



Benenden
Magazine
March 2026



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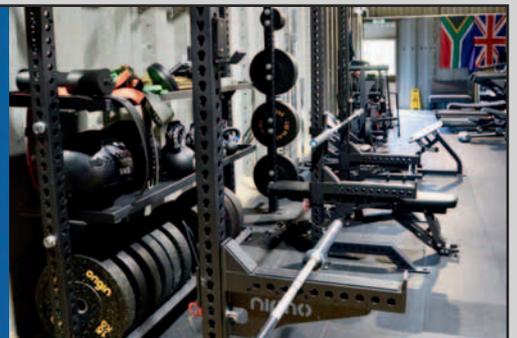
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Editorial



Well, there was one benefit of all the rain: it took biblical levels of it for our hosepipe ban to be finally lifted on 5 February after seven months! Not that I was considering venturing out in the pouring rain to water the garden - more like planning to stockpile wood to build an ark. Seesawing between near drought and floods seems to have become a normality, along with the daily surprise of encountering 'pop-up' road closures whenever we leave home. I swear that Benenden became an isolated island on a couple of days and the impact on local businesses must have been hard.

But ever the optimist (despite the weather and global politics conspiring to lower my mood) I can celebrate the good things about our village which this issue encompasses. The panto was wonderful and bonkers and even my co-editor Peter (who is panto-phobic and was coerced into attending) enjoyed the silliness (see his review on page 24). Then came the good news that Mr Ward's sausages have made a comeback and can be found at Block. Hurrah - these are legendary and Mr Ward's recipe deserves to endure. Spending time with Arthur 'Rusty' Blakemore to hear about his escapades in the village during and after the war was a reminder about how simple and fun life was for children way back then, despite bombs flying overhead (page 27).

So, as I write looking out the window at the rain and reflecting, I know I wouldn't be anywhere else. See - an unabashed optimist!

Ruth Clark, Co-Editor

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Village Calendar

March

Saturday 7	Spring Village Clean, Benenden's Community Shop, 9am	p.9
Saturday 7	Cornhole Tossing, St George's Social Club, 8.15pm	
Tuesday 10	Mobile Library, bus stop outside Benenden Village Hall, 10-10.30am	
Tuesday 10	Mobile Library, Benenden Hospital, 10.40-11.10am	
Tuesday 10	Village Lunch, Benenden Village Hall, 12.30pm	p.15
Friday 13	Hemsted Park, Scummy Mummies: Hot Mess, Benenden School Theatre, 7.30pm	p.11
Saturday 14	Fish and Chip Supper, St George's Social Club, 8.15pm	
Monday 16	Parish Council Meeting, Iden Green Pavilion, 7pm	
Tuesday 17	Iden Green and Benenden WI, Nick Rendall: History of Hemsted from 1923, Memorial Hall, 2pm	p.17
Saturday 21	Quiz Night, St George's Social Club, 8.15pm	
Tuesday 24	Mobile Library, bus stop outside Benenden Village Hall, 10-10.30am	
Tuesday 24	Mobile Library, Benenden Hospital, 10.40-11.10am	
Tuesday 24	Merry and Bright, Visit to The CM Booth Collection, Rolvenden, followed by tea at The Star, 2pm	p.13
Friday 27	Hemsted Park, Ronnie Scott's Jazz Club: Miles Davis at 100, Benenden School Centenary Hall, 7.30pm	p.11
Saturday 28	Benenden Bowls Club, Coffee Morning, Memorial Hall, 10am	
Saturday 28	Axe Throwing, St George's Social Club, 8.15pm	
Sunday 29	The Angry Whelk Fresh Fish Stall, Benenden Village Hall, 12-2pm	

Iden Green Toddler Group

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

Wednesday Coffee Mornings

Wednesdays in the Memorial Hall, 10-11.30am

Cakes & Chaos: Toddler Group

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

Parish Council



Following on from Paul Tolhurst's excellent Talking Point in this magazine last month, the parish council wholeheartedly agrees with the issues he raised following the extremely disappointing decision made by the Planning Inspectorate to allow the developer of the site in New Pond Road to go ahead with a housing scheme to build 22 homes, without the provision of any affordable housing.

This goes against the very ethos of our Neighbourhood Plan, that is to allow new homes to be built in our parish only if this includes the provision of affordable housing. This was set out clearly in our NDP policies, and these policies have been adhered to successfully by developers on the other three allocated sites in the village. Why not this site?

The parish council is following this up with the planning officers at TWBC and is considering taking the case to the Minister of State for Housing and Planning. If a developer cannot provide affordable housing in one of the most affluent areas of the South-East, what hope for the rest of the country? We are also carefully considering the consequences of the issues raised by this decision in relation to the upcoming review of our NDP.

On much more positive news, we are very pleased to welcome two new councillors, Mike Taylor and Philip McMillan, who were co-opted at our February meeting. We are now up to full capacity, firing on all cylinders again and very much look forward to working with Mike and Philip moving forward.

A date for your diary: Saturday 7 March is the spring village tidy. Please come to the community shop at around 9am to register and pick up the equipment required. This time we are co-ordinating with Rolvenden for a same day clean-up, making your trips to Tenterden even more enjoyable! We are also increasing the number of volunteer vouchers for cake and a drink at the café, so that we don't run out this time - who knew keeping our village spick and span would prove so popular!

