let us know if you have any bright ideas. We will also be requiring quotations from local builders for the work required, so please register your interest with Caroline, our clerk.

Nicola Thomas, BPC Chair
nicolat@benendenparishcouncil.org

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

Parish Council Meeting
Monday 20 March 2023,
Memorial Hall, 7pm



Church Calendar

St George's Church

Rector: Revd David Commander 240658 revdavidcommander@gmail.com (day off: Thursday)
Curate: Revd Ylva Blid-Mackenzie 01233 820100 rev.ylva@gmail.com (Sunday, Monday and Tuesday)
Churchwarden: David Collard 241944 julia.collard@btinternet.com
Churchwarden: Sue Fisher 241907 sue@undaunted.co.uk
www.benendenchurch.org 850849 benendenchurch@gmail.com
Please inform the Rector, Curate or Churchwardens if you, or anyone else, is ill.

Sunday 5 March	8am Communion	10am All-age Communion	5pm Choral Evensong *
Sunday 12 March	8am BCP Communion	10am Morning Worship	
Sunday 19 March	8am Communion	10am Mothering Sunday Service with Communion	
Saturday 25 March			4pm Connect Four at Mission Church, Sandhurst
Sunday 26 March	8am Communion	10am Communion at St Nicholas, Sandhurst with Bishop Rose Hudson-Wilkins	

Morning Prayer 8am Mondays and Fridays
* Service will include Revd David's commissioning as the next Area Dean of The Weald Deanery

Mission Church, Sandhurst

Rector: Revd David Commander 240658 revdavidcommander@gmail.com (day off: Thursday)
Morning Prayer 8am Tuesdays and Wednesdays
Mid-week Communion 10am Tuesdays

Iden Green Congregational Church

Pastor: Tobin Bird 240027 www.idengreen.org.uk
Sunday Services 10am Morning Worship 5.30pm Evening Worship
The 10am Morning Worship is broadcast on our YouTube channel: search 'Iden Green Congregational Church'.

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

Fr Barry Grant 713364 www.sttheodore-cranbrook.org
Masses 9am Sundays 7.30pm Holy Days

From the Parish Registers

Funerals 8 February Iain Thomson Memorial Service
22 February Barbara Sheffield Funeral and burial

Church Letter



Things are happening - but I'm not planning going anywhere

There are some unusual and exciting things happening within our parishes this month. Firstly, some of you may have heard the rumours that my job is changing - and some are jumping to the conclusion that means I am leaving. My role is changing, in that I am taking on something new, but Helen and I are definitely not leaving - our parish ministry continues. On Sunday 5 March, in the 5pm service at St George's, I am being commissioned as the next Area Dean for the Weald Deanery by our Archdeacon. (When I know what the role involves, I'll let you know!) If you can be at the service, it would be lovely to see you. As an incentive, there will be wine and nibbles after the service.

Secondly, on Sunday 26 March, Bishop Rose Hudson-Wilkins, the Bishop of Dover, will be preaching and presiding at the 10am service at St Nicholas Church in Sandhurst. The reason for her coming to the church is to consecrate the churchyard extension and the new Garden of Remembrance. It will be an opportunity to hear the Bishop preach and to meet and speak with her after the service. The service will be a benefice service; there will not be a 10am service at St George's.

We are also entering the period of Lent in the church year. (Not that that is unusual!) Lent begins on Ash Wednesday 22 February. There is a service in St George's that evening, at 7.30pm. This Lent, for our course, we will be exploring the liturgy of the Eucharist service, entitled 'In His Service'. (We're unpacking the familiar, and discussing what the words and actions of the communion service mean to each of us.) We are meeting in the Mission Church at 7.30pm on the Wednesdays throughout March; we culminate with communion together on Maundy Thursday at St George's.

On Saturday 25 February, we are holding our next 'Connect Four' service (4pm on the fourth Saturday of the month). It's a very informal service for all the family. Come along and give it a try. We meet in the Mission Church, Back Road, in Sandhurst. As an incentive to come along to this one, we are having pancakes, as the Tuesday before is Shrove Tuesday.

Finally, I want to say a thank you to the 50 or so people who came along to the open meeting chaired by Stephen Taylor (our Diocesan Secretary) to hear people's thoughts about the future of St George's Church. I was delighted at the openness of everyone and the positive manner in which people expressed their views, their concerns, and their wishes. Following this, I have invited our church architect and a heating engineer consultant to present and explain the various options concerning the energy source, the heating, and the insulation (i.e. heat-loss issues) of the church to the Parochial Church Council. This will include ball-park costings, the disruption, and the effect of the options upon the environment. We will keep you abreast of the progress of this project.

Revd David Commander, Rector

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Commission

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vote at a
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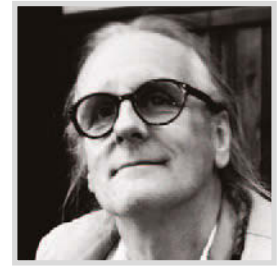
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Talking Point



You now need to prove your identity to vote - but why?

On 7 December 1950, Harry Willcock was stopped in his car by PC Harold Muckle, who asked Mr Willcock to produce his National Registration Identity Card. He refused to do so. Mr Willcock won the subsequent court case, causing Winston Churchill to declare the result would “set the people free”. In 1952 the ID card was scrapped and Britons have been suspicious of them ever since. We’re pretty sanguine, though, about giving personal details to anyone who has a right (endowed by ourselves or by an Act of Parliament) to request them; but equally confident in denying them to those who do not.

We accept that we need our driving licence when we drive and our passport when we travel abroad, and we acknowledge a secondary benefit in that they can be used for ID in other contexts. Furthermore, for those without a passport or driving licence, there is a plethora of personal documents that can be used for identification (although often more than one will be required).

Proving who we are is not difficult. So, it may surprise you to learn that in the May elections, all voters must produce, not a polling card - which has been sufficient until now - but a photo ID. Your driving licence or passport will do, but none of the other usual forms of ID will be accepted. You may, though, want to ensure that your driving licence or passport bears the same name as appears on the electoral register - not always the case, following marriage or divorce, for example. If it doesn’t, you will be turned away.

Are you one of the 11,000,000 registered to vote who have neither passport nor driving licence? You can apply for a free Voter Authority Certificate; but do so by 25 April, or it will be too late.

So why are we being forced to do this? Is there a massive problem with voter fraud? Actually, no. In fact, the Electoral Reform Society has concluded that “voting is safe and secure in Britain”. In 2019, for example, of the approximately 58,000,000 votes cast, only 34 cases of ‘in person’ voting fraud were detected. This, I’m reliably informed, means that somewhere in the region of 0.000006% or 1 in 1,705,882 of the voting public attempted fraud at the polls! If we accept that the incidence of voter fraud is vanishingly small, what other reason could there possibly be?

