

A dynamic night photograph capturing a festive atmosphere. In the upper left, a large, multi-colored firework display with long, glowing trails dominates the sky. In the lower left, a large bonfire or firework at ground level emits a bright orange glow and smoke, with silhouettes of a large crowd of people watching from the foreground. A small red firework is visible in the lower right. The overall mood is celebratory and energetic.

# Benenden Magazine

December 2025

# Merry Christmas from Benenden's!

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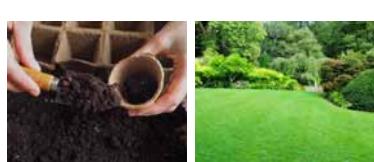
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# Editorial



In case you were wondering: three wing mirrors, one front bumper and a traffic cone; two large plastic bottles for cleaning fluid; multifarious cans, largely energy drinks; two vodka bottles (Scottish); plenty of chocolate bar wrappers but no cigarette packets at all. Interestingly, the second vodka bottle was discarded by the roadside in the hiatus between me going home to put on dry trousers and going out again to retrieve the traffic cone. The village clean-up is always a mixed bag, in so many ways. It depresses me a bit to start with but then I'm heartened by the community spirit on view, and by the free coffee and cake at the end of it, in our bustling community shop café.

The lessons to be learned, I mused as I picked, are 1) some people really don't care and probably never will, so \*\*\*\*\* to them, and 2) the 30-odd people who traipsed our lanes with their picking sticks and high-vis suggest that the population of Benenden really do care quite a lot. It's not just two weekends a year, either. This is a place where good things happen, and when bad things happen, people rally round. My only worry is that it's very easy to take this kind of thing for granted.

The shop is a great place but it will only continue to exist if everybody chips in, even if only to buy there, but preferably to volunteer there as well. We've already lost our butcher's shop, which should remind us how precious our pubs are. Use 'em or lose 'em, as they say, which applies also to all the clubs, societies and institutions featured in these pages - they all need our support to survive.

I drive through too many villages where once-thriving pubs are now private houses; dead villages where everybody has to drive miles to drink, eat, shop, get their hair done, or do yoga and watch panto in the village hall. The tipping point between a living village and a dead one is a precarious knife edge of engagement, apathy and complacency. If everybody does their bit, of course, Benenden and Iden Green have a long and happy future ahead of them. Happy Christmas and a communal New Year.

Peter Thomas, Co-Editor

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

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# Church Calendar

## St George's Church

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

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

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

Sunday 30 November	8am Benefice Communion	10am Benefice	5pm Advent Service of Light
		All-age Communion	
		at St Nicholas, Sandhurst	
Sunday 7 December	8am Communion	10am All-age	
		Communion	
Sunday 14 December	8am BCP Communion	10am Morning Worship	
Sunday 21 December	8am Communion	10am Sung Eucharist	
Monday 22 December			7.30pm Parish Carol Service
Christmas Eve		3pm Crib Service	11.30pm Communion
Christmas Day	8am Communion	10am Morning Worship	
		followed by Communion	
Sunday 28 December	8am Communion	10am Morning Worship	
Morning Prayer	8am Mondays and Fridays, and also on Christmas Eve, but not 29 December		

## 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, but not 30 December

## Iden Green Congregational Church

Pastor: Tobin Bird 240027 [www.idengreen.org.uk](http://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](http://www.sttheodore-cranbrook.org)

Masses 9am Sundays 7.30pm Holy Days

## From the Parish Registers

Baptisms 2 November Bunty and River Hukins

Funerals 3 November David Barnes Funeral Tunbridge Wells Crematorium  
22 November David Barnes Thanksgiving Service

# Church Letter



## Restore, Renew and Rejoice this Christmas

You may have heard that Christmas is coming! When you get this magazine, it will only be a matter of weeks away, so I hope all your plans for the festive period are coming together and that you will see some of your relations - either by going to see them or having them come to you. Also, that you will find space to remember the relationship between God and us and remembering the birth of his son. That is the true gift of Christmas. Come and join us at St George's for the parish carol service, or the crib service, or the 'midnight' service, or the Christmas Day service. Just as people have done for centuries.

You may also have heard of a building project for your parish church. There was a piece about this in the September edition, with details about the visit by HRH The Duchess of Edinburgh and her becoming patron for the project; and also pictures of what the church will look like, inside, following the work. Well, just like Christmas, the Restore, Renew, Rejoice project is coming. Work starts on Phase 1, the underfloor heating, mid-January 2026.

To put in underfloor heating means the removal of the floor. Removal of the floor means nowhere to stand or sit in the nave of the church (the main part, with all the pews.) So, for the duration of this work, possibly nine to ten months, St George's will be closed. Our last service is on 18 January. But it does mean we will be open again for next Advent and Christmas.

The building might be closed, but worship and services will not stop. The 8am services will take place, I hope, in the chancel of St George's, with access via the Bishop's door - that's the door on the front left-hand side of the building as you look at it from the Green. If they can't be there, and for the time when work will be taking place in the chancel, then they will be in the Memorial Hall. The 10am services will take place in the hall of Benenden Primary School, so most of the regular acts of worship will still take place in Benenden, although there will be some occasions when we will join with our benefice brothers and sisters in Sandhurst - at St Nicholas or the Mission Church - for some of the special services through the church year.

Next month's edition of the magazine will contain more details about the project and how you can get involved. If you can't wait and want to know more now, drop me an email, or please visit the project website: [www.stgeorgeschurchbenenden.co.uk](http://www.stgeorgeschurchbenenden.co.uk), where you can also donate. Please get involved in your parish church project.

Happy Christmas, and a happy 'Restore, Renew, Rejoice' project.