Nicola Thomas, BPC Chair
nicola.thomas@benendenparishcouncil.gov.uk

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

Parish Council Meeting
Monday 16 March,
Iden Green Pavilion, 7pm

Church Calendar

St George's Church

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

Associate Priest: Revd Ylva Blid-Mackenzie 01233 820100 rev.ylva@gmail.com

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

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

www.benendenchurch.org 850849 benendenchurch@gmail.com

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

8am and 5pm services will be in the chancel of St George's Church, accessed through the Bishop's Door to the east end of the church

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

Sunday 1 March	8am Communion	10am All-age Communion	5pm Evening Prayer
Sunday 8 March	8am BCP Communion	10am Morning Worship	
Sunday 15 March	8am Communion	10am Family Communion	
Sunday 22 March	8am Communion	10am Morning Worship	
Saturday 28 February			4pm Connect Four at Mission Church, Sandhurst
Palm Sunday 29 March	8am Communion	10am Benefice Communion at St Nicholas, Sandhurst	
Monday 30 March			7.30pm Reflective Service
Tuesday 31 March			7.30pm Reflective Service at Mission Church, Sandhurst
Morning Prayer	8am Mondays and Fridays at The Rectory, Benenden		

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

Church Letter



Restore, Renew, Rejoice: the physical work has started

Some ten years ago the idea of a possible refurbishment of St George's Church was first mooted (the last major undertaking of work in our parish church was in Victorian times - about 150 years ago). After many design iterations, meetings with planning authorities, the Diocesan Advisory Committee, architects, contractors, and many setbacks, the work has finally started.

Our last service, using the nave, took place on 18 January and we then moved everything that was moveable in the church out for safe storage (huge thanks to everyone who helped). Worship continues: the 8am services in the Chancel, and the 10am services in the primary school. All seems to be going well with these alternative worship arrangements.

On 19 January, our appointed contractors, B W May, started to move onto site and the serious work of storing the pews and lifting the wooden floor and tiles began a week later and is progressing well.

With the exception of the west end, the wooden plinths, floorboards and joists have been removed, as have most of the Victorian tiles. These have been upcycled where possible. It has been interesting to see the construction of the large ducts for the old warm-air heating system. The work has also uncovered two large memorials that we knew nothing about, under the wooden floor on the south side of the church. All this work is taking place under the careful supervision of the Canterbury Archaeological Trust and we now have a digital record of previously unknown memorial tablets. The trust are recording all historical details and advising what should be preserved for the future.

Thank you to everyone supporting this exciting journey of restoration. The physical work of the Restore, Renew, Rejoice project is underway. (Health and Safety notice: no one should enter the main church site without permission and appropriate supervision.)

Revd David Commander, Rector and Area Dean



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Talking Point



You're never too old to volunteer

A few months ago, I moved to Benenden to live with my son and daughter-in-law. After settling in, I began wondering how I could give my days more purpose. When I asked for ideas, my daughter-in-law suggested volunteering at the village shop, which is owned and run by the community.

At first, I hesitated. I thought, "Who would want an 80-year-old like me behind the counter?" But my daughter-in-law was persuasive, and eventually I agreed to give it a try. I'm so glad I did. From the very first day, I was made to feel welcome and useful. Helping in the shop has given me a renewed sense of purpose and reminded me that we all have something to contribute, whatever our age. I've also met so many friendly villagers I might never have got to know otherwise.

So if you've ever thought about volunteering but held back because of self-doubt, please take it from me, your help will be truly appreciated. You'll be joining a warm, welcoming team, and you might even find, as I did, that it adds a whole new spark to your week.

Since starting to volunteer at Benenden's in the summer, I have moved to Tenterden. Because I no longer drive, I now catch a bus to continue helping at the shop. It can be inconvenient - the buses only run every two hours - but the joy I get from volunteering makes it worthwhile.

Through the shop, I've met so many wonderful people: fellow volunteers and our customers, who are always patient and kind. This sense of community makes every shift a pleasure. Volunteering has also boosted my confidence in other areas of life. In fact, I'm now planning to volunteer in additional roles to keep active and fill my days. Each session is about two and a half hours, which fits perfectly around my other activities - even with the bus schedule.

Benenden's village shop relies on volunteers to keep its doors open and serve the community. Even giving a small amount of your time - just a couple of hours a week - can make a major impact to the community. Every shift helps ensure the shop remains a friendly, thriving hub for everyone.

If you've ever thought about volunteering, now is the perfect time. Your contribution will be valued, your presence appreciated, and you might discover, as I did, that it brings joy and satisfaction.

David Coupland

Benenden Village Hall

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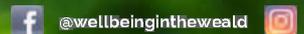


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Restore, Renew, Rejoice

Benenden has a unique opportunity to give back to the longest-established institution that has supported village life for generations. In February and March many of us have no council tax payments, so during this time we are inviting village residents and supporters to take part in 'Giving Back' by considering whether the equivalent of their usual council tax payment could be invested directly back into the Benenden community through the St George's Restore, Renew, Rejoice appeal.

For centuries, St George's Church has been more than a place of worship. It is a historic landmark, a setting for community celebrations and remembrance, a refuge in difficult times and a shared space that belongs to the whole village. Whether you attend services regularly, occasionally, or not at all, St George's has played a significant role in Benenden's story and continues to do so. It is also the backdrop to many of life's most important moments: baptisms, confirmations, marriages, and funerals - milestones shared by families across the village.

If you're not paying council tax in February or March, could that saving become a gift back to our village? You would not just be funding building repairs, you'd be investing in the village's future, helping to protect a place that shapes our community, that brings people together and gives Benenden its heart.

This 'Giving Back' campaign is inclusive, village-wide, and rooted in shared pride. Every contribution, large or small, is a statement that Benenden values its heritage, its people, and the spaces that connect us all. If you choose to add Gift Aid, your donation could be increased by at least 20% at no extra cost to you. Together, let's give back and keep the heart of Benenden beating strongly for generations to come.

To donate:

www.givealittle.co/c/restorerenewrejoicebenenden

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Facebook: St George's Church Benenden

Contact us:

fundraising@stgeorgeschurchbenenden.co.uk

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Village spring tidy

Saturday 7 March is the spring village tidy from 9-11am and we are very grateful to our volunteers - many have become regulars and take part every year - who come together to keep our village looking beautiful. Please come to the community shop at around 9am to register and pick up the equipment (litter pickers, hi viz jackets, bin bags) that's been provided by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council.

You can take part at any time for any length of time between 9 and 11am and every volunteer will receive a voucher for cake and a drink at the café. Litter collected and bagged should be left at the village hall and equipment returned by 11am.

