

A close-up photograph of a lit fireplace. The fire is burning brightly with orange and yellow flames, and the logs are glowing red. A black metal fire poker is stuck into the fire. To the right, a brass tool with a curved handle and a metal hook is leaning against the fireplace. The background shows the dark, textured stones of the fireplace wall.

Benenden Magazine

February 2026

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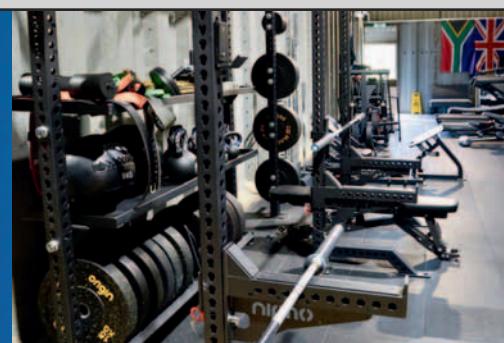
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Editorial



I don't know about you, but when I saw this month's front cover, I felt an urge to head for the Bull. Not just because I'd been reading the horror stories about out-of-control business rates threatening the very existence of pubs like our own, but also because this is the time of year when a log fire and a pint of foaming ale with friends come into their own as quintessentially British pleasures.

So I went to the Bull and had a pint or three; then I went back again, this time for a social evening to give thanks to the hard-working group of people who distribute this magazine to every house in the village every month, come rain or shine.

Our calculations suggest that this merry band of 31 stout yeomen and yeowomen shifted more than 454,000 pages last year, delivering to your door the efforts of our enthusiastic contributors, backed by 82 advertisers and the excellent Steve and Rob of Wealden Print. Ten years into our task of bringing the best of Benenden to all our readers, we at the magazine are proud of our growing team and ever grateful for your own support, feedback and ideas. Long may it continue.

Of course, not everything we write about is good news. We're not quite in Donald Trump territory when it comes to daily disasters, but this month, for example, we bring you a tale on page 7 of how, despite the concerted efforts of our parish council and many village volunteers, our Neighbourhood Development Plan, approved by 81% of voters in a referendum, has been overridden by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council to allow the building of a 22-home site with not a single unit of affordable housing, so crucial to locals and their families.

In among all the good stuff - the clubs and the charities, the walks and the gardens - it's a salutary reminder that communities like ours are always under threat and we have to do what we can to help them thrive and survive - starting with a pint at your local, perhaps.

Peter Thomas, Co-Editor

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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 February	8am Communion	10am All-age Communion	5pm Evening Prayer
Sunday 8 February	8am BCP Communion	10am Morning Worship	
Sunday 15 February	8am Communion	10am Sung Eucharist	
Wednesday 18 February			7.30pm Ash Wednesday Service at St Nicholas Church, Sandhurst
Sunday 22 February	8am Communion	10am Morning Worship	
Saturday 28 February			4pm Connect Four 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

From the Parish Registers

Funeral 9 January Ann Cole Funeral and burial

Church Letter



A short month that's long on saints and singers

Well, we're into February already. I'm not sure what happened to January - that has obviously just flown by, never to be seen again. And now we are into the month of Valentine's Day and, this year at any rate, the beginning of Lent.

Valentine's Day on 14 February is a confusing day in terms of saints in the Church. I have a book entitled 'Saints on Earth: A biographical companion for Common Worship' (a catchy title). It starts off by saying, "The commemoration and celebration of Valentine has nothing to do with lovers, doves or Roman courting rituals." Saint Valentine may be a conflation of two, or even three, Valentines who were martyred - killed for their Christian faith. It goes on to say, "There has been much speculation and misunderstanding surrounding these martyrs."

Somehow, we have moved from Christian martyrs in the 3rd and 7th centuries, to a custom of sending cards, flowers, chocolates and other gifts to loved ones. If Christian martyrs weren't enough to put a dampener on the romantic notion of Valentine's Day, it has also become a day that is hugely commercial. But, yes, I will still be giving Helen another Valentine's Day card, although, just to add another unromantic layer, in our household at least, 14 February is also the day of the Calcutta Cup (Scotland v England) in the Six Nations this year.

This year Lent starts on 18 February. Due to the closure of the nave of St George's Church, our Ash Wednesday service will take place at St Nicholas Church in Sandhurst (7.30pm.) I hope you will be able to join us for this reflective service - and, of course, the day before is Shrove Tuesday, with lovely pancakes to eat.

The other church event we have this month is combining two things that I enjoy: beer and singing! We have a 'Beer and Hymns' event at The Bull on Sunday 8 February, from 5pm. Come along, choose and sing some of your favourite hymns. (We'll have the old Come and Praise hymn book from school assembly days for many of you).

So, whether February brings a romantic day for you, or means Six Nations rugby, or beer and hymns, or pancakes, or the start of Lent, may it be a good month that doesn't fly by too quickly.

Finally, just a reminder regarding the Restore-Renew-Rejoice Project: the 8am services will continue every Sunday in the chancel of St George's, as will the monthly evening prayer service. The 10am services will take place in the hall of Benenden Primary School.