Electoral Commission research on other countries has shown that voter ‘reforms’ tend to be inspired by “partisan interests” and that “age, race, and income significantly impact the likelihood of having appropriate identification”. In the US, changes to voting procedure have “reduced voter participation”. The research concluded that this was “disproportionately high amongst racial and ethnic minority groups, as well as those from lower-income groups and with fewer educational qualifications”. It seems almost certain that the take-up of photo ID will be by no means universal and will be particularly low amongst certain groups of already disadvantaged voters.

One feels bound to ask: Cui bono? Who stands to gain?

Russell Cruse

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David Commander becomes Area Dean

In a special choral evensong service at 5pm on 5 March in St George's Church, Revd David Commander will be commissioned as the new Area Dean by the Ven Andrew Sewell, Archdeacon of Maidstone. Bell ringers from across the Deanery have been invited to ring before the service, as well as choir members to augment the St George's choir. Refreshments will be available after the service.

New Iden Green sign

Twenty-three years ago, the Pavilion Trust paid for a village sign to mark the dawn of the new millennium. On the evening of 31 December 1999, a party was in full swing at the Woodcock Inn, but before the chimes of midnight, the pub emptied and the crowd set off, with flaming torches to light their way, along Woodcock Lane, up Standen Street and along Iden Green Road to a point close to the congregational church where the signpost was positioned.

It was an unruly procession, and the burning torches recalled a riotous witch-hunt from the Middle Ages. Some of the burning oil cloths had fallen onto the road and the tarmac was ablaze, causing the few vehicles that had planned on driving through the village to consider a detour. The blazing road was quickly extinguished, the sign unveiled to loud applause, we wished each other Happy New Millennium and we all adjourned to the recreation field for a (planned) bonfire and fireworks.

Fast forward to February 2022 and the sign, having been refurbished once and re-located nearer the pavilion, became a casualty of Storm Eunice, damaged beyond repair. Now, a year later, a new sign with a new image, beautifully painted by Stephen Message, has been erected (see back cover).

Whenever you pass the sign, you may recall the antics of the villagers on that evening 23 years ago.

Bill Lewis



A Concert of
Spring Music
to include
Haydn's
Little Organ Mass

on Saturday 18 March 2023
at 7.30pm
in St George's Church, Benenden

The concert is being held in support of
Friends of St George's

Tickets £15 to include interval refreshments,
available from Benenden's Community Shop
or at the door

The Wealden Consort

On Saturday 18 March at 7.30pm there will be a concert of spring music in the church, in aid of the Friends of St George's. The Wealden Consort will perform a varied programme, including Bach's 'Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring' and Haydn's 'Little Organ Mass'. The theme of the second half will be for Britain and St George and will feature lighter music, including some English folk songs.

The Wealden Consort is a long-established choir, based in Cranbrook, which has about 25 mixed voices. Its Musical Director, Cornelis Taekema, who was born and studied music in the Netherlands, is a distinguished organist and has conducted the choir for the last 20 years.

This will undoubtedly be a great evening and will raise money for a good cause. Tickets are £15 and include a drink and nibbles during the interval. We look forward to seeing you there.
Martin Pexton, Chairman, Friends of St George's

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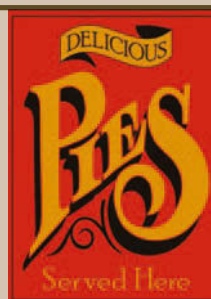
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The Saturday Telegraph Travel Section January 2023

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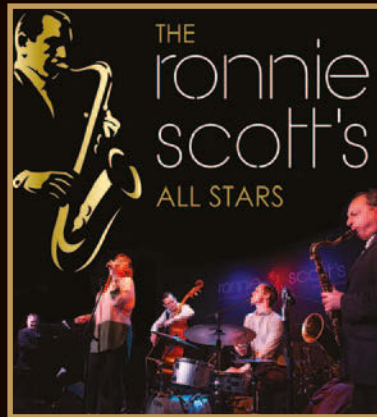
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Friday 26 May



Stringfever
Saturday 3 June



BBC Big Band
Sunday 25 June

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Benenden School

During a busy and varied few weeks, it was pleasing to see the Upper Fifth and Six Two putting so much effort into their mock exams, which have highlighted areas that students need to focus on between now and the public exams in the summer. Staying with academic matters, it was lovely to receive an accolade from the Education Advisors Ltd in recognition of our outstanding GCSE results - very well done, again, to the current Six One on their achievements in the summer.

I am very proud of the students who put on the ACE (A Complete Education) Talks event on the evening before half term. Featuring external speakers as well as some student speakers, topics covered imperialism, mediation, authorship, democracy and the metaverse, with plenty more in between. It was an incredibly impressive evening so well done to all those involved.

It was delightful to welcome the Memory Lane Café, which supports local individuals living with dementia, to the Centenary Buildings, where they enjoyed refreshments and music, courtesy of some stunning performances from students.

We are also looking forward to welcoming members of the public to these beautiful new buildings in the coming weeks as we unveil our first season's programme of commercial events, operating under the Hemsted Park brand. There are some superb professional performers scheduled and we would be delighted to see our friends from the village at some of these events; full details are at www.hemstedpark.com.

Meanwhile, our Upper Fourths may not be professionals but they were incredibly impressive in their production last week. Their performance of Ernie's Incredible Illusions by Alan Ayckbourn was delightful and very funny indeed. Parents, staff, students and children from nearby prep schools were certainly entertained.

Samantha Price, Headmistress

Merry and Bright

Our 2023 club is now up and running with a new committee: Laraine Penny is chair, Julia Collard is secretary, David Collard is treasurer and Glenda Marshall and Sandra and Steve West are committee members. We thank Bonny Sullivan and Joan Hagens for all the hard work they put into keeping the club going in the past. Without them the club would not exist today.

We meet every fourth Tuesday of the month from 2-4pm in the Memorial Hall and all are welcome. Our first meeting is on Tuesday 28 February where there will be a quiz and full afternoon tea. On 28 March we will be treated to a talk and Victorian tea.

Laraine Penny 241763

Julia Collard julia.collard@btinternet.com

Parent, Teacher and Friends Association

World Book Day is on 2 March and the PTFA is organising a book sale on 3 March for the children to swap and shop for new books to take home and read. We have received some lovely donations from our parents and we hope everyone enjoys their new books.