We request that drivers take extra care driving around the village whilst our volunteers are carrying out the tidy.

For more information email:
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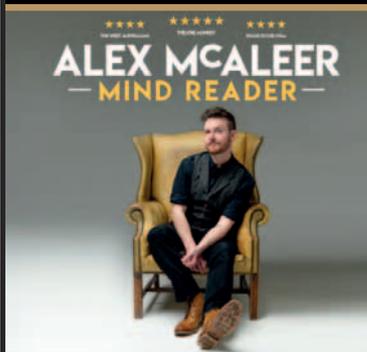
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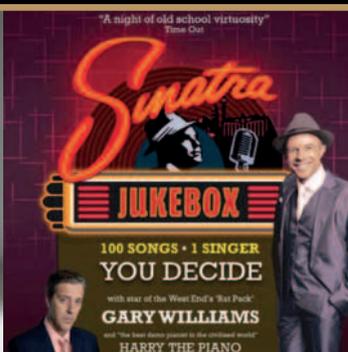
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The Bull at Benenden
Music Club
2 May



Alex McAleer
Mind Reader
9 May



The Sinatra Jukebox
30 May



An Evening with
Joe Swift
6 June



Len Phillips
Swing Orchestra
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BENENDEN FETE 2026

DONATION TIMES & INFORMATION

WHAT Good condition bric-a-brac, tools, equipment, clothes, jewellery, books & toys

WHEN into our cars from 8.30-9.30am on:

- Saturday 23 & 30 May, 6 June
 - Wednesday 27 May, 3 & 10 June
- Please DON'T leave donations outside these times

WHERE Car park area outside the public toilets, adjacent to The Bull

BOOKS FOR THE FETE

BOOK DONATIONS

WHAT Good condition books (except reference books)

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ruthbclark55@gmail.com

Benenden Fete donations

An important date for your diary - the village fete, in aid of St George's Church, takes place from 12-4pm on Saturday 13 June.

Despite the rain there are signs that spring is on its way, so what better time to start considering donating any quality unwanted items to the fete stalls. We are after books (except reference), clothes, bric-a-brac, toys, tools and equipment (anything as long as it isn't broken, please). There's no better way to give these items a new life while also raising funds.

Our volunteers will be pleased to receive your kind donations, directly into their cars in the car park area outside the public toilets, adjacent to the Bull, between 8.30-9.30am on the following dates: Saturday 23 and 30 May, 6 June; Wednesday 27 May, 3 and 10 June.

Finally, we are very grateful for the support of a fantastic team of volunteers, but there is always room for more so please get in touch. Athena Cripps and Cathy Presgrave
stgeorgesbenendenfete@gmail.com

Fete book donations

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

Ruth Clark 07767 261883
ruthbclark55@gmail.com

Merry and Bright

The club is well under way for 2026. Now to look ahead to all the delightful talks and outings we have planned for the coming year. We started off with our AGM in January followed by a talk in February from the youth bereavement charity Slide Away. In March we shall be visiting the motor museum, The CM Booth Collection, in Rolvenden followed by tea in The Star. I look forward to seeing everyone. If you are 50-plus and would like to join please call me. Lifts can also be arranged. First visit is free and then it is £15 per year.

Laraine Penny, Chair 241763

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Village lunch

All Benenden villagers are invited to join us for lunch in the village hall at 12.30pm on Tuesday 10 March. If you would like to come and haven't written your name down already, then please ring me by Thursday 5 March. It costs just £5 and lifts can be arranged.

Kay Martin 240566

Talking shop

As I write this with rain pouring down outside the window and talk of more bad behaviour amongst our political leaders in the news, I take time to read the talking point by David Coupland (page 7) and it reminds me of the very genuine kindness which abounds in this lovely village. Volunteering, in whichever way you can, truly yields more rewards than you might think. Thank you, David, for your help, warm words and support.

With the kind help of our parish council and the hard work of staff and volunteers, we are in the process of developing a greater variety of options for our shop and café. We now sell lovely scented candles, bath bombs and a whole new range of Pez sweets and Wonka chocolate bars. We are also stocking local Mudwall wines. If you are holding a celebration of any sort, there is no need any more to go to a busy town for helium balloons; we are looking to supply these to order for all kinds of occasions.

You might have noticed the new menus in the café. These include all the products we offer, among them some new ones which are proving popular: sourdough with smashed avocado and poached egg, fries and halloumi fries, chicken burgers, hash browns along with new drinks from Biddenden Vineyard, which include sparkling apple, apple and grape and strawberry, apple and mint. We are also looking to make our own brand of freshly made pre-packed sandwiches so we can better cater for our customers' needs.

Bev Beveridge info@benendens.co.uk

www.benendens.co.uk

Wednesday coffee mornings

We would love to see more people at the coffee morning in the Memorial Hall every Wednesday between 10-11.30am, to catch up and make new friends. We look forward to seeing you soon for a hot drink and a biscuit.

Gilly Walton 242855 gilly.walton@gmail.com

Benenden's Gardeners' Quiz

Members of Benenden Allotment Association and the Benenden Gardening Club dug in at the village hall in late January to enjoy another horticultural themed quiz. This year we sowed more gardening questions into the mix and pulled together varied sets of rounds which proved fun and challenging. Over 70 people took a break from their gardening duties, laid down their spades and forks and donned their thinking caps to cultivate their chances of winning. Each team had the opportunity to play their 'Monty Don' (Joker) on one of the quiz rounds. Many thanks to Mike Taylor who was an excellent quiz master, to Paul Tolhurst and Nick Marks, who were firmly planted behind the bar, to able under-gardener Ruth Clark, to Sally-Ann Marks, who sourced prizes, questions, and chivvied entrants, and Nancy Tolhurst who pulled together the questions and the scoring spreadsheet.

