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Magazine  
December 2023





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on Tuesday 12 December

# Editorial



Every time I join in the village clean-up, I find myself with a fluorescent jacket and a picking stick, humming the tune to that old Johnny Cash song, One Piece at a Time. You may know it. It's the one where he gets a job on the General Motors assembly line in Detroit and comes up with a cunning plan to smuggle out enough parts to put together his own hybrid car at home.

On the November litter-pick, my umpteenth, expertly marshalled by Stephen Cochrane, I found the final piece of my own automotive jigsaw, an offside windscreen wiper, that will enable me to build the car of my dreams. I also picked up two more wheel trims, a plastic bumper, a brake-light glass and a radiator grille - they're from a disturbing variety of makes, models and years, but if Johnny can do it, then so can I, even if it may not pass an MOT.

I also found 24 Foster's cans, 14 energy drink cans, several beer and cider bottles and a bunch of environmentally friendly coffee cups from Costa. Interestingly, there were no cigarette ends or packets, but one organic yoghurt pot. How times change.

Anyway, the point I'm working towards is that for all the infuriating negatives of having to clean up after selfish, lazy and inconsiderate people, there's an upside. I've decided instead to focus on the public-spirited souls who give up their time to keep Benenden looking its best, as well as all the other decent folk who do the same with different clubs, organisations, charities and voluntary bodies, for the benefit of all of us.

You know what? It makes me feel good to live here, and as the festive season approaches, and as I drive through the village in my new 'Psycho-Billy' automobile, I, and the rest of the team who give their time free of charge to produce this magazine, would like to wish you as much peace on earth as possible, and goodwill to everyone. Happy Christmas.

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](mailto:revdavidcommander@gmail.com) (day off: Thursday)

Associate Priest: Revd Ylva Blid-Mackenzie 01233 820100 [rev.ylva@gmail.com](mailto:rev.ylva@gmail.com)

Churchwarden: David Collard 241944 [d.collard49@btinternet.com](mailto:d.collard49@btinternet.com)

Churchwarden: Sue Fisher 241907 [sue@undaunted.co.uk](mailto:sue@undaunted.co.uk)

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

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

Sunday 3 December	8am Communion	10am All-age Communion	5pm Advent Service of Light
Sunday 10 December	8am BCP Communion	10am Morning Worship	
Sunday 17 December	8am Communion	10am Sung Eucharist	
Tuesday 19 December			7.30pm Parish Carol Service
Christmas Eve	8am Communion	10am Morning Worship	3pm Crib Service 11.30pm Communion
Christmas Day	8am Communion	10am Morning Worship followed by Communion	
Sunday 31 December	8am Benefice Communion	10am Benefice Communion at St Nicholas, Sandhurst	
Morning Prayer	8am Mondays and Fridays		

## Mission Church, Sandhurst

Rector: Revd David Commander 240658 [revdavidcommander@gmail.com](mailto: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](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

Baptism 18 November Lily Boothman

Funeral 7 November John Mansell Thanksgiving, and Committal at Charing Crematorium



# Church Letter



## Compassion and tolerance, whether you believe or not

Thank you for the feedback from some people to my letter in last month's magazine. The feeling of powerlessness regarding war and the suffering of innocent men, women and children continues. Watching babies and young children suffering is heartbreaking. Watching people trying to care for their elderly relatives who are suffering is heartbreaking. Those who were already in hospital, suffering even more. Those who are trying to get away from the war but can't. Those whose only option is to return from where they came as an army advances and the bombing continues. The fear of not knowing what your day (or night) will hold for you. All these things we see relayed on our televisions - and I feel powerless about it all.

As I said last month, there are only two things that I feel I can do: the first is to remember to treat everyone I meet with compassion, love, justice and equality; seeing what we have in common rather than looking for the differences between us. The second is that I can pray for the situation. Some of you reading this will believe in prayer, and some will not. If you do believe in prayer, then I offer you these prayers that were given to me and ask that you would use them in your daily prayer time. If you do not believe in prayer or in God, I trust you value human life and can have compassion for those who are suffering.

Take time to read the meaning within these words; take the 'God bit' out if you wish, focus on the message for humanity and seek to work for these things in your community.

Almighty Father, whose will is to restore all things in your beloved Son, the King of all: govern the hearts and minds of those in authority, and bring the families of the nations, divided and torn apart by the ravages of sin, to be subject to his just and gentle rule; who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

God, our refuge and strength, bring near the day when wars shall cease and poverty and pain shall end, that earth may know the peace of heaven through Jesus Christ our Lord.

God of peace, whose Son Jesus Christ proclaimed the kingdom and restored the broken to wholeness of life: look with compassion on the anguish of the world, and by your healing power make whole both people and nations; through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Most of us may not be able to change things in Ukraine or in Gaza, but whether you believe in God, whether you believe in prayer, or not, we can all work for peace; we can all have compassion for those around us. We can all show tolerance, love and care at this Advent and Christmas time.

Revd David Commander, Rector and Area Dean

# Village Calendar

## December

Saturday 2	Cranbrook Symphony Orchestra, St George's Church, 7.30pm	p.9
Saturday 2	Skittles, St George's Social Club, 8.15pm	
Sunday 3	Advent Carol Service: The Service of Light, St George's Church, 5pm	p.9
Tuesday 5	Mobile Library, bus stop outside Benenden Village Hall, 10-10.30am	
Tuesday 5	Mobile Library, Benenden Hospital, 10.40-11.10am	
Thursday 7	Iden Green and Benenden WI, Christmas Lunch at The Bull, Benenden, 12.30pm	p.21
Thursday 7	Benenden Literary Event, Adam Nicolson in Conversation, Memorial Hall, 3pm	p.6
Thursday 7	Christmas Twilight Pop-Up, The Bull, Benenden, 5-8pm	
Friday 8	Christmas Market, Benenden Primary School, 3.30pm	p.15
Friday 8	Benenden Gardening Club, Members' Christmas Party and Wreath-Making Workshop, Iden Green Pavilion, 6.30pm	
Friday 8	The Jazz Sapiens, Benenden School Centenary Hall, 7pm	p.19
Saturday 9	Golf Game, St George's Social Club, 8.15pm	
Sunday 10	Benenden String Orchestra, Christmas Concert, St George's Church, 3pm	p.21
Monday 11	Parish Council Meeting, Memorial Hall, 7pm	
Tuesday 12	Benenden's Community Shop Volunteers' Carol Singing Social, Benenden's Community Shop, 6.30pm	p.18
Friday 15	Christmas with the Len Phillips Swing Orchestra, Benenden School Centenary Hall, 7.30pm	p.19
Saturday 16	Quiz Night, St George's Social Club, 8.15pm	
Tuesday 19	Mobile Library, bus stop outside Benenden Village Hall, 10-10.30am	
Tuesday 19	Mobile Library, Benenden Hospital, 10.40-11.10am	
Tuesday 19	Christmas Village Lunch, Benenden Village Hall, 12.30pm	p.9
Tuesday 19	Merry and Bright, Christmas Party, Memorial Hall, 2pm	p.21
Tuesday 19	Parish Carol Service by Candlelight, St George's Church, 7.30pm	
Saturday 23	Christmas Draw, St George's Social Club, 8.15pm	
Christmas Eve	The Crib Service, St George's Church, 3pm	p.17
Christmas Day	Christmas Lunch, Memorial Hall, 12.30pm	
Saturday 30	New Year 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

