

Kempsey Times



A free monthly newspaper for Kempsey, Norton, Severn Stoke and surrounding villages

Issue 23

March 2026

FREE



'Hill Farm' by Peter Hodge

The old rhyme says that in March 'the north wind doth blow and we shall have snow!' Today, as I am writing this, it is sunny, bright and incredibly mild! Daffodils are in blossom everywhere, green shoots and shrubs are showing new buds. Let's hope this carries on and we have an early Spring!

We have had a very wet and windy February, so things must get better. We are already seeing more daylight and the clocks go forward on the 28th of March. Always a most welcome event, signalling that Spring has officially arrived. We also have Mothering Sunday, always a

special, happy day. The many gardeners we have will be hoping for dry days, as it is a very busy time with many jobs to do. This is an exciting time and nature gives one a feeling of optimism and well being. Many congratulations to our Winter Olympic team. They have

achieved the best ever results, with five medals and also five fourth places. The winning medal times are in nanoseconds, so these results are astonishing. The men's Curling final was watched by over five million in the UK and the games overall had over 30 million viewers! The news is generally gloomy and lots of things seem to be going wrong. We can't do much about it, so all we can do is keep our heads down, be thankful for what we have got and carry on. We have lots to be thankful for

and, it does no good 'whinging'. You have to be positive and enjoy every day as much as possible. We have the 'Obama' slogan 'Yes We Can!' in our office. We discuss an issue and normally finish by repeating this slogan, with a big smile. Try it! You may be surprised! It works!

Mothering Sunday
15th March

Clocks spring forward on
28th March!



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County and District Report

Councillor Martin Allen



Hey, the daffs are out! Isn't it lovely to see their golden petals bobbing to and fro, standing proud and tall against the wind and rain. They remind me of so many individuals I have had the great delight in meeting over the years: old and young standing strong and resilient against life's hiccups and challenges. Each person is different, unique and special, just like each of the daffodillies. The good times and festivals are coming soon!

“Come On In” hits the right mote!



Did you know Kempsey has a rich history of hosting coffee and cake mornings, providing a warm welcome to both residents and visitors alike? These friendly gatherings take place at the Firs on Old Road North every Monday and Wednesday from 10:30 to 12:00. Attendees can enjoy complimentary hot and cold beverages, along with a delightful selection of free cakes and biscuits. While donations are appreciated, they are not required. When I stopped by a couple of Mondays ago, I was

thrilled to see such a great turnout – it was wonderful to reconnect with familiar faces. Now, thanks to the efforts of Libby James and other wonderful helpers on behalf of Severnside Parishes, there will be a Come and Sing held on the first Monday of each month from 12:00 to 13:00, and everyone is invited. If you have the chance, please come along – the cakes alone make it worthwhile! *If you would like more information about “Come On In”, please telephone Libby James on 01905 353935.*

Bad or good times, there's food here!

Just a reminder that there is a warm and welcoming space in Upton's Baptist Church. It is hosted by the fantastic Amy Wearing and her brilliant team, who provide much-needed free soup and rolls. Last year, using my divisional discretionary fund, I provided two new replacement soup makers, which are making a real difference. The Baptist Church is open each morning,

10:00 - 13:00, Monday to Friday, for anyone who needs a warm, safe space. There is no charge for the food, and it does give many who are lonely or isolated the chance to have a natter and good friendly company. Please can you pass this on to anyone you think would benefit? Or come along yourself and join in.



Kempsey's new path damaged

After years of urging action, the footpath from Kempsey's only shop was finally refurbished and turned into a proper pavement. I was dismayed to see that a contractor, installing a supply to a house under construction on the Main Road, dug up part of the newly laid tarmac and performed a poor resurfacing job. I want to reassure all of you that I have filed a complaint with Highways and will not let this issue go unresolved.