Revd David Commander, Rector and Area Dean

Village Calendar

February

Sunday 1	Jack & The Pet Shop, Benenden Players, Benenden Village Hall, 2.30pm	
Friday 6	Hemsted Park, Benenden V-1 Flying-Bomb Excavation Lecture, Benenden School Theatre, 7pm	
Saturday 7	Bingo, St George's Social Club, 8.15pm	
Sunday 8	Friends of St George's, Beer and Hymns, The Bull, Benenden, 5pm	p.9
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.13
Friday 13	Hemsted Park, King for a Day: The Nat King Cole Story, Benenden School Centenary Hall, 7.30pm	p.11
Saturday 14	Mr and Mrs Evening, St George's Social Club, 8.30pm	
Monday 16	Parish Council Meeting, Benenden Hospital Quinlan Centre, 7pm	
Tuesday 17	Iden Green and Benenden WI, Delia Taylor: Coco Chanel, Memorial Hall, 2pm	p.17
Saturday 21	Quiz Night, St George's Social Club, 8.15pm	
Sunday 22	The Angry Whelk Fresh Fish Stall, Benenden Village Hall, 12-2pm	
Monday 23	Hemsted Park, Ben Fogle: WILD, Benenden School Centenary Hall, 7.30pm	p.11
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, Slide Away: supporting children following bereavement, Memorial Hall, 2pm	p.15
Thursday 26	Hemsted Park, Attention All Shipping: A Celebration of the Shipping Forecast, Benenden School Theatre, 7.30pm	p.11
Friday 27	Benenden School Symphony Orchestra's Winter Concert, Benenden School Centenary Hall, 7.30pm	p.21
Saturday 28	Skittles, St George's Social Club, 8.15pm	

Iden Green Toddler Group

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

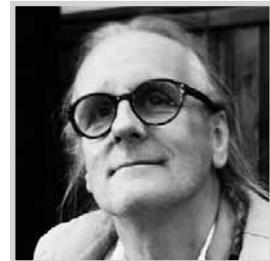
Wednesday Coffee Mornings

Wednesdays in the Memorial Hall, 10-11.30am

Cakes & Chaos: Toddler Group

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

Parish Council



Yes, I know I wrote a piece about unnecessary road closures a couple of years back but it's the gift that keeps on giving. We had plenty of notice regarding the major works on Walkhurst Road and were prepared for the detours and diversions and inconvenience we would have to endure. On the first day, my daughter and I made for Benenden's café and, as we arrived at the junction with Goddard's Green Road, were surprised to find that, had we wanted to turn right, we wouldn't have been able to because there was a red sign indicating that the road - in the direction of the hospital - was closed.

More worryingly, there was a white car parked just beyond the sign and, just before the sign, there was a worried-looking chap on the phone and a car - his - in the front garden of the end cottage. Having swerved and crashed through the gates, seemingly knocking down what looked like 250mm thick gateposts, it had fetched up perilously close to the brickwork (I only learned it hadn't gone through the wall after it had been taken away).

I asked the driver if he needed help. "On the phone to the cops, now," he said.

We continued along Goddard's Green Road, up to the junction with Golford Road. Again, fortunately, we were going left. Fortunately, because Golford Road (to our right) was also closed. This didn't augur well for people trying to get to Benenden Hospital, since the diversion sign pointed down the road we had just driven down, which was closed at both Walkhurst Road and Goddard's Green Road!

I decided to call Kent Highways, and since there had been an accident (seemingly caused by two fast-moving vehicles turning up, effectively, at the bottom of a cul-de-sac) I would use the emergency number.

It was with some difficulty that I convinced the operator that Goddard's Green Road had been closed. Eventually, he took my word and I was told it would be sorted out, which it was. It appears the sign should not have been there and it was subsequently removed. Why it was there in the first place, I could only guess - which is, of course, the problem. Guesswork should not be required by drivers when approaching Road Closed signage, nor when trying to find the way back to their intended route.

Russell Cruse, Parish Councillor

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 February,

Benenden Hospital Quinlan Centre, 7pm

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Talking Point



What price local democracy in battle with builders?

The 2011 Localism Act introduced the concept of a Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP). The intention was to enable communities to shape local development, including giving the option to identify acceptable sites for new homes. Better than centrally imposed developments, out of kilter with local views and needs.

The NDP process is not a NIMBY's charter. Benenden's team of over 20 volunteers spent four years in research, design, drafting and consultation to produce a positive plan that councillors at Tunbridge Wells Borough Council incorporated into the TWBC Local Plan as a binding document. Local democracy in action.

We worked closely with the professional planners at TWBC to ensure our plan was aligned to theirs, although their Local Plan failed to satisfy the examiner and had to be re-written. I am still surprised that we amateurs succeeded while the professionals fell short.

Our NDP identified sites for development, each incorporating affordable housing. In Walkhurst Road work is almost complete and the show home is open. In East End the site south of Goddard's Green Road is now being built following constructive consultation with the developer.

The final site on New Pond Road has proved more controversial. The developers who purchased the site produced a plan for 22 new homes, but none 'affordable'. This is a major issue. The NDP was designed to deliver a mix of homes for families or those looking to downsize, and affordable homes so that local people could stay in the village. Developers, meanwhile, are reluctant to provide affordable homes, as it reduces their profit.

The parish council argued that the development must meet our NDP policies, but the developer created a design that convinced TWBC's professional planners that any affordable housing would make the site unviable. TWBC councillors supported the parish council, overruled their own planners and rejected the application unless affordable homes were included. But, on appeal, the developers won. The National Planning Inspector was convinced by the developers' argument that the site was too expensive to develop with eight affordable homes included. He gave greater weight to TWBC planners who supported the application, not pushing back for an alternative, viable proposal.

Our positive plan in support of building, including affordable homes for local people, was set aside, although it had support from 81% of residents in a referendum. Support from elected borough councillors, who rejected the recommendation of their own planners, was also set aside.

What made this site so expensive to develop? There is a single 1970s house to knock down and this appears to have made affordable housing impossible to deliver. No wonder our green fields are under attack; brownfield sites just don't make big enough profits for some housebuilders.

Paul Tolhurst



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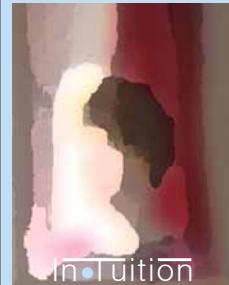
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News and Events

Cakes and Chaos

As you may have heard, St George's Church building is temporarily closing for refurbishment. This will include lifting the old worn-out tiles and laying a new floor throughout, with underfloor heating being installed. Our toddler group will have to relocate temporarily for the duration, probably until November 2026. From 23 January we will meet from 9-11am in the Mission Church, Back Road, Sandhurst TN18 5JU.