We will soon be hopping into Easter and the PTFA is planning an egg hunt and event for the children to celebrate. Our ongoing fundraising collaboration with the Co-op is going well, with £120 so far. If you are a Co-op member please do select Benenden Primary as your cause for this year.

We have now finalised the design of the well-being garden and all fundraising efforts are underway to begin phase one of this project in the summer holidays. If you would like to support this worthwhile cause, you can do so by donating on our JustGiving page www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/benenden-primarieschoolwellbeinggarden or scan this QR code.

Rachel Tinker, Benenden CEP,
PTFA Chair

www.benenden-cep.kent.sch.uk/PTFA/



The Lent course

This Lent we are looking to grow in our understanding of the 'liturgy', the pattern of our worship offered day by day and week by week 'in His service'. Many of us are so familiar with the words of our church services that we are in danger of reciting them without really thinking much about what we are hearing and saying. Others, new to church, may find parts of the service quite hard to understand. 'Liturgy' actually means 'the work of the people'. Not a spectator event, but something involving us all.

In our Lent course we shall be looking at the service of The Eucharist (Holy Communion, The Lord's Supper), hoping and expecting to discover in the familiar (or unfamiliar) words and actions new springs of meaning and inspiration. As we share our understanding, thoughts and experiences, we look to grow in His service. See the adjacent advert for details of when and where the course will take place.
Revd Rosemary Kobus van Wengen

Iden Green and Benenden WI

Although January appeared to be a quiet month, there was a lot of planning going on in the background and our committee met at The Peacock to discuss future activities. Many thanks go to Val who, yet again, has produced a superb programme of events to entertain us.

At our February meeting we learnt a great deal about the origins and growth of plastic use and how waste management is causing an environmental disaster. It's the big businesses who are the main culprits. We need to encourage the innovative use of paper, starch, seaweed, community composting and the introduction of a new bottle disposal system.

We look forward to meeting on 21 March when Anna Astin will talk about 'Bringing up Baby the Victorian Way'. Our first outing of the year is planned for 13 April when we shall be visiting The Castle Inn.

Jackie Liffen 752232 WI@daisystar.co.uk



Benenden Pre-School

Pre-School is delighted that it has been awarded funding from the Benenden Bonfire Society. The children really get stuck in to making the guy for the bonfire each year (especially the sticky papier-mâché). The generous donation will specifically enable the children to continue to enjoy weekly yoga classes and fortnightly Sporty Tots sessions throughout the summer term 2023.

Both these activities offer huge benefits for pre-school children in terms of well-being and physical development, which in turn impacts on cognitive development. Children's confidence and self-acceptance is boosted, in addition to skills such as listening, focus, hand-eye coordination and balancing. The skill of balancing alone is fundamental to children's development. Balance supports children's concentration and body control, and research shows that it plays a role in developing communication, reading and writing skills.

Thank you Benenden Bonfire Society for supporting our outstanding village pre-school.
Lucy Oakley, Supervisor
supervisor@benendenpreschool.co.uk

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Primary School

Reflecting back on last term, it was another very busy and purposeful one. I was delighted to be able to join Year 6 on their residential trip to Bowles in Tunbridge Wells, where the children weren't fazed by the wintery weather. On the contrary, they were fully engaged in their activities and demonstrated all our school values - curiosity, courage, compassion and commitment.

At the end of January, Years 4, 5 and 6 all took part in Change4Life workshops run by TWKSSP. They were learning about the lifelong benefits of activity, exercise and making good choices with food. Years 5 and 6 even made their own smoothies using the smoothie bikes. At the beginning of February, 45 children from across our federation journeyed to London to take part in the Young Voices concert at the O2, in which 9,099 children were involved. Well done to all our children for being impeccably behaved and for showing the values of courage for performing and commitment.

Another highlight of term 3 was our Christingle Service held in St George's Church. The service was planned and run by the Seekers club, and they did an amazing job of bringing the Christingle to life. Amazing singing too - as always.

As we approached half term, we celebrated Mental Health Week. The children took part in a range of activities around the theme of 'Let's Connect' encouraging the children to explore how they can nurture meaningful connections in their lives to support their mental health and wellbeing. All classes also took part in a live 'YogaBugs' yoga session with schools from all over the country, as well as mini mindfulness sessions. On the last day of the term, all children came in dressed for 'Wear your scarf to school day', celebrating the SCARF values that promote children's health and wellbeing: Safety, Caring, Achievement, Resilience and Friendship.

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

While working in Benenden's café this week on three different shifts, I was gratified to observe the diverse nature of customers who visit and who create such a pleasingly varied experience for those of us who work there. There are the early morning workers in desperate need of a good strong coffee to wake them up; the chirpy builders who stock up on hot pastries or bacon rolls for breakfast; the groups of friends who meet for coffee and cake and put the world to rights; and of course our treasured regulars whose requirements are often catered for before they even sit down!

What they all have in common is the desire for a friendly welcome and buying a good product. We do our absolute best to provide both and we would like to thank all our patrons for their custom. Thanks to you, Benenden's continues to fare well and long may it last.

Hopefully as we enter March, we will be past the worst of the winter ailments but we ask that you bear with us if staff illness means that we sometimes have to close the café earlier. This will only ever be done when there is no other option. More volunteers have come forward for café training recently and we are delighted to welcome them. Please do keep coming and signing up for sessions.

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Are you the enthusiastic, efficient and forward-thinking person we are looking for to manage, promote and expand the use of our popular, lively village hall?

The jobholder will be based at the village hall, where an office will be provided, but with some flexibility to carry out some tasks from home.

Our ideal applicant will be self-motivated with good communication skills, and will enjoy interacting with hall users and attracting new hirers.

The role includes hall administration - bookings, enquiries, marketing and preparing simple accounts. These duties require the ability to use a computer. The job also involves caretaking duties around the hall including simple day to day maintenance, as well as supervision of our part-time cleaner. Priorities change from day to day, and the job requires both flexibility and initiative.

Hours: 20 per week (this is a new role and the hours will be reviewed after 3 months)

Salary: Negotiable plus contributory pension scheme
Training will be given in various aspects of the hall's operation.
For further information email bvtrust@gmail.com

Calling potential scouts

While there is no scout group in Benenden, the Sissinghurst Scouts Group is just up the road and we welcome new members - of any gender - with open arms.