## Benenden Bowls Club

Thursdays, April-September, on the recreation field, practice night, 6.30pm

## Cakes & Chaos: Café and Toddler Group

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

# Parish Council



As I am writing this, the Rolling Stones have just released a new album and the Beatles have just put out a new single. It's just like 1963 all over again. That year was also notable for the one of the coldest winters on record (although apparently 1740 was pretty nippy as well). The sea froze over at Herne Bay and there were eight-foot snow drifts in Kent; the Big Freeze started in December and lasted through to March. It's difficult to imagine that today, as our winters have become increasingly mild, but undoubtedly there will be a few frosty mornings and icy road conditions in the months ahead and it still pays to be prepared.

Kent County Council's highways department does a good job of keeping the main routes gritted, but many minor roads remain unsalted and these can become treacherous. To compensate, KCC provides roadside salt bins for use as required. There are 18 in Benenden (although they occasionally go missing - one was stolen from Dingledean last year) but KCC do not check the levels of salt in these bins, preferring to wait for people to report low levels. They will then come out and refill.

If you are reliant on these salt bins it's probably worth checking, firstly that it hasn't been stolen, and then maybe just lift the lid to make sure there is a decent amount of salt present - enough to see you through to next March (just in case it really is like 1963 again!).

Finally the parish council would like to wish everyone a joyous Christmas and a sensational New Year. Let's hope it's a good one, not too cold and with enough salt to go round.

Peter Driver, Parish Councillor

Caroline Levett, Benenden Parish Council Clerk

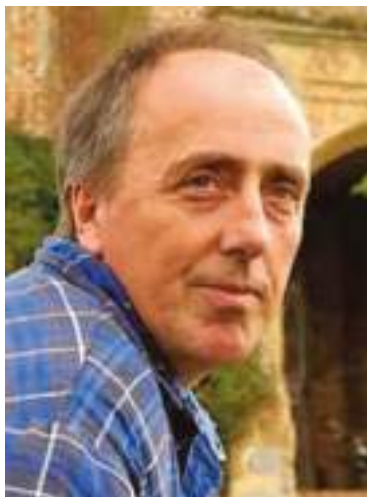
07593 226462 [clerk@benendenparishcouncil.org](mailto:clerk@benendenparishcouncil.org)

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

Parish Council Meeting

Monday 11 December 2023,

Memorial Hall, 7pm



# *Benenden Literary Event*

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# Talking Point



## Spare a thought for the b\*\*\*\*\*d in the black

It was with great sadness that I read this week that Wayne Barnes, the rugby union referee and one of the finest practitioners of the art, was hanging up his whistle. The sadness is that he is retiring, in part, because the level of abuse, from fans and coaches, has become too much. For rugby, a sport that prides itself on its relationship with its officials, Barnes's retirement should be a red flag. A point at which the governing body gets a grip on what is happening and takes positive action to reset how officials are viewed and treated. Above all it needs to understand that without the officials, the game simply won't happen.

While, unfortunately, there is little the powers-that-be can do to curb the keyboard warriors of social media, the tenor and ethos of the game is fashioned by the responses from the top, and for some reason, senior international, national and club coaches get away with blaming the referee for their latest loss.

Rugby is certainly not the worst offender. While that unwelcome tag probably sits squarely on the shoulders of football, the truth is that poor behaviour towards officials is a creeping malaise that is spreading through all sports and at all levels.

For my own part, I have been incredibly lucky to umpire women's lacrosse for over 20 years. During that time, I have travelled around the world, officiated some amazing games and made some lasting friends. It is a sport which is generally well-behaved, and when passions do spill over, an apology is usually close behind. However, even here there are spectators, coaches, and parents who overstep the mark.

I still remember a national universities final which was definitely feisty. Tempers were running high and, sadly, one father, in full shooting tweeds pursued us across the pitch, haranguing us at the end. What he seemed to misunderstand was that the officials had no interest in who won or lost. We simply wanted to deliver a safe and fair game where the best team won.

Don't get me wrong. I'm not claiming all officials are infallible, but I am saying they are not biased or crooked. Some are better than others, all make mistakes, but all step onto the field wanting to deliver the best game possible. So next time you go to a school match, or one at a local club, all I ask is that you think before you shout. All sports need officials. Be part of why they want to be involved, not why they choose to leave.

Giles Clark

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## Christmas village lunch

The Christmas village lunch will be on Tuesday 19 December in the village hall and we will look forward to welcoming all our loyal lunchers to the celebratory meal. It will be at the usual time of 12.30pm. Please let me know by Thursday 14 December if you are able to come.

Sheila Hume 854627

## Volunteer Drivers Group

The group has been back in existence for just over a year and during that time has covered 16 requests for lifts to medical appointments. So far we have not had to turn down a request, but during the course of the year we have lost some of the original volunteers, so are now looking for a few more drivers to join the ranks. There is no specific or minimum time commitment, you just pick up a request if you are available.

If you would like to find out more or need to call on the group for assistance, please contact:

Mick Moore 240755

m.moore131156@gmail.com

## Benenden panto

Our talented and creative cast and crew have been hard at it, rehearsing, sewing, building, making and painting, ready to open the curtains on a spectacular OZ panto production. From 2-4 February there will be four shows, two in the evening and two matinees.

We promise a fabulous fun-filled panto with goodies and baddies and happy endings. It's been written by James Conmy especially for us and he is directing alongside Bev Beveridge. As always, our panto band will be led by maestro Graham Beveridge. Sweets, ice cream and a bar will round off your panto experience.

Tickets are now on sale. See page 11 for the online booking link or scan the QR code.