If you have any questions, please talk to me or contact me:

Helen Commander 240658 or 07930 898910
helenjcommander@gmail.com

Grief talk

Coming to terms with the loss of a loved one can be one of the hardest things we have to do. When someone has died, while we may feel our loved one is at peace, it can still leave us with hugely mixed emotions.

From 10am-12noon on Saturday 28 February in the Mission Church, Back Road, Sandhurst TN18 5JU, we are offering a morning to explore our grief through conversation, readings and crafting together. It will be a safe space to come to talk and share what has been going on for you. Talking to others who have been through similar experiences can be helpful, or just knowing that someone is there to listen.

For more information and to book this free workshop please contact:

Claire Roberts 754374
claireecr57@yahoo.com

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ALL ARE WELCOME

BVT film night

A screening of Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, hailed as one of the greatest Westerns ever, was a big hit with the sell-out audience in Benenden Village Hall on 6 December. The event, the third film night organised in the venue by Benenden Village Trust raised over £1,300 to support modernisation and improvements to the hall.

BVT would like to thank all those who made the evening a success: the audience, who contributed a great atmosphere and lots of bar and raffle ticket purchases; and the team of volunteers who organised the event, prepared the hall and cleared up afterwards.

Particular thanks to Paul Tolhurst, event mastermind and BVT trustee, and Grant Matthews of WoW Cooking who, as at previous film nights, contributed (at cost) a delicious, themed meal - this time with a Western flavour.

Martin Dickson, Chair, Benenden Village Trust

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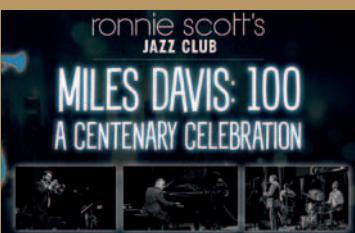


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26 February

Spring/Summer 2026 Sneak Peek



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13 March



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27 March



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in the Hat
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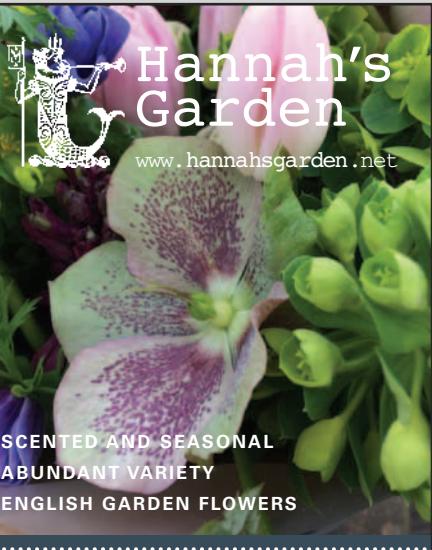


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Village lunch

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

Sheila Hume 854627

Friends of Benenden Primary School

We're delighted to share that the year ahead is shaping up to be a busy and exciting one, with lots of events planned to bring our school community together and continue supporting the children.

One of our headline events this term will be the much-anticipated Danceathon. This fun, high-energy fundraiser is always a favourite with the children, giving them the chance to get moving, enjoy music, and raise money for school projects at the same time. More details will be shared soon.

We'll also be hosting a series of bake sales, which are a wonderful way to bring everyone together over homemade treats while supporting our school. If you enjoy baking (or buying cakes), these are a brilliant way to get involved.

Another exciting addition to our calendar is a pre-loved book sale. This is a fantastic opportunity to give books a second life, encourage a love of reading and pick up some great finds at the same time. Donations and volunteer help will be very welcome.

As always, none of this would be possible without the support of our school community. Whether you can help at an event, donate items, or simply come along and take part, every contribution makes a difference. Here's to a positive, connected, and successful year ahead for Benenden Friends.

Evie Banfield and Jane Mason

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For more information get in touch at thecopperhousegarden.co.uk

Benenden Primary School

January has been a month of excitement at Benenden CEP. The Year 6 children had an incredible time at their residential trip to Bowles Outdoor Centre, the Young Voices event at the O2 was amazing - and we had a little bit of snow!

All members of the school community have been working hard to find 'glimmers' in every situation this term. Glimmers are those spiritual moments that make your tummy feel good or give you a warm, fuzzy or happy feeling. This term, these have included a staff member noticing a sunrise and taking a photo, children listening to the birds in silence at forest school, and watching a child grow in confidence with their learning. I highly recommend looking for glimmers in situations that might feel difficult - they are everywhere.

The school is now preparing for the Benenden Showcase - where children can audition and, if successful, show a packed audience their talents. In previous years, this has included comedy acts, singing, drama sketches, breakdancing and ballet - to name but a few. It is always a joy to see children (who may not necessarily thrive in the classroom) blossoming and performing so beautifully.

Alison Brook, Headteacher 240565

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Talking shop

We are starting the new year with renewed energy and there have been some positive changes. We have been welcoming in some great new volunteers as well as welcoming back many of our former ones. Jules, our manager, has sourced some new suppliers whose products we are going to try; Holmes Bakery, who provide specialist pastries; J Hall and Sons, who produce simple slices of favourite cakes to add to picnics and lunch boxes; Choc on Choc (who doesn't love that name?), offering products similar to those of Hotel Chocolat; the Victorian Candle Company and the Yorkshire Candle Company, who provide gorgeously scented candles (e.g. cedar wood and vanilla, lime and mango, caramel latte, baby powder) at a reasonable price; and Timeless Aromas offering bath salts and wax mounts. Some great choices here for Valentine's Day.

You will have noticed that we have some lovely new café furniture both inside and out. Both sets have been bought with funds donated by two very kind people who want to remain anonymous. We offer our sincere thanks to them for their generosity.