Scouts are 'do-ers' and 'give-it-a-go-ers'. Yes, we go camping, hiking, climbing, abseiling, cycling and canoeing, but we also get to hang out with our friends every week, having fun, playing games, working in a team and taking on new challenges. Every week we help to give youngsters the skills they need for school, college, university, the job interview, the important speech, the tricky challenge and the big dreams: the skills they need for life. 'Squirrels' is for those aged four to six years; 'Beavers' is for six to eight-year-olds; 'Cubs' is for eight to 10½-year-olds; 'Scouts' is for 10½ to 14 years; and 'Explorers' for 14 to 18-year-olds.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the Benenden Bonfire Society for their generous donation to the Sissinghurst Scouts Group, and our New Explorer unit that was set up in September last year. This will make a huge difference to the activities we are able to offer our young members.

Sign up to help your child to discover their 'thing': from climbing to coding to performance art and everything in between. Please contact us and come along for a taster one evening.

Alex Dawes, Group Scout Leader
sissinghurstgsl@gmail.com

Village hall manager vacancy

We are seeking an enthusiastic and efficient person to manage, promote and expand the use of our village hall. Working 20 hours per week, the role includes handling bookings, marketing, simple accounts and basic caretaking duties.

For full details see page 16.



Ronald Kellett and 303 Squadron

Many people in Benenden have heard of Wing Commander Ronald Kellett, who formed and led 303 (Polish) Squadron during the Battle of Britain and who is buried in our churchyard. However, there are many newcomers to the village and some may wonder about the man behind the memorial on the south wall of the church in the shape of a Hurricane's wing.

On Monday 17 April at 7.30pm there will be a talk in St George's church about Ronald Kellett and the squadron, so if you are interested in finding out more, please make a note in your diary. Despite only becoming operational at the end of August 1940, 303 was the most successful RAF squadron during the battle and had a huge impact. Commander-in-Chief of Fighter Command, Sir Hugh Dowding, said afterwards: "Had it not been for the magnificent work of the Polish squadrons and their unsurpassed gallantry, I hesitate to say that the outcome of the battle would have been the same."

The talk will start after the Friends of St George's AGM. All are welcome.
Martin Pexton, Chairman, Friends of St George's

Benenden Hospital

I'm pleased to share the achievements of our sustainability strategy. It aims to limit the impact our private hospital has on the surrounding environment and people, which includes Benenden village, my hometown.

We've paid particular focus to our lighting action plan, which seeks to reduce costs and light pollution, as well as supporting the local dark skies initiative. I'm happy to say our atrium now has a night-time lighting setting, which has significantly minimised the amount of light pollution our hospital emits overnight.

Our food and drink project supports good health and wellbeing, and our catering team are continuing to strive for the procurement of sustainable produce from local food suppliers wherever possible. We currently use David Catt & Sons, a farm in Maidstone, for our fresh fruit, veg and salad; our Korkers sausages are from Rolvenden; our wholesale products come from Bidfood in Paddock Wood, who have a strong sustainability strategy; and all our coffee is from Fairtrade in Medway, as they have ethical measures in place.

Cleverly compacting our waste has resulted in a 50% reduction in collections, which I'm delighted to say has significantly cut down on unnecessary heavy goods vehicle journeys. While it was bittersweet when we ended our transportation service, which worked hard for years to deliver patients to and from Headcorn Station, we now have a fully electric internal transport fleet.

Our wildflower meadow, which used to be an old overflow car park, was officially opened on 2 September 2022 by MP Damian Green. This, along with our garden, Edna's Retreat, encourages wildlife to flourish within our hospital grounds and promotes calm for all.

I'm excited and proud to see our private hospital continue to evolve sustainably and always with the local community and patients at the heart of what we do.

Jane Abbott, Hospital Director and Chief Nurse

Topical health

World Sleep Day on 17 March is a day to consider the health and wellbeing benefits of sleep. Many of us are aware that we function less well when we are tired, but few of us appreciate that under-sleeping by about two hours a night for a fortnight is equivalent to losing two full nights' sleep.

Research shows that seven to nine hours' sleep every day is the optimum for good health. Lack of sleep is associated with a decreased attention span, poorer memory and a slower speed of processing ideas. This puts people at an increased risk of accidents and is one of the reasons why professional drivers face working time restrictions. Some studies from the USA suggest poor sleep increases the experience of pain in people with a knee or hip replacement. Poor sleeping patterns are also associated with conditions such as obesity and therefore diseases such as diabetes, high blood pressure and even cardiovascular disease.

Insomnia is also associated with an increased prevalence of depression and other mood disorders such as anxiety. One study suggests that people who regularly sleep for only around four and a half hours a night are more sad, stressed and angry than the rest of the population.

Some tips for a better night's sleep include sticking to a routine including a regular bedtime, relaxing before bed and avoiding late evening exercise. People who struggle to sleep at night should also not nap during the day. It is always best to try to avoid medications to aid sleeping where possible, with GPs now advised to send people suffering from chronic insomnia for cognitive behavioural therapy or to a sleep clinic first. Whatever you do, you should take sleep at least as seriously as diet and exercise when it comes to promoting your own health and wellbeing.

Peter Ellis

Defibrillator donations

Thank you to the individuals and businesses that have made donations towards a new defibrillator. Due to your generosity, Benenden Players will shortly be buying the device and an external box, which Cranden Diamonds will site outside its main building on Mounts Hill, TN17 4ET, and which will be accessible 24 hours a day. There will then be four defibrillators spread across Benenden, Iden Green and East End.
Peter Ellis

Mental health fund raising

Poor mental health is both a cause and consequence of homelessness. Some 45% of people experiencing homelessness have been diagnosed with a mental health issue. This rises to eight out of ten people who are sleeping rough.

Inspired by the late Tracy Claridge's skill for focussing on the things that can have most impact, a campaign to raise £15,000 to fund a part-time mental health professional at Catching Lives for a year has been started.

Several groups and private individuals in the community have already contributed, including St George's Charity Committee, the Benenden Wine Society, the Memorial Hall Christmas Lunch, Ghost Stories in the Bull and the Benenden Bonfire Society, to name but a few. So far just over £5,000 has been raised. A big thank you to all who have contributed.

Over the coming months we will be asking the many groups within the Benenden community that Tracy helped for their financial support in his memory. Think of it as a community-wide crowd-funding exercise. In the interim, if anyone wishes to donate, please visit www.catchinglives.org and click the 'Donate' button, which will take you to their JustGiving site. Please be sure to put 'In memory of Tracy Claridge' in the message box. All ideas and questions on the campaign are welcome.