Ruth Clark



## Cranbrook Symphony Orchestra

### Concert with profits to Friends of St George's

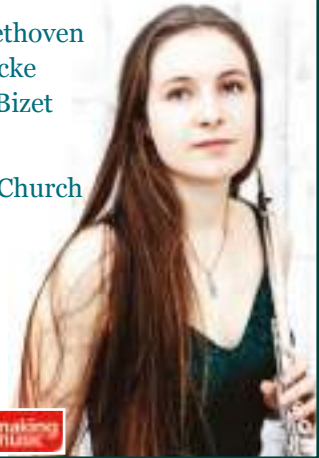
Conductor: Michael Hitchcock, Leader: Clare Haythornthwaite  
Soloist: Daisy Noton (BBC Young Musician Woodwind Finalist 2020)

Egmont Overture - Beethoven  
Flute Concerto - Reinecke  
Symphony No.1 in C - Bizet

Saturday 2 December  
7.30pm at St George's Church

In advance adults £12,  
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## Advent Carol Service

St George's Church  
Sunday 3 December  
5pm

The  
Service  
of  
Light



## Bethlehem baubles

Bethlehem Baubles is an inspiring social enterprise working with a partnership of Muslim, Jewish and Christian communities across Israel and Palestine to produce unique Christmas decorations. If you wish to support these artisans in these extremely troubled times you may wish to buy a handmade glass bauble. They cost £18 each and are shipped in the UK so will arrive in time to decorate the tree or make a nice gift. These can be ordered from me or direct from [www.bethlehembaubles.com](http://www.bethlehembaubles.com). Please visit the website to learn more about the organisation.

Rosemary van Wengen

[rosemaryvanwengen@gmail.com](mailto:rosemaryvanwengen@gmail.com)



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# The Benenden Panto



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**Directed by Bev Beveridge & James Conmy**

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## Primary School

We were very excited to receive a free visit from the 'Night Owls' Bird of Prey demonstration team. The children had a fantastic experience where they learnt about these beautiful creatures and had the opportunity to see them fly during a whole school assembly. The children were then photographed with their spectacular Barn Owl, Dottie.

We are very proud of our sporting achievements; a group of six year 3 girls played hockey for the first time at Dulwich Prep School, grew in confidence during the afternoon and showed great development in skill and understanding of the game. The football team also had a fantastic afternoon. First, they played Cranbrook Primary School, who were a tough team, but they showed great resilience. Our next game with Sandhurst was really encouraging, with excellent teamwork and a close final score. Our last game was with Lamberhurst. The afternoon was a really good experience and we were very proud of all the children.

Finally, we are pleased to be a partner school of the Weald Family Hub, a local charity that provides schools with subsidised professional mental health counselling places. As a very small, local charity it has offered help to more than 250 children across local Weald schools, with over 20 children having received support at Benenden Primary over the last five years.

In November a team from local business HaesCooper accountants took on an epic 25-mile hike visiting ten local primary schools, raising awareness of the mental health challenges facing children and young people in our area and raising money on behalf of the Weald Family Hub. Search HaesCooper on [www.gofundme.com](http://www.gofundme.com) to donate.

Lindsay Roberts, Executive 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)

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## The new Branch Standard

There was a most timely response to our appeal for funds towards commissioning a new Standard for the Benenden Branch of the Royal British Legion. We are very grateful to all of these generous donors. Their support also enabled us to replace several missing but essential features of the Standard Bearer's equipment. See further report on page 27.

Robin Dalton Holmes

## Poppy Appeal 2023

Our Poppy Appeal collection in Benenden and Iden Green has already raised the substantial amount of £4,250 to date. This interim total includes a very generous St George's Church collection of £818 on Remembrance Sunday, as well as contributions through the now discontinued JustGiving site, QR codes, the Saturday poppy stall, Benenden School, the hospital, the primary school, our shops and pubs, and also from several particularly benevolent donors and organisations.

We are most grateful to those who volunteered their time to undertake house-to-house collections at a continuing difficult time for all fundraising.

Jane Dalton Holmes

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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 10am and 11.30am, to catch up with old friends and make new. We look forward to seeing you soon for a hot drink and a biscuit.

Gilly Walton 242855 gilly.walton@gmail.com

## Benenden Allotments

Benenden's new allotment gardens are making progress. The big news is that we've broken ground and started to turn over the soil on our plots. After a summer of admin, meetings and costings we have managed to:

- Secure access to the site over the ditch for vehicles and pedestrians with a decent gate
- Tidy the hedges around the plot
- Mow and take away the hay
- Mark out the plots
- Sign up members of the association and allocate the plots on a first come / first served basis.

We have six full-sized plots; these are around the size of a doubles tennis court, and eight smaller plots. Three full-sized plots are split between allotment holders, so in total we have 24 active allotment holders.

Now the hard work starts. The soil looks good, but we will need to either turn over the existing turf, or cover with compost and topsoil, creating raised beds for those following the no-dig system. Starting as we move into winter gives us an opportunity to allow frost to help break up the soil and kill off some pests. I'm getting ready to start with onions and garlic, always dependable and always welcome in the kitchen.

If you're interested in joining us the Allotment Association will be keen to sign you up for a plot just as soon as we can. Just email us to be added to the waiting list.

Nancy Tolhurst, Chair, Benenden Allotment Association  
allotments@benendenparishcouncil.org



## Parent, Teacher and Friends Association

For the past year, Cranbrook Co-op members have been supporting the PTFA as their community cause. We raised a whopping £3,698.81 and are extremely grateful to the Co-op and community supporters. Thank you.

Our winter fundraising events kicked off with a quiz night on 10 November, followed by our Christmas Market on Friday 8 December, from 3.30pm to 5.30pm. We will have a selection of local business stalls selling gifts and seasonal items as well as a couple of stalls run independently by the children, along with refreshments and a visit from Santa in his grotto. The fundraising event is open to the public and we welcome the whole community to join us this year inside the school.

The PTFA is a charity and we help to support the school by funding school trips and providing resources that enrich the children's experiences. If you would like to contribute to our recent garden project, please do get in touch or donate on our GoFundMe page <https://gofund.me/47a02e8e> or via the QR code.