Rugby Club hosts new Dementia Café



Upton Town Councillor Rebecca Rollinson and I were delighted to attend the recently established Dementia Café, hosted at Upton's Rugby Clubhouse by Debbie Ashwell from Ashwell Home Care Services and the Worcester Warrior Foundation. Dementia affects not only individuals, but also their partners, children, friends, and families, who may feel uncertain, isolated, or overwhelmed. I spoke to many of those present and it's clear that the Dementia Café brings people together, providing a safe space where no one need face dementia alone. I have now written to Debbie offering to help secure financial funding so this important café can continue. Rebecca told me, “It was wonderful to see people engaging and becoming less withdrawn. This café gives everyone a chance to talk, listen, enjoy a cup of tea, and have a chat.”

Debbie Ashwell who organised the café said, “Our ethos has always been about adding life to the years, not just years to life, and this Dementia Café truly brings that belief to life. Creating a safe, welcoming space where people living with dementia – and those who love and care for them – can connect, feel understood, and enjoy meaningful moments together is something we care deeply about, and we are honoured to bring this café to our local community.”

The café meets every other Tuesday from 10:30 to 12:00 at Upton's Rugby Club, off Old Street, Upton Upon Severn. Attendance is free, though a £2 contribution for coffee and biscuits is appreciated. For more information, contact Ashwell Home Care Services at 01684 778750 or email info@ashwellhomecareservices.co.uk

And finally ...

This last winter, I have really got into leek and potato soup – it's funny how one's taste changes as the years fly by. So, of course, this has led to me rethinking my veg plot: leeks and potatoes

will now take centre stage, while the poor old cabbages are facing relegation. I bet the cabbage butterflies will be miffed! As always, I'm here if you need me.

Martin Allen

A few words from... Dame Harriett Baldwin MP



Keeping Pressure Up for Delivery at Severn Stoke

Dame Harriett Baldwin MP has repeated her call to get spades in the ground on the long-awaited flood defence scheme planned for Severn Stoke. She has written to Natural England chief executive Marian Spain asking for her to support to speed up the project and allow diggers to get onto the site as quickly as possible. Work has been carried out to clear hedges, and fences to limit the movement of the protected great crested newt were first installed in 2022. The project has already been granted planning permission but Natural England will be required to give its consent to

the project and this process could take as long as forty days to get the green light to start work. The MP has also urged Worcestershire County Council to ensure that its contractor is signed up and ready to start work as soon as possible. Dame Harriett said: "With much of West Worcestershire still sodden and flood water still around, it could not be more important that all the obstacles are overcome at Severn Stoke to allow contractors to start work swiftly. The Government has shown that this project is now a priority and I am grateful for the continued support from Flooding Minister Emma Hardy to get this project in the schedule. It's now going to need a well-motivated team locally to deliver the project and I am working hard to identify and overcome any potential blockages. The Environment Agency actually started on this project several years ago and drivers will have seen new fences in place at the site since 2022. I'd love to see all the relevant agencies working smoothly together to get the bund and road built in Severn Stoke protecting people's homes and businesses and the historic church."

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Save the Children

Heather and I would like to thank all our supporters of Save the Children throughout 2025 for their help in raising £3454-28. This is a wonderful amount to raise and Kempsey people are so supportive. We must thank others who have helped when holding our events and especially St. Mary's church for opening up the church for us. Thank you once again.

Heather Davies and Julia Grant

Cornflower Club

Our meetings for March start on Wednesday 11th then a fortnight later on the 25th, going in to April on the 8th. We meet in the Parish Hall at 2-30 until 4-30 on a Wednesday. If you are lady or gentleman over 60 years of age

you would be made most welcome to join us and enjoy a cup of tea and biscuits after our entertainment. Come and see what we do.

Sally Linsey 01905 820476
Julia Grant 01905 820138

Teddies for Tragedies

We are still collecting lots of knitted items to send off to different parts of the world and also in this country. We need blankets, hats, gloves, scarves, cardigans and, of course, the

teddies. Crocheted large blankets are welcome. Thank you to all the knitters out there, keep your items coming. Drop your items off to me,

Julia Grant

Music Society

The Music Society meets fortnightly on Thursday afternoons in a comfortable lounge at The Firs on Old Road North from 2:00pm – 4:00pm. We listen to a variety of music, presented by members, or the occasional visiting presenter. We would welcome anyone new who would like to come and join us. Do come and give us a try. We would like to increase our numbers, so new faces are very welcome. We have a social break in the middle of the afternoon, for tea or coffee and biscuits. We are a friendly group and mostly very local to Kempsey.



