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Magazine  
February 2019

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# Editorial



Sometimes it tires me out just reading about what our readers get up to in their spare time. If they're not beautifying their winter gardens or watching the influx of migratory birds, they're ringing bells for hours on end or rowing across the Atlantic, as you'll read this month. Me, I feel I've done well if I wash the car once a fortnight, but at least compiling this magazine means I can share vicariously in the achievements of the village.

For those who simply like to sit and watch the world go by, there is also the welcome news that from the start of February (bureaucracy permitting) we shall be able to sit in the county's finest community shop and enjoy an alcoholic beverage with our grub. Given the fine range of local brews and classy wines available in Benenden's, this should make for some very pleasant lunchtimes, although it must be remembered that, according to the terms of the new licence, booze can only be consumed with food and only during set hours - no all-day sessions here!

Despite all these goings-on, you'll notice that this month's edition is dominated by news of the Neighbourhood Development Plan, the first draft of which is due to be released shortly and shared with the village at a meeting in the village hall on Saturday 23 February. The NDP is the document that will shape the future of the village in the coming decades, so I felt it was only right to give over plenty of space to explaining it and airing the concerns of villagers.

Given that the plan has yet to be published, it's not surprising that there have been many misunderstandings and a lot of disinformation flying around as to its nature, and the hard-working chairman Paul Tolhurst and his excellent team of volunteers have been keen to clarify the direction in which the project is heading. On 23 February, however, the detail will be revealed. It's an important moment for anybody who cares about the village, so please make the effort to be there.

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.

Editors: Kent Barker, Minnie Garnier, Peter Thomas

Editorial Board: PCC Rep: Tracy Claridge, PC Rep: Nicola Thomas, Treasurer: Charles Trollope

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

Contributions to: [benendenparishmagazine@gmail.com](mailto:benendenparishmagazine@gmail.com) by the 15th of the preceding month.

Advertising orders or queries to: [advertising.benendenmag@gmail.com](mailto:advertising.benendenmag@gmail.com).

Distribution queries to: [dd.rhill@btinternet.com](mailto:dd.rhill@btinternet.com).

Postal address: c/o Community Office, Benenden Village Hall, Benenden, TN17 4DY 01580 240371

# Church Calendar

## St George's Church

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

Churchwarden: Tracy Claridge 240454 [maisonsicheluk@tlclaridge.co.uk](mailto:maisonsicheluk@tlclaridge.co.uk)

Churchwarden: Julia Collard 241944 [Julia.collard@btinternet.com](mailto:Julia.collard@btinternet.com)

[www.benendenchurch.org](http://www.benendenchurch.org) 850849 [benendenchurch@gmail.com](mailto:benendenchurch@gmail.com)

Please inform the Rector or Churchwardens if you, or anyone else, is ill or would like a visit or home communion.

Sunday 3 February      8am Communion      10am All-age Communion and Sunday School      5pm Choral Evensong

Sunday 10 February      8am 1662 Communion      10am Morning Worship      5pm Evening Prayer at Mission Church

Sunday 17 February      8am Communion      10am Sung Eucharist      4pm Messy Church

Sunday 24 February      8am Communion      10am Morning Worship

## Mission Church, Sandhurst

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

Every Tuesday      10am Communion

## Iden Green Congregational Church

Elder: Tobin Bird 240027 [www.idengreen.org.uk](http://www.idengreen.org.uk)

Sunday Services      10am Morning Worship      5.30pm Evening Worship

## The Roman Catholic Chapel TN17 4EL

Fr Barry Grant 713364 [www.sttheodore-cranbrook.org](http://www.sttheodore-cranbrook.org)

Masses      9am Sundays      7.30pm Holy Days



# Rector's Letter



## Quiet month the time to work on your wish

It always strikes me that February is a bit of a quiet month. Christmas and the New Year celebrations are well behind us. The Tax Return has been completed ... at the last minute. (Remember that promise you made yourself this time last year to do it much earlier next year? What happened to that well-intentioned plan?) We've got used to being back to work or back to school. So it's a quiet time for you ... unless:

- You're getting married soon. Or,
- You're celebrating a big birthday (Helen) or a special anniversary soon. Or,
- You're involved in the village pantomime. (Lines learnt; costume sorted; now the performances and 'the roar of the greasepaint and the smell of the crowd') Or,
- You're organising the Canterbury Choristers concert (Saturday 9 February), or the Cranbrook Choral Society community concert for the Hospice in the Weald (Saturday 23 February); or the many other events happening locally this month. Or,
- You're planning for all the Lent and Easter services and events. (There I go again, "looking forward" - remember the message last month?) Or,
- You're trying to come up with a Brexit plan that your party will agree with, Parliament will agree with, the British people will agree with and 'Brussels' will agree with. (Good luck with that one.)

At least, with all that going on in a quiet month, we've got pancakes to look forward to on Shrove Tuesday. (There I go again, looking forward!) But wait. Easter is late this year (Sunday 21 April); so Ash Wednesday is late. Which means pancake day is late, too; it's not until Tuesday 5 March - oh no! But the good news is: February is a short month. Only 28 days - 28 days of a quiet month, and we'll all still feel very busy.

Now the problem with all that is this: do you remember those New Year resolutions you made? Or do you remember those plans you had for 2019; the exciting or important thing you wanted to make sure happened in your life this year? By the time you read this, we'll be one twelfth of the way through. By the time we get to the end of February - only another 28 days - we'll be one sixth of the way through the year. Have you started to action that exciting or important thing for 2019 yet? No? Then you'd better make a start, because in 28 days' time we'll be over 16% of the way through the year; and before you know it, it will be Easter, then summer. Then, just like your promise to yourself last year to do your Tax Return earlier, the year will run away with you and with it your dream for the year will disappear too.

February is actually a (relatively) quiet month, so use it to start work on your wish, your dream, your plan for 2019. In the words of Star Trek's Captain Jean-Luc Picard: "Make it so."

Revd David Commander, Rector

# Village Calendar

## January

Thursday 31 The Legend of King Arthur, Benenden Players Panto First Night,  
Benenden Village Hall, 7.30pm p.9

## February

Friday 1 Woodland Wide Games, Iden Green Congregational Church, 7pm  
Saturday 9 Skittles, St George's Club, 8.30pm  
Saturday 16 Cornhole Tossing, St George's Club, 8.30pm  
Sunday 17 Messy Church, St George's Church, 4-6pm p.13  
Monday 18 Parish Council Meeting, Memorial Hall, 7pm  
Tuesday 19 Village Lunch, Benenden Village Hall, 12.30pm p.9  
Tuesday 19 Iden Green and Benenden WI, Looking at Antiques, Memorial Hall, 2pm p.23  
Saturday 23 Neighbourhood Development Plan Public Exhibition and Presentation of the  
first draft plan, Benenden Village Hall, 1.30pm p.16  
Saturday 23 Cranbrook Choral Society, Community Concert, St George's Church, 7.30pm p.9  
Saturday 23 What's in the Box, St George's Club, 8.30pm  
Tuesday 26 Merry and Bright, Memorial Hall, 3pm

## Benenden Youth Club/Streetcruizer, age 11+

Tuesdays at Benenden Village Hall, 6.30-8.30pm

## Coffee Shop

Wednesdays in the Memorial Hall, 10-12noon

## 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

## Refuse Lorry Collections

Saturday 9 February for Domestic Waste

Benenden, Village Hall layby, 8-9.20am and Iden Green, crossroads, 9.40-11am

Saturday 23 February for Garden/Compostable Waste

Benenden, Village Hall layby, 8-9.20am and Iden Green, crossroads, 9.40-11am

# Parish Council



As this is the first time I have written in the magazine in 2019, with my colleague Mervyn ably contributing to the January issue, I take this opportunity to wish you all a very happy new year.