Rachel Tinker, Benenden CEP, PTFA Chair  
chair-ptfa@benenden-cep.kent.sch.uk  
[www.benenden-cep.kent.sch.uk/PTFA/](http://www.benenden-cep.kent.sch.uk/PTFA/)



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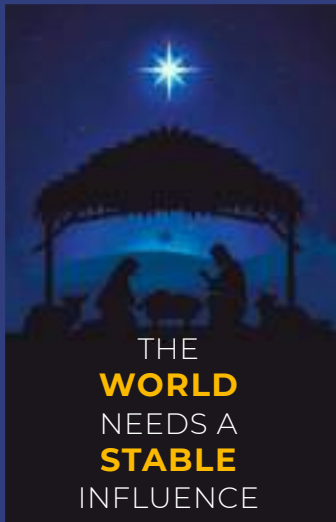
The Crib service  
in St George's Church  
on Christmas Eve  
at 3pm



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*

 <p>THE <b>WORLD</b> NEEDS A <b>STABLE</b> INFLUENCE</p>	<p>IDEN GREEN CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH <b>CHRISTMAS SERVICES</b></p> <p>13 December at 6pm <b>Carols in the Car Park</b> Followed by mince pies &amp; warm drinks</p> <p>17 December at 5.30pm <b>Service of Lessons &amp; Carols</b> Tea at 4.30pm - All welcome</p> <p>25 December at 9.30am <b>Christmas Morning</b> <b>Family Service</b> Everyone welcome</p>
	<p><b>HAPPY CHRISTMAS FROM ALL AT IDEN GREEN</b></p>

## Benenden Village Hall

As we approach the season of goodwill, it is disappointing to have to advise potential hirers of a scam that has been circulating on social media. An advert on a local Facebook group was advertising for stallholders for a two-day Christmas fayre at Benenden Village Hall on 25 and 26 November. The hall has not been hired for such an event on these dates and the advert has now been removed after being reported to administrators.

Whilst we would love to have regular and seasonal markets at the hall, and hope to do so next year, stallholders being asked to pay a third party are welcome to check with the hall manager as to whether an event is genuine.

On a brighter note, it has been a good month with regular classes, pantomime rehearsals, and parties for birthdays and Halloween. Parish residents can hire our entire venue consisting of the main hall with stage, small hall/meeting room, and communal facilities including our well-equipped kitchen, toilets and use of the car park from as little as £27.00 per hour. Why not contact the hall manager to arrange a visit?

John Betts, Hall Manager 07419 989830  
[enquiries@benendenvillagehall.org](mailto:enquiries@benendenvillagehall.org)

## Weald of Kent Preservation Society

When you have lived in a place for more than 37 years, walking over the land almost every day, you think you know it, but how wrong you can be. As I discovered when Michael Bax, chair of the Weald of Kent Preservation Society (WKPS) brought local amateur naturalist Stephen Lemon to look at my 'ghylls'.

The visit was part of the WKPS initiative 'Rainforests of the Weald', studying the deep valleyed streams of Dingledden, which revealed hidden treasures. In the stream bed we found slag generated by the ancient iron industry, alongside a fossil of molluscs dating back millions of years, among lichens, mosses, ferns and liverworts native to this type of rainforest.

WKPS are looking to develop community awareness of their project to reveal the remarkable diversity of the Weald, the ancient buildings and rich habitats in our streams and woodlands. Stephen is working on a more detailed report on our local ghylls, which I look forward to sharing soon.

If you would like to join WKPS, learn more and perhaps become involved, please contact the secretary, Faye Merrick on [secretary@wkps.org.uk](mailto:secretary@wkps.org.uk)  
Eleanor North

## Talking Shop

Once again the festive season is upon us and that means a very grateful thank you to all those customers, volunteers and staff who have kept Benenden's buzzing throughout the year. We invite all our wonderful volunteers to come to the shop at 6.30pm on Tuesday 12 December for Christmas carols, accompanied by Graham on the piano and very ably directed by our very own David Commander. There will be mulled wine, soft drinks and all kinds of festive treats. So many of our volunteers have helped enormously during times when we have been short staffed and we are keen to show our gratitude for all your hard work. Please sign up on the list behind the shop counter so we know numbers.

We would like to thank our customers for all their patience recently as we have had to reduce the choice in the café and close earlier in the afternoon, due to staffing difficulties. We are aiming to resolve this situation soon and it has been improved recently by Alicia, who has worked part time, now taking on a permanent role, and Les, who has just joined the café staff. However, please do keep volunteering as it reduces the pressure on everyone, especially when regulars are poorly. It really is great fun and our customers are very friendly people.

Karen Sharp has produced two types of mince pie for us this year; the traditional shortcrust pastry as well as a new variety with frangipane. They're a tasty treat with a hot drink. (Watch out for a festive offer soon).

Finally, the staff, committee members and volunteers in Benenden's would like to wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a very happy, healthy New Year.

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

## Benenden School

As ever, last month was very busy, despite winding down for two weeks during half term. Hot on the heels of our recent global conference, and continuing our centenary programme of events, we were delighted to host the inaugural Women and Wellness conference. We are grateful to former Benenden parent Davina McCall, who opened the event with a highly entertaining and enlightening keynote speech and Q&A session.

Around 200 students and members of the local community attended to learn more about the issues that matter to women in the 21st century, including topics such as the menopause, pensions, investing, nutrition and digital safety. The event fostered all-important authentic and meaningful conversations on the topics that are relevant to women of all ages. I very much hope that those from the local community who were able to attend found the event to be hugely insightful. I certainly did.

As part of our Lower School Diploma, this month our year 8 students relished their recent Enquiry project, which focused on resilience and adaptability. This involved a trip to Brogdale Collections to learn about evolution and inheritance, plant reproduction, seed dispersal and plant adaptations - all with a view to restoring Benenden's orchard.

We were also delighted to welcome the Tonbridge Chapel Choir, joining our own students for a wonderful rendition of Fauré's Requiem. The occasion was certainly memorable, and we very much look forward to hosting our first carol services in the Centenary Hall in the coming month.

Samantha Price, Headmistress



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## Planning Matters

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

- 23/02866/FULL and 23/02867/LBC Tile Barn House, Standen Street. Internal and external alterations to the listed barn to bring it into residential use and to connect it to the existing oast house.
- 23/02824/FULL 2 Pullington Cottages. Demolition of existing conservatory, replacement single storey rear extension, two storey side extension. Erection of 1.8m closeboard fence.
- 23/02825/TPO Orchard Cottage, Mill Street. Trees: RED OAK (T1) - Reduce lateral branches growing towards house by 2 meters back to previous points; OAK (T2) - Works Crown lift over garden to a height of 4.5 meters.
- 23/02832/REM Land At Standen Street. Approval of Reserved Matters (appearance, landscaping & layout) following 23/01591/FULL - Erection of five dwellings; and submission of details in relation to Condition 9 - (Landscaping); Condition 10 - (Parking); Condition 12 - (Refuse Storage); Condition 13 - (Levels, Survey & Cross-sections) of 19/00362/OUT.
- 23/02847/TPO Nightingale Barn, Goddards Green Road. Trees: MATURE OAK - reduce branches on roof line of barn by 1-2metres, reduce large over-extended horizontal 24ft branch on left of tree by 4 metres.
- 23/02937/LBC Yew Tree House, Walkhurst Road. Internal alterations including: enlargement of existing bathroom, removal of existing partition walls and closing up of doorways, creation of x2 new bathrooms, insertion of partition walls, install two roof lights in front roof plane.
- 23/02955/FULL and 23/02956/LBC The Cottage, Iden Green Road. Replace existing staircase in lounge and replace front door.