Our meetings will take place at The Firs on Old Road North from 2:00pm – 4:00pm on:

Thursday 12th & 26th March,
9th April

For further details please contact Anne on 07931 636309

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Solar in 2026: Is it still worth it?

Keith Thompson



With energy prices still unpredictable, many homeowners are asking whether solar remains a sound investment. The short answer is yes — provided it's approached as a medium to long-term decision.

In the UK, around 70% of annual solar generation occurs between April and October. Output peaks in late spring and summer, but panels generate electricity throughout the year whenever there is daylight. A typical 4kW system in the Midlands will

produce approximately 3,500–4,000 kWh per year. For many households, that represents a substantial proportion of annual electricity usage.

At current electricity rates, most domestic systems achieve payback in around seven to eight years, depending on usage and system design. Panels are built to last twenty-five years or more and degrade very slowly over time. Unlike interest from savings accounts, the financial return from reducing your

electricity bill is effectively tax-free for homeowners. Solar also acts as a hedge against future price rises - something traditional savings cannot offer. Battery storage has become increasingly popular. Without a battery, surplus daytime electricity is exported to the grid. With storage, you can use more of your own generation in the evening, potentially reducing grid reliance by up to 80–90% annually. Batteries also allow you to charge overnight on cheaper off-peak tariffs and use that energy during peak periods. Properly configured systems can even provide backup power during outages. While battery payback can be slightly longer than panels alone, prices have reduced significantly in recent years. There are currently no domestic grants, but solar panels and batteries are zero-rated for VAT. In addition, the Smart Export Guarantee (SEG) pays homeowners for exported electricity, providing an additional income stream.

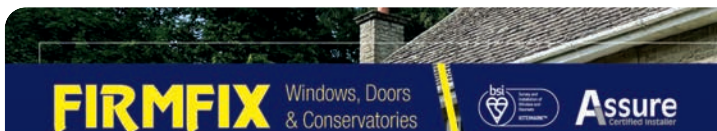
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From the Parish Council



The Pavilion Community Café at Plovers Rise opened on 13th February. The project was originally conceived and developed by our Community Builder, Cathy Garner, in response to findings of the 2022 Parish Survey, which identified a community café as the most requested new facility for the parish. In autumn last year, funding from the District Council's Rural Fund became available to partially fund the project and the refurbishment of the existing kitchen and the seating area was designed and organised by KPC's Deputy Clerk, Claire Witton, who has spent a considerable amount of her personal time on the project. KPC are currently recruiting for a Café Manager to lead the team of volunteers operating the café. It will be open each Friday throughout the spring with openings likely to be extended in the summer, with purchases by card only. More information on the background to this 'not-for-profit' project can be found on our website.

Following a change in policy by the Independent Remuneration Panel for Worcestershire Councils, Parish and Town councillors who were elected in 2023 can now be

paid 'allowances' from Parish Council funds, effectively a salary. District and County councillors already have this entitlement. The policy is somewhat divisive since it does not apply to Parish and Town councillors co-opted onto the Council since the 2023 public election. However, Kempsey Parish councillors have formally and unanimously turned down the opportunity to be paid these allowances and have opted to continue as unpaid volunteers. A summary of the monthly full council meetings is now being published on KPC's website in advance of the approved minutes being published, as these do not normally appear until at least a month after the meeting to which they refer. We will, unfortunately, be changing KPC's email address shortly to comply with new government regulations. A Daffodil Weekend is being organised on 21st–22nd March 2026, including a drop-in event at St Mary's Church and targeted action in areas where daffodil bulbs have failed to grow.