There is, as ever, plenty happening in our village. Things to look forward to are notably the new primary school opening in September; hopefully new owners taking on The Woodcock Inn; and a new venue for events at Frame Farm - with the The Oak Barn, The Byre and Weaver's Cottages all having been beautifully restored by the owners.

If you do have a new business or club opening up soon, the magazine is a great way of letting everyone in the village know of your new enterprise - hand-delivered to every household in the Parish.

The new contract for waste collection by the Borough Council begins at the start of April, with Urbaser Ltd taking over the service. You can register for your chargeable garden waste collection from 7 May, new bins will be delivered during September 2019, and the new collection service starts on 27 September. Full details can be found on the TWBC website - <https://beta.tunbridgewells.gov.uk/new-waste-service/timeline> - and we will keep you updated on progress through this magazine and our own website.

Last but not at all least, we currently have two vacancies on the Parish Council, and if you feel you would like to volunteer your time and expertise to help us, please do contact Caroline, our clerk, and she will be happy to assist you with your application.

Nicola Thomas, BPC Chair  
01580 240364 [nic.jthomas@btinternet.com](mailto:nic.jthomas@btinternet.com)

Caroline Levett, Benenden Parish Council Clerk  
01580 240371 [clerk@benendenparishcouncil.org](mailto:clerk@benendenparishcouncil.org)  
For more information see our website [www.benendenparishcouncil.org](http://www.benendenparishcouncil.org) or find us on facebook

**Parish Council Meeting**  
Monday 18 February 2019,  
Memorial Hall, 7pm



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# Just a Thought



## Crossing borders

The question of crossing borders has recently come to my attention! My earliest memory is of a school trip to Switzerland and the apparent need to make a list of every key ring, bar of chocolate and model chalet that I had purchased as presents. Crossing the border by car from Botswana into Zambia many years later involved a significantly longer list. We were loaded up with paint for the inside of our government house (options in Zambia being dark grey or bright red), a spare car tyre, DIY bits and other practical goodies. The customs official took objection despite the reams of paperwork presented. Richard then spent an hour patiently discussing not returning 500 miles to Gabarone for yet more forms, whilst I took our daughter for a long walk. Children however can be useful. Rather too often ours have been required to sacrifice space in their luggage for the inclusion of essential items such as a variety of car parts, when coming home for school holidays.

Talking of paperwork, my husband spent months researching all we would need for crossing all the borders on our drive from the UK to Turkey. The one that concerned us most was getting into Albania. When it came to it there was no queue at the Montenegro border hut so we drew up at one window, presented our papers, were passed to the next window and were quickly sent on our way. We spent the next few miles looking to officially enter Albania. Nothing, no-one, an empty landscape - so we eventually presumed that the second window had been Albanian! Since they let us out again into Greece, it must have been. Getting through the airport into Mongolia on the other hand, was a little more challenging. It was just as well that we were clutching a letter from the British Ambassador whom we were visiting, as there was considerable reluctance to let us in.

Actually crossing a border physically could also throw up problems. When I went hitching round Turkey as a student, we had got to the far border with Syria and thought it might be fun to cross over. However, when told that we needed a cholera vaccination and that they would do it at the border, the idea rapidly lost its attraction. Then again, one time Richard and I went by overnight train for a shopping trip from lowly Kampala to the metropolis that was Nairobi. Unfortunately some time during that night Idi Amin declared that Ugandan currency was no longer freely convertible. Fortunately, a Kenyan branch of Barclays set us up with a new account and an instant overdraft. Perhaps the most disconcerting occasion was when I left our two small boys with my husband in Malaysia whilst I went off with friends to climb Mt Kinabalu in Sabah. On my return the border official was unwilling to let me back in as I couldn't produce the two boys who were on my passport!

We will probably not try to cross the Channel on 30 March 2019.

Sue Fisher

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# News and Events

## Benenden Village Trust

### The Village Hall car park

As owner of the Village Hall, the BVT also oversees arrangements for its car park. Traditionally this has been for use of hirers of the hall, but at other times has also been available as a facility for the village. Some surprise was expressed recently when a hirer of the hall restricted entry to it. At the time a large number of people were parked around the Green for a carol service at St George's so there was little or no parking available for locals. As a result the trustees were asked to clarify the policy with regard to 'closing off' the hall car park.

Clearly if someone has booked the hall they should be able to use its car park but should that be exclusive use? The trustees felt that it was unusual for the hall car park to be completely full but nonetheless it would be desirable to ensure that some parking was available for others. So from now on hall hirers will be able to claim exclusive use of the main car park in front of the hall, but not the smaller 'upper' parking area by the public toilets. This will continue to be available for patrons of The Bull or any other local residents on a first come first served basis. There are two provisos. First the area is not for permanent parking and, second, it remains in the ownership of the BVT and permission for temporary parking there does not make it a public space nor confer any other rights on users who will continue to park at their own risk.

The trustees very much hope this will be seen as a satisfactory compromise and we welcome your views by emailing:

David Harmsworth, BVT Chair  
bvtclerk@gmail.com



## Cranbrook Choral Society Community Concert

in aid of  
Hospice in the Weald  
and  
The Friends of St George's Church

**Saturday 23 February 2019**  
**St George's Church, Benenden at 7.30pm**

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[www.cranbrookchoral.org.uk](http://www.cranbrookchoral.org.uk)

## Village lunch

Tuesday 19 February, Benenden Village Hall,  
12.30pm

All are welcome. It's just £5 a head. If you need a lift please let us know and we can arrange it. Please call Sheila on 01580 240838, preferably by Friday 15 February, if you haven't already put your name down but would like to come. We would be very grateful if anyone coming to the lunch is able to pick up anyone who needs collecting.

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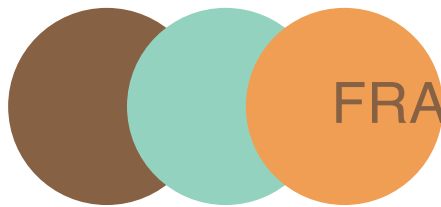
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## News from Benenden School

It is lovely to have the girls back after a good rest over Christmas and they were all excited to catch up with their friends again, albeit the older girls returned with some trepidation as they were launched straight back into mocks.

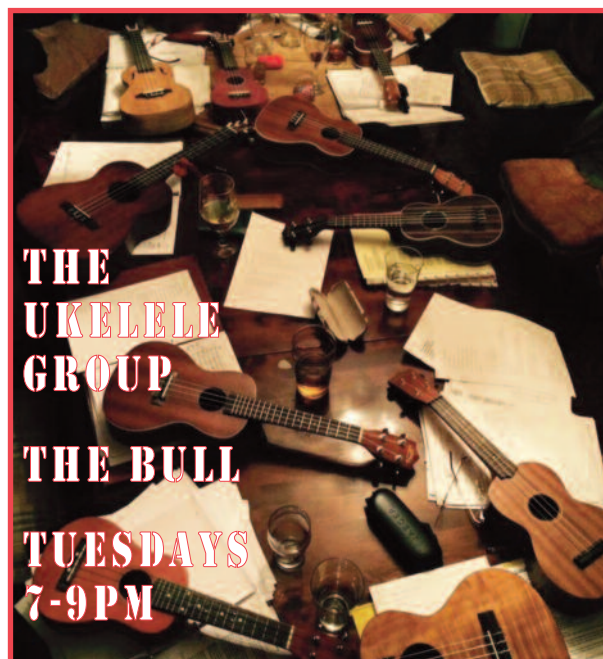
Away from the pressure of exams, we have enjoyed the beginning of the spring term. During the first weekend we were delighted to be joined by Dr Helen Pankhurst, great-granddaughter of suffragette Emmeline Pankhurst, who herself is a prominent women's rights activist and was awarded the CBE in the New Year's Honours List. Then we were entertained by House Shout, when the houses compete in the annual fun and rather raucous singing (and dancing) contest!