Feedback from attendees was very positive, and the event raised much needed funds. The Allotment Association used the funds raised last year, alongside a much-appreciated donation from the Bonfire Society, to improve access and parking on site. This year both organisations will share profits to ensure they remain well-established and continue to grow and thrive. For more information on either organisation please email:

Nancy Tolhurst, Allotment Society

nancy.tolhurst@btinternet.com

Ellie Cochrane, Gardening Club

eleanor.cochrane@btinternet.com

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Benenden Hospital

Cardiac arrests happen suddenly, often in the home, long before an ambulance can arrive. In these moments, the actions of ordinary people, family members, neighbours, and passers by, make the greatest difference.

In the UK, bystander cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) is attempted in 40%-70% of out of hospital cardiac arrests. When someone steps in immediately, they can double or even quadruple the chance of survival. Yet overall survival remains under 10%, and only around half of UK adults feel confident performing CPR on a loved one. Public access defibrillators are used in just 8.5%-10.3% of cases, despite being simple and safe to operate. The more people who know CPR, the more lives can be saved.

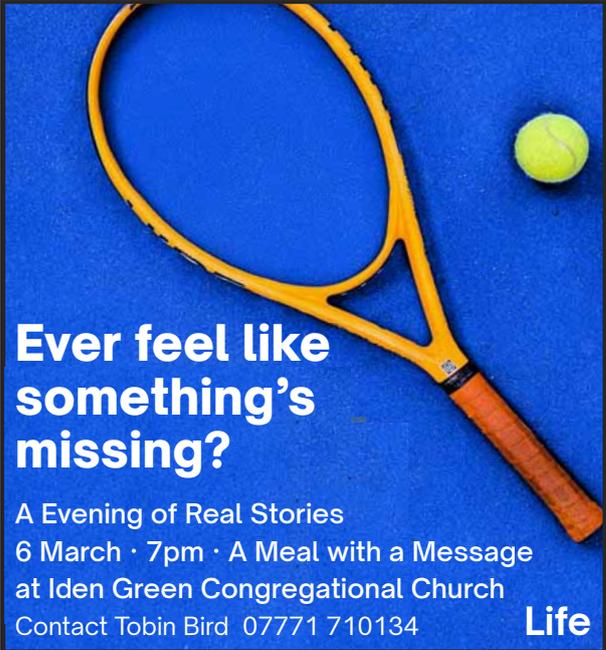
Our Clinical Skills programme grew in November 2025 when Becky Friend became clinical skills facilitator. With two decades of experience in operating theatres, Becky has seen how quickly emergencies unfold, and how vital it is for people to act confidently and decisively.

“I have spent 20 years working in theatre, seeing how quickly things can change in an emergency. I decided that I needed to be able to teach people the lifesaving skills that I have learned over my career,” she explains.

Becky’s passion for teaching began when she expanded her role as an operating department practitioner to include manual handling training. She went on to complete an instructor course through the Resuscitation Council UK, enabling her to teach CPR and basic life support. She now volunteers in the community, delivering sessions in schools, village halls, and most recently at Benenden Village Hall, which drew an excellent turnout.

Her aim is simple: to help people feel confident, capable, and empowered to act in an emergency. “My main goal for running sessions for the local community is to show people that anyone can do basic life support,” she says. “I want to ensure that people feel comfortable and empowered to take the initial steps when a person suffers a cardiac arrest.”

Claire Harley, Hospital Director



Ever feel like something's missing?

A Evening of Real Stories
6 March · 7pm · A Meal with a Message
at Iden Green Congregational Church
Contact Tobin Bird 07771 710134

Life

Iden Green and Benenden WI

The happy chatter inside the hall and the most interesting talk about Coco Chanel by Delia Taylor added a cheerful ambience to the afternoon. It was a pleasure to welcome some new members and visitors to our February meeting.

Our next talk, in the Memorial Hall on Tuesday 17 March, will be the History of Hemsted by Nick Rendall, director of partnerships at Benenden School. Nick told us about Hemsted from Roman times when he and three sixth form students visited us last year. The talk this month will be about Benenden School from its foundation in 1923. We shall enjoy chatting with the students afterwards and hearing about their projects and interests.

The talk will start at 2pm so that those who collect children from school can leave in good time.

Plans are being made for social and craft afternoons, lunches and a garden visit. These are in addition to our usual meetings in the Memorial Hall. All our meetings are open to members and non-members.

Jackie Liffen WI@daisystar.co.uk



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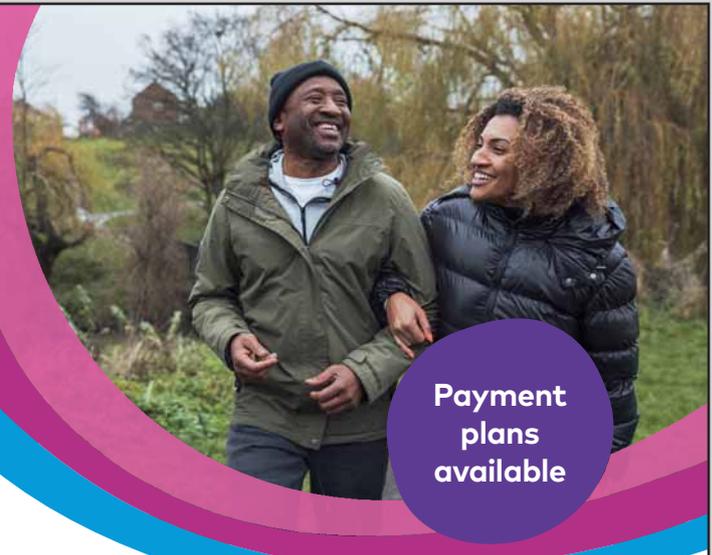
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Benenden Primary School

What does outdoor learning actually mean? We use the outdoors to support the children to thrive in every aspect of school life.

Firstly, we don't have wet play. You may remember from your time at primary school, the rainy days where break and lunchtime were spent playing board games and drawing in the classroom. We don't do that. We go out to play. By doing this, we support the children to build resilience and enable them to get rid of excess energy, ready to go back into the classroom.