Planning

The South Worcestershire Development Plan Review continues along its path to adoption, and the sooner the better, since once adopted, it should help prevent – but not guarantee – resisting further speculative housing applications on sites not allocated for development. The Inspectors have recommended Main Modifications (or changes) to the submitted plan, 83 in all, which they feel are necessary to make the plan 'sound', which is a legal requirement. They affect proposed



policies, introduce a number of new policies and give reasoned justification why they are needed. These are undergoing public consultation, which in fact ends at 5pm today. The Parish Council has considered the various modifications insofar as they are likely to affect future planning in the parish. In the main, our view is that they do not significantly change things from the plan submitted. There are no new housing sites proposed in the parish although, unsurprisingly, the South Worcester Urban Extension – which is mostly in the parish and already underway – has been kept. Importantly, the Worcester-Kempsey Significant Gap has been retained, but such gaps now have a policy of their own, not lumped in with Green Belts (which concerned the Inspectors since they have a different status). They have made it clear that the gaps are not to protect the countryside as such – they are a tool to keep the land open and essentially free of development to prevent settlements merging, which is what parishioners want. That makes it all the more difficult to understand why the allocated 2ha. employment site at Open Barn Farm – right in the middle of the Strategic Gap alongside the A38 – is still proposed. It is clearly contradictory to the purpose of the new policy, and the parish council has submitted representations as part of the consultation pointing out this anomaly and have asked for it to be removed.

Having mentioned the Urban Extension, the applications for early infrastructure to bring the housing development forward and to establish the Design Principles to be followed by future proposals on the largest parcel of land have yet to be approved. As well as the SWDPR being adopted, this housing has to start being built if the available housing land supply is to meet the required target. Again, without that being met year on year, further speculative proposals might be successful since the government's 1.5 million housing target is influencing many decisions. In that respect, rumours abound, but we have not yet been told that an appeal has been made against the refusal of outline planning permission for up to 99 dwellings between Bannut Hill and Napleton Lane. It is possible but, in a way, the later the better. This is another reason to get the SWDPR adopted as soon as possible.

Councillor vacancies

KPC currently has vacancies for four councillors by co-option and would welcome applications from parishioners who believe in dialogue, debate, teamwork and commitment to make a difference in our community. For more information regarding the activities of the Parish Council, please refer to www.kempseyhub.co.uk For all enquiries, please contact Sharon Dunn, Parish Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer on 01905 828183 or email: kempseyparishcouncil@gmail.com

Worcester Philharmonic Orchestra

The highlight of WPO's Spring Concert is Edward Elgar's Sea Pictures. This iconic work, composed in Great Storrage, near Cradley, "offers, frankly, everything one might want in a song cycle: sweeping melodies, evocative scoring, stirring drama and pathos" (Tom Service). We are joined by Suzie Purkis, contralto, an exciting young artist as soloist in this much-loved composition. Suzie is studying part-time on the Birmingham Conservatoire Master's course. She made her debut as an emerging artist at Longborough Festival Opera in 2023, performing the roles of Puck,

Snug and Egeus in Purcell's The Fairy Queen. Other operatic roles recently performed include Carmen for Heritage Opera, and Natasza in the premiere of Michael Betteridge's opera Across the Sky at Cheltenham Festival. Grieg's Norwegian Dances are one of his most popular and charming works. These dramatic pieces evoke contrasting characteristic dances, from vivaciously athletic to humorous and sinister. Almost everyone knows the sly and winsome second dance. Grieg provides the perfect opener for our Spring Concert. Dvořák's 6th Symphony is a feast of a

piece. It is a celebration of his arrival as a major composer, blending his Czech roots with the symphonic mastery he learned from Brahms and Beethoven. The composer blends lyrical melodies, vigorous energy and Czech folk music to create his own personal style. Our last two concerts have been sold out, so book early to avoid disappointment!

Tickets £17 (Under 16s, £5) are available from Tourist Offices in Worcester/Pershore*/Malvern (*cash only) or online at worcesterphilharmonic.orchestra.ticketsource.co.uk



Edward Elgar (1857 - 1934)
He composed the song cycle, 'Sea Pictures' around the turn of the twentieth century.

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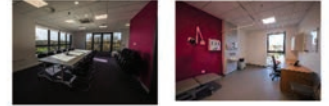
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Radar's competitor

Tim Hickson



J.B. Gunn and the Gunn diode



Example of a tank when viewed using an infrared camera

We are all familiar with security lights that come on when a person approaches. I have one in my porch which is very useful when I come home at night as it helps me to see where to put the key! That one is operated by radar.