We would also like to express our gratitude to the parish council for a much-needed grant to cover the cost of some basic replacement items. So far we have bought a new laptop, menu boards and oven. We are also looking to find a better chiller for the café.

Menu wise we are now offering yummy halloumi fries, french fries and hash browns as well as our normal fare.

Sunday opening times have changed just for the winter period. The shop will be open from 9am until noon. When the better weather comes it will change again.

Thank you all for your custom and continued goodwill. We all appreciate how important Benenden's is to the village and the customers, staff and volunteers who keep it buzzing and thriving.

Bev Beveridge info@benendens.co.uk
www.benendens.co.uk

Non-perishable food leftovers

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 gemma.lou.hunter@gmail.com or call 241064. Gemma Coupland and Liz Bewley

Merry and Bright

I hope everyone managed to get through the cold spell unscathed. The poor garden looks very sad at the moment, but we should be able to put our plans into action soon and they will start to look good again. After our AGM we shall start our 2026 activities, talks and outings. Do come along and join us as we have a great programme. Our next meeting is on 24 February featuring a guest speaker from the bereavement for children charity Slide Away. Lifts are available - just contact me.

Laraine Penny, Chair 241763

Christmas Day lunch

Our Christmas day lunch was attended by 21 people in total (plus two very well-behaved little dogs). We all enjoyed a traditional Christmas meal with a glass (or two) of wine, with a break at 3pm to watch the King's Speech.

Most of the items (food, decorations, crackers etc) had been provided by generous people, with money also donated. The result was we had a lovely lunch and were able to send a donation of £170 to Catching Lives, the homeless charity we support in Canterbury.

Thank you to everyone who contributed in some way to making this a successful day. We were having so much fun that no photographs were taken to record the event!

Helen Commander

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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 Village Trust

The dead and dying trees on Benenden recreation ground, which had been suffering from an attack of honey fungus, have now been cut down and removed. The problem, first described in last month's issue, affected all but four trees on the northern, roadside boundary of the recreation ground. Honey fungus (*Armillaria*) destroys the roots of trees and perennial plants.

The stumps of the trees affected will need to be ground and the remains taken away, which will take place when the weather improves. The soil will also be analysed and treated to promote the immune system of the remaining healthy trees. A view will be taken on replacing the dead trees with saplings when it is safe to do so.

The operation is being undertaken by Benenden Village Trust, the charity which owns the recreation ground and village hall. The scheduled work would have cost the BVT around £5,000, which would have had to be met from its reserves. However, the parish council has agreed to meet the costs and BVT is most grateful for this generous contribution to the wellbeing of this key village recreational facility.

Separately, a number of dead trees on the Iden Green recreation ground, also owned by BVT, were cut down and removed in early January. They were not affected by honey fungus.

Martin Dickson, Chair, Benenden Village Trust

JESUS: THE EVIDENCE

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Iden Green and Benenden WI

WI meetings foster friendship and inclusion, and January was no exception. The icing on the cake was provided by member Jocelyn Gregory, with her memories of life as a farm student in Oxfordshire. Her reminiscences never disappoint.

We also took part in the vote for the WI Resolution for 2026. WI resolutions and campaigns have long been examples of the WI's purpose and objectives. Tickets are still available for the Kent Federation AGM in March.

Popular social/craft afternoons and lunches/outings are being planned for warmer days ahead. Come to the Memorial Hall on Tuesday 17 February 2-4pm when Delia Taylor will be giving a talk on Coco Chanel. You will find a warm welcome.

Jackie Liffen WI@daisystar.co.uk



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Benenden Hospital

Whether you recognise Valentine's Day or not, February is a great opportunity for us to raise awareness of all matters of the heart. On 14 February, many take part in celebrations of romantic love, friendship and admiration. This can be especially difficult if you suffer from loneliness. You could feel lonely due to a lack of close friends or family, or you could be in a room full of people you know and still feel lonely.

According to Office for National Statistics (ONS) research published in November, 33% of Britons aged 16 to 29 reported feeling lonely "often, always or some of the time" - the highest of all age groups (17% of over 70s said the same thing). I want to raise awareness of the impact that chronic loneliness can have on your heart health, especially as this month marks the British Heart Foundation's campaign, Heart Month. Every three minutes, someone in the UK dies from cardiovascular disease so it's extremely important to check in with your heart health and wellbeing.

A study from the Universities of York, Liverpool and Newcastle published in the journal 'Heart', showed that loneliness and social isolation was associated with a 29% increased risk of coronary heart disease and a 32% increased risk of having a stroke. Loneliness, if severe or lasting a long time, might also increase the risk of other health conditions such as stress, anxiety, low mood or depression and dementia.

So, take some time to reconnect with yourself and others this Heart Month - you never know what benefits it could have on your health.

Claire Harley, Hospital Director

The Rhythm of Life Community Choir

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Village Fete

We are very happy to announce that our wonderful village fete, in support of St George's Church, will take place on The Green on Saturday 13 June (12-4pm). Planning is already well underway to create a wonderful community event featuring traditional stalls, games, fun, music, food and drink.

Over the next few months we will provide updates and details of where and when to drop off your much-appreciated donations (starting in May). So please start putting aside any pre-loved and good condition toys, books, clothes, jewellery, bric-a-brac, tools and hardware that you would like to give. It's so good that these items will find new life at the fete while also contributing to the upkeep of the church. Although the church interior will be closed we hope that the tower will be open for visits to try the bells and enjoy the fabulous views. We will keep you updated.

As always, the success of the fete depends hugely on the support and energy of many volunteers. If you would like to get involved for a few hours on the day before or on fete day itself (10-6pm) it would be very much appreciated, and we would love to hear from you. Every little helps enormously and you will still be able to enjoy all the fun of the fete.