Secondly, we use the outdoors as a means to embed learning and excite the children about a topic. Where better to learn about maps than outdoors, using or making a map? Where better to learn about the life cycle of plants, than gardening. Where best to create a graph using data about the weather. You get the idea! Real life tasks provide brilliant opportunities for children to engage enthusiastically with learning.

Thirdly, the outdoors enables many children who struggle to engage in the classroom to access the learning. There is significant evidence to show that children (including those with ADHD) are able to settle better having been outdoors. This is offered in a variety of ways, taking into account the needs of individual children. We have had children sitting in a barrel in the playground while completing a reading task and we have an outdoor learning provision that enables a small group of individuals to learn to engage with others and communicate successfully while learning through an adapted curriculum.

Lastly, the outdoors provides the setting for our wider curriculum, including forest school, sleepovers, wellbeing activities and walks. We love the outdoor space at school and we can often be found busy learning using the village as our classroom. Do say hello if you see us.
Alison Brook, Headteacher 240565
office@benenden-cep.kent.sch.uk
www.benenden-cep.kent.sch.uk



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Benenden Pre-School

This year is designated nationally as the Year of Reading, designed to help more people discover (or rediscover) the joy of reading and make it part of their everyday lives. At pre-school we read at least two stories daily to the children as well as singing songs and rhymes. Every morning the children also have time for independent reading, when they look at books either individually or with a friend. Most children really engage with books, turning the pages carefully and pointing out their favourite page or illustration.

Children regularly use the narratives of stories they have heard, for example the three little pigs and the big bad wolf featured recently in games in the garden. Julia Donaldson's Gruffalo and a Squash and a Squeeze storylines and characters also appear in their play. We have a big box of books for children to borrow and enjoy with their families and children often bring books from home in to share with their friends.

We are introducing simple poetry writing to the children this term and of course we celebrate the annual World Book Day in March. As Dr Seuss said: "The more you read, the more things you will know. The more you learn the more places you go."

Lucy Oakley, Supervisor
supervisor@benendenpreschool.co.uk



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Benenden School

Earlier this term, the whole school community came together to pay tribute to Janet Allen, Benenden's third headmistress, following the sad announcement of her death. It was a moment of shared reflection and gratitude, as we remembered Miss Allen's nine years of leadership and the enduring influence she had on the school.

That same week also offered a powerful illustration of Benenden's forward-looking and outward-facing ethos - one that I am sure Miss Allen would have recognised and been proud of. We were delighted to welcome two visiting speakers who inspired the girls to think ambitiously about investment and entrepreneurship, encouraging them to engage confidently with the wider world and their future possibilities.

We also said a fond farewell to our 14 guests from Benenden Guangzhou, our partner school in China, who had spent ten days with us as part of our ongoing partnership. During their time here, friendships were formed and there were some deeply touching moments as pupils from both schools said their goodbyes. These exchanges serve as a vivid reminder of the power of education to build understanding and lasting connection.

Together, these moments captured something essential about life at Benenden: a school that honours its past with gratitude, while continuing to look ahead to prepare its students for the modern world with confidence, curiosity and purpose.

Rachel Bailey, Headmistress

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Thursday 5 March
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Hospice in the Weald recitals

These are the proposed plans for this year's season of Hospice in the Weald recitals in Sandhurst. Leslie Howard, world Liszt specialist, is planning a programme on Wednesday 17 June at 3pm (minimum donation £30). Daniel Grimwood will be here for the garden party on Saturday 25 July at 3pm and the Dutch pianist, Florian Verweij, has asked to return on Wednesday 9 September.

Programme details will be confirmed closer to the dates. For further information please contact me in April.

Gillian Davis 850384

gillian@wimbourne.com

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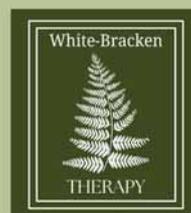
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Planning Matters

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

- 26/00180/SUB Forest Farm, Nineveh Lane, Benenden TN17 4LG. Submission of Details in relation to Condition 1 - (Acoustic Report); Condition 2 - (Details of risks associated with contamination) of 25/00233/PNR.
- 25/02953/TPO Middle Coach House, The Green, Benenden TN17 4DN. TREES: Lime (T1) - Pollard & crown lift; Field Maple (T2) - Remove Stem; Holly & Hawthorn (G1) - Cut back by 3m.
- 26/00056/FULL Havering House, Walkhurst Road, Benenden TN17 4DR. Render ground floor elevation excluding chimney.
- 25/02955/TPO Stable Cottage, The Green, Benenden TN17 4DN. TREES: Lime (T1/T2) - Re pollard and crown lift over buildings to provide a separation of no more than 4 metres; Hawthorn (T3) - Fell
- 26/00123/ELEC Iden Green Recreation Ground, Coldharbour Road. Electricity Notification - installation of a substation and underground cables.
- 26/00108/LBC The Barn, Great Nineveh, Nineveh Lane, Benenden TN17 4LG. Listed Building Consent - Proposed single storey rear extension, internal alterations, & installation of 4no. roof lights to main house.

More planning matters at:

benendenparishcouncil.gov.uk

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Leftover biscuits? Diet started and want the last of your treats out of the house? Any non-perishable foods would be appreciated for the Nourish foodbank. Please drop at St George's Church or the Garden House, Standen Street. Collections possible. Please contact Gemma at gemmalouhunter@gmail.com or call 241064. Gemma Coupland and Liz Bewley

Volunteer Transport Group

If you have a medical appointment that you are unable to get to because you do not have access to a vehicle and public transport is not a viable option, contact me and I will see if one of our volunteer drivers can assist you.

The group has responded to more than 90 requests for assistance since being re-formed, but to keep up with demand we would always welcome new volunteers to sign up and help out. There is no minimum time commitment, so if you are interested, do please get in touch with me.