A Malvern physicist, J. B. Gunn, invented a device, known as a Gunn diode, which is no bigger than a 9V battery, that can emit microwaves. Other uses are in speed guns and automatic door openers. Many security devices use lights and, when triggered by an intruder, their sudden coming-on might scare them away. Other security devices use infrared. This invisible radiation can be used to switch on lights, but can also produce images so that intruders can be seen on a screen. TV police programmes often show these, particularly when used by police helicopters. They have the advantage over those produced by light in that intruders are unaware they are being filmed. Alongside the scientists developing radar, before and during World War Two, some were seeing whether infrared radiation could be used. Both are electromagnetic waves. Radar waves were initially produced with wavelengths of several metres, but ultimately, with the development of the resonant cavity magnetron (as now found in our microwave ovens) at Birmingham University during World War Two, they were reduced to a few centimetres; infrared waves are much, much smaller, in a range from a millimetre to about a thousandth

of a mm. However, there was a major difference between the uses of radar and infrared in that radar pulses had to be sent out from a transmitter, reflected by the target and the echoes picked up by a receiver; infra-red did not have to be transmitted as it was emitted by anything hot or even just warm. You and I give off infrared waves. The hotter the object, the smaller the length of the waves. The time lapse between sending the pulse of radar waves and getting it back tells us the distance to the target. Early infrared could not do this. It only showed the direction of the emitter. Thus, once radar was made to work well, the work on infrared was no longer funded.

However, typically, a few Malvern scientists kept up their infrared research as well as doing what they were paid for. Once, with the smaller wavelengths, radar transmitters became small enough to fit into an aircraft, they enabled our fighters to locate enemy bombers at night, our bombers to hit their targets accurately and our maritime aircraft to locate and attack surfaced U-boats. Eventually, even when the German night-fighters were able to use our transmitted pulses to locate and attack our bombers, the scientists at Malvern and RAF Defford devised a way to deal with that problem. Code-named 'Village Inn', the RAF Defford Museum at Croome shows it being demonstrated. When World War Two ended, we entered the Cold War with Russia. 'Cold' because war was not declared, but we prepared

for fighting that hostile nation. The scientists at Malvern, part of the Royal Radar Establishment (RRE), continued their research and, by the early 1950s, extended it into infrared. However, by 1958, little progress had been made, and the work was officially abandoned as it was decided that 'thermal imaging' was of little practical use. Typically again, that did not stop some scientists from quietly carrying on. Eventually, the progress they made was recognised. As a consequence, research on the uses of infrared was not only funded but also expanded. The infrared emitted by the engines of military vehicles can be used, and the fact that someone is picking it up cannot be known is invaluable. This was particularly useful for battle tanks as it means they can see enemy vehicles in the dark without the enemy knowing. This Thermal Observation and Gunnery System was used very successfully by British

Challenger tanks in the Gulf War. For no losses, the British tanks were reckoned to have destroyed about 300 enemy tanks. Increasingly, driving at night has become difficult owing to LEDs making headlights brighter and more people using large vehicles whose headlights are higher. So we face more dazzling lights on oncoming vehicles. Particularly as one gets older, these dazzle dangerously. Now it seems that help is on the way. If your car is fitted with infrared detectors giving night-vision, the scene ahead can be clearly seen, but lights are faint. Drivers so equipped can see ahead clearly and are not dazzled. Furthermore, humans and other animals show up well. Drivers are getting used to having screens taking up part of the windscreen area. So, rather than looking through the windscreen, the driver looks at the screen with the infrared image.



A mock-up of infrared technology applied to windcreens

Farming

Mike Page

In the last article, I mentioned certain problems that could well arise following the dry weather conditions of 2025.

First of all, it seems from reports that I have heard, seen or read that domestic supply reservoirs are at a lower level than the seasonal average. This could result in major domestic supply problems if we do not get higher than usual rainfall over most parts of the Country this winter, followed by at least average rainfall as the 2026 seasons unfold.

Something like the same argument can be made for Agricultural water supply; in both cases, much higher than normal amounts of rain are needed to bring water/moisture levels in the soil or in irrigation reservoirs back to levels where we can face up to whatever sort of season comes to any of us in 2026.