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Bringing the lonely in from the cold

February can be a challenging month for many people. Colder weather and short days can make it difficult to stay connected, and it's often tempting to stay indoors. Loneliness isn't always obvious, and for some older people or those who live alone, getting out at this time of year can be difficult, making the winter months feel particularly isolating.

A short phone call, a visit to say hello to a neighbour, or even a letter through the door can make a real difference. It's sad that letter writing is something of a lost art, but I find that taking the time to write a few lines by hand, even a short note, can mean a great deal to many people, showing them they're cared for, while also offering a welcome break from screens!

Charities like Age UK also run telephone friendship services, matching volunteers with older people for a regular weekly chat. Just half an hour a week can provide companionship and friendship to those who might otherwise go days without speaking to anyone. Many of our local churches and charities run face-to-face befriending schemes, and many community groups across the Weald (like The Dementia Experience) are glad to welcome new volunteers.

Rural areas like ours have such a strong sense of community, and it's something I'm immensely proud of. So, this February, I encourage everyone to write a letter to someone who'd appreciate it, volunteer, or if you know anyone that's struggling or you need help yourself, please don't hesitate to write to me at Katie.Lam.MP@parliament.uk.

Katie Lam MP

Hug in a Mug

A warm & welcoming Coffee Morning for family members of those with dementia

Thursday 5 February

10-11.30am

The Trough, Charity Farm, Swattenden Lane, TN7 3PS



Benenden Pre-School

It is really important for children to embrace all kinds of weather and we certainly have had a range on offer this winter. Rain, wind, ice and sleet followed by temperatures at above average for the time of year.

There are many benefits for children from playing outside in all weather conditions, including boosting their immune systems and offering opportunities for exploration and discovery. Fresh air is brilliant for the good health of both the body and the mind and children and adults alike will come in from outdoor play invariably feeling fresher and brighter than when they went out.

The sensory experience of the seasons fosters an understanding of the cycle of life, for example that plants need both rain and heat in order to grow, and there will be nothing more magical than soon seeing the daffodils that we planted in the autumn pushing up through the soil. Thank goodness that children adore mud and water as we have plenty of it in the garden.

Lucy Oakley, Supervisor
supervisor@benendenpreschool.co.uk

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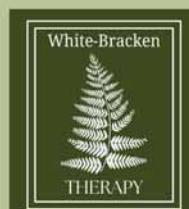
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Benenden School

Benenden School prides itself on playing an important role in the life of the village and to that end, I am delighted that we have published details of our next season of Hemsted Park shows and we extend a very warm welcome to our local community to join us for the professional performing arts events that comprise the spring/summer season. Full details can be found on the Hemsted Park website, www.hemstedpark.com

Before that season opens, we are looking forward to the final events of the autumn/winter programme, including Ben Fogle's theatre show on Monday 23 February and Charlie Connelly's joyful celebration of the Shipping Forecast on Thursday 26 February.

In addition, we are proud to invite local families to attend the many free concerts that form part of our school's musical calendar. These performances are an important expression of our students' impressive talents and showcase the breadth of the school's music provision. Highlights include our Symphony Orchestra concert on Friday 27 February at 7.30pm, as well as several other concerts throughout the term, which can also be found on the website.

I was pleased to see that the achievements of our students continued over the Christmas holidays, with a successful ski-racing trip in Canada and debating success at a Model United Nations conference in Greece. The spring term has got off to a strong start, with students in our public exam years sitting their mocks and the first weekend of January dominated by our traditional House Drama competition, in which students compete to produce a ten-minute performance involving all the girls in the house. It's always very loud and great fun!

Rachel Bailey, Headmistress

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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

Planning Matters

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

- 26/00018/LBC Hurstdene, The Street.
Internal alterations to annexe.
- 26/00017/LBC Hurstdene, The Street.
Internal alterations; window replacement with new doorset.
- 26/00036/FULL Beacon Hall House, Rolvenden Road. Replacement conservatory; single storey extension; removal of front porch.

More planning matters at:

benendenparishcouncil.gov.uk

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Friends of St George's

Who are the Friends of St George's?

You've probably heard of the Friends of St George's but may well not know who we are and what we're here to achieve. Stand by.

St George's Church has been the beating heart of Benenden for hundreds of years. It's where our children are married, our loved ones are laid to rest and we gather at the most important times of the year: Christmas, Remembrance Day, Easter, Mother's Day and more. Thanks to St George's and its tireless team of volunteers, the lonely, infirm and disadvantaged in our community are listened to and supported. We're fortunate. St George's brings a humanity to the people of Benenden most villages and towns would love to have.

The building itself dates back to the 12th century, with carved stonework from the 15th, and boasts some of the most beautiful stained glass windows in Kent. With torrential rain lashing its walls, aisle, nave and roof on a regular basis, repairs to its exterior will always be necessary to maintain its beauty and protect it from future damage.

Our purpose

Enter the Friends of St George's. We exist for two reasons. The first (and our primary purpose) is to raise essential funds for repairs to the exterior fabric of the church. We're a registered charity and don't receive a penny from the Church of England or grants from the council or other bodies. It's all down to us.

In recent years it's been our responsibility to restore the church's exterior stonework, repair dry rot, carry out work to the turret and tower, repair the north roof of the church and much more. We're also responsible for the maintenance of the Commonwealth War Graves

cemetery, which marks the selfless service the brave men and women buried there gave us.

Our second role is to bring the community of Benenden even closer together. We do this through events such as our incredibly competitive annual quiz, choral concerts, talks from local celebrities and evenings such as 'Beer and Hymns' at the Bull, which takes



place on Sunday 8 February at 5pm, when you can join us and sing your favourite hymns. It's free to attend, with drinks obviously at your expense. To nominate your favourite hymn, simply email joanne.clube@gmail.com.