Mick Moore 240755
m.moore131156@gmail.com

Benenden Panto

Near the knuckle,
off the wall and full
of (magic) beans

I've seen my dear friend and co-editor Ruth Clark go down the slippery slope over the past few years. She started out as the rear end of a camel, next a nun and a prostitute, and most recently I was shocked to see her give birth live on stage in front of the whole village, to 1,400 eels in an imaginary aquarium. To say she was plumbing new depths was true in so many ways.

That, however, is the way of panto, especially with the racy and risqué writer and director James Conmy at the helm, wreaking havoc upon the rules of Benenden entertainment, sailing gleefully close to the wind and recalibrating the lowest common denominator.

Jack and The Pet Shop was his latest venture, and while his own character in the piece, the busty, bearded and brazen Widow Wonky (looking alarmingly like an old girlfriend of mine) bemoaned "the sound of a good script being

murdered", the fact remains that a good panto script isn't truly great until it's been mangled and brutalised by a reassuringly 'am-dram' cast.

And so we found that the busiest Benenden Player on the night was Bev Beveridge,

herself no stranger to bawdy writing but on this occasion chipping in as an over-worked prompter. More lines were forgotten than I can remember, some by actors who didn't even realise they'd forgotten them; sometimes it wasn't clear if the prompts were even the right lines; but the knack of good panto is to be able to turn the amnesiac lunacy into something even funnier than the polished article.

Ian Aldridge as Jack was a case in point. As a seller of a pantomime cow and a buyer of magic beans, he was most efficient, as a recaller of words, less so, but with the aid of comedy wellies, a bad Irish accent, a quick wit and a cheeky grin, he squeezed more laughs out of a packed village hall than even the writer could have prayed for.

In fact, it seems the Benenden audience is rather more open-minded and receptive than you might have imagined. When the opening musical number includes a line about a syphilitic monkey, you might guess you're in for a rocky ride, but the next couple of hours of this Saturday night proved near enough to the knuckle to raise fears that the cast might be accidentally given the same script for the children's matinee. Suffice it to say, Chris Parkinson (eyebrows actor's own) treads the boards as a smelly and unsavoury Willy Fungus, and I think the level is set.

The premise of the plot? Hardly the point, but briefly, Buttercup the cow (Elsie Pain and Josie Clark, although which end was which I couldn't say) is mistakenly sold to a freaky mystic called Magic Mike - whose French accent sounds almost as funny as the Irish one until it turns out he's our own French thespian Pierre Gautier - for a bag of beans





that, when eaten for comic effect, give the animals in the Wonky pet shop the power of speech, which has serious ramifications for the plan of the glamorous yet

evil Ophelia Giblets (Penny Williams, booooo!) and her gormless sidekick Snotrag (played with a suitable lack of gorm by Joy Rowlands) to shut the place down and build a shopping mall. This evil duo was word perfect, sparking brilliantly off each other.

That's about it, really. Everybody gets flak, from South East Water to the local council to the good folk of Rolvenden (all of whom frankly deserve it), but mostly it's talking, singing, dancing animals, possibly too many to mention, but here goes:

There was a three-kitten chorus, consisting of Jen Conmy, Annabel Pook and Flo Aldridge, who with versatile eel Lucie Burrows turned Bohemian Rhapsody into a relatable ditty about mouse-dismemberment; Polly the insubordinate and indiscreet parrot (Pippa Cox); a tiny gerbil (Florence Hughes) who identifies as a hamster (never let it be said that our panto is behind the curve on gender issues); the eels (also including Louise Clarke) were rather surprised by the biologically incorrect live birth scene, but nobody seemed to mind; Annabelle Williams showed her versatility by doubling up as a moth and

a rabbit, although neither procreated, for which we should be thankful; Serena Gautier was a scene-stealing Deeper Dog, although Angela Patrick elegantly tilted the balance in favour of the cats as Meow Meow; Mark Hollander was three-handed, as assistant director, a very tall but inadequate one-coloured chameleon and the arch villain Mr Dodgy; Ian Malaugh joyfully led the crustacean cabaret as the kind of lobster you probably wouldn't pick out of the tank for supper; and, as ever, if we could connect Bonny Sullivan up to the National Grid (this time in her role as cow-owning Wendy Wonky), we could power the entire village for a month.

There, I think that's everybody, apart from the excellent band led by Graham Beveridge and the hard-grafting folk behind the scenes, who really are too numerous, but deserve plaudits nonetheless.

What to make of it all? I'd say it was an alarming cross between Dr Dolittle and Carry On Up Somewhere Rude, which, will hopefully be surpassed for brilliance and ludicrousness next year.

What on earth will happen to poor Ruth is anybody's guess.

Peter Thomas

Photographs: Paul Woolwich, Giles Clark, cast and crew



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Spotlight



Benenden back in the day: feral children, flying bombs and lots of 'goings on'

Chatting with Arthur Blakemore about his Benenden childhood I was transported back to what sounded like an idyllic time for a young scamp. He lives today in the house his parents built and where

he was born - a huge shock to his 44-year-old mother, who called the doctor with stomach pains only to discover Arthur's arrival was imminent. She had no idea that she was pregnant and his father had to rush around neighbours to ask for emergency baby supplies.

Born in 1938 Arthur's early memories are of Benenden during the war. His mother was a skilled plantswoman so the garden provided much-needed vegetables for the family. "There was a lot of talk about fruit that we couldn't get from overseas. I vividly remember the first time I saw a banana after the war," he recalls. "It was huge disappointment after the descriptions I had been given."

Growing up, Arthur (to many 'Rusty' or 'Russell') clearly had a great time running around the woods and fields. "There were no computers to keep us indoors so we spent most days outside - I was quite feral," he grins as he remembers being chased on his bicycle by the local policeman (on a motorbike) for minor misdemeanours. "I knew all the escape routes so he didn't stand a chance."