Revd David Commander, Rector and Area Dean

# Village Calendar

## December

Tuesday 2	Mobile Library, bus stop outside Benenden Village Hall, 10-10.30am	
Tuesday 2	Mobile Library, Benenden Hospital, 10.40-11.10am	
Tuesday 2	Christmas Village Lunch, Benenden Village Hall, 12.30pm	p.9
Saturday 6	Film Night - Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, Benenden Village Hall, 6.30pm	p.11
Saturday 6	Bingo, St George's Social Club, 8.15pm	
Tuesday 9	Benenden's Community Shop Volunteers' Singsong Social, Benenden's Community Shop, 6pm	p.13
Thursday 11	Hemsted Park, Jess Gillam, Benenden School Centenary Hall, 7pm	p.19
Friday 12	Hemsted Park, Lost in Music, Benenden School Centenary Hall, 7.30pm	p.19
Saturday 13	Hemsted Park, The Nutcracker, Benenden School Theatre, 1pm and 3pm	p.19
Saturday 13	Board Games Evening, St George's Social Club, 8.15pm	
Sat 13-Sun 14	Hemsted Park, Faulty Towers The Dining Experience, Benenden School Centenary Hall, 7pm	p.19
Monday 15	Parish Council Meeting, Iden Green Pavilion, 7pm	
Tuesday 16	Mobile Library, bus stop outside Benenden Village Hall, 10-10.30am	
Tuesday 16	Mobile Library, Benenden Hospital, 10.40-11.10am	
Tuesday 16	Merry and Bright, Christmas Party, Memorial Hall, 2pm	p.14
Wednesday 17	Iden Green and Benenden WI, Christmas Lunch, The Bull, Benenden, 12.30pm	p.23
Friday 19	Hemsted Park, The Philharmonia Brass at Christmas, Benenden School Centenary Hall, 7pm	p.19
Friday 19	Christmas Draw, St George's Social Club, 8.15pm	
Saturday 20	Christmas Quiz, St George's Social Club, 8.15pm	
Monday 22	Parish Carol Service by Candlelight, St George's Church, 7.30pm	
Christmas Eve	The Crib Service, St George's Church, 3pm	p.17
Christmas Day	Christmas Lunch, Memorial Hall, 12.15pm	
Saturday 27	Golf Game, St George's Social Club, 8.15pm	
Sunday 28	The Angry Whelk Fresh Fish Stall, Benenden Village Hall, 12-2pm	
Wednesday 31	New Year's Eve Party, 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 in St George's Church, 9-11am

# Parish Council



One of the duties of Benenden Parish Council is to formulate a Highways Improvement Plan (HIP), which is submitted to Kent County Council (KCC) so that their Highways Department can organise a programme of repairs and improvements to our parish roads, alongside other parishes under their control. We were recently advised that there had been a substantial grant from Tunbridge Wells Borough Council to allow some HIP works to be undertaken. However, KCC will only be considering one of the items on our HIP to be put forward for the Rural Parish Grant.

Our biggest concern is to reduce the frequency of accidents at both Benenden and Iden Green crossroads junctions. The improvement works that we suggested at Benenden crossroads were considered to more expensive than those at Iden Green and so we put forward the works at Iden Green as we thought this project had more chance of being given the go-ahead. It is compiled mainly of additional signage and road markings, to attempt to slow traffic on Mill Street approaching the crossroads.

In other news, sadly our colleague, Guy Hagan has now stepped down from his position as parish councillor due to the pressure of other village commitments. This leaves us with two vacancies and should any volunteers wish to step forward, please speak to our clerk, Caroline Levett, whose details are below. On behalf of the parish council I would like to thank Guy for his sterling work and for guiding us with his expertise over the last four years.

We would like to take this opportunity of wishing you all a very Happy Christmas.

Graham Beveridge, Parish Councillor

Caroline Levett, Benenden Parish Council Clerk

07593 226462 [clerk@benendenparishcouncil.gov.uk](mailto:clerk@benendenparishcouncil.gov.uk)

For more information see our website [benendenparishcouncil.gov.uk](http://benendenparishcouncil.gov.uk) or find us on Facebook

**Parish Council Meeting**  
Monday 15 December,  
Iden Green Pavilion, 7pm

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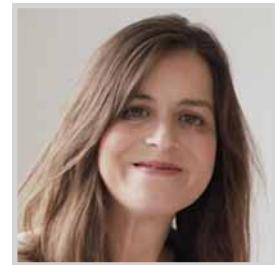
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# Talking Point



## Building a body that's made to last

If you'd told me ten years ago I'd be writing a book called *Training For Your Old Lady Body*, I'd have laughed, loudly. Back then, fitness wasn't my job. I was a lawyer, and my days were mostly hearings, witness statements and emails.

After having my second baby, I wet myself in a circuits class. Mortifying as it was, both experiences set in motion my career change, and I qualified as a personal trainer in 2017. As part of this, I started sharing little thoughts on Instagram about exercise, getting older, and fitness culture. Then one spring day, I posted this:

Training for my summer body?

F\*\*k no. I'm training for my old lady body.

Dense bones. Strong muscles. A healthy heart.

Functional independence.

It was a push back against the relentless bikini body messaging I was seeing everywhere. I nearly didn't hit 'post' because I didn't think people would get it. Oh, they got it. It went viral. Thousands of women shared it. The message of fitness as a tool for longevity rather than aesthetics really resonated with people.

That said, a few people have pushed back against the phrase "old lady body". They say it's rude or insulting. Really? If we consider the word old as offensive, this says more about the youth-obsessed culture we live in than it does about ageing itself. Ageing is aspirational. Not everyone gets the privilege.

So that's what the book is about. Regardless of your current age or level of fitness, it's about building a body that carries you into the next decades of your life with confidence. It's not a diet book. It's not about abs or aesthetics. It's about training for the long game - strength, power, mobility, independence, and joy. Writing it has involved a lot of sitting down, which, ironically, is worse for my back than any deadlift ever has been. But it's also been one of the most satisfying things I've ever done.