We will vacate the current school hall at the end of January ahead of the beginning of the project to construct a new school hall and music school. The hall has served the school incredibly well for the past 80 years and we will bid farewell to it with a series of events, including an archive display, Sixth Form movie night and a final farewell service in which we will ceremonially leave it for the final time. We are also screening a countdown around school - at the time of writing there are seven days, 18 hours and 57 minutes until we say our final farewell.

In the meantime we have already begun preparatory work for the development and during the Christmas break this included creating a new side door into the chapel and making more music teaching space in Cloisters. These temporary measures will help us to ensure that daily school life continues with as little disruption as possible during construction work.

This week we have also had a film crew on site, producing a fundraising film for this project and a promotional film about Benenden. This included filming the younger year groups using a drone - a memorable experience for all concerned - and we look forward to sharing these with the community when they are completed in a few weeks' time. Many of our Fourths are also looking forward to attending the village pantomime.

Samantha Price, Headmistress



## Talking Shop

Wine and beer now on the menu

As February sneaks in, bringing with it a sense of lighter evenings and mornings, Valentine's Day approaches and young and older men's and women's fancy turns (hopefully) to love. Don't forget that Benenden's will be stocking a selection of appropriate cards, chocolate goodies and Prosecco, so you can spoil that special someone. No excuse for forgetting.

What's more, while we may not be The Ritz, there will also be the chance to enjoy a glass of wine or a beer with your meal in the café. Red or white wine and local brews will be on offer to drink in Benenden's, as the good news is that we have been granted an alcohol licence to serve it with food. Once on sale, hopefully from around the beginning of the month, it will be available in the café from noon until 2pm from Monday to Saturday and from 11am to 1pm on Sunday. We must stress that it will only be sold with food.

This is an exciting new venture for us and we hope that it will be well supported, as the licence is relatively expensive and we need to justify the cost. So please come and have a drink with us and make sure our community shop and café continues to thrive.

Bev Beveridge





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## Village Hall highlights

Did you know that February is named after the Latin word 'februum', which means purification, because the month was traditionally a time for ritual purification? Which oh so cleverly leads me into the yoga workshop taking place on Sunday 10 February with Weald Power Yoga.

'Yoga and Meditation for Stress and Anxiety' promises to be a deeply relaxing workshop to ground, unwind and release tension from body and mind. For further information contact Ruth at [ruth@wealdpoweryoga.com](mailto:ruth@wealdpoweryoga.com) or check out [www.wealdpoweryoga.com/events-1/](http://www.wealdpoweryoga.com/events-1/)

If you have a child who goes to Benenden Primary School, then you can take advantage of Breakfast Club, which runs Monday-Friday from 7.30am during term time. For further information contact Fiona Brothers on 01580 241825 or 07769 937561.

The hall recently welcomed its newest member of staff, Jen Gurr, who will be making sure the hall is kept sparkling clean. Jen will be working alongside Karen Saunders, the hall's caretaker, in ensuring the hall is looking its best.

If you are looking for a venue for holding a club or class, there is a rare opportunity for a regular slot each Wednesday from mid-July. These don't come along very often so don't miss out. Our rates start from as little as £10 per hour and include complimentary social media advertising and a mention in this magazine. If you're interested get in touch.

For further information on events and classes check out either our Facebook page [@benendenvillagehall](https://www.facebook.com/benendenvillagehall) or go to: [www.benendenvillagehall.org](http://www.benendenvillagehall.org)  
Lorraine Jones 243123  
[enquiries@benendenvillagehall.org](mailto:enquiries@benendenvillagehall.org)

## Pavilion Quiz Night

Saturday 2 March, Iden Green Pavilion, 7pm  
Please join us £10pp including hot supper.  
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Bill Lewis 243093



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## Benenden Pre-School news

So far this term the children have been enjoying the Puss In Boots story and have been taking part in lots of activities related to the classic tale. They have been making cat masks and have opened up a welly boot shop, where they can buy and sell boots. Some of the boots have sold for thousands! The children have also been choosing books about cats from the library section and brought in photos of their own feline friends at home.

We are looking forward to Theme Week just before half term. Last year was Science Week, which involved lots of messy experiments, so we are excited to find out what this year's will be.

To find out more about Benenden Pre-School, please email:  
[supervisor@benendenpre-school.co.uk](mailto:supervisor@benendenpre-school.co.uk)

## Symphony of kindness

The Cranbrook Symphony Orchestra recently performed at St George's Church and, through their own efforts and the kind generosity of the audience, raised £1,000 for the Catching Lives charity (see p.30-31 for more about the charity). Those of you who attended the concert will know what a great evening we had, the star of the show being the brilliant Freddie Flintoff of Benenden School on violin.





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## Neighbourhood Development Plan

We're nearly there ...

the end of the beginning

The first Neighbourhood Development Plan Steering Group meeting was held on 12 October 2017. At the time we hoped to get a plan all wrapped up within six months. Jim Boot, our experienced consultant said it would take two years. As I write this in mid-January 2019, I can report we are not quite at the beginning of the end, but we are at the end of the beginning.

Last month I set out the criteria by which we are assessing the 20 sites offered so far by landowners for development, and asked for your views. We have received supportive and helpful feedback and, as you'll see elsewhere in this magazine, interest in the neighbourhood plan continues to gather pace and energy.

After many months' work, learning the complexities of planning regulations, gathering local information and consulting with villagers, we have finally started drafting our plan. Why then do I say we are only at the end of the beginning?

Our first draft plan will be offered to the Parish Council, as the local body responsible for the plan, in February. We will ask them to approve publication of our rough draft to residents for informal consultation. So, a date for your diary. We want to invite you to a parish meeting at Benenden village hall on Saturday 23 February. At that meeting we will share our proposed policies and development options.

We will be seeking feedback on this draft plan from residents, landowners and other stakeholders for around six weeks. Concurrently we have to obtain a 'screening opinion' from Tunbridge Wells Borough Council to see if the plan requires a Strategic Environmental Assessment.

A revised draft of the plan should be published in May for formal 'Regulation 14'



### Benenden needs You!

Benenden Neighbourhood Plan  
Village Meeting

Benenden Village Hall  
Saturday 23 February  
1.30-4pm

This meeting will be an **EXHIBITION AND PRESENTATION OF THE FIRST DRAFT PLAN**

**1.30pm Doors open**

**2-3pm Presentation and questions**

**4pm Exhibition closes**

**Get involved and help shape our future**

consultation. This is a further six-week process, seeking the views of residents and stakeholders, local businesses, landowners and developers. Based on the representations received we may make further changes to the plan. Next comes the 'Regulation 15' formal consultation, this time managed by TWBC, providing another six weeks for stakeholders to review the amended plan and to offer feedback. Representations will be assessed by the Independent Examiner, who has the power to instruct us to make changes or to uphold each aspect of the plan. We hope to undertake Reg 15 in October 2019.

The final plan will be published (we hope) in December 2019. Residents of the Parish will be able to vote for or against that final plan in a referendum in January 2020.

We want to keep everyone informed on progress via the three consultations, additional exhibitions and presentations. There will also be our monthly magazine updates. I am hoping that when the referendum finally happens, everyone will be well informed and fully understand the consequences of a Yes or No vote. Won't that make a change!

Paul Tolhurst, Chair NDP Steering Committee

## Letters to the Editor

Please write to the Editor,  
c/o Community Office, Benenden Village Hall,  
Benenden TN17 4DY or email  
benendenparishmagazine@gmail.com

### ‘NDP NOT CARTE BLANCHE FOR IGNORING PLANNING POLICY’

I read the article entitled Debate: Outside the Ticky-Tacky Box [an exchange between magazine co-editor Kent Barker and Neighbourhood Development Plan Steering Group chair Paul Tolhurst] in the December issue of the Benenden Magazine with interest. This related to housing development to be included in the draft NDP.