Outside his home, not many cars travelled along New Pond Road so it was perfect for Arthur and his friends to commandeer it for games of marbles and cricket. It got a lot busier when English and American convoys arrived in the village, preparing for the D-Day invasion. In 1944 unmanned German V-1 'doodlebug' flying bombs and V-2 missiles heading towards London were a regular sight for the six-

year-old. "The doodlebugs made a buzzing sound and were quite slow so you could see and hear them, but the V-2s were super-fast and very quiet. You only heard a quiet 'whoosh' after they had passed overhead," he remembers. "Dad built an Anderson Shelter inside - it wasn't long before mum insisted it was moved outside."

The village was a hub of activity during the 1950s, with several shops and businesses. "And when the hop pickers arrived in September the parties on Saturday nights were legendary. It wasn't unusual to see people sleeping in the ditches recovering after the night before," recalls Arthur. And it wasn't just the hop pickers. It seems that Benenden folk were an extremely sociable bunch with "lots of goings on" all year around! I pressed him for more stories but he wasn't for

telling (leaving me much intrigued).

After school Arthur headed off to Chatham for a Royal Navy engineering apprenticeship. He then joined the Blue Star shipping line and enjoyed just a couple of trips before love called him back ashore. "They say that love can blow you further than gunpowder ever can. I was courting Dilys before I went to sea and couldn't wait to come home." The day after he came ashore at Liverpool in 1954 he bought the ring and the day after that they married in Maidstone and over the next few years they welcomed babies Adrian, Natalie and Tristan into their family. They were married for almost 70 years before Dilys passed away in 2023.

Ruth Clark





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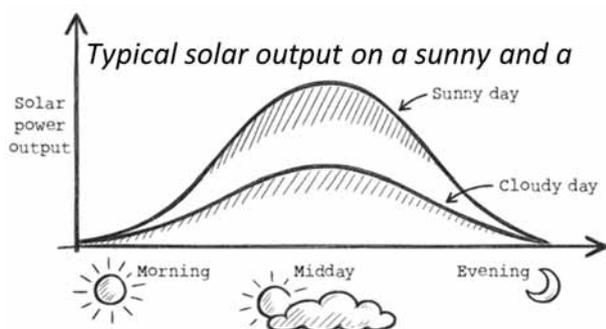
Another way to turn sunshine into power

Solar panels are now common, but do they really work in our climate, suit a village like Benenden, and make a meaningful difference to everyday homes? Here Tim Dwyer looks at solar photovoltaic (PV) systems, which generate electricity rather than heat water, and explores what they can realistically offer homes.

How solar PV works

PV technology turns daylight into electricity using panels made from layers of silicon that react when light falls on them. Even on cloudy days, daylight releases electrical charges inside the panel, creating a flow of electricity - just less of it than on a bright day. Panels don't need intense heat to work and often perform best on cool, bright days, because excessive heat reduces their efficiency.

The electricity produced by PV panels is direct current (DC). A built-in inverter converts this into the alternating current (AC) used in our homes, to power lights and appliances just like electricity from the mains. If more electricity is produced than the home is using, the surplus usually flows into the national grid, with households paid a small amount for this export. More complex-shaped roofs can benefit from 'smarter' (and usually more expensive) inverters that make better use of available solar energy.



What panels can produce in Benenden

Today's systems are far more efficient than those installed ten or 15 years ago. A typical modern panel is about the size of a wide internal door and rated to provide around 400 watts of electricity at peak output, though in Benenden's climate it will rarely reach that figure. What matters more is annual output.

Each well-fitted panel on a southish-facing roof can typically generate just under 400 kilowatt-hours (kWh) a year.

Solar panels deliver most value when their electricity is used as it's produced. Running washing machines, dishwashers or charging devices during daylight can noticeably reduce how much electricity is bought from the grid.

Storing solar electricity

Home batteries are often discussed alongside solar panels. They can store surplus electricity for evening use and, in some cases, also be topped up overnight from cheaper off-peak mains electricity. However, most home battery systems are designed to switch off during a power cut for safety reasons and do not usually provide emergency power. At current prices, batteries are usually chosen for flexibility rather than quick payback.

Fitting solar into village life

For villages like Benenden, location matters. Being within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty or a Conservation Area doesn't automatically rule out PV panels, but it does mean care is needed. Panels fitted flush with the roof, placed on rear roof slopes, or using darker frames are often more acceptable visually. Panels on outbuildings can also offer a discreet alternative. In some cases, planning permission may be required, so early discussion with council planners is advisable.

Solar panels are silent, have no moving parts and typically last 25 years or more, with little maintenance beyond possible inverter replacement. They usually repay the energy and carbon used to make them within a few years, then go on to produce low-carbon electricity and lower bills for decades.

Solar PV won't suit every home, but in the right place and at the right scale, alongside insulation and efficient appliances, it can help reduce electricity bills and offer some resilience against future price rises - without changing the look or feel of the place we live in.

Coming next: Solar thermal: hot water from the sun



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Some hot sausage news: Ward's bangers are back

It was a mystery for the ages, like the Riddle of the Sphinx with a little Lord Lucan thrown in for good measure, but the Lost Recipe of the Ward's Sausage is lost no longer.

I know that for many of you the brilliant bangers from our old village butcher's shop were something of a religion, and I'm aware that when it closed down there was a rush to fill freezers with whatever stocks remained.

It's been well over a year since that fateful day, but salvation is at hand: the old Ward's sausage is back and as tasty as ever.

The man behind this news is Will Devlin, the leading light of the Birchwood and Small Holding restaurants and now the artisan butcher's shop, Block, near Cranbrook. He had long seen the recipe a missing link in the local food chain, and finally persuaded our old friend Martin Ward to reveal the family secret and bring the great Benenden institution back to life.

"We'd been on the trail for a while," says Will over the sizzle of sausages in the pan, "and I got in touch with Martin in the new year.

"We'd bought the old block and mincer from the shop in Benenden, and they were very helpful to us, so it was great that he came and showed us how he used to make them, the way his dad showed him back in the day."