*Training For Your Old Lady Body* will be out in the spring and I can't wait to get it into the hands (and onto the coffee tables) of all the women who helped make it happen.

Elizabeth Davies

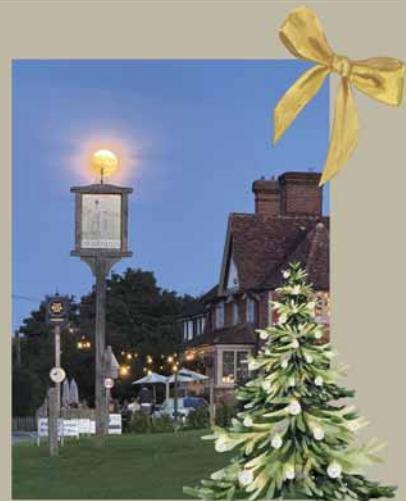
(Ed - Elizabeth's book '*Training For Your Old Lady Body*' is published in March 2026. You can pre-order your copy here: [geni.us/OldLadyBody](http://geni.us/OldLadyBody))



As the sun sets on another busy year at The Bull, Benenden, we look forward to our 22<sup>nd</sup> year serving our wonderful patrons in this cherished pub. We have loved, lost and met some incredible folk in the last year. Thank you for your continued support, it all helps to keep The Bull at the heart of this remarkable village. Cheers!

Please see our website for festive opening times, thank you.

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# News and Events

## Parish Council

Parish councillors' email addresses will be changing and the old email addresses will not work from 1 January. The council is required to use a .gov.uk domain and has made this change to its website already. If you've not already done so please look at our new website [www.benendenparishcouncil.gov.uk](http://www.benendenparishcouncil.gov.uk). We would welcome any feedback.

The main contact for the parish council remains the clerk and the new email address is [clerk@benendenparishcouncil.gov.uk](mailto:clerk@benendenparishcouncil.gov.uk)

If you need to contact a parish councillor directly, the new email addresses are:

[nicola.thomas@benendenparishcouncil.gov.uk](mailto:nicola.thomas@benendenparishcouncil.gov.uk)

[peta.grant@benendenparishcouncil.gov.uk](mailto:peta.grant@benendenparishcouncil.gov.uk)

[julie.lewis@benendenparishcouncil.gov.uk](mailto:julie.lewis@benendenparishcouncil.gov.uk)

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[stephen.cochrane@benendenparishcouncil.gov.uk](mailto:stephen.cochrane@benendenparishcouncil.gov.uk)

[debbie.ham@benendenparishcouncil.gov.uk](mailto:debbie.ham@benendenparishcouncil.gov.uk)

[russell.cruse@benendenparishcouncil.gov.uk](mailto:russell.cruse@benendenparishcouncil.gov.uk)

Caroline Levett, Benenden Parish Council Clerk

## Christmas tree recycling

Hospice in the Weald offer a simple, eco-friendly way to dispose of your unwanted Christmas tree by collecting it from your home and recycling it. Anyone living in any of the postcodes TN1-TN20 can take advantage of this service, so please pass the message on to friends in the area. It will save time while also raising funds to provide free care for those facing terminal illness and their loved ones. Our team of amazing volunteers will be collecting trees between 10-12 January.

All proceeds help to fund the free care and support Hospice in the Weald offers to adults and children in our community facing life-limiting illness. For more information and to find out and how to register for a collection, please visit the events section of our website, [hospiceintheweald.org.uk](http://hospiceintheweald.org.uk)

Richard Moxham

## Advent Carol Service

St George's Church

Sunday

30 November

5pm



## ST GEORGE'S CHURCH FLOWER FUND

STALL

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30 NOVEMBER

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## Christmas village lunch

The Christmas village lunch is on Tuesday 2 December at 12.30pm in the village hall. All welcome at £5 a head. We would like to thank all who have supported the lunch this year. Please ring me by Thursday 27 November if you would like to come.

Sheila Hume 854627

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Thursday 9am  
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Thursday 7.45pm  
St Andrew's Church Hall, Tenterden

#### GROUP REFORMER CLASSES

#### PRIVATE ONE TO ONE & DUETS

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in new Pilates Studio, Benenden

## Talking shop

It's already December - where has the year gone? We are looking forward to the brightness of the volunteers' Christmas singsong social evening in the shop on 9 December, starting at 6pm. With mulled wine and mince pies, it promises to be a lovely get together and a wonderful chance for our volunteers to meet each other. Please do come and bring along any friends who might be considering joining our volunteers' group. Please add your name to the sign-up list in the shop.

Grateful thanks to all the volunteers who help keep the shop running. Without volunteers Benenden's would not exist and we always need more to lighten the load on those who already do it. It is easy to take for granted that we have a community shop in the village with a post office and café but we really need more volunteers to help keep it running.

If, in the New Year, you are looking for a new activity and can spare some time to help us, please come in and sign up. You will be warmly welcomed. It really helps if you can commit to a couple of hours each week but any help at all is very much appreciated.

The committee offer our sincere thanks to Gary Bell, who is stepping down as chairman due to work pressures. Gary has contributed hard work, expertise and support during his time at the helm and we are sorry to see him go. The good news is that Clare Jaques, known by many as CJ, steps into the role and we warmly welcome her. Our grateful thanks also go to the hardworking staff at Benenden's, and all of us wish you a very merry Christmas.

Santa's Grotto is here on 20 December. 10am-4pm, £5 including gift.