Become a friend

Becoming a friend costs just £10 a year, although a great many Friends choose to give more monthly by direct debit. And, since we're a charity, donations attract Gift Aid, adding 25% at no extra cost and making donations go even further.

In 2026, we're looking for 100 new people to join the Friends of St George's. We'd love you to be one of them. To join our gang, please email markhollander1@googlemail.com or joanne.clube@gmail.com. Funds go to keep the heart of Benenden beating and the fabric of the church in sound repair. Do join us if you can.

Mark Hollander

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Local Walks

Following the village roads that lead us back into history

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

TRAIL 2

The Old Manor House, Hemsted and The Ford

Duration: 1hr 15min

Start: Grid reference 806331



Fig.1

Golden Jubilee. It is on the site of a toll house at the junction of turnpike roads.

The Old Manor House is on the right just after the well. Most of the land of Benenden Manor (earlier the den of Benenden) lay to the east of the manor house. It included the village centre, The Green and church, and on towards Rolvenden, either side of Rolvenden Road, the old drove road. The fact that the manor house is at the edge of its lands supports the idea that there may have been an even earlier, more central, manor house. In the 1700s, Benenden Manor was bought by the Norris family of Hemsted and so was joined in ownership to Hemsted Manor.

The Old Manor House is probably the oldest surviving house in the parish and is still partly surrounded by its moat. The oldest part of the house, aligned east-west, dates from about 1390 and includes a hall, originally open to the roof. The house was home to no fewer

than five families in the early 20th century. Like many other large houses in the parish, it was built by a wealthy man and was too large when hard times came.

Oaks, on banks either side of the road, show the former width of the drove road, perhaps here narrowing from a linear common along The Street. The houses on either side are mostly from the 20th century, built on land that became available for building when the Hemsted Estate was sold and broken up in 1924.

Turn right (2) into the drive of Benenden School (Fig.2), the former Hemsted Park, along



Fig.2

footpath WC119. The lodge house was designed by George Devey for Lord Cranbrook in the late 19th century.

Go left, still on footpath WC119 (3), soon after entering the park (Fig.3). The Guldeford family built the first great house here, replacing a timber-framed manor house, and created a deer park to the north-west of the house, probably when the family rose to national eminence in the late 1400s. The earliest known map of the park is from 1599.



Fig.3

The Guldefords also owned Halden Manor in Rolvenden, their main residence for a long period.

Richard Guldeford fought at the Battle of Bosworth Field and helped Henry VII, the first of the Tudors, to gain the crown; the Guldeford family then occupied high office for some 200 years. Queen Elizabeth visited Thomas Guldeford here in 1573 and he was knighted →

Local Walks

→ at Rye a few days later. The owner of Hemsted following the Guldefords was Admiral John Norris, who created a new landscape park to the south of the house, more or less as we see it now, in about 1720. The old park of the Guldefords was divided into hedged fields.

After the Norris's left, the house was reduced in size and, finally, Lord Cranbrook demolished it and built a new house a short distance from the old in 1859-62. As built by Lord Cranbrook, the house was a striking building with a prominent tower, the whole described as having "alarming vitality"; this vitality was toned down in 1912 and the tower truncated by the next owner Lord Rothermere. The house has been occupied by Benenden School since 1924.

Just before the pond to the left of the path is a slightly raised ridge, running north-east from the track; this marks a medieval road from Hemsted to Parsonage Farm and is mistakenly marked as a Roman Road on modern Ordnance Survey maps. The Roman Road from Rochester to Hastings indeed crosses our path close to here but runs more or less north-south and has left no visible trace. There is archaeological evidence suggesting a Roman settlement close by, no doubt associated with the junction between the north-south road Roman road and another running eastward to Canterbury.

Turn left on footpath WC315 (4) (Fig.4) shortly beyond the ancient sweet chestnut



tree, heading for the corner of the park on Mounts Hill (Cranbrook Road). There is a tradition that the tree was planted to mark the defeat of the Spanish Armada

in 1588, but it is probably too young - they grow very quickly. In spring, jackdaws nest in its many hollows.

At the entrance to the park there are banks, forming a roughly circular enclosure, where a

substantial house is shown on the 1599 map. The lane running north from Mounts Farm Cottages was a major route to the north, before the turnpike was built, and was known as Simmonden Lane and Crabtree Lane at different times - a map of 1777 marks it "to London". The den of Simmonden spanned the Benenden/Cranbrook parish boundary, while 'Crabtree' survives as the name of a farm close by.

At the main road turn left (5)

then at Corner



Fig.5

Cottages, just beyond Parsonage Farm, **go right on footpath WC312A (6)** (Fig.5). The farm once belonged to Combwell Priory in Goudhurst, which held the advowson (right to appoint the vicar) of St George's Church before the Dissolution of the Monasteries. The owners of Hemsted then took the advowson. There is said to have been a tithe barn or grange here, giving the name Grange Hill to this part of Cranbrook Road.

The first part of the footpath (Fig.6), along a green lane, is on the line of the Roman road. The road was used primarily to transport iron out of the Weald and was surfaced in places with the iron waste (bloomery slag) from the furnaces. The path continues on the east side of the sunken road. Finds of slag suggest that the Roman road ran close to the footpath, not on the line of the sunken road. The sunken road, obviously itself old, remained in use until the early 1900s. Its banks have ancient coppice stools and hornbeam pollards, with less common trees such as wild service and crab-apple (both near the first hedge at right angles to the



Fig.6

route) and a ground flora of woodland herbs.

Continue towards Stream Farm (once 'Ginders', after Stephen Ginder a wealthy clothier). At the stream was a ford, with stones of Bethersden marble. A 1930s photograph shows many stones in position, but few remain now and those few are not visible. The ford is reputedly of Roman origin - although it lies on the line of the Roman Road, direct evidence seems to be lacking. The line of the

Roman road beyond the ford is uncertain, but

it can be picked up again close to Mill Street.