More planning matters at:  
[benendenparishcouncil.org](http://benendenparishcouncil.org)



## Iden Green and Benenden WI

Despite miserable weather there was lots of bright laughter at our social afternoon in November, while at our winter party the food was most delicious and the company scintillating.

We look forward to celebrating Christmas on 7 December at The Bull, Benenden with their traditional festive meal, meeting at 12.30pm.

Our New Year gathering on 16 January will give us a chance to catch up with all the news and discuss the WI resolutions.

May we wish everyone a happy Christmas and a peaceful New Year.

Jackie Liffen 752232 [WI@daisystar.co.uk](mailto:WI@daisystar.co.uk)

## Merry and Bright

Although a while ago now, our October meeting went well, with a quiz arranged by Glenda. Thanks to her for all her hard work.

We cannot believe we are near the end of the year with our Christmas party in December. Our next year's meetings are being arranged by the committee, with many new ideas. Hopefully next year will be as successful as this.

It is still not too late if you would like to come along to see what we are all about. Lifts can be arranged if needed, please contact us:

Laraine Penny 241763

Julia Collard 241944



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Robertsbridge, East Sussex TN32 5JL  
geoffreywhitehead@vinehallschool.com

## Benenden Pre-School

In late November we celebrated Divali, reading the story of Rama and Sita, which symbolises the spiritual victory of light over darkness and good over evil. The children made Divas out of clay, painting them and decorating them with glitter. Divas are traditionally oil lamps but our version served as a candle holder for a tealight.

The glitter theme continued during our Christmas activities, the children making presents and cards for families as well as block printing their own wrapping paper. The children bought a present for their parents at our Christmas shop, working out how much paper they needed to wrap it and creating their own labels. Helped out by one of our lovely parents the children enjoyed using biscuit cutters to make Christmas tree decorations from salt dough.

Lucy Oakley, Supervisor  
supervisor@benendenpreschool.co.uk

## Benenden Hospital

At the end of the year, I thought I'd share some of our standout moments from 2023.

From recent visits to Benenden Primary School for infection prevention education, to a Merry and Bright Club meetup and hosting Andrea Sutcliffe CBE, Chief Executive Nursing and Midwifery Council, we've held our arms open wide to visitors from national organisations and the local community to create long-lasting relationships.

In August, we became the first independent private hospital in the UK to install SageTech Medical's innovative anaesthetic gas recycling technology, underlining our commitment to carbon reduction. This volatile gas capture solution could prevent up to 370 tonnes of CO2 emissions being released into the atmosphere over the equipment's lifetime.

The healthcare landscape is ever-changing, particularly within the field of medical robotics. We've invested in our Aquablation robotic-assisted procedure for enlarged prostate, so patients benefit from shorter hospital stays, less pain and quicker recovery, and I'm excited to announce that our Zimmer Biomet ROSA® Knee System will be coming soon.

As mentioned in last month's article, we have hosted several charity events including Wear It Pink Day, Macmillan Coffee Morning and Red Nose Day, which have collectively raised over £1,000. I'm incredibly proud of Kate Minett, our staff nurse, who has raised over £12,000 for Papyrus, the young suicide prevention charity, after winning our Lord Plant Fellowship last year.

After Friday 22 December 2023, our hospital is closed for rest and recuperation until Tuesday 2 January 2024, when we'll resume our activity as normal. We wish you a very merry Christmas and a happy and healthy new year!

Jane Abbott, Hospital Director and Chief Nurse

## Topical health

In my last column we discussed shoulders, now we are looking at the opposite end of the body: feet. We often totally neglect our feet unless something goes wrong with them, but they are complex structures, with 26 bones, 33 joints and more than 100 muscles, tendons and ligaments. When you walk, all your body weight goes through each foot and at least four or five times when you run. Feet are important to us osteopaths as we look at the whole body. If someone has a bad hip/knee/back etc, their feet may be to blame.

As we age, the very important shock absorbing arches in our feet can change, also after pregnancy. This can often cause plantar fasciitis or tight hamstrings, which can cause back issues and other problems. We advise our patients on how to manage foot issues at home, as well as directly working into the feet. Other things we may see include arthritic feet, metatarsalgia, pronation, Achilles tendon issues and sprained ankles.

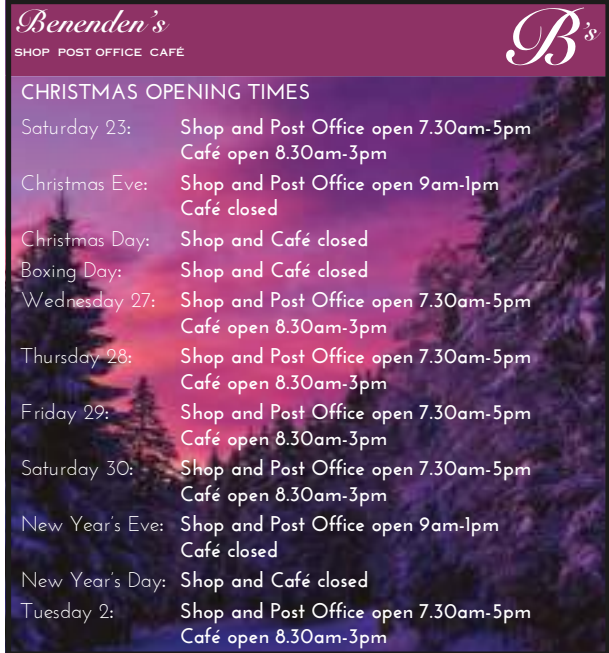
Some general foot tips include:

- Look at your feet: do they look healthy?
- Practise your balance as it's so good for the intrinsic muscles of your feet.
- Moisturise your feet. Cracked heels aren't good and feet like being rubbed.
- Check your shoes. If there is uneven wear you should seek an osteopath or foot health advisor.
- Wear good shoes. Supportive footwear doesn't have to look frumpy.
- Don't wear wellies unless for very short periods.
- Putting on weight means more work for your feet.
- Spread your toes and scrunch your toes. Circle your ankles and move your feet more.

If a house has bad foundations, problems will, at some point, occur. The same can be said for us and our feet.

Sophie Bendall

[www.cranbrookosteopaths.co.uk](http://www.cranbrookosteopaths.co.uk)

A poster for Benenden's Shop Post Office Café with a purple and blue background featuring a snowy forest scene. The text is white and lists opening times for the Christmas season.