The views expressed in the article by Mr Barker do not appear to take into account the process for establishing an NDP. The draft NDP will be subject to examination. If it does not adhere to planning policy, the examiner will in all likelihood request TWBC to modify the draft NDP to comply with planning policy, before the community can vote on it. TWBC would essentially be obliged to take the examiner's recommendations into account.

The Parish Council could only request the Secretary of State to intervene, were TWBC not to follow the examiner's recommendations (see Paragraph 13B of Schedule 4B of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, inserted by section 141 of the Housing and Planning Act 2016). Conversely, there would be no grounds for the Secretary of State to intervene, were TWBC to take account of the examiner's recommendations. There is therefore no mechanism for “standing up and saying no” to TWBC, as Mr Barker suggests.

The community is thus only able to vote on an NDP that is compliant with planning policy. That, as Mr Tolhurst rightly identifies, means that deliverable sites must be close to existing settlements.

Given the above, the community should be clear about the risks of voting against an NDP that complies with planning policy. Under such

circumstances, developers would then be free to submit development proposals to TWBC on an ad hoc basis. That in itself would cause the community to lose control over where development occurs. If TWBC were furthermore ever unable to demonstrate a five-year land supply for housing, the presumption in favour of sustainable development would automatically apply to such proposals. This would force TWBC to approve them and thus lead to a further loss of control for the community.

In short, an NDP is not a carte blanche for ignoring planning policy. The community should in my view be clear about this point as to ignore it may ultimately disadvantage it.

As ever, I am grateful to all of those involved with the NDP for their continued efforts.

Gerard Conway

### LESSONS OF HISTORY

May I bring some historical perspective to the discussion of new housing?

The Jutes in north Kent, from about the 5th century A.D., drove their herds of pigs to the High Weald to forage every autumn to fatten them for the winter, when they were driven back. These woodland pastures were called ‘dens’, which developed, over time, into roughly 200-acre farms, each linked to others by footpaths.

From the 11th century, with the payment of tithes, the parish system developed. Each farm was supposed to be within walking distance of their parish church but in ours, because it is unusually large, this is not the case. Farmers in the north and east sometimes had a shorter walk to Rolvenden or Biddenden church.

By the 18th century, in each den, you had a house, with attic rooms where workers slept, and a large barn. A scattering of pubs developed around the parish where farm workers gathered of an evening (having walked there), also, occasionally, a smithy and a mill. By this time, in the centre, the village →



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Produced by Helen Grant MP, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA



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→ proper was born, home to tradespeople, the vicar, the lord of the manor, one or two of the wealthier farmers and the schoolmaster. Housing in the village was dense.

In the 19th century, the East End, being remote (about two miles away) was thought a suitable site for a sanatorium. This is also the reason why, in the 21st century, building there would not extend the village. It would create a new one.

Hazel Strouts

### WHAT LOCAL PEOPLE WANT?

In the past, Benenden has benefited from modest housing projects. Cherryfields, Rothermere Close and Harmsworth Court are all developments of which the community is rightly proud. So surely we should be fighting to ensure similar developments. Throughout the parish as a whole we are perfectly placed to offer a number of smaller sites, rather than turning over large fields to developers. The offering of swathes of greenfield sites would be extremely detrimental to our village.

The argument that developers aren't prepared to build that sort of housing seems to have been accepted without question. However, until we have taken into account small-scale builders, self-builders, and housing associations, is it wise to offer such lavish terms to large-scale developers such as Rydon Homes, already engaged in development in the village. If we capitulate to developers, we run a very real risk that the design, location, quantity and type of houses we find ourselves landed with will blight this community for decades to come.

It's surely a council of despair to claim that if we stand for what we believe in, we're likely to receive a worse outcome; tell me, what could possibly be worse than accepting "a few medium sized sites containing 20 to 50 dwellings" as our starting point for negotiation. If there's one thing I'm certain of, it's that the Neighbourhood Plan should not make TWBC's job of meeting its Government-set quota any

easier, particularly if it is to the detriment of our community. Last year, the then Housing Secretary Sajid Javid claimed that his new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) would ensure that "development is dictated by what local people want and not by speculative applications". Andrew Motion, vice-president of the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE), called on Government to provide a "cast-iron guarantee that locally agreed development plans - including neighborhood plans - would be upheld when deciding planning applications".

We must also not forget that the fewer 'affordable' houses per site, the more profit developers make. Under a change in law in 2012 they are entitled to argue that affordable housing agreed to in an original plan is no longer profitable and so no longer possible. Councils all over the country are now accepting that Section 106 affordable housing agreements are not worth the paper they're written on. Developers build what they want whilst the needs of the community are disregarded.

Is it wise to offer to accept up to 50 dwellings in each of a number of sites in the hope that we are going to stave off demands for even larger developments? It's seldom a good tactic to hand over lunch money to the playground bully in the hope that he'll be satisfied with that alone. Javid believed the NPPF would help communities to stand against the kind of development we've seen in neighbouring settlements and if we don't exploit one of the chief advantages a Neighbourhood Plan is meant to offer, then what has been the point?

Russell Cruse

### PARISH PREFERENCES

May I please add to the current debate over the Neighbourhood Development Plan and comment briefly on a couple of statements in the article in last month's magazine. →



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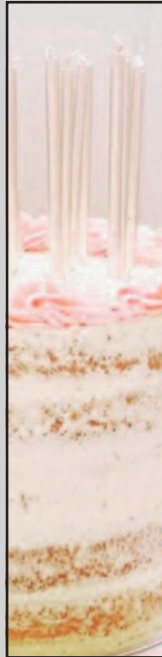
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→ First I was surprised to learn that “after negotiation with TWBC Benenden has accepted a total of around 100 houses to be built over a 15 year period”. Who accepted this? Were villagers consulted? Was it voted on by the Parish Council?

Or is this something the NDP members themselves have agreed?

As it happens I think that sort of total for new local housing is not at all unreasonable. The question is where they should go and how many should be in any one location.

Benenden clearly expressed its preferences in the survey for the 2015 Parish Plan when 49% said they wanted ‘small groups of houses - less than 5’, while only 8% supported the idea of ‘larger groups of houses - 5 or more’. This really does seem at variance with the NDP chair’s suggestion that they are considering recommending “a few medium sized sites containing 20-50 dwellings.”

The chair of the Housing Supply Group misunderstands me when I said last month that I “knew of small available sites”. I know that 19 landowners have offered sites of different sizes. What I am arguing is that the NDP does not have to recommend that any of these sites takes more than a handful of houses. And I absolutely refute the contention that “if someone gets permission to build just a few houses in one corner of a bigger site then the whole site is opened up for future development”. No it isn’t. Any housing development is, and will still be after the NDP, subject to normal planning procedures. But we will have a much stronger argument against large developments if we specifically eschew them in OUR Neighbourhood Plan.

Kent Barker

## SEEKING CLARIFICATION

At an NDP meeting in Iden Green, I was talking to a member of the committee and was told that if fewer than 11 houses were built on a plot of land, those 11 houses were not

considered as part of the 100 target we have been allocated. If this is the case, and as Kent Barker mentioned in a recent village magazine ‘debate’ that he had offered land for three or four houses, and then you add several other small developments of up to ten houses, you end up with Benenden having built 130 to 140 houses. In the November issue, Paul Tolhurst wrote: “Of the five smaller sites only two are deemed suitable for development (and these offer space for just eight dwellings in total).”

Kent Barker is quite right in saying that the village wants small developments not ‘estate-type’ plots, but if this ruling does apply then that changes the whole discussion. I feel that if 100 houses are built it should not matter how that number is achieved.