The ford (Fig.7) is at the hub of streams, roads and field boundaries. A hundred stone close to the ford near the stream

marks the boundary of Cranbrook, Rolvenden and Selbritten hundred. Two places in the parish where three hundreds meet are on Roman roads.

Turn east (7), left, at the ford on footpath WC320 along a green lane (Fig.8). The hedge alongside has a wide variety of woody species, including a single yew, with violets and primroses in the bank. On the left, just short of the road, is a small quarry where

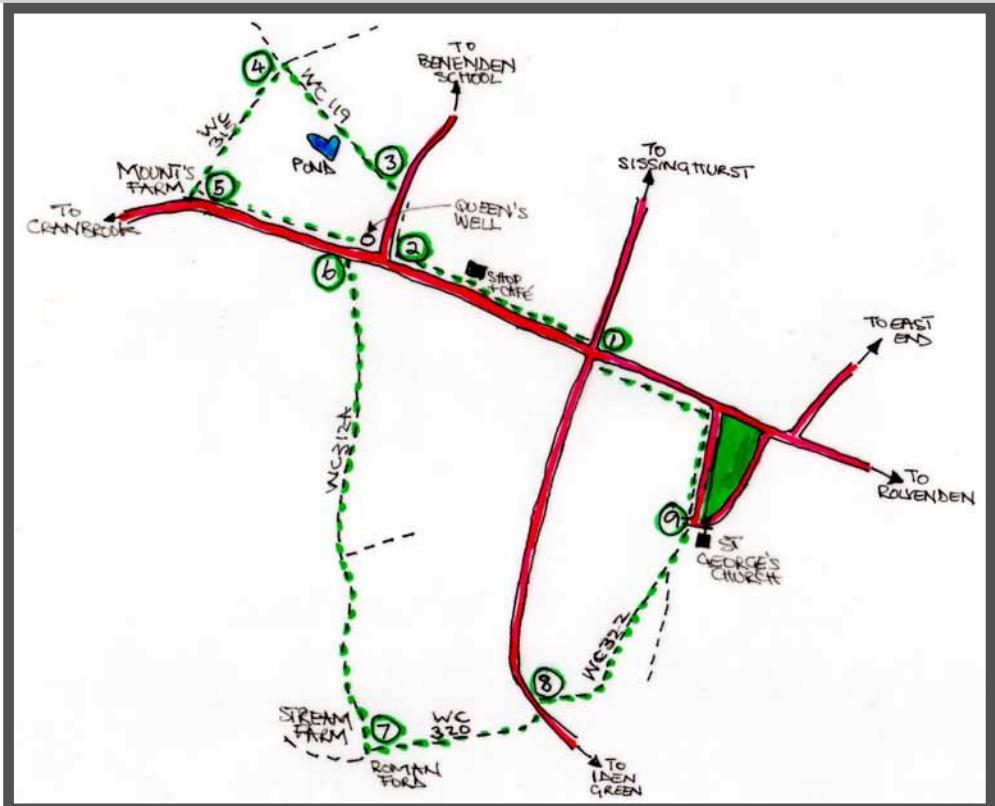


Fig.7



Fig.8

sandstone from the Ashdown Beds was dug, perhaps used in the rebuilding of the church in



the 1670s after the catastrophic fire. Emerge on the road with a view of the church ahead; imagine how spectacular must have been the old timber steeple, destroyed by the fire; it was almost twice the height of the present tower.

On reaching the top end of WC320 (8), where the stile meets the road, cross straight ahead to WC322. The bottom of the path immediately over the stile can be boggy. Follow the path up the hillside (Fig.9) with St Michael's Lodge on your right. Go through the wooden gate and turn diagonally left to cross 'Hilly Fields' to meet footpath WC323,



Fig.9

then past a paddock up to **St George's Church (9)**. From there walk down The Green and turn left to the crossroads.

Explore Ernie's history articles at www.benenden.history.pollardweb.com Useful maps: Ordnance Survey Explorer 125, 136, 137 cover the whole Benenden, Iden Green and East End area, also the online KCC footpaths map

Photographs and walk check: Helen Gray

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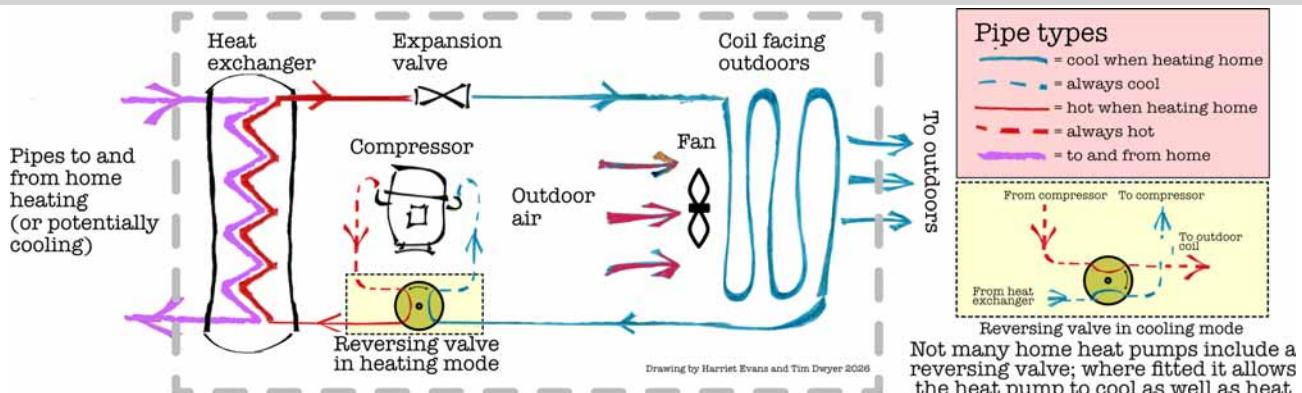


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The simple science of heat pumps

You may have heard heat pumps mentioned as an alternative to oil or gas boilers. Here, Tim Dwyer explores how they work and what they could mean for our homes.