'Mr Ward's' sausages - "Martin insisted on the name because they were very much his dad's thing" - are now on the counter at Block (now open Tuesday to Saturday), and sales are already strong, says Will, who sees them as part of his mission to keep local traditions alive.

"We've got a butchery, restaurants and a farm and it feels like we should be investing in the infrastructure of food and drink in this area," he explains. "It's a challenge at the moment but we'd like to see a resurgence at a time when a lot of the old places are shutting and there aren't many young farmers starting out."

Anyway, enough chat. Now the recipe has been unearthed, I'd be keen to know what it is.

"I'm sorry, I can't tell you that," says Will, who clearly sees himself as the new guardian of the sausage secret. "I can say that it's a classic combination of pork, sage, pepper and other spices, and rusk (the breadcrumbs that help bind the sausage), so it's fairly traditional.

"There's good quality meat from our own farm, and they're hand-made fresh with natural skins, so they're always going to be a lot better than a supermarket sausage in a synthetic skin, whipped with emulsifiers. "But although there is a unique recipe, a lot of it is about how Martin mixes them, and why we wanted to learn how to do it."

The sizzling stops and the tasting begins, and I can report that Mr Ward's bangers are as good as I remember them. I'm offered a few to take home to Mrs Thomas, and she declares them a wonderful English breakfast sausage, juicy, herby, well-seasoned and full-flavoured.

We also road-test the Block Originals, which are rich and 'free-range' in taste and perfect with the following night's pasta and tomatoes, but I fancy Mr Ward's will soon be our sausage of choice again.
Peter Thomas



In Your Garden

I'm muddy, wet and cold but spring is on its way

I look after a large village garden outside Sevenoaks, stocked full of lovely plants and shrubs but particularly late-season perennials and grasses. Although this is an article for the March issue, I write it in mid-February, which is the last month I make available to cut all the remaining herbaceous material back. Some might say I have left it far too long and certain sections of the borders must be a terrific mess - but in my defence what is left is still holding strong.

The grasses are starting to fling themselves around the garden and lawns, though, which is a nuisance as that does look untidy and I have already cut back the mass of hakonechloa macra I have growing underneath a sycamore tree, as they have well and truly had it. It's a very easy job though, the leaves come away with barely more than a tug and I make sure I rake each of the crowns, too, to disturb any sycamore seedlings - and it makes them look a lot tidier.

By the end of February all the blocks of miscanthus will have come down as well and heaped in a pile in the paddock area to the rear of the property. They are tricky to rot down, tricky to burn (too much smoke) and there are huge amounts of them, around 120 grasses, all at least seven feet tall.

The rest of the perennials to come down are eupatorium, a very pale pink and pretty loosestrife and sedums.

All the geraniums and nepeta are long gone; with the ferns, I brush the spent fronds away from the crown and leave on the ground

nearby to decompose into the soil - I know the books say it is best to keep some of the fronds in situ to protect the crowns, but I don't bother, as it looks so untidy and I have never lost a fern yet, even an evergreen which tends to be more fussy.

Since January it has been a nightmare working outdoors - the rain has been incessant and I have now doubled my collection of wet-weather gear, thermal socks and gloves.



My client very kindly supplies a little electric heater in the bothy, which is constantly littered with saturated, muddy gloves, drying out just in time before they are needed again. I have also treated myself to some very cosy wool boot liners, which are a huge success (cold, damp feet are unbearable in this sort of weather).

I am very careful treading around the lawns and borders when they are in such vulnerable condition - so boards in the borders and I put a groundsheet down on the lawns to avoid over-treading on the edges. Ideally I would put down large sheets of ply but it is usually only me in the garden and I try to tread lightly!

The cold and the wet have not deterred emerging bulbs in the slightest: the snowdrops are out and looking very pretty, as are a lot of the hellebores. The narcissi are budding up nicely and the muscari have plenty of leaf, too. Primroses are still a little shy and the crocuses do not like the rain and look a mushy mess right now, but a few dry days (please!) and they usually recover. Enjoy your gardens in March - spring is just around the corner.

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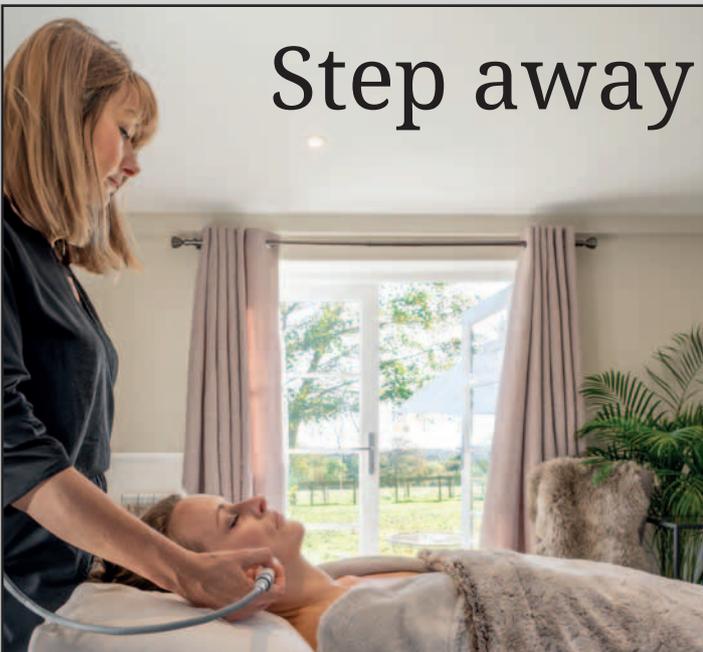
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Above: Activities: Beer and Hymns at the Bull; primary school children embracing outdoor learning; CPR and basic life support training delivered in the village hall; refreshments in the community shop after a dance and exercise class; St George's Church showing the two large memorials uncovered and the lifting of the floorboards

Front cover: Kilowatt energy: Jack and The Pet Shop lights up the stage. Photograph: Paul Woolwich