The thinking behind such a rule, if it is true, is hard to understand unless it is a way of conning communities such as ours into building more houses than we sign up for.

I should appreciate your clarification on this matter.

Christopher Rhys-Jones

Dear Christopher

*I am afraid the guidelines are a little complex and are changing following publication by government of a new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) in September 2018. I will try to steer you through this!*

*The new NPPF (a weighty document) was published in September 2018, and one of the many changes to the previous framework is material to your question. Windfall sites are typically smaller sites made available/offered for building after the local development plan (in our case our Neighbourhood Plan) has been established. We had worked on an assumption, based on the previous NPPF guidance, that sites under 11 dwellings would be counted as ‘windfall’, and therefore additional to our planning target. This is the probable source of the guidance you were given at the exhibition.*

*However under the new NPPF they now can be incorporated into our plan numbers, provided the →*



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→ windfall assumption is credible. Our current thinking is that up to 20% of our overall target could be planned in as windfall, and at this stage we are working to agree this percentage with TWBC. We believe 20% is the maximum we could take as 'windfall'. This enables us to meet in part the village's stated aspiration for 'scattered development'.

That still leaves the village with a task in the region of 80/90 houses. At this point we need to balance a number of factors; other village priorities, our responsibilities under national planning rules and the AONB, and the likely commercial behaviours of developers.

In the Parish Plan, and in the workshops we undertook as part of the Neighbourhood Plan, the village expressed a preference for building on previously developed land (often known as brownfield sites). This helps us protect the environment, and the AONB, and as a result plots offered under the Call for Sites which are previously developed, and/or outside the AONB score well on our site assessment criteria.

The village also asked for affordable housing (60% of those responding to the Parish Plan survey). The new NPPF does allow for the allocation of small plots for housing. However, the cost to provide services such as electricity, gas, sewerage etc. to a small plot of land tends to be higher per dwelling. These and other economies of scale mean that small plots tend to attract higher cost executive housing. As a result, local authorities have not required developers to provide affordable housing for sites of fewer than ten dwellings. TWBC are reviewing this policy at present but at the moment if a plot has fewer than ten units no affordable housing is required. So in order to secure sufficient affordable housing we will need to allocate some larger plots.

We intend to publish our considered proposals for future development in Benenden towards the end of February. I hope this helps alleviate your concerns.

Paul Tolhurst, Chair NDP Steering Committee

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Iden Green Tennis Club junior membership is £20 per year.

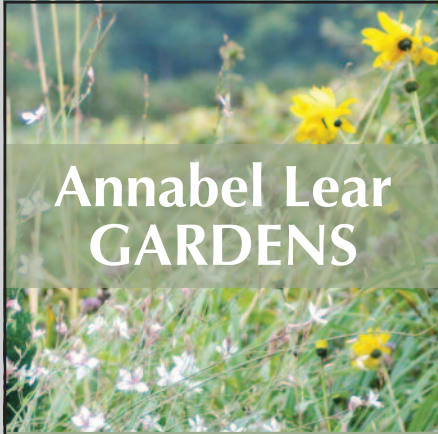
## Iden Green and Benenden WI

Our gathering in January was a Members' Meeting and AGM. It was well attended and very good to be together again after the Christmas break. We are pleased to welcome one new member. We enjoyed an excellent raffle and another very popular quiz.

Date to remember:

Tuesday 19 February, Looking at Antiques with  
Mr Tim Antonisz, Memorial Hall, 2-4pm  
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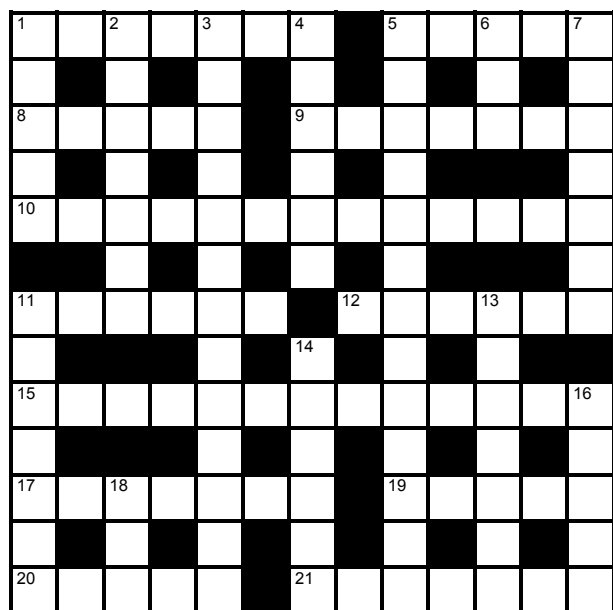


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# MINDBENENDERS By ASCII

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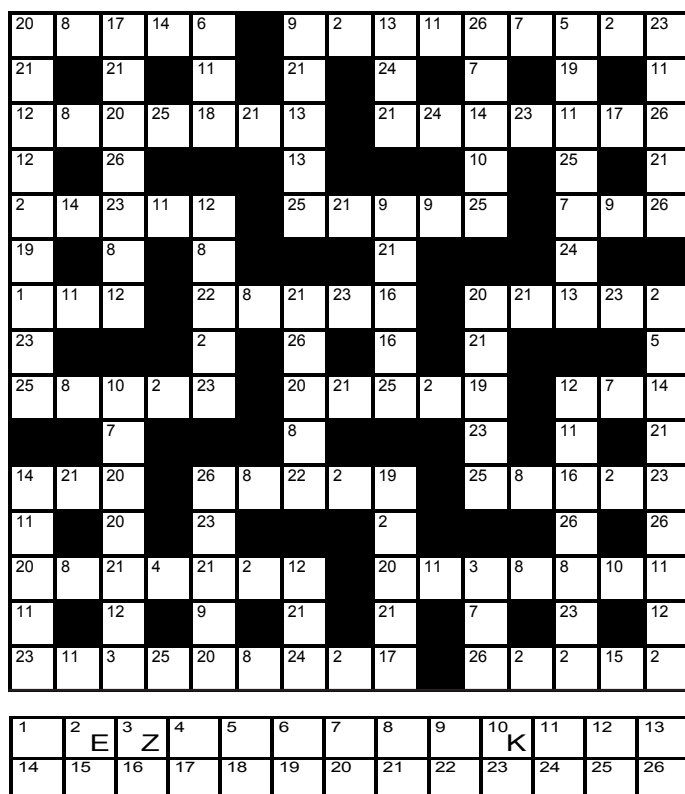
### Across

- 1 Windows open in galleries (7)
- 5 Fluffy rice? (5)
- 8 Spotted on Strictly? (5)
- 9 Confused historian not so happy high up because of this (4,3)
- 10 0.52083 pence could go a long way (5-8)
- 11 Shares rotten tropes on social media (6)
- 12 Electric shock therapy after a very strong sensation (6)
- 15 Re: crash. Bob's OK. Catastrophic part failure, perhaps? (5,8)
- 17 Precise nature of fuel in France (7)
- 19 Ladies have fingers in pies? (5)
- 20 Disciple dwindles away (5)
- 21 Violently resolve dispute over tickets, I hear! (4,3)

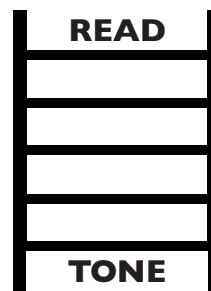
### Down

- 1 Young dog from Los Angeles enjoys milk (3,2)
- 2 Takes off then comes down on higher ground (7)
- 3 As rockery neared reconstruction, accounting tool emerged (5,8)
- 4 Strange savant points the way (3-3)
- 5 Reputation not so much on the line as on the very tip (5,2,6)
- 6 Poor ale leaves one three sheets out of the wind! (3)
- 7 Only the trustworthy wanted for the post (7)
- 11 A step up badly needed before computerised typesetting (5-2)
- 13 Bond's boss simply off to the pub? Stop it! (7)
- 14 Single-minded approach to the job's essentially not a good thing (6)
- 16 Tries hard but doesn't do well enough (5)
- 18 Gone off all! (3)

## CODEWORD No10 (Moderate)

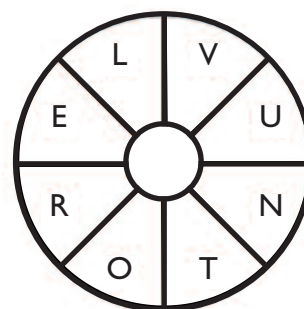


### STEP CHANGE



Change the word at the foot of the ladder into the word at the top by altering only one letter at a time.