Bev Beveridge [info@benendens.co.uk](mailto:info@benendens.co.uk)  
[www.benendens.co.uk](http://www.benendens.co.uk)



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Sunday 28:	Shop open 9am-1pm
Monday 29:	Shop and Post Office open 7.30am-5pm Café open 8.30am-3pm
Tuesday 30:	Shop and Post Office open 7.30am-5pm Café open 8.30am-3pm
New Year's Eve:	Shop and Post Office open 7.30am-3pm Café open 8.30am-1pm
New Year's Day:	Shop and Café closed
Friday 2:	Shop and Post Office open 7.30am-5pm Café open 8.30am-3pm

## RBL Poppy Appeal 2025

Following the Poppy Appeal collection in Benenden and Iden Green in November, the interim total at present stands at £4,225. The continuing generosity of donors to the Royal British Legion is greatly appreciated. We are grateful for so much support, and have particular gratitude to those who kindly gave their time to help make collections at this difficult time for all fund raising.

Jane Dalton Holmes

## Benenden Primary School

The school is buzzing with the excitement of the festive season and we have our school Christmas Fair on Friday 28 November from 3.30pm. You would be most welcome to come and buy some gifts, enjoy a hot chocolate or cook a s'more on the fire.

The children have been preparing for the Nativity, and the choir have been practising Christmas songs for a number of events. Not only that, but the Young Voices choir are busy rehearsing for their big event at the 02 Arena in January.

We have been fortunate enough this term to have a visit from Roots to Food - an incredible immersive healthy-eating experience for 120 of our children, which linked well to their design technology curriculum focusing on knife skills and cooking.

On 11 November, the Year 6 children went down to the war memorial to pay tribute to the soldiers from Benenden who fought for us. Back at school we benefited from our resident cornet player, Miss Maynard, who played the last post to help us with our two minutes of silence.

I have been fortunate to show a number of prospective parents around the school this term, and it is always a pleasure to share all the things we offer here at Benenden.

Wishing you a happy and restful Christmas.  
Alison Brook, Headteacher 240565  
[office@benenden-cep.kent.sch.uk](mailto:office@benenden-cep.kent.sch.uk)  
[www.benenden-cep.kent.sch.uk](http://www.benenden-cep.kent.sch.uk)

## Panto tickets now on sale

This year's joyful Benenden panto is 'Jack & the Pet Shop', a comedy romp where instead of climbing the beanstalk, Jack fights to stop evil developers who have designs on turning Benenden's pet shop into a super mall. Boooo. Rehearsals are well underway (see back cover). You can look forward to two hours of high-octane comedy, drama, magic and song, suitable for both little Jimmy, grandma and every age in between.

Tickets are on sale now for all four performances at [www.benendenplayers.co.uk](http://www.benendenplayers.co.uk) (see advert opposite). Evening shows are on Friday 30 and Saturday 31 January - and matinees on Saturday 31 January and Sunday 1 February. The early bird, as always, bags the best seats.

Mark Hollander

## Merry and Bright

I am writing this on the first day of November sitting in my garden. Sun is beating down on me and there is quite a breeze but I am tucked away on my patio. Looking at my garden a lot of flowers are still blooming. Hopefully this weather will make the winter shorter, when it arrives.

Our October meeting was very interesting. I had no idea how many watermills and windmills we had around Benenden. We had three new people come along to see how our Merry and Bright club works. They all enjoyed it and hopefully will return for our November meeting - on 25 November there is a visit from a Guide Dogs for the Blind representative. Our Christmas Party is on 16 December. We look forward to seeing you all. Transport can be arranged.

Laraine Penny, Chair 241763  
Julia Collard, Secretary 241944

The Benenden Panto

# JACK & THE PET SHOP

30 Jan - 1 Feb



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## IDEN GREEN CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH Christmas Services

Wednesday 17 December at 6pm

### Carols in the Car Park

Followed by mince pies & warm drinks

Sunday 21 December at 5.30pm

### Service of Lessons & Carols

Tea at 4.30pm - All welcome

Christmas Day at 9.30am

### Christmas Morning Family Service

Everyone welcome

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JOIN US AS WE CELEBRATE JESUS THIS CHRISTMAS

## Friends of Benenden Primary School

On Friday 14 November, our school hall was transformed into a glowing wonderland for the Friends of Benenden School's first ever glow party - and what a fantastic night it was! Children enjoyed an evening full of music, dancing and laughter. Plenty of glowing accessories lighting up the dance floor. The tuck shop was a huge hit too, serving sweet treats and drinks to keep everyone's energy high.

For those who needed a little break from the excitement, our quiet area offered a cosy space with soft cushions and calming colouring activities, which proved just as popular with children looking to relax and recharge.

A massive thank you to everyone who helped make the event such a success, from our amazing volunteers and staff to the children who came along to support. It was wonderful to see so many happy faces, and we're already looking forward to the next FOBS event, which is our Christmas Bonanza on Friday 28 November from 3-5.30pm in our school hall. Expect handmade gifts, games, hot food and drinks. Also a visit from Santa! Entry is free so come along and support our school. Evie Banfield and Jane Mason  
[friends@benenden-cep.kent.sch.uk](mailto:friends@benenden-cep.kent.sch.uk)  
[www.benenden-cep.kent.sch.uk/PTFA/](http://www.benenden-cep.kent.sch.uk/PTFA/)

Everyone is invited to ...

The Crib service  
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on Christmas Eve  
at 3pm



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

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

David and Helen Commander

## Benenden Hospital

I am proud to see that 'Be Caring', one of our strongest hospital values, extends well beyond our hospital. The last few months have been packed with charitable fundraisers and celebratory events.

In September we held our very own Benenden Bake-Off, which raised £532 for Macmillan Cancer Support. For Wear it Pink Day, staff wore their best pinks and £307.57 was raised for Breast Cancer Now. In November, nine colleagues and I attended the LaingBuisson Awards, which celebrate private healthcare, where we were shortlisted in two categories: Hospital of the Year and Excellence in Sustainability in Healthcare.