All the flooding that has been seen in more recent times means that much of that 'extra' rain has run away to waste. So – dare I say it – in spite of all the flooding problems we have experienced nationwide so far this winter, we need yet more rain.

The weather so far this autumn and winter has allowed most planting of autumn/winter crops to proceed successfully, and most cattle are indoors and comfortable. Many sheep are still outside, where some will remain, even during the lambing season, but leaving sheep outside, even if

they go on to lamb outside, should not be a problem, provided they are closely monitored. An easing of worries and responsibilities before the real activities of 2026 begin?

The problem hanging over livestock this time is likely to be the availability of fodder (hay/haylage/silage) following poor harvests last year as a result of the drought. But perhaps the overly wet underfoot conditions we are experiencing at the time of writing (Feb 11th) will keep most of us farmers indoors with time enough to work on how best to cope with such problems that may emerge later on. An early end to winter conditions and a mild spring would be nice ... Presently, we are waiting for the start of the 2026 round of SFI (DEFRA Sustainable Farming Incentive) schemes, due in the summer. These are Government schemes designed to promote environmental benefits across farmland. They move away from previous government support schemes, having their origins in the need to give home-grown food production priority above almost all other considerations in the post-WWII years, as the UK slowly returned to normality. It is recognised now, even by the majority of farmers, that nearly all Govt agricultural support schemes in the past were probably too focused on simply enhancing production levels,



This photo shows surface water still lying recently on the surface of an otherwise reasonably well-drained field after the continuously wet weather we have had since the start of the year. However, due to 2024's prolonged drought conditions, the subsoil underneath is still relatively dry.

with some of that concerted effort helping to bring about environmental decline and contributing to climate change. We can but hope that SFI schemes already operating (some on this Farm) and those yet to be introduced, in achieving their objectives, do at the same time compensate farmers for the drop in output that will almost definitely occur.

The Chancellor has recently reconsidered her approach to the way Inheritance Tax is imposed on Farming Assets when they are transferred as a going business from one generation to the next, as is probably the case with the greater number of agricultural businesses. Only after concerted lobbying by

organisations and individuals representing rural-based and farming-connected industries has the Government been persuaded that the taxation moves it proposed nearly a year ago were likely to do more harm than good unless revised. Most Governments are inevitably composed of members having urban backgrounds, or representing predominantly urban interests, which gives many MPs a rather different political outlook than suits our rural folk. As I have said before (and I mean this in a polite way), the closest most of them have ever been to a farm is passing by a field of cattle when travelling down the motorway.

£15,000 Boost to Worcestershire Cancer Charity



Helen Jones and Naomi Smith from i-Sing Choirs conducting The Greatest Sing.

A Worcestershire charity event, attended by more than one thousand people, has been hailed as a huge success by the organisers. The Greatest Sing, which took place at the Three Counties Showground in Malvern last

month, saw hundreds of people spending the day learning a medley of songs, then performing as part of an evening show with other local acts. The Anna Wilkinson Mockingbird Trust charity enlisted the help of local choir



Ringmaster, Malcolm Boyden, introduces The Greatest Sing show

organiser, Helen Jones, from i-Sing Choirs and BBC presenter, Malcolm Boyden, to help arrange the day of learning, singing and performing. Head of the trustees, Chris Wilkinson, said: "The total raised from this joyous event

stands at £15,000, which will help us to continue our work across the West Midlands." The charity arranges and funds days or evenings out for young people between the ages of 16-25 years who have a cancer diagnosis.

If bees are in crisis, could I help by becoming a beekeeper?