### NINE FROM EIGHT



Find the missing letter at the centre of the wheel to create a nine-letter word.  
**CLUE:** They could step up to help

Each number represents a letter. Break the code and complete the grid. Three letters have been given to help you.



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The local band who rang out 2018 and rang in this New Year

## Ringling endorsement of local talent

It is with pleasure that we can report that a quarter-peal of 1,260 Grandsire Doubles, on the middle six bells, was rung at Benenden on Thursday 27 December, being the first for at least half a century (probably much longer, but living memory goes no further back) that has been rung by a band entirely from the local band of ringers, all of whom ring at St George's regularly for local practices and services.

Although quarter-peals, lasting about 50 minutes, are regularly rung on our bells, they have hitherto always had to include one or more ringers from other towers, as there have never been enough Benenden ringers able to ring a quarter on our own. Congratulations both to Bill Martin, whose first quarter it was, and also Gavin Hogben, who rang his first as

conductor, calling the 'bobs' and 'singles' clearly and in the right places, throughout. The band was: Sue Glossop, treble; Karen Lebon, 2; Gavin Hogben (conductor), 3; Corinne Orde, 4; Rod Lebon, 5; Bill Martin, 6.

Almost two centuries ago, between about 1820 and 1840, the local band (known as the Gentlemen of Benenden) were a notable band of ringers, who rang full peals of 5,040 changes on eight bells both at Benenden and at neighbouring towers. The present band still has some way to go to equal this, but the above is a promising start, even if only on six bells - although we need more ringers.

Anyone interested in taking up this fascinating musical performing art, our unique and distinctive English national music, is invited to join us in the tower any Wednesday evening, or contact:

Rod and Karen Lebon 240083

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# Rowing with the whales

Benenden mother Gilly Walton brings us the latest instalment in her daughter Alison Wannell's rowing adventure in the Talisker Atlantic Challenge, 3,000 miles from the Canary Islands to Antigua and Barbuda.

At time of writing, 39 days completed, and only about 11 or 12 to row. The journey across the Atlantic is going well. There have been periods of no wind or of headwinds, which is a bit like rowing through treacle, and which slowed all the boats down, but then along comes a good breeze and, with the help of the trade winds, the boats all get a helpful shove towards Antigua.

There are two types of boat. One is the Concept, which is lighter, almost flat bottomed and newer. Then there is the Pure, which is older, heavier and with a shaped hull, but more stable. Ali's boat is a Pure and has done really well to remain in the middle of the pack. Her team, three men and herself, called Heads Together and Row, have had a few technical problems, the main one being the autohelm, but with magical DIY the guys on board have managed to repair it, several times. Otherwise they would have to steer with their knees - not very easy when rowing.

The wildlife has been terrific for all the crews. They have spotted whales, dolphins and turtles, and flying fish have gone winging by, some landing on the deck, one hitting a rower in the face! A Storm Petrel, a seabird, has been following them since they left La Gomera on 12 December.

Some of the nights have been amazing, but not so good when there was no moon, as the rowers couldn't see the waves, and if you can't see the horizon it is very easy to feel seasick. The moon is up again so it feels a lot more comfortable. The

days, too, are getting warmer, so it is a real treat to get in the sea and clean the barnacles off the bottom of the boat, which makes it go a bit faster.

Three boats have already arrived in Antigua, breaking all records. Heads Together should arrive there in the first couple of days of February and I will be there to meet them.

## A happy Christmas Day lunch

The Christmas day lunch, in its third year now, was a very happy and successful occasion, with 23 people enjoying the generosity of many in the village. The lunch is free, but some kind people make donations and it raised £100 for the homeless charity Catching Lives that St George's supports in Canterbury. Thanks must go to the Arnold Cole Trust for their generous donation.

The cast was as follows: mulled wine, Lesley Attwood; sprouts, Dot; beer/mineral water, Sensible Wine services; Christmas puddings, Lucinda Hamilton at Cocolicious, Cranbrook; sausage rolls, Barbara Royle; mince pies, Aurea Gregory and Janet Beattie; roast spuds, Mike Lycett; turnips, Helen Commander; carrots and gravy, Bonny Sullivan; cheese and biscuits, the Dalton Holmeses and the Leeks; port, the Hewitts; red wine and Christmas crackers, Helen Dennis.

Thanks must also go to Deborah Jenkins for setting up and laying the table on Christmas Eve; to Ian Malaugh for his taxi services; to David Commander for visuals and music; and to Helen Commander for cooking the excellent turkey roll.

Tracy Claridge

CODEWORD No10

1	F	2	E	3	Z	4	Q	5	X	6	H	7	I	8	O	9	M	10	K	11	A	12	T	13	G
14	C	15	V	16	D	17	S	18	J	19	R	20	B	21	U	22	W	23	L	24	N	25	Y	26	P

STEP CHANGE

READ, REND, TEND, TONS, TONE

NINE FROM EIGHT

VOLUNTEER

MINDBENENDERS

Answers

CROSSWORD No10

Across: 1 Loures, 5 Pila, 8 Polka, 9 Thin air, 10 Penny-farthing, 11 Poster, 12 Affect, 15 Shock absorber, 17 Essence, 19 Okras, 20 Peter, 21 Sort out  
Down: 1 Lap up, 2 Uplands, 3 Ready reckoner, 4 Sat-nay, 5 Point of honour, 6 Lea, 7 Upright, 11 Paste-up, 13 Embargo, 14 Obsess, 16 Resit, 18 Set





Bear in mind that many people sleeping rough will already have health issues caused or made worse by homelessness. They may also experience added complications due to drugs, alcohol, pain or medication. It should not be assumed that people sleeping rough have somehow become resilient to severe weather - if anything, the risk of harm and death from exposure is higher for people sleeping on the streets, as their

health may already be suffering.

Extreme cold can cause serious health problems and death for those who are exposed overnight or for long periods of time. Historically, SWEP provision was triggered when the forecast was zero degrees or below for three days. It is now best practice to take a common sense approach, where any forecast approaching zero is considered; the impact of rain, snow and wind chill are taken into account, and the 'feels like' temperature is checked, along with conditions underfoot (e.g. ice). Under the scheme, anyone who would otherwise have to sleep in the open will be offered emergency accommodation.

It is important to note that when SWEP is in place, many rough sleepers refuse help, and this is their right. A forceful intervention to provide support is not possible. People who contact the authorities about a rough sleeper should not necessarily expect to see that individual removed and placed into accommodation.

At the Open Centre, Catching Lives opens its doors in SWEP conditions. It also supplies volunteer staff and camp beds for many church halls that also open their doors during SWEP in Canterbury. Two of us would take it in turn to stay awake and watch people sleep. I did this for a couple of years, when possible.