November saw our annual Best of Benenden staff awards, where staff celebrated their hard work in alignment with our values. Trophies were won across seven categories, and it was so heartwarming to see how colleagues supported and celebrated each other's achievements.

On Remembrance Sunday, I was honoured to lay a wreath at the Benenden village war memorial on behalf of everyone at Benenden Hospital alongside great attendance from the local community. As we look forward to the festive season, for me, there is nothing more uplifting than hearing carols echo round our atrium sung by the Primary School choir.

Claire Harley, Hospital Director

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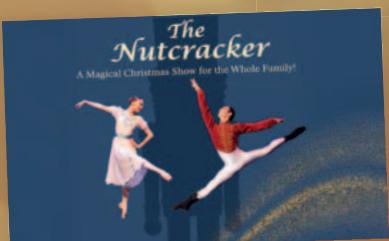
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Jess Gillam  
11 December



Lost in Music  
12 December



The Nutcracker  
13 December

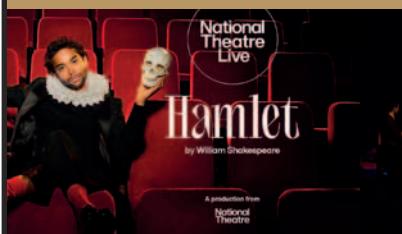


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## Gardening Quiz returns

Thanks to all who came along to the inaugural Gardening Quiz, organised by the Benenden Gardening Club and the Allotment Association earlier this year. We enjoyed it so much that we're going again, this time on Friday 23 January in the village hall. Doors open at 7pm, and we'll have a bar and raffle to keep you entertained, with the quiz itself starting at 7.30pm. Bring snacks to keep your brains ticking over. Any profits will benefit both groups. There will be 10 tables of eight, so gather a group of friends and book a table / part table. Tickets £10 each, cash / card on the door.

Nancy Tolhurst

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## Benenden Pre-School

We have been on our autumn walk through our lovely village, where the children were thrilled to be accompanied by siblings, parents and grandparents as well as staff. We collected conkers, acorns and colourful leaves, sticks and moss in a basket as we ambled our way across the green, through the churchyard and round the Glebe Field.

We all shared a picnic snack on the field, the children eating the cupcakes they had baked the previous day. They listened to a favourite story about a squirrel and his friends searching for their own autumn treasures before we walked back to pre-school.

The children have loved making the Guy for the Benenden bonfire and they all pitched in, enjoying the sensory experiences it entailed. They plastered a balloon in glue and newspaper to make the head. Once dry they covered it in paint, adding more glue and wool for the hair. They stuffed old clothes full of hay. After some discussion, the children decided to paint a big smile on the Guy's face. Always look on the bright side of life!

Lucy Oakley, Supervisor

[supervisor@benendenpreschool.co.uk](mailto:supervisor@benendenpreschool.co.uk)

## Benenden School

We were delighted to welcome more than 160 Sixth Form students from six schools across the South East to our third annual business conference, *Enterprising Minds: Creating Impact in a Fast-Changing World*. The event brought together an exceptional line-up of speakers, who inspired and challenged students to think boldly about their futures. These included members of the Benenden community and alumni, who shared valuable insights into leadership, innovation, sustainability and entrepreneurship.

In my opening address, I reflected that today's students are growing up in a time of extraordinary complexity but also of immense opportunity. I urged them to embrace the fast-changing world, seize new possibilities and remember that success is not just about profit, but about purpose, resilience, and creating something that truly matters.

Rachel Bailey, Headmistress



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## Iden Green and Benenden WI

It has been a good year for our WI. A warm welcome and excellent speakers make for happy meetings. Our extra social and craft afternoons are always popular. It has been good to see non-members at our meetings and we look forward to seeing them next year.

The winter party was very much enjoyed. Members provided the food and singers Doreen Hulm and Beverley Hone entertained us. We couldn't resist singing along with some well-remembered songs.

Next year, as well as the meetings on the third Tuesday of the month and some social afternoons (Memorial Hall 2-4pm), there will be lunches and a garden visit or two.

Our Christmas lunch is coming up in the Bull, Benenden, at 12.30pm on Wednesday 17 December. We look forward to welcoming you.

We wish everyone a happy Christmas and a peaceful New Year.

Jackie Liffen 752232 WI@daisystar.co.uk

## 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 Friday 12 December 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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## Sissinghurst Scouts

Activities over the last couple of months included a brilliant fireworks evening, a windy Bewl Water camping and water sports weekend, learning some tricky circus skills and essential first aid, trying martial arts, going on an eerie night hike, making very loud music, designing a den and making fancy pumpkin decorations.

We'd love adults and children to join us. In particular, we need a Squirrel leader for the four- and five-year-old scouts. Please email me: Jan Ashley [enquiries@sissinghurstscouts.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@sissinghurstscouts.org.uk)

## 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 80 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](mailto:m.moore131156@gmail.com)

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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

## Planning Matters

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

- 25/02569/FULL Orchards, Cranbrook Road. Erection of a single-storey annexe with associated groundworks & retaining wall.
- 25/02570/FULL Orchards, Cranbrook Road. Excavation of ground & erection of a timber sleeper retaining wall.
- 25/02550/FULL Bikkel, Goddards Green Road. Erection of an outbuilding.
- 25/02436/FULL Beacon Hall House, Rolvenden Road. Installation of ground mounted solar panels.

More planning matters at:  
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Or perhaps you are one of the 1,000 volunteers who lend your time, energy and skills - we couldn't do it without you, and we thank you. Your generosity has made a difference to the lives of adults and children in our community who are facing life-limiting and terminal illnesses.