Paul Hewitt phewitt1203@gmail.com

BENENDEN VILLAGE FETE

Say goodbye to unwanted and un-needed winter clutter and donate it to the bric-a-brac stall at the village fete

It will be possible to deposit items from early May

If you are moving or downsizing we would love your donations. Bric-a-brac means 'anything' and textiles (tablecloths, cushions, material, vintage clothes)

Arrange earlier collection or storage by calling
Maggy Hoyt 07485 061265
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Table tennis

Benenden's Diccon Gray, a member of the Weald Table Tennis Club, fought his way to the quarter finals of the men's over 60s singles at the World Veteran Championships, held in Muscat, Oman.

After beating a Greek and a German in straight games and then defeating the Iranian Seyed-Ezaz Okhovat Alavian 3-1 in the last 16, the left-handed Gray faced the former Hungarian, Romanian and German international, Zsolt-Georg Bohm, the second seed, who in his earlier career has beaten several of the top players in the world. Gray fell in straight games, though he got close in the third, 8-11. Bohm went on to lift the title, defeating the former Chinese, top-seeded Wang Yan Sheng in the final. He also won the men's over 60s men's doubles with Boris Rosenberg (Germany).

If you would like to play table tennis, then why not take part in the regular Thursday evening sessions 7.30-9.30pm or Sunday evening sessions 6.30-8.30pm in the village hall. All levels welcome.

For further information, contact:

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Planning Matters

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

- 23/00126/FULL and 23/00127/LBC Duck Cottage, 1 Rolvenden Road. Ground floor rear extension, the addition of a rear dormer window, replacement windows and internal alterations.
- 22/03419/FULL Culpeppers, Coldharbour Road. Demolition of existing dwelling and outbuildings, erection of new replacement dwelling, erection of outbuildings including replacement garage and swimming pool.
- 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 enhancements.

More planning matters at:

benendenparishcouncil.org

Blackadder Goes Forth

Following Benenden Players' well-received stage production of 'Allo 'Allo (review, page 28) there is a fresh chance to enjoy a classic TV sitcom on stage coming to the area soon: Blackadder Goes Forth.

Stuart Collier, who played café owner René Artois in 'Allo 'Allo, will this time be tackling the title role of Edmund Blackadder for Cranbrook Operatic and Dramatic Society on the Queen's Theatre stage, Cranbrook School, in early April. Tickets for the both funny and deeply poignant sitcom set in the trenches of World War One are available at: www.cranbrookods.org.uk/tickets

Village lunch

Anyone and everyone is welcome to join the village lunch, held in the village hall at 12.30pm on Tuesday 21 March. There is always a main course, a pud and coffee or tea, for £5 per person. If you would like to come, please let me know by Thursday 16 March.

Kathleen Brewis 240081

Letter to the Editor

Please write to the Editor,

c/o Community Office, Benenden Village Hall, Benenden TN17 4DY or email benendenparishmagazine@gmail.com

MAKING AMENDS FOR THE PAST

Dear Editor

I was surprised to read in the January magazine's Church Letter, that Revd David Commander finds it inappropriate that the church should attempt to make some, albeit limited, amends for its complicity in and profiteering from, the slave trade.

While it is true that nothing can put right the gross injustices of the past, the fund provides some acknowledgment of the cruelties carried out by the church in its god's name and may provide some practical assistance to some of those who are the heirs of wrongdoing.

As to how our successors may look back at our actions today in 200 years' time, maybe at least they won't condemn the church for entirely washing its hands of the profits made from the slave trade. I would be intrigued to know from the Revd what 'standards' he thinks didn't apply to the church 200 years ago that enabled it to profit from this 'trade'. I can't recall anything in the New Testament that would condone capture, transportation, murder and enslavement of a people on any scale.

If God really made the perpetrators 'in his image', it's not a great look.

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Looking for a guy or girl to save Benenden Bonfire

Grant Matthews, who has led the team that organises the Benenden Bonfire for many years, is stepping down and is seeking another energetic person to take on the task. Could this be you? Here he reports on how funds raised by last year's event have been shared among village groups, benefiting young and old.

If you enjoy the bonfire and display or like the fact that we can give local causes financial support, please know that unless someone comes forward to chair the committee, a decision has been made that there will be no event this year. Therefore, no event, no fun and no funding distributions next year.

Support for this event is amazing. Thank you to all the members of the committee and the hundreds of volunteers who have helped during my tenure. Thank you to our sponsors, Benenden Hospital Trust, Jubilee Hire and Tate Fencing, who have all helped and given generously in many ways over a number of years. Also, to Benenden School, who have allowed us to use their grounds and this year joined us in the provision of one display, as well as support from local companies Shotcrete, the Bull, Benenden and Wards Butchers.

So that's it. Is it all over? Well, it is for now unless that one person comes forward. There are committee members, there is an army of volunteers, there is a template, there is experience that will be shared, but one person to co-ordinate is needed. Could you take this role on? Do you know someone who would?

Please get in touch with me if you'd like to discuss this rewarding role.

Grant Matthews, Outgoing Chair, Benenden Bonfire Society
07788 279000 info@benendenfireworks.co.uk

2022 BENENDEN BONFIRE FUND BENEFICIARIES

- **Benenden Bowls Club: £500.**
To enhance the playing area and encourage new members of all ages.
- **Benenden Pre-School: £445.**
To provide weekly yoga and fortnightly Sporty Tots sessions.
- **Benenden Primary School: £1,500.**
Towards a new wellbeing area.
- **Catching Lives: £1,000.** As part of a wider parish initiative in memory of Tracy Claridge. To provide funding for a part-time mental health professional to help and support the homeless.
- **Merry and Bright: £100.** To provide speakers for this local, young-at-heart 60-plus group meeting monthly.

As, sadly, the Benenden Scouts has disbanded, we felt it right to recognise the applications from Cranbrook and Sissinghurst as they are our nearest providers of scouting opportunity for local children aged from 4-18.


- **Cranbrook Scout Group: £1,000**
(and thank you to Gail and Mark Chandler for providing our first aid capability)
- **Sissinghurst Scout Group: £1,000**
- **Sissinghurst Explorer Group: £1,000**

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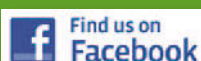


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See farming in close-up on a walk with Will

Following our recent visit to Little Pix Hall Farm in Hawkhurst, farmer Will Steel has been inspired to

host a series of guided walks around his farm during 2023. Will is passionate about ensuring farming and the environment can work together to ensure long-term sustainability. His spring, summer and autumn walks are designed to offer a marvellous opportunity to see and learn and ask first-hand about what happens in our ever-changing seasons on a mixed farm practising regenerative techniques. They will take place on Sundays, with places for between ten and 15 people and will last two hours, ending with refreshments.