<i>Benenden's</i> SHOP POST OFFICE CAFÉ	
CHRISTMAS OPENING TIMES	
Saturday 23:	Shop and Post Office open 7.30am-5pm Café open 8.30am-3pm
Christmas Eve:	Shop and Post Office open 9am-1pm Café closed
Christmas Day:	Shop and Café closed
Boxing Day:	Shop and Café closed
Wednesday 27:	Shop and Post Office open 7.30am-5pm Café open 8.30am-3pm
Thursday 28:	Shop and Post Office open 7.30am-5pm Café open 8.30am-3pm
Friday 29:	Shop and Post Office open 7.30am-5pm Café open 8.30am-3pm
Saturday 30:	Shop and Post Office open 7.30am-5pm Café open 8.30am-3pm
New Year's Eve:	Shop and Post Office open 9am-1pm Café closed
New Year's Day:	Shop and Café closed
Tuesday 2:	Shop and Post Office open 7.30am-5pm Café open 8.30am-3pm

## Prestigious art prize

Benenden's resident wildlife artist Stephen Message's painting of a Great Grey Shrike has been awarded the Michael Harding Watercolour Painting Prize in the Society of Wildlife Artists' 60th annual exhibition, The Natural Eye 2023. This exhibition showcases the very best of art inspired by the natural world.

"I am delighted and honoured to win the MH Watercolour prize. I spent many hours studying the Great Grey Shrike as it hunted beetles at Hothfield NR, Kent," says Stephen. "Michael Harding was formerly an artist who decided to make oil and watercolour paints and my generous prize contains 40 large tubes, many of which are new colours to my normal palette. Hopefully this will inspire me soon."

The beautiful painting is shown on the back cover and you can browse more of Stephen's wonderful watercolour, oil and acrylic paintings online here:

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



# Benenden Bonfire and Fireworks

## Our Dunkirk spirit on show

Benenden never cancels. It was something I'd heard said many times by villagers since I arrived here in January 2022. So it shouldn't have been to anyone's surprise - regardless of multiple weather warnings for the week and Storm Ciarán promising us biblical rainfall and up to 80mph winds - that we decided to go ahead with the bonfire and fireworks on 4 November.

The decision made, we now needed to get the bonfire built, fencing, marquee and gazebos erected, and food prepared. Fortunately, Ciarán did not wreak its havoc in Benenden, and the following day gave us blue skies and sunshine, enabling





us to get a fair amount of the set-up completed. It was just as well, because Saturday brought torrential rain and the once-firm ground became swamp-like in places.

As we battled on in the rain, we were hearing that Sandhurst had cancelled and ticket sales at the shop were virtually non-existent, but amazingly online sales were holding up. Throughout the day there had been a Dunkirk spirit among the band of volunteers, without whom the event would not be possible. All the hard work was rewarded when the gates opened at 5.30pm, a queue had formed and the good villagers of Benenden began to turn out in their hundreds.

While the rain had continued unabated all day, at precisely 6.15pm, as the LED planes prepared to launch and we were getting ready to light the bonfire, the clouds parted and the deluge finally stopped. While the sodden bonfire took its time to get going, the firework display that followed was summed up nicely by a comment

on the Benenden Bonfire Facebook page as being “truly magical, against the cloudless sky, glittered with silver stars - the most perfect backdrop for the stunning display. The best ever!”

After 11 years, this was Grant Matthews’ last time at the helm. Having spent the weeks in the build-up to the event shadowing him, I know just what a shift he has put in and he will be a very hard act to follow. On behalf of the Bonfire committee, thank you, Grant!

Thanks, too, to our generous sponsors: Tate Fencing, Jubilee Hire, Wizard Fireworks, Benenden Hospital, Mark and Lucy at the Bull, Benenden School for allowing us to use the field and Benenden Pre-School for the guy. While our costs were higher this year, we still hope to be able to be able to distribute some funds to local groups. Details on how to apply for these will be published in a future edition of this magazine.

Finally, thanks to the Benenden Bonfire committee and all the volunteers for making 2023’s event so successful. We look forward to doing it all again (hopefully in better weather) in 2024.

Gary Bell, Co-Chair  
Benenden Bonfire Society







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# New Benenden Standard on parade



## Royal Albert Hall appearance tops a memorable weekend

The parish's smart new Royal British Legion Standard was unfurled in October and immediately found itself in the midst of a busy schedule. Following a dedication at St George's Church, it was carried into action at London's Royal Albert Hall on November 11 by Ian Malaugh, who was again on duty at the Remembrance Sunday service at the war memorial the following morning.

For Ian it was clearly a special weekend, and he recalled it thus: "I was honoured to be selected to represent the Royal British Legion in carrying our

Branch Standard at this year's Festival of Remembrance at the Albert Hall. The Benenden Branch had not been represented in recent times so we were selected as one of three from Kent.

"It began with practices with the Armed Forces contingents on both Friday evening and early on Saturday 11, culminating with a matinee and the main event later in front of their Majesties the King and Queen, and broadcast on BBC1.

"It was a long and tiring weekend, followed by our village service on Sunday at 10.45am, but to be involved in such a prestigious event representing Benenden at such an iconic venue was an experience which I shall treasure forever."





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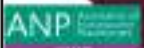


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## The Wellness Haven: helping us inside and out

Serendipity brought Lisa Dawson (Azara Therapies), Kat Briggs (PilatesWise) and Angela Young (Wild Herbology) together and when I met the trio recently their passion for their individual practices and their new collaboration was inspiring.



It's not surprising that these experts in their complementary fields of facial therapies, massage, pain management,

herbal medicine and pilates gravitated to each other and decided to launch a centre, the Wellness Haven, here in Benenden. "Our passion for wellbeing brought us together as we were personally seeking expert practitioners in each of our fields," says Kat.

Set in beautiful surroundings on the edge of the village, the Wellness Haven is open now and is a tranquil space equipped with treatment rooms and a pilates studio equipped with reformer machines. "Our specialities complement one another really well, enabling us to take a holistic approach to providing wellbeing advice and therapies, tailored to individual needs," explains Lisa.

"Being able to provide a variety of expertise under one roof gives clients the opportunity to choose one or more complementary therapies

together with a bespoke fitness programme, as and when they wish," says Angela.

**Azara Therapies** Lisa has worked in and run salons for 25 years and founded Azara in 2007. Working with her daughter, they offer an array of wellbeing treatments, facial technologies to treat all skin types, beauty maintenance and advanced massage for chronic pain.  
[www.azaratherapies.co.uk](http://www.azaratherapies.co.uk)



**PilatesWise** Kat certified to teach pilates in 2013 and has run her own studio and group classes for over ten

years. Her Wellness Haven pilates studio offers group reformer classes, tailored one-to-ones and duets, and injury rehabilitation. Kat also teaches group mat classes at the village hall on Mondays at 8.30pm and Wednesdays at 10.15am.