Thanks to you, we have been there for 2,267 people and their loved ones this past year. Our specialist teams supported 388 people in our wards, provided support and advice to 1,809 people in their own homes and in care homes, and helped hundreds more to live well with our range of activities, counselling and therapies.

Every pound donated helps change lives. All our services are provided free of charge. However, with just 13% of funding coming from the government, we depend on our community for the rest. We need to raise £25,000 every single day to pay for things like nurse's salaries, food for our patients, and therapeutic support. Katie Greywood, Director of Income Generation

# Benenden Bonfire and Fireworks

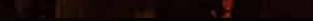
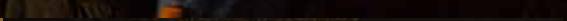
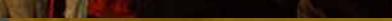
## Benenden Bonfire and Fireworks: a sparkling village extravaganza

We were so lucky with the weather again this year which made the evening extra special for everyone

who came along to enjoy the bonfire and Wizard Fireworks' amazing display, which vibrantly lit up the sky.

A huge thank you to our fantastic team. This event simply couldn't happen without the incredible dedication of our committee members and volunteers. A huge thank you to everyone who pitched in. We always need more volunteers, so if you are interested, please sign up on our website.

We're also so grateful to our generous sponsors:  
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Benenden Hospital, the Bull, Harvey's Brewery, Benenden School, Hinxden Farm Dairy, Youngs Timber & Builders Merchants and Homeleigh Timber & Building Supplies for their continued support. And of course, a special shoutout to Benenden Pre-School for creating this year's brilliant Guy. Together, you've all helped us keep one of the village's favourite traditions alive.

The Benenden Bonfire Society is all about giving back. Each year, we use the profits from the event to support local projects and opportunities within the parish.

Applications for this open for one month on 1 January 2026.

To find out further details, or to download an application form, please visit our website. We'll also post reminders on Facebook and Instagram in January, so give us a follow to stay in the loop.

We can't wait to see you all again next year.

Deborah Davidson [www.benendenfireworks.co.uk](http://www.benendenfireworks.co.uk)



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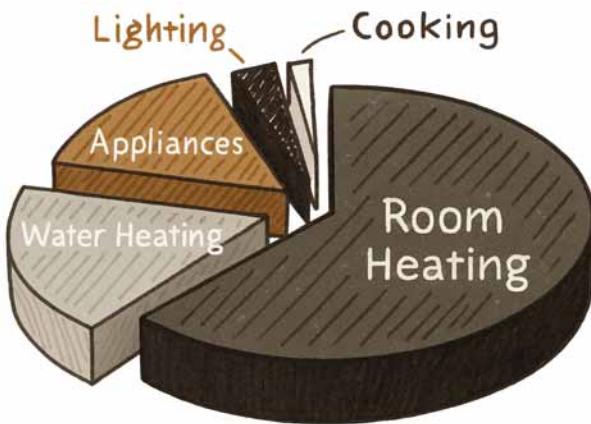


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# Energy Matters

## Where the energy goes in our homes

When the energy bill arrives - whether it's a single number of kilowatt-hours (kWh) or a load of logs - it typically doesn't tell us what that energy was actually used for. Tim Dwyer helps make sense of it all.



### The big picture of home energy

This chart gives a rough picture of where energy goes in a typical UK home each year. Most goes on heating, with hot water and appliances also taking a big share. Just knowing these proportions is the first step to making your home warmer, cheaper and kinder to the planet.

### Hold on to your heat

Heating needs depend on the size of the house, its insulation, and how warm we like it inside. A typical well-built three-bedroom home might use about 8,000 kWh a year for heating, while an older draughty house could easily use twice as much. (A kWh is defined in my November article.)

Heating use can be reduced with simple measures. Using thick curtains and draught excluders helps to keep heat indoors. Sealing gaps, adding loft insulation, and fitting double glazing can give great results. Simple habits help too - closing curtains at dusk, heating only where needed and shutting doors between rooms - all reduce heat loss.

### Breathe easy, stay warm

Homes need fresh air to stay healthy and help keep mould at bay. The trick is to control your ventilation - using small vents above windows or extractor fans to remove moisture and stale air. The aim is balance: staying warm and comfortable while still breathing clean air.

### Every drop counts

Hot water use depends more on how many people live in a home than on the building itself. Each litre of hot water takes about 0.035 kWh to heat - and it soon adds up. So, a 75-litre bath needs about 2.6 kWh, and a five-minute shower about 1.75 kWh - roughly the same as boiling the kettle ten times. Because we use hot water all year, even when the heating is off, it's always part of our energy use. Using water efficiently, fitting low-flow shower heads or choosing 'eco' settings can all help reduce it.

### Keeping your cool

Cooling has traditionally been less of an issue in the UK, but hotter summers are changing that. Cooling needs are much smaller than heating but can matter in lofts or large glazed rooms. Simple steps such as shading, blinds, and good ventilation can keep rooms naturally cool.

### Bright ideas and busy appliances

Lighting now takes a much smaller slice thanks to LEDs. An old-style bulb might use six times more energy. Fridges, washing machines and cookers all use steady amounts of energy. A fridge runs all day and can use a couple of kWh, a washing load about one, and a tumble dryer cycle two or three.

Cooking a meal in an oven might take two kWh of electricity, but a microwave uses only a small fraction of that. An air fryer cooks small meals quickly and often uses less than half the energy of heating an oven.

### Small steps, big difference

Every small step cuts the energy you use. Now that we know where the energy is going, the next step is understanding the cost.

Coming next: Untangling your energy bills



## New knee needed? Robot and a surgeon are the joint solution

As a consultant orthopaedic surgeon, I've seen first-hand how knee arthritis can restrict people's lives and diminish their quality of life. Symptoms such as stiffness, deformity, weakness and of course chronic unremitting pain can be a terrible burden. Lifting that burden, relieving the pain and restoring function can be transformative for people. Knee replacement offers that solution.