- The early spring walk will be during the calving of Will's Simmental herd. He will also explain cover crops and spring crop planting practices; talk about the benefits of woodland management; how to monitor and manage soil health after a wet winter, with the help of his 'soil my undies' experiment (!) and uncover the secrets of farmers' 'big sheds'.
- In June, the early summer walk will look at Little Pix Hall's bird and wildflower plots; investigate harvest potential; take a look inside the grain stores; explore the purposes of all his machinery; understand why Will tries not to use pesticides and when he has to; and discover muck heaps and how to use them properly.



- In September, on the early autumn walk, the cows will be getting ready for winter and Will will report on the harvest;

he'll look into manure - smelly or not; explain what he does with stubbles and straw left after the harvest and what he plans to sow for autumn crops.

The first walk will take place from 9-11am on Sunday 19 March. Please wear suitable footwear for uneven and potentially muddy conditions.

Some rough ground is to be expected and dogs are allowed, but only on a lead. Please arrive promptly to set off at 9am sharp.

Tickets cost £10 and include a hot drink and Will's wife Kate's delicious oat biscuits using their own honey. Dates and tickets for the walks in June and September will be announced in future issues.

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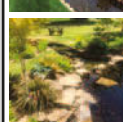
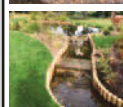
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Cakes & Chaos: turning church into toddler paradise

Every Friday morning, from 9-11am during term time, St George's Church transforms into a truly wonderful large play space for toddlers.

Cakes & Chaos is a perfect

description for the two hours when mums, grans, nannies, and the occasional dad gather with their pre-school children to play and chat.

A rota of volunteers provides tea and coffee and home-made cake, which is happily shared amongst children and adults alike. While the grown-ups chat, the children are clearly having a fabulous time playing with the toys, kicking soft balls, dressing up, and whizzing up and down the aisles in several iconic Little Tikes

Cozy Coupes, or on small trikes.

When David and Helen Commander moved into the village nearly ten years ago, they moved Cakes & Chaos from the village hall into the church and started the drop-in toddler group in Sandhurst (on Wednesday mornings) and it's clearly very popular, attracting up to 20 children

every week. At the end of each session, Helen gathers everyone in a circle to sing a few songs before jointly flinging a rainbow parachute into the air (giggling children rushing underneath) then tidying everything away.

"This is my happy space," says one mum. "You just come as you are and chat if you want to or not - there's no judgement." Another agrees: "I think it's more for me than for my child - although he really loves coming. Everyone is so welcoming and it's good to spend time with other people who have young children." Several parents I spoke to have been coming for several years and appreciated that the friends their children make at the group they see again when

they start at primary school. They will also meet up with David again as he leads Collective



Worship in the primary school. It all helps with continuity.

"It's a lovely atmosphere and a perfect way for families to end the week," says Helen, clearly in her element. "We only ask for a £1 donation per family to help towards heating and refreshments."

If you have pre-school children, then I very much recommend a visit to St George's on Friday mornings. Alternatively, please lend me your toddler and I'll take them along!

For more information, please contact Helen Commander on 240658 or email helenjcommander@gmail.com
Ruth Clark



Event Review



Saying 'allo to comedy Nazis, difficult sausages and a rude cockatoo

'Allo 'Allo by the Benenden Players
Sitcoms of the 1970s and 80s haven't necessarily all aged well, and some have even suffered the ignominy of being banned in perpetuity for attitudes to race, sex and almost everything else that have come to be regarded as outmoded and offensive.

There's Till Death Us Do Part (brilliant but doomed to be misunderstood); It Ain't Half Hot Mum (never likely to age well, but Windsor Davies was wonderful); and Mind Your Language (apparently had 18m viewers but probably should



never have been made because it just wasn't funny).

Then there was 'Allo 'Allo, the WWII spoof which had more racial stereotypes than you could shake a

knackwurst at and was probably also a bit homophobic and hugely sexist, but it has survived because of its wartime high jinks, international innuendo and risqué sausage gags, which clearly made it ripe for a revival in the village.

The Benenden Players have never been ones to shy away from the risque or the just plain rude - as veterans of their annual panto will testify.

Mostly this has been written by the gloriously madcap Bev Beveridge, but here they reverted to the script of the stage show by David Croft and Jeremy Lloyd, and with Bev in the director's chair, facing up to the usual restrictions that accompany village hall am-dram, they put on a comic gem in which the funny bits were almost all as intended and the laughs came broadly in the right places - although the memory of Chris Parkinson's wardrobe malfunction in the trouser region will linger in my mind for many years, I fear.

The production was underpinned by a tour de force of theatrical Frenchness from Stuart Collier as René Artois, the put-upon café owner trying to balance the conflicting demands of appeasing the Nazis, coping with the incompetence of the French Resistance and assorted British airmen, and keeping his clandestine affairs with his waitresses a secret from his wife.

If Stuart was the bedrock, however, the whirlwind was Joy Rowlands, who was later declared over a pint in The Bull to be an even better Edith (René wife) than the original Edith, with an even worse singing voice (although I'm told that in real life she sings like a bird) and a scene-stealing personality.

The action hopped wildly from the mock-up bar (in the heart of the audience) to the village hall stage, as the director and backstage staff

grappled (largely) successfully with multifarious props (we're back to bumbling undercover policeman Chris and his sausage/trouser malfunction again, as well as the cockatoo, which was obviously the



subject of much obscenity) and Pierre Gautier sailed flamboyantly through the bizarreness of being the only native French-speaker in the cast, yet given the role of the very Italian Captain Bertorelli.

All our favourite characters were there, from the menacing Gestapo officer Herr Flick - played with suitable ludicrousness by Ian Aldridge - and the uber-camp Nazi Lieutenant Gruber, given the full stereotype by the excellent Ian Malaugh, to René's highly credible love interests Yvette (Tilly Milnes) and Mimi (Bonny Sullivan).

Debbie Katis, normally seen behind the microphone in Benenden's beloved jazz combo, starred as Private Helga and treated us to a strip tease that almost led to an unscripted use of the community defibrillator on some of the more excitable male members of the audience. Even our own co-editor Ruth Clark trod the boards as not only a prostitute but also a nun, in both of which roles she was equally convincing.

There's not room here to list all the worthy performers, the suitably Gallic soundtrack (all the right notes played in almost entirely the right order by Graham Beveridge) or the gargantuan efforts behind the scenes; suffice it to say that the lunacy of the original received due respect, along with a little taste of Benenden thrown in for good measure.