[www.pilateswise.co.uk](http://www.pilateswise.co.uk)

**Wild Herbology** Angela supports women in improving their health using herbal medicine and naturopathic techniques, which stimulate



the body's own ability to heal. She has a special interest in menopause, digestive health and brain fog. Angela offers free 15-minute chats if you want to know if she can help you.

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Discover more about the Wellness Haven here:  
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Ruth Clark



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# Clubs, Sports and Recreation



## Iden Green Tennis Club The village reverberates with the sound of ball on racquet

Tucked away inconspicuously at the western end of Iden Green's recreation ground are the clubhouse and the two tennis courts of the Iden Green Tennis Club. It is a lovely spot, with bird song accompanying the thud of ball on racquet and the cries of "Sorry", "Oh no!" and occasionally "Good shot!"

There are currently about 200 playing members and the club is always pleased to welcome new players. Some members like to play with their friends and family and some like to join in with the club sessions on Saturday mornings and Tuesday afternoons (in the winter) and evenings (in the summer). Either way it is a friendly place. It is noticeable that the courts are particularly busy when it's a coffee and cakes morning or a wine and nibbles evening.

During the dreary days of Covid, once the most severe rules were relaxed, tennis was a popular way to take some exercise and to see other people. The courts have never been so busy. Touching racquets rather than shaking hands is a habit which is surprisingly hard to forget.

For those who are more competitive, there is also the opportunity to play other tennis clubs in the Wealden League



matches. Each fixture consists of four mixed doubles, each pair playing two three-set matches.

Iden Green Tennis Club was originally founded in 1935 but the grass courts fell into disrepair during the Second World War. The present day club owes its existence largely due to

Anne Cyster's encouragement. She remembered the pre-war club and, in 1985, marshalled a hard-working band of local tennis enthusiasts to raise funds to build a single hard tennis court (costing £7,000).

Such was their commitment that they not only paid up membership fees for two years without there being an actual court to play on but also undertook some of the building work themselves. Fortunately for them, an extremely generous anonymous donor offered enough money to get the court built professionally, and by 1987 it had been completed. Subsequently a second court and the clubhouse were also built.

Much of the money was raised by energetic fund raising but now the membership fees cover the day-to-day costs. I might add they are very good value! The club is run by a committee of volunteers and the chairman, Nick Conington, the latest in a long line of hard-working chairpersons.

If you want to find out more about playing at Iden Green Tennis Club, please look at the website [www.idengreentennis.net](http://www.idengreentennis.net) or wander along and introduce yourself at a club session. It is the nearest thing to playing on a court in your garden that you will find (unless you do have your own court of course).

Catriona Prynne





## Christmas comes but once a year - although it starts in May

Peter Thomas talks to Nick Driver as his Cranbrook Farm Shop gears up for the festive season

I'm probably more of a curmudgeon than most, but I like a festive season that starts when the tree goes up on Christmas Eve and finishes sometime after the last turkey sandwich on Boxing Day. That's plenty long enough for me, so I can't help but feel sorry for Nick Driver.

Nick is the man at the helm of the Cranbrook Farm Shop and Nursery, and for him, Christmas begins in spring, some five months before I start complaining about hearing that Slade single leaking out of every shop on the high street.

"We started ordering in May," he says, barely flinching. "Chocolate, wines, gift packs, and then in the middle of September you order the trees for the end of November. Girls are making wreaths throughout the year.

"The key is having really good regular suppliers who do the same things for us year after year. Once that's in place, it all runs fairly well and I'm pretty relaxed about it now after so many years."

I'll look around in awe next time I visit the shop - down Swattenden Lane, as I'm sure you already know - and look around at the seasonal offerings. Yet, as Nick says, when you've been doing it as long as he has, it's second nature.

His retail journey began when, having moved from Chester as a boy - after his dad went to work in Kent County Council's education department - and studied at Maidstone Grammar, followed by teacher training at Leeds, he joined Marks and Spencer.

There followed seven formative years, from warehouse to shop floor, which led to management roles at Alldays in Caterham and Sittingbourne, followed by a long search for a business of his own, which brought him in our direction.

"It really could have been anything, but we thought a farm shop would be a good fit for us and we moved here in 1999 on a 15-year lease," he remembers. "It was an existing business and we took the staff on, but it was hard. A lot of the staff didn't like the change of leadership and a lot of them moved on in the first couple of years, but others are still here now.

"Anyway, we got to know the customers across the road in Hartley, which was our main customer base. We told people we'd try to get any product they wanted, which broadened our range, then the kids' nursery opened up, which brought in a different trade, and the new coffee shop next door attracted more people. It was quite straightforward."

That, as you'll be aware, though, isn't the full story. When the lease was up on the premises at Hartley Dyke - at the top of Swattenden Lane - Nick and his wife Mel (whose three children are university age and beyond and definitely not in retail) had a worrying time trying to relocate the business, before ending up a few hundred yards down the road in a vacant barn, next door to the Charity Farm Country Store.

What now looks like a thriving concern, with an expanding plant nursery attached, was once a source of no little worry. "The move was a very close call," says Nick. "It hung over us for about a year, but planning permission for retail finally



came through, we've ended up in a lovely spot, and we were lucky to have the kind of loyalty our customers have shown."

Head past the pot plants, negotiating the strings

of onions by the door, and you'll enter a world of fruit, veg, chutneys, preserves, beer, wine, bread and pretty much anything else you could want, where 'local' is very much the key word. Local shops these days face an uphill struggle against the multi-nationals, but Nick went into the fight with his eyes open and has stuck to his guns.

"I always knew retail was going to be tough, because of the supermarkets expanding," he explains, "and they've continued to expand. Every village now has one or more and it's been hard on the smaller shops, but we wanted to go in the right direction, support the local farmers, take the business forward in a way the supermarkets can't."

He reels off a long list of Kent and Sussex suppliers, from Park Farms and Weald Smokery, to Rye, Cranbrook and Sussex Kitchen bakeries, Chapel Down, Biddenden and Cellar Head for beer and wine - even a cake lady called Queen Alfred - who are, quite literally, food and drink for the shop and its customers. He gives a special mention to several local individuals - Barbara, Lionel and Tony - in their 80s and 90s who grow and supply him with flowers, fruit and vegetables.

Nick is supported all the way by Mel, who deals with all the paperwork and is the one looking to push the business forward in different directions. "You want to get the



word out, be on all the different platforms," he says, adding hastily, "but my wife does all that."

Then there's the excellent and ever-present manager, Angela Harris - who arrived two years after the business started and never left - heading a crew of eight to ten full-time staff, ten to 12 part-time - including parents and in-laws and a ready supply of personable local youth at weekends. Not to mention Tinks the farm cat and Maisie the dog.