Knee replacement surgery has been a trusted solution for decades, giving patients their mobility and independence back, but like all medical innovations, things change over time: implants are more anatomical and conforming, advanced material manufacture of the metals and plastics has resulted in devices that last decades.

The way we perform the operation has also evolved and one of the most exciting developments in recent years is robotic-assisted knee replacement.

### What makes robotic-assisted knee replacement different?

Traditional knee replacement is already a highly successful operation. It involves removing the damaged surfaces of the knee joint and replacing them with smooth metal implants that move comfortably against each other, cushioned by next generation plastics. The surgery is tried and tested, and the results are life changing.

However, the procedure relies heavily on the surgeon's eye and experience when it comes to angles, alignment, and fit. Even with the most skilled hands, there is some degree of variability. That's where robotic assistance comes in.

With ROSA (Robotic Surgical Assistant), it's possible to plan your surgery with even greater precision, and we are able to do this without the need for expensive preoperative tests and scans. The ROSA technology allows your surgeon to map out the procedure in advance, tailoring it exactly to your anatomy. During the operation, ROSA provides real-time data and feedback, helping to adjust alignment and implant placement down to fractions of a millimetre.

The key thing to remember is this: the robot doesn't replace the surgeon, it is simply a more advanced tool that is used to perform the surgery with improved accuracy. The surgeon remains fully in control of every cut and every movement, but is armed with a level of detail and guidance that's simply not possible with the human eye alone.

### The benefits for patients

So, what does all this technology mean for you if you're considering knee replacement surgery?

- **Faster recovery:** Many patients notice that they can get back on their feet more quickly, with less discomfort in the early weeks after surgery.
- **Greater accuracy:** Better implant alignment leads to a more natural feeling knee and by extension to improved long-term outcomes.
- **Fewer complications:** By ensuring precise fit and balance, robotic assistance can reduce the risk of implant wear, instability, or the need for revision surgery later on.
- **Personalised surgery:** Every knee is unique. With robotic planning, your replacement is designed around your own anatomy, not an average template.

### My experience with robotic-assisted surgery

As someone who has specialised in knee surgery for many years, I've seen the incredible difference

joint replacement can make. Introducing ROSA into my practice has been a game-changer.

I was initially sceptical about the ROSA system; I was not convinced that I'd see a significant difference in the results of an already highly successful operation that I have performed hundreds of times a year for decades.

Now that I've carried out a significant number of these procedures, I can honestly say that the outcomes speak for themselves. The early days of recovery progress more smoothly, patients hit their early milestones more quickly. Patients frequently tell me that their new knee feels more natural and that they're back walking, gardening, golfing, or simply enjoying life much sooner than they expected.

One of the things I value most is being able to give my patients confidence, not just that their operation will relieve their pain, but that it will be done with the very best technology available, by a surgeon who has used it many times before.

### Is robotic-assisted knee replacement right for you?

Not every patient needs robotic assistance, but for many it represents a real step forward. If your knee pain is limiting your life, and you're considering surgery, it's well worth exploring your options. The best way to find out is to book a consultation here at Benenden Hospital where we can examine your knee, review your

investigations, and talk you through the benefits and considerations of both conventional and robotic-assisted surgery.

**Alex Chipperfield**  
Consultant  
Orthopaedic  
Surgeon



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# Melody in Mind



confident enough to join in and loved it. I wasn't alone. My co-singers were on the same page, with one saying, "I absolutely love it", another, "It's one of the best ways to relax and clear your head" and "It's so enjoyable and I've made good friends".

Singing is proven to bring multiple physical and mental benefits. It lowers stress, improves lung function and boosts your mood through the release of endorphins and other feel-good hormones. It can

## Melody in Mind Choir: with a song in their hearts

Ella Fitzgerald famously said, "The only thing better than singing is more singing", and I agree wholeheartedly. Coming together and singing does wonders for the soul and this was very much in evidence when I recently dropped in on the Melody in Mind community choir in Cranbrook.

The choir gets together from 5.30-7pm every Wednesday evening in term time in the Vestry Hall and it's clear from the start that it's a very relaxed environment. Anyone can get involved and you don't need to audition to be warmly welcomed. Just turn up and join in. Each week between 45 and 65 members take part. Under the guidance of professional choir master 'Ginger' (Ralph Millington) the evening I joined was filled with joyous and excellent harmonies delivered by the men and women gathered around Frances playing piano. There's no pressure to read music - which is supplied - but several I spoke to said that they were surprised how quickly they picked it up.

The group is very democratic, with members suggesting and voting on songs they'd like to sing. I'm not a great singer but, after some limbering up vocal exercises, felt



improve memory and cognitive function and that's in addition to the social benefits. So no wonder our local choirs are so popular.

The team behind Melody in Mind, making sure everything runs smoothly, are Nathan and Danielle Sage, supported by fellow directors Lisa, Naomi and Amanda and young helpers Sienna and Ethan. It's a not-for-profit foundation but, to help cover the cost of choir master, pianist and venue they ask for a donation of £7 per session (or £6 by direct debit), but if you can't afford this then you are still welcome.

For more information:  
email Nathan: [sing@melodyinmind.com](mailto:sing@melodyinmind.com)  
Instagram and Facebook: [@melodyinmindchoir](https://www.instagram.com/melodyinmindchoir)  
Ruth Clark

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### VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

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# Food and Drink to come

## Your Christmas claret is closer to home than you might think

It's three years now since we lost our great friend Tracey Claridge. I think about him a lot but especially so when we hold our annual TC Memorial wine tasting at Benenden School, which inevitably brings back memories of all he did for the drinkers of the village.