Moving, not making, heat

A heat pump doesn't make heat by burning fuel - it moves it. Even on a cold day the air and ground still contain some warmth. A heat pump works on the same principle as a fridge, but instead of releasing unwanted heat into the kitchen it delivers heat where it is needed. A fridge takes heat out of food and releases it through the warm coils at the back. A heat pump takes heat from outside and uses it to warm the home or produce hot water.

The clever cycle

The magic comes from a refrigerant that circulates around a sealed loop (see sketch). This fluid easily switches between liquid and gas. You may have felt something similar if a drop of perfume or aftershave lands on your skin - it feels cool as it evaporates and takes heat away.

Inside the heat pump, the refrigerant absorbs warmth from the outside air (in the blue coil) as it turns into a gas. A compressor then squeezes this gas making it hotter. The hot refrigerant passes to a heat exchanger connected to the home's heating system, where it gives up its heat and turns back into a liquid.

The liquid then passes through a tiny expansion valve, where the pressure drops, cooling it again before it returns to the outside coil to pick up more heat ready to start the cycle again. Some heat pumps can reverse this

refrigerant flow, allowing the unit to provide cooling in summer.

Efficient and low carbon

Because a heat pump moves heat rather than making it, it's far more efficient than a boiler. For every unit of electricity it uses, it can deliver three or four units of heat - known as a Coefficient of Performance (COP) of three to four - giving several kilowatts of warmth for the price of one. Although electricity currently costs three to four times more per kWh than gas, this efficiency means running costs are broadly like a modern boiler.

Heat pumps give a more constant warmth, so they're often paired with underfloor heating or slightly larger radiators and are particularly well suited to well-insulated homes. On colder days, or when higher temperatures are needed, they work harder and the COP falls slightly.

Unlike gas or oil systems, heat pumps don't burn fuel or produce carbon dioxide. Because they run on electricity, their environmental impact falls as more of the UK's electricity comes from wind and solar.

Quiet, steady, and familiar

An air-source heat pump usually sits outside in a box about the size of a wheelie bin (shown by the grey dashed line) and is designed to run quietly. Ground-source systems use buried pipes to gather heat and are quieter still.

In villages like ours, where oil tanks and fuel deliveries are common, heat pumps may offer a practical alternative. So next time you feel the warmth behind your fridge, remember that the same simple idea could one day be keeping your home cosy.

In Your Garden

Evolution not revolution the best way to restore

I know it's February, so I can't attribute such tasks to a 'new year's resolution' (although I often adopt new beginnings in line with the Chinese New Year, which starts on 17 February this year - my brother lived in Hong Kong for 30 years so the fixture is firmly logged into my internal calendar, including an annual pilgrimage for dumplings in Chinatown) but 'restorative work' is still a handy 'aide-memoire' for all garden owners to herald that this is a good month to implement a change, even small, in the way our gardens are laid out and used.

In the depths of winter our gardens are dormant (at least on the surface) and the increasing daylight hours allow us plenty of time to take stock. This can be anything from tackling a small awkward corner, or widening a border, perhaps relocating the compost heap or renovating an old hedge. Or you can be thoroughly ambitious and decide to transform your terrace, start a new kitchen garden or even attempt the latest 'hot topic' and rewild parts of your garden (needs more thought than you would think).

As a designer, I can help navigate a way through a garden owner's long to-do list so that the space becomes easier to manage and ultimately is more enjoyable to be in. Traipsing off on a frosty evening to snip herbs for a warming stew will no longer involve navigating across a muddy lawn. No need to have a fight on your hands with an overhanging prickly shrub every time you want to put the bins out, or a slippery walk along a north-facing path that's badly lit when you are putting your bike away after a long commute.

How about creating a new border (which is a bit more absorbing than contemplating bike stores). If you have some working knowledge and are prepared to see it as an evolving



project, it is a very satisfying task to do one crisp winter's day. You could then fill it with flowers to bring into the house, for example.

Taking out that overgrown corner of shrubs or an unproductive tree often clears a space enough to revitalise an area and then it is easier to visualise what to do or whether just to leave it alone and enjoy the space. And don't forget our new best friend, AI - not to be overlooked to at least give a totally unexpected



perspective once you have downloaded a photo of your new project area. One of the nicest things a client has ever said to me is that they now spend more time in their new garden than they had ever imagined, not to mention catching the 'gardening bug' and developing an interest in plants.

I have noticed a new conversation taking place amongst garden designers and landscapers, which is that gardens can be 'restored' rather than completely redesigned and overhauled. I am enthused by this school of thought, particularly in an established garden that may require a gradual transformation rather than a total takeover by contractors and their giant machines. Sometimes a gentler pace is required and, with a thoughtfully staged master plan in place, even an ambitious redesign can occur over time.

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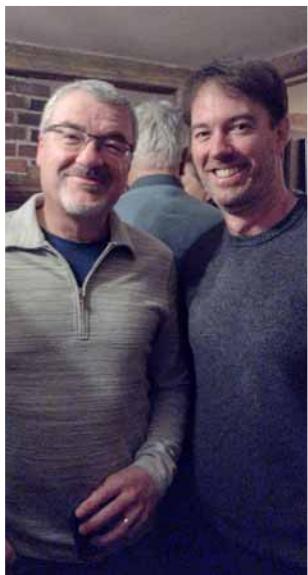
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Above: *In the depths of winter*: primary school children join the Young Voices at the O2, London; a runner's view one snowy morning; with an evening at the Bull, Benenden Magazine appreciates the efforts of distributors, contributors and printers
Front cover: *Inviting*: A warm seat at the Bull. Photograph: Lucy Barron-Reid