"It's a family business and we try to treat the staff the same way," says Nick, as he ponders the next Christmas delivery, too early for my liking but clearly not for the man who may well supply your tree and bubbly this year. As well as your chocolate.

"I love chocolate," says this selfless taster of new confectionery. "My favourite at the moment is Tony's, although I know it's not local (it's from the Netherlands, actually, but apparently very good). I shouldn't really, but I'm surrounded by it."

He's a keen gardener - tending his plot at home in Staplehurst and offering sometimes welcome advice in the plant department - likes walking (now that basketball is beyond him) and pub lunches, but his primary focus is on the year-round quest to make it a very festive season for us all.

So, when I find myself complaining about the new Aldi Christmas advert being on my TV in November, I'll stop and spare a thought for Nick Driver.







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# Food and Drink

## Tis the season to eat, drink very well and be merry

Peter Thomas on the pick of the festive wines at the community shop

Budgeting for Christmas is never easy. It seems that while outgoings treble over the festive season, income remains largely static, so I like to prioritise, which means allocating adequate reserves for food and drink first. If there's nothing left for cards and presents, so be it. You can always tell them it's a protest against rampant consumerism, or some such.

Anyway, I'm No. 12 on the Wards' turkey list, so that's the dinner table centrepiece done and dusted. Now I'm working on the wine, but the trimmings make the whole thing a real headache. After all, if you went to a posh restaurant for your Christmas lunch and asked the sommelier to recommend you a bottle that would go equally well with poultry, ham, sausages, bacon, parsnips, red cabbage, cranberries, chestnuts, sprouts and gravy, he'd either spontaneously combust or ask you to leave. Or both.

Which way to go? Well, this year I'm plumping for a top all-rounder: something that will roll up its sleeves and take on the chipolatas and stuffing, while doing nothing to offend the bird. It can't be too tannic, but it needs enough body to cope with the onslaught of different flavours. It can have a lick of spice and a bit of oak, but a little lift at the finish will help avoid complete gastronomic overload.

Luckily, I've just discovered a wine at the community shop (full disclosure, I'm helping out with the wine room there and have been busy sampling the stock) which fits the bill. It's the excellent Colinas do Douro Superior, a silky smooth red blend from Portugal, all Christmassy and ruby coloured, with the fruity nose and spicy palate the meal demands, but with the kind of freshness that comes from being raised high up in the Portuguese hills. I think it's a snip at £13.95, although you won't go far wrong, either, with the young and fruity Valdehermoso Joven, also from Portugal (£11.95).

If you'd prefer to go white, then you might consider one of our offerings from Burgundy, the powerful and elegant Macon-Vergisson from Domaine Simonin, which is £17.45 but still excellent value for the region, or look a little further down the list for the oaky and creamy Rowlands Brook Australian Chardonnay at £9.75. As a wild card, there's a lovely wine called Grounded Cru, another Aussie, this time made from the criminally under-used Pinot Gris grape, bringing flavours of sharp apple and ripe pear to the meal. I think it would do the job nicely at £16.65.

Some of you 'turkey deniers' will no doubt go for roast beef, in which case we have a selection of nice clarets, including the warm and spicy Jade de Fleur de Lisse, from St Emilion, priced at £11.25, or the smooth and rich Chateau Moulin de Mallet for £12.15.

For anybody still standing (or at least comfortably seated) by now, there are two very decent sweet wines to round off your proceedings. Both are from France: the Petit Guiraud from Chateau Guiraud in Sauternes will set you back £20.15 but is luscious and from a top producer, while the Instans Muscat de Beaume de Venise from the Rhone Valley has bags of sweet apricot fruit and excellent balance for £13.95.

In the background, keep a ready supply of the super-fun, pink and sparkling Gouguenheim Malbec Bubbles (£14.95), so nobody will run dry. Then drink responsibly, as people are fond of saying these days, and enjoy.





# In Your Garden

## Choosing the twelve plants of Christmas

Having originally planned to write about 12 indispensable plants I would take with me to a desert island (being a firm fan of Radio 4!), I realised my article would be appearing in the December issue of the Benenden magazine. While the thought of decamping to a warm and tranquil beach seems

appealing right now, considering our recent stormy skies and incessant rainfall, penning an article on 12 plants I rely on during Advent seemed more appropriate.

A bowl of bulbs sitting on a window sill is my starting point. I tend to hoard suitable shallow containers as I like to sit the bulbs on a bed of grit with a light layer of loamy topsoil. I use moss from the garden or a handful of birch twigs twisted into a circle to 'dress' the top layer. I use hyacinths, paperwhites and muscari, pushing small bare twigs in for support - hazel is good as the catkins are a bonus, amelanchier or small evergreen branches also add height.

Continuing with the indoor theme, the Lenten Rose (*Helleborus niger*) is another favourite (plant no.4) with glamorous white blooms and dark evergreen foliage. These work



I am a big fan of tiny pink and white calluna heathers, too, which partner well with cyclamen (nos. 5 and 6) - I often see planters of cyclamen used to great effect

on London balconies but I use them indoors here in the frosty Kent countryside.

Finally, I like to include some of those tiny conifers (no.7) which look lovely sitting on the Christmas table, again using wired LED twinkling lights and any additional decorations for added sparkle.

Outside I favour evergreen foliage and coloured stems over blooms. If a client has a large enough planter then I will add in some orientalis hellebores, as they are very beautiful and bred in lovely shades of dusky pinks, lime greens and dark jewel colours. Otherwise, dogwood stems cut and stuck in generously and bushy evergreens such as bay or juniper help to bulk out the space (nos. 8-11). The hellebores can be transplanted in early spring, ignoring advice about root disturbance, and left to naturalise in a border.



My twelfth and last selection goes to seed heads, usually a giant allium or a poppy, which I will spray with metallic paint. A bit of artifice is an easy and fuss-free way to add extra glamour and sparkle.

Wishing you all a peaceful festive season and a positive outlook to the New Year.

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perfectly indoors but will survive in a pot display if placed somewhere sheltered, as they dislike winter wet (and cold) - I have planted them out in the borders post-Christmas but they have never performed as well. I often dress with a small length of wired LED lights set on a timer and may add fir cones to the bowl if it is on the roomy side.





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Above: Engagement: volunteers at the Bonfire and Fireworks; the autumn village clean-up; marking Remembrance Sunday; primary school pupils enjoy away fixtures and the Weald Family Hub continue their partnership; Davina McCall opens Women and Wellness conference at Benenden School and pupils help with orchard project; Stephen Message's prize-winning painting. Front cover: In the spirit of the season. Dove of Peace designed by Anna Taylor. Photograph: Peter Thomas