Of course, he did a lot of other stuff as well, because he was a charitable kind of chap, but wine was his job, so he became the Emperor of the Wine Room at the community shop, stocking the shelves and persuading travelling wine makers to visit for weird and wonderful evenings.

The pick of them was the old silver fox Patricio Gouguenheim, whom Tracey hijacked on his way to a rather more illustrious London date, which meant Argentina's finest visited Benenden on the Friday night before being released to go to Selfridge's on the Saturday morning. Patricio, sadly, is no longer with us, but his family's wines are still available on our shelves.

Eventually, the tastings outgrew the shop and were relocated to Benenden School, where the grandly named Benenden Wine Society keeps up the TC tradition. Last month we held the latest memorial bash, tickets for which sold out in the pop of a cork (roughly 24 hours, to be more precise), and the great man's influence was still at play.

Tracey used to work for Maison Sichel, who have holdings across Bordeaux, the south-west of France and the Pays d'Oc, and their wines were well represented, including the old favourite Chateau Argadens, a modern, concentrated, fruity Bordeaux Supérieur that went down as well as ever.

It's another that's still available in the Benenden's wine room, which I took over from Tracey, retaining the essence while trying to add a few new bits and bottles to stave off drought in the parish.

In a roundabout way, I'm saying that we have in our village shop a selection that most communities of 1,500 people could only dream of. Where many have to survive by buying at petrol stations and out-of-town supermarkets, our drinkers can stock up while collecting their Saturday morning papers or buying a pint of milk; and the range is worldwide and as keenly priced as we can manage without the buying power (and nail-the-grower-to-the-wall ethics) of the conglomerates.

For Christmas, for example, we have the aforementioned Argadens claret, which will sit as nicely alongside a turkey with all the trimmings as it will sidle up to a lovely rib of beef; but we can also offer you a superb value Aussie Grenache on special offer from Grounded Cru, as a racy alternative; or the silky smooth Colinas Do Douro, a Portuguese blend that punches way above its weight.

If you start with a smoked salmon, we have several Chardonnays, including a bright new French one from Domaine Grauzan in the Languedoc; and if you finish with something sweet, we have a couple of dessert wines, including the sumptuous Petit Guiraud from the Sauternes area of southern Bordeaux.

There are so many I could suggest, from Biddenden and Dingleden sparklers to Gouguenheim Malbec and a delicious southern French Albarino or Viognier - and I hope I'm not banging my head against a brick wall here.

There's nothing more disheartening for a wine room volunteer than having an enthusiastic villager come up and wax lyrical about the range and the quality of the wines and the clear and concise shelf labelling, only to finish on those immortal words, "Of course, I buy all my wine from Majestic/Waitrose/Tesco".

At a time when Benenden's is going through hard times - if not quite a full-blown existential crisis - indulging your festive spirit locally would be a good way to show your support. I promise you, we have everything you'll need for a Christmas that won't drain your bank account.  
Peter Thomas

# In Your Garden



## Christmas comes early for the gardener these days

I usually have a plan in my head for Christmas that falls somewhere between having planted all the spring bulbs for my clients (a momentous task) and then moving onto preparations for Christmas in my own home. Having only reached halfway through the bulbs so far this year, I have had to make a conscious decision to start my Christmas early in order to get everything done! It has always been a fairly small window but it seems to get even narrower each year, which I most definitely put down to the warmer weather we now experience this side of January.

Historically, when October and November were particularly chilly (remember freezing bonfire nights?), conditions were perfect to plant bulbs as early as October - the soil was good and damp, any herbaceous had died back fully and could be cleared away and by the time November arrived we had already had a couple of welcome frosts and could put the tulips in.

Not so these days, and my first ever experience of tulip blight hit me like a gong back in 2023. We have left the borders clear of tulips since and am tentatively planting again this year, but I suspect I have not left it long enough, and in any case, as I write this article it is 15 degrees outside!

We need those cold temperatures to blitz any harbouring pests and diseases in the soil, particularly ones that can cause fire blight in tulips, so I find myself planting with caution and praying that all will be well in the spring.

With this ever-narrowing gap, my own Christmas preparations have now begun. As

always, I begin with clearing up immediately outside - any garden furniture that needs to be over-wintered is put away and I am able to give the paths a good sweep.

I have a border running just outside my house up to the front door, so I have a tidy up in there too; all herbaceous is cut back, leaving any evergreen foliage, and then I mulch to make it look neat. Next I make a list of what foliage I will have available to bring into the house nearer to Christmas - lots of lovely ivy, some bay and sarcococca, a prettily variegated pittosporum, juniper - all of which will either go into a wreath or be tied into bundles around candles on the Christmas table.

Ivy can be a contentious issue with some, especially if you are superstitious, which, largely, I am not so ivy trailing around my house I love. It can crisp up a bit in the warmth but is very easily replaced.

I cram some white scented viburnum flowers into small glass vases and pop in some eucalyptus for contrast. I do take a trip to the florist - it's a fun thing to do and I can pick up some sprayed foliage pieces if I haven't had time to do these myself, plus there are always tempting pots of white cyclamen and small hellebores to buy. I also like those tiny conifers which can look perfect on a windowsill or table surrounded by tea lights and some twinkling decorations.

However we get there, the Christmas period is a magical one and I always find time to slow down and enjoy the moment for what it is: a gathering of friends and family, good food and a chance to reflect on the year gone and to look forward to the new.

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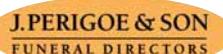
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Above: Community together: Benenden Players rehearsing for Jack & the Pet Shop; Merry and Bright gather for tea; Benenden Hospital staff support Breast Cancer Now on Wear it Pink Day; Sissinghurst Scouts celebrate time together; the Act of Remembrance at the war memorial on Remembrance Sunday  
Front cover: Light in the darkness: Benenden Bonfire and Fireworks. Photograph: Angus Macdonald