What do I do now? I am pleased that Catching Lives is one of the ten nominated charities that St George's supports financially

## Catching the lives that fall through the cracks

Benenden's own Tracy Claridge talks about his work with the homeless charity Catching Lives

Like many people, at Christmas I had often thought of helping somewhere, wherever I was living, but it was only when I moved to Kent that I decided to do something about it. The Revd Dr Rosemary Van Wengen told me about Catching Lives (previously called The Shrine Foundation), so about 14 years ago, post divorce, I turned up on Christmas day and duly helped in the kitchens.

In year two I also started striking up conversations with many of the homeless. They were, and are, mostly well clothed and well fed - mental health, drug and alcohol abuse, unemployment and lack of self esteem are the main problems. So once a year I felt good about myself. A bit pathetic. I then volunteered to help with the night shelters when Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) comes into force.

What is severe weather? There is no single definition - any conditions that increase the risk of harm to people sleeping rough can be classed as severe. This includes extreme cold, wind, snow, rain and heat. Local Authorities should not presume when, or in what form, severe weather will occur, and should be prepared each year to escalate responses as and when required.

through mission. Just inside the church doors on the left is a box for clothes and blankets and bedding and books, and a tin container for sugar. Many of you will know the Wonky Door in Canterbury, at 27 Palace Street - voted the best second-hand book shop in Kent last year. It is a big source of funds and is run by Catching Lives volunteers. Any books left over from Benenden's village fete go straight to Catching Lives, usually a van load. At least once a month, I take a car load down to Canterbury

and nothing gets wasted. A van collects any spare clothing and our charity receives money by weight. Besides donating by standing order on a

monthly basis, I raise funds through dinners, wine tastings and sponsored sports activities.

I have a great client in London who knows a lot of people in the music industry. They sign old vinyl records, people bid and the money comes in. Thank you David Gilmour, thank you Rick Wakeman. Thank you to everyone who helps me to help Catching Lives, which survives only through voluntary donations and Government contributions, which seem to diminish year on year. Please see [www.catchinglives.org](http://www.catchinglives.org) if you would like to donate.

If you would like to visit Catching Lives in Canterbury and see what goes on, please contact me directly. Please visit the website [www.catchinglives.org](http://www.catchinglives.org) for further information. Thank you to all of you who have dropped off anything to the church for Catching Lives. We can all play a part to try and reduce homelessness and stop the hopelessness. [TLClaridge@TLClaridge.co.uk](mailto:TLClaridge@TLClaridge.co.uk)  
[www.catchinglives.org](http://www.catchinglives.org)



**CATCHING LIVES** is an independent charity aimed at supporting the rough sleepers, homeless and vulnerably housed in Canterbury and East Kent; those who have, for many reasons, fallen through the gaps in society and feel they have nowhere else to turn.

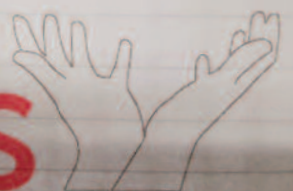
Our vision is of a society where all are included and all, no matter how disadvantaged, can make a contribution. Catching Lives works towards ending the harm caused to individuals, families and the community by homelessness, rough sleeping and insecure housing. We do this by offering immediate respite at our project in Canterbury: the Canterbury Open Centre. In addition to this, we work with our clients to help them to tackle any issues that they may have, get access to suitable accommodation and find the motivation to take steps towards personal recovery and independent living.

To this end, a combination of several different types of interventions are available on site: basic services such as nutritious meals, showers, laundry, clothing and a postal address; health services providing access to the Mental Health Outreach Service; assistance in registering with a GP; referral to a specialist for further care; social and emotional support offering a listening ear, pastoral care and crisis recovery support; advice, advocacy and referral, giving housing and benefits advice, amongst others; work, learning and meaningful activities engaging in recreational and community activities, literacy and numeracy support.

Our day centre (Station Road East, Canterbury) is open 9-2pm, seven days a week for homeless clients.

# Medical Room

**catching**  
**LIVES**



## Cape crusaders focusing on fine wine and ‘fair trade’

South Africa now sits at number seven in the world wine production table yet it still faces criticism from the international community. Here, Tracy Claridge looks at the wine of the Western Cape.

**Wine-growing areas** The Cape winelands stretch from the rugged mountains and multi-directional slopes of the coastal region to the open plains of the Klein Karoo, where viticulture takes place mainly in the riverine valleys. South Africa's vineyards are mostly situated in the Western Cape, near the coast. Rainfall on the coastal side, where natural fynbos and renosterveld vegetation flourish, measures up to 1,000mm per year. Travel over the mountains into the hinterland and the rainfall decreases dramatically, with the vegetation dominated by hardy succulents, cycads and aloes.

Currently around 95,000ha of vines producing wine grapes are under cultivation over an area some 800km in length. Under the auspices of the Wine of Origin Scheme, production zones in the Cape winelands are divided into officially demarcated geographical units, regions, districts and wards. There are five regions in the geographical unit of the Western Cape: Breede River Valley, Cape South Coast, Coastal Region, Klein Karoo and Olifants River, and Boberg (for use in respect of fortified wines from Paarl, Franschhoek, Wellington and Tulbagh). Another five geographical units exist: Eastern Cape, Free State, KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo and Northern Cape. The South African winelands encompass 28 diverse districts and some 77 smaller wards in total.

*On the 2 February 1659, Jan Van Riebeck, the first Commander of the Cape colony, praised God that “wine was pressed for the very first time”, commenting on the “very fragrant and tasty” liquid made mostly with “Muscadell and other white, round grapes”. It’s a possibility that Chenin Blanc, South Africa’s most distinctive white wine, was among that supporting cast.*

*Tim Atkin MW, Decanter 2016*

**Grape varieties** White grape varieties constitute 55%, with Chenin Blanc (Steen) accounting for 19% of the total. Red-wine varieties account for 45%, Cabernet Sauvignon being the most widely planted with 11%. Shiraz comes next with 10% and then Pinotage, indigenous to South Africa, 7%, and Merlot 6%.

According to a study commissioned by the SA Wine Industry Information and Systems (SAWIS) and published in January 2015, some 300,000 people were employed directly and indirectly in the wine industry in 2015, including farm labourers, those involved in packaging, retailing and wine tourism. The study also concluded that of the R36.1 billion gross domestic product (GDP) contributed by the wine industry to the regional economy, about R19.3 billion would remain in the Western Cape to the benefit of the residents. Growth in contribution to the GDP has risen by at least 10% per annum since 2003.

In terms of world wine production, South Africa ranks as seventh and produces 3.9% of the world's wine (2016).

**Criticism** There has been much commentary on the documentary entitled Bitter Grapes - Slavery in the Vineyards, broadcast in Denmark and Sweden in 2016 and alleging post-apartheid abuse and mistreatment of workers in the South African wine industry. The Government body Wines of South Africa made the following statement in response:

“The South African wine industry has come a long way in recent years to work together in order to improve the sustainability of one of its biggest assets - the workers. Whilst we recognise that there is still a lot of work to be done, there are numerous programmes that include social upliftment, housing, land reform, education,





skills and medical care for farm workers and their families.

“Thanks to the hard work and dedication of bodies such as WIETA (the Wine and Agricultural Ethical Trade Association) and Fairtrade, there are regular audits across the board that support and encourage positive change. However these changes cannot simply happen overnight. It will take time. The reality is that change is taking place, despite many wine farmers running their businesses on very tight margins. What is needed now is more support of the industry, instead of boycotting it.

“Each litre of wine sold at the right price point contributes to the growth of the industry, which directly translates into a flourishing industry where all stakeholders, including our workers, are supported. Increased sales of higher-priced wines bottled in South Africa will generate better profit margins and have a direct influence on the wellbeing of these farming communities and should be encouraged across the board.”

## Cape tasting

I am pleased to announce that we will receive Richard Banks of Ridgeback Wines here at the Benenden School Café for the next wine tasting on Friday 29 March, at 7 for 7.30pm.