And in case you were wondering, the Fallen Madonna with the Big Boobies did, indeed, make an appearance. If you're under the age of 40, go and Google it!

Peter Thomas



Photographs: Hayley Daley





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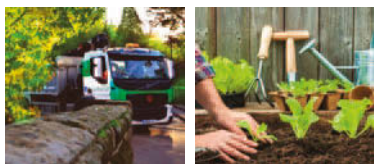
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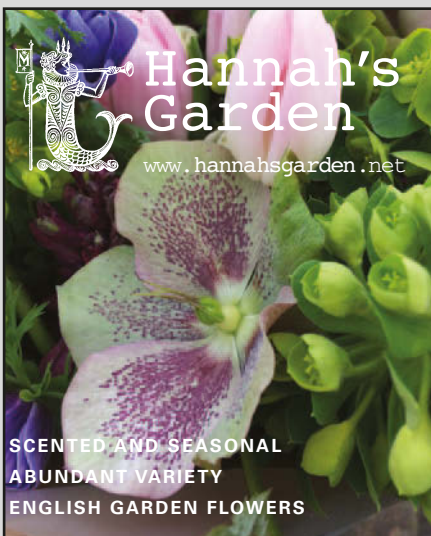
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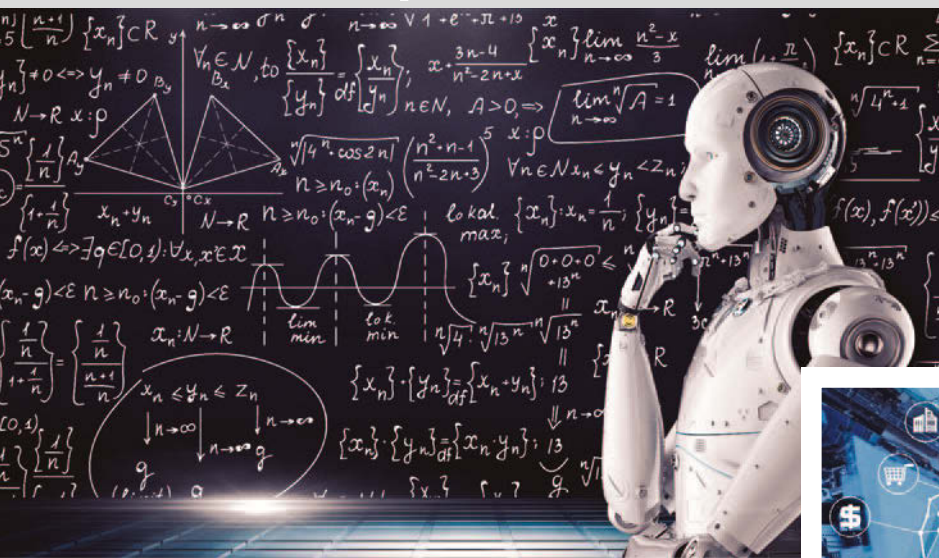
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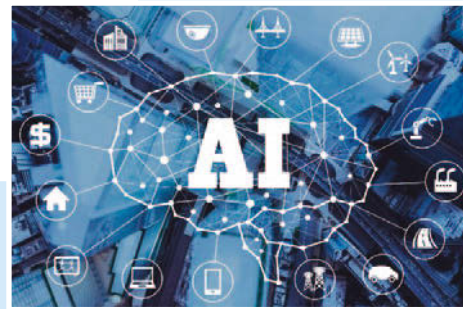
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AI brings ethical dilemmas. Because the machine is trying to get better at the task it is given, the key question is: what does good look like? Today a human defines that, with the risk of

the biases we carry; ultimately the machine may decide for itself what good looks like.



What's artificial intelligence ever done for us?

Peter Massey delves into AI and examines its impact and issues

Artificial intelligence, or AI, is a revolutionary technology that is already changing the way we live and work. It is the cutting-edge of computer science and technology. Some examples of AI include speech recognition and natural language processing (e.g. “Alexa, switch on the lights”), image recognition (e.g. searching the photos on your phone for a specific person), writing code to programme computers, and decision making (e.g. optimising the temperatures in your house as the weather changes or to your habits).

Machine learning is a specific type of AI that focuses on creating systems that can learn from data and improve performance over time. In other words, machine learning is a way for AI systems to become better at tasks without being explicitly programmed to do so. One example of a machine learning model is GPT (Generative Pre-trained Transformer), which is a type of language model developed by OpenAI. GPT was trained by reading and analysing 100s of billions of text data from the internet. By analysing this data, GPT was able to learn patterns and relationships between words and phrases, allowing it to generate human-like text.

GPT is able to perform a wide range of natural language tasks such as language translation, text summarisation and question answering. The latest version, ChatGPT, is so good that it has created immediate dilemmas in schools and universities,

It's easy not to notice AI. Imagine a world where your personal assistant can understand your every command and anticipate your needs before you even ask. “Would you like me to give your car directions to your next appointment?” Where cars avoid crashes despite the driver. A five-star Euro NCAP safety rating already requires and tests this capability. Where artificial intelligence-powered systems can predict and prevent financial crimes or identify diseases from patterns in huge amounts of data. And of course, there are military applications.

In retail, AI can use your private and social data to personalise your shopping experience and improve customer service. Or use it quietly in media, affecting polling, voting and government. AI has the power to change the world for the better or worse, so we must be cautious and consider the ethical and societal implications of this powerful technology.

It's an exciting time to be alive as we're witnessing a new generation of students who use AI tools everyday like we might use a spreadsheet to do calculations or PowerPoint to make slide shows. AI is at the forefront of this revolution, and it's up to us to use it responsibly and make the most of its incredible potential. So, get ready for some big societal decisions and a wild ride as we explore the world with AI and all the incredible possibilities it holds.

This article was written by ChatGPT and Peter Massey. Can you spot which parts?

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Journey to the heart of France's finest

Peter Thomas with exciting news of the latest village tasting

It's been a while since the very poignant triumph of the Tracy Claridge Memorial Tasting, but at long last we're back with another offering for the wine lovers of the village, and we think you're going to be as excited by it as we are.

It will be on Friday 24 March, at Benenden School (thanks, as ever, to them) and after several years of trepidation we're finally dipping our toe into one of France's, and the world's, most prestigious regions: Burgundy.

"Burgundy?" I hear you say. "Burgundy's eye-wateringly expensive and I don't want to have to take out a second mortgage just to have a glass of wine." Well, we're with you on that. If we were talking about Domaine de la Romanée Conti at £30,000 a bottle, we might have to make the portions a little smaller, but what we've decided is that we want to take you into the world of 'affordable' Burgundy.

Don't get me wrong: even affordable Burgundy isn't cheap, but we've unearthed a few treats that you'll be able to savour on a Friday night without breaking the bank, and we think you'll be surprised at the value for money they offer.

Given the price increases on everything in the world that's nice, plus the quality of the wines, we're setting the ticket price at £30, to include a nice glass on entry, four whites and four reds to taste, expert commentary from

our great friend, the wine merchant and educator Richard Household, as well as some delicious Burgundian food (probably not snails, but something lovely, as ever). Any 'profit' will go to one of Tracy's favourite charities.

The precise wine line-up is as yet undecided, but there will be one or two at the upper end of 'affordable', to give connoisseurs the chance to savour and novices the opportunity to discover the delights of some truly wonderful terroir, where Chardonnay and Pinot Noir in particular reach their heights of excellence.

We anticipate strong demand for tickets, so please don't be slow out of the blocks. To book, simply email me and I'll tell you where to send cash to secure your place: pmartinthomas@hotmail.com

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'Best guide on the market for the new birdwatcher'

Charles Trollope reviews the new RSPB Pocket Guide to British Birds, which features over 800 illustrations of 310 species by renowned artist and villager Stephen Message

My first thought on seeing this pocket guide is that it actually looks like it might fit in a pocket! Its bright, clean picture of a pair of Goldcrests on the cover certainly catches the eye.

Each species is given a whole page, with Stephen's brilliant artwork of the species at the top of the page normally showing male and female but, depending on the species, juvenile and in-flight images are sometimes shown as well. Underneath the images, the text is broken down into five sections of text: key features, songs and calls, where to see it, movements, populations and finally ID pitfalls. This is well laid out and the reader can home in quickly to the aspect they require. Finally, there is a distribution map. On each page there is a colour tab near the top and the page number is also highlighted in the same colour to reflect the conservation status of the bird on the page.

My first guidebook was *Birds of the Wayside and Woodland*, a Warne pocket guide. It had the odd colour plate interspersed with many pages of text. The text of the bird in question was never very near the colour plate. The plates themselves were of very poor quality and quite useless for ID purposes unless it was obvious - like a Robin. In the 1970s, the Peterson Guide came out, revolutionising guidebooks, with images of the birds with arrows pointing to the key features mentioned in the text. The next popular guide published in the early 90s was the Shell Guide - the first to have maps, images and text on the same page or spread.

This new RSPB pocket guide has all the required features on the one page but has steered away from arrows pointing to the key

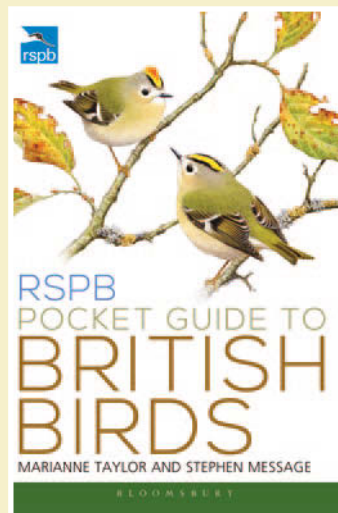
features in the images. There is no doubt this would spoil Stephen's artwork, but at the end of the day this is a guidebook not a picture book. The colour-coded maps are very informative and the best I have seen in any guide. But I question the colour-coded tabs indicating conservation status in the UK. Firstly, these change every four or five years and any reader might ask why on earth is the Woodpigeon amber listed? Perhaps a colour code on abundance might have been more useful than an estimate under the 'movements and populations' section.

Having briefly thumbed through the book, I decided to look at the species I struggled to separate when I started learning. One of the first difficult pairs is the Willow Warbler/Chiffchaff. Although their songs are very easily separated, it is not easy when they go silent later on in the breeding season. All the key features, like leg colour, wing length and a more prominent eyebrow are mentioned. Most guidebooks refer to the eyebrow stripe as the supercilium, but the use of a simpler descriptive term is better suited to the target audience for this guide. The white under-eye crescent is also highlighted as a feature - one I have never used in the field as in my view it is quite impossible to see as these birds are rarely still. Having said that, the modern use of powerful digital cameras may make this key feature more applicable.

A key behavioural feature not mentioned is the tail flicking/dipping of the Chiffchaff whilst trying to feed, which is rarely if ever seen of the Willow Warbler. Similarly, when distinguishing Common Terns from Arctic Terns, no mention is made of their differing diving techniques.

Most of the confusion species are on a double-page spread, but quite a few are not, such as Curlew/Whimbrel, Goosander/Red-breasted Merganser and Black and Bar-tailed Godwits, for which one has to keep turning the page for comparison. I suspect this is because the guide is following the taxonomic order.

Nonetheless, these minor quibbles should not dissuade anyone. It is by far the best guide on the market for the new and younger birdwatcher.



In Your Garden



A timely lift in early spring

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, if I say so myself, as the ground is very workable at the moment and many bulbs are poking through so I can see where they are, before I replant around them.

The two propagation tasks I do now are division (of grasses and herbaceous perennials)

and splitting and division of any snowdrops 'in the green'. In a large border at one of the gardens I maintain weekly, there is a fair bit of moving about that needs to take place - some grasses are too tall and need swapping out for a shorter variety and a number of perennials

have grown too large. The priority for now is splitting and dividing some persicaria and rudbeckia, both of which have sped along each year. 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 which I would rather not have so close to the edges, so I plan to move them into the centre.

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. I have been known to get 16, albeit small, sections out of a large astrantia plant! These sections can then be replanted straight away, into their new space.

I should mention that 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.

Returning to snowdrops, I now no longer purchase packets of these bulbs, having much more success with digging up manageable clumps and gently prising smaller handfuls for replanting straight away. Some leaf mould or home-made compost will be appreciated, dug in around the base and I usually do not need to water them in. I also divide primroses this way at the same time and I find both plants then establish easily and it makes a huge difference the following spring.

One quick final note: I was very late putting my own tulips in this year, on 19 January - "spectacularly late" were the exact words on my Instagram feed. Needless to say they are already pushing through and look quite fine to me. I heard through the grapevine that Christopher Lloyd often put his tulips in as late as March - thankfully, there is hope for us all!

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Above: Built to endure: the newly installed Iden Green village sign painted by Stephen Message; Diccon Gray in action at the World Veteran Table Tennis Championships; Edna's Retreat encouraging wildlife to flourish within the grounds of Benenden Hospital

Front cover: Unabashed feasting: foraging an early source of pollen in St George's churchyard. Photograph: Amelia Thomas