Ridgeback is situated in the northern part of the picturesque town of Paarl in the Western Cape, on the northern slopes of the magnificent Paarl mountain.

The vineyards are amongst the finest in the Cape, and the winery, which overlooks a small dam, is home to an abundance of water fowl which add to the beauty and peaceful ambiance of this tranquil environment. There are currently 35ha under vine, with the potential to further increase the capacity.

Their first white wine was produced in 2000, and the 5\* award-winning Ridgeback Shiraz, created in 2001, was the first red. Ridgeback has built an impressive foundation and has been awarded numerous accolades and medals since 2001, both locally and abroad. The winemaker, Toit Wessels, goes from strength to strength, refusing to settle for anything less than the best being released from the cellar.

Ridgeback has a great array of wines: Shiraz, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc, Mourvedre, Petit Verdot and Grenache for the reds, and Sauvignon Blanc, Viognier and Chenin Blanc for the whites.

Today, Chenin Blanc is the number one white variety in South Africa, with 19% of plantings. The Chenin Blanc Association was founded in 1998 and now has 112 members. This has been a very positive move, and the variety's image has improved to the point where the best examples are just as highly rated as those from the Loire Valley.

Richard Banks at Benenden School Café

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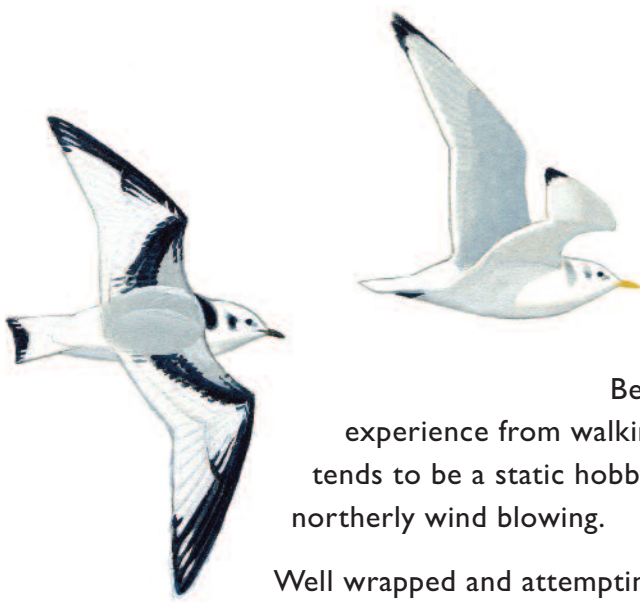
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## Bird Notes



Charms of Dungeness not for the faint of heart

One aspect of birdwatching in which I only occasionally participate is seawatching, although we are lucky in

Benenden that the coast is not too far away. It is a very different experience from walking in our local woods and meadows listening to birdsong. It tends to be a static hobby and particularly good during migration times with a strong northerly wind blowing.

Well wrapped and attempting to find shelter on the leeward side of a fishing boat on the beach at Dungeness, this is birdwatching for the dedicated! Hours looking at the swelling grey seas of the channel can be a little off-putting to say the least, but in late October I decided to give it a go and arrived in early afternoon at the boats and joined a couple of other birdwatchers.

The wind was in the north and a bright sky lit up the channel, so viewing was excellent. I waited with anticipation whilst listening to what the other birders had already seen. A few birds flew past including a flock of Common Scoter with a few other wildfowl in the vanguard. "21 Scoter, three Wigeon and a Teal," was announced to my left. I had seen the flock of Scoter but not noticed the other birds and sure enough when I looked at the tail end of the flypast there were the other birds. I am not sure I would have known what they were, despite their being very common birds, because Wigeon look very different in flight compared to feeding in the meadows where I usually see them. In flight they have large white wing patches which look even larger at a distance, something which is often the case with wildfowl.



From nowhere a large flock of gulls landed on the sea in front of me. I immediately noticed that they included a number of Kittiwake. Their black primary wing tips having no white windows was immediately apparent, making them look rather dapper in comparison to other gulls. Kittiwakes are declining as they struggle to find enough small fish, such as sand eels, to breed and feed their young.

I then looked at the remainder of the flock and realised they were all Mediterranean Gulls and behaving rather oddly, as they appeared to be trying to catch some prey flying near the surface of the sea. I was trying to identify the cause of this behavior when the whole flock suddenly took off following the appearance of a pirate of the sea in avian form: a Skua. It was chasing down the Kittiwake hoping they would regurgitate their last meal. I alerted my expert colleague to my left, who announced juvenile Pomarine Skua. Despite never having seen one before, I knew from the field guides that adults have long spoon-shaped tails, but this individual, being a juvenile, did not.

Fortunately, the light was good and the bird came quite close to the shore and I was able to make enough mental diagnostic notes to confirm in my own mind the expert was indeed right. With experiences like this I will be seawatching more frequently in the future.

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from top: Kittiwake, *Rissa tridactyla*; Mediterranean Gull, *Larus melanocephalus*; Pomarine Skua, juvenile, *Stercorarius pomarinus*

Illustrations: Stephen Message [www.message-wildlife-art.co.uk](http://www.message-wildlife-art.co.uk)





# In Your Garden

## Heavenly Hellebores

Whilst writing this article, it is bitterly cold outside, the skies are grey and on the face of it, our gardens appear to be in deep hibernation. Not so if you are a hellebore. Although I delight in seeing snowdrops pushing through the leaf litter at this time of year, what really catches my eye is a group of hellebores. In my experience they have been easy to grow and if you follow a few tips that have worked for me, then I would recommend giving them a go.

They like leaf mould, with a handful at planting time and then as a mulch in winter;



The Christmas Rose

try not to disturb them, for example dig up and move elsewhere or worse divide a large hybrid clump - they will not thank you for

it much and seem to struggle for ages; get a colony going, they seem to prefer it; and finally, don't plant anywhere where the soil is too waterlogged or too windy. They can cope with clay if you mulch regularly to improve the structure and seem fine in the sun.

My knowledge of these plants is increasing the more interested in them I become. I do know that I have worked with two of the species (*Helleborus niger* and *H. foetidus*) and the rest have been those huge flowering hybrids you will find in the garden centres now. The *H. niger* (or Christmas Rose) is one of my favourites as the flowers are the purest white. I prefer



Hellebore hybrids with narcissi

them near to the house in a container over winter so that I can see them every time I walk past, however, I have found they are a little fussy in the ground and don't thrive too well unless conditions for them are good - not too waterlogged (so not great in my heavy clay) and out of harsh winds.

The *H. foetidus* is a self-seeding monopoliser of the borders which rewards me with its architectural leaves and citrus green flowers. The hybrids are very successful in the ground and look splendid with other groups of spring contenders. Their evergreen leaves, however, can get huge and then you cannot see the flowers, so cut a few of these away - this will do no harm as they reshoot - and remove any carrying blackspot.

Once you have grown these wonderful plants you will find yourself buying new ones every winter to add to your collection so try something new this year and plant a hellebore!

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Amongst the borders



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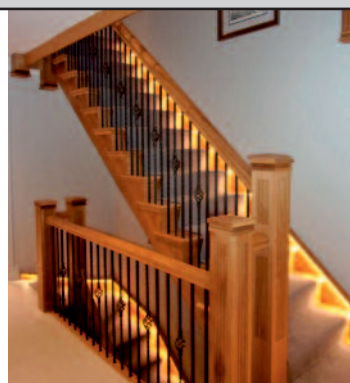
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Above: Warm spirit despite the cold outside: Carols in the Café at Benenden's Community Shop;  
 Messy Church celebrated at St George's Church; the parish's first lambs, Viv Miles and her Hampshire Downs  
 Front cover: Finding brilliant colour during the dark days of winter. Photograph: Amelia Thomas