Martyn Cracknell

For about thirty years, there has been an intermittent stream of scare stories in the press about bees dying out and the dire consequences for wildlife, crop pollination and even humanity. The sensational articles require closer investigation. Initially, honey bees were the subject of concern as the parasitic mite, Varroa, spread rapidly throughout Europe and wiped out colonies of both hobbyist and commercial beekeepers. A frenetic search for a quick-fix solution led to various pesticide treatments, which worked well but soon led to resistant parasites and plunged us back into near despair as our colonies perished. Meanwhile, stories from the U.S.A. described a catastrophic loss of colonies on a massive scale. This was widely described as Colony collapse disorder or CCD, but the precise symptoms were vague except for a sudden population decline and finally, just empty hives. A shortage of colonies for commercial pollination of orchard and other fruit crops led to predictions of dire consequences for the food supply, and whilst bee losses in the UK continued and were sometimes blamed on CCD, they were probably more likely to be Varroa-related. Among the probable causes, there were several strong contenders. Agricultural pesticides, in particular the neonicotinoids, were implicated and attracted a strong lobby to have them banned. Another suggestion was the electromagnetic influence from

mobile phone masts. Both of these were supposedly responsible for the bees losing the ability to navigate to their hive. Another idea was the combination of virus infection and crop monocultures with changes in weather patterns. Against the backdrop of this press exposure, stories emerged about bumblebee populations being under threat, and some species even becoming extinct. This racked up the public concern. Garden centres started to label their flowers and shrubs as 'pollinator-friendly', and on every household item, from tea cosies to bed spreads, pictures of bees would feature. Applications to beekeeping courses and interest in public beekeeping displays increased and remain sky high. So, is it all true, are the bees in danger, or has the situation been exaggerated? Twenty-one species of social bumblebee have been recorded in Britain and three have become extinct in 1857, 1941 and 1989. Six species seem to have declined during the 1900s, and with another four are now only found in local populations in Scotland, uplands or coastal sites. The general consensus is that the declines are probably due to habitat loss and are part of a much wider decline in populations of insects like butterflies and moths. Seven species are widespread and common and are the ones likely to be seen in your garden, and are probably the only types you have ever seen. At the same time, one species,



the tree bee, is new to the UK, having arrived in 2001 and since then has spread throughout the British Isles. There is also a solitary bee that has spread throughout the UK over the same period. These success stories suggest that neither pesticides nor phone masts are responsible for the recorded declines. The tree bee, common throughout Britain since 2001. (Wiki commons, RL's 34742598795). As for the honey bee, well, we have learned a great deal about the interaction between Varroa and honeybees, and with changes in hive management and the development of natural resistance by bees, beekeepers are able to monitor and control the level of infestation. The number of hobby beekeepers is at an all-time high, and the availability of courses, training materials and sources of good information is excellent, so that the general level of competence among beekeepers is much improved. It would seem that CCD may be a cyclical condition involving high viral loads and exacerbated by other

stresses like Varroa and other diseases. There have been previous periods with high colony losses, such as 'Disappearing Disease' and 'Isle of Wight disease', but these tend to be self-limiting and have not been a European problem in recent years. So should you become a Beekeeper to 'Save the Bees'? No, that would be like keeping chickens to 'Save the Birds'. However, you can manage your garden to provide opportunities for wild bees to nest, feed and shelter. Maintain hedges with a dense leafy base, plant trees, shrubs and flowers to provide shelter, pollen and nectar, throughout the year. Leave some long tussocky grass, and some rockery or drystone wall as nesting sites, or get some solitary bee nesters from a garden centre. You won't save the rare bees found only on Scottish islands, but you will encourage a much richer variety of insects at home. And if you do want to keep bees (or chickens), that's a different story.

Spring

Where did the buds come from?
Have they been hiding away all winter
And only now, poked out their heads,
Inquiringly, to take stock?
They weren't here last week
But now, suddenly, they are all about us,
Crowning the tips of branches.
Some fat and furry, some delicate,
Some already beginning to unfurl.
And what about the blossom?
Its light, bright petals dust the bare branches,
Clouds of gentle colour, illuminating and cheerful.
Daffodils too are in on the act,
Gathering in groups or even crowds,



Nodding to each other,
Showing off their spring frocks
Like Ladies' Day at the races.
Snowdrops still sprinkled shyly,
Pinpoints of white in shady woods.
And the crocus, with its purples and yellows,
Complements the new green growth of the grass.
The forsythia has been quietly, discreetly,
Pushing forward its yellow blooms
And now the garden glows with its golden branches.
Spring is coming
And we wait for it to unveil its full beauty.



Susan Catford



The Runnymede Memorial Unveiling - I was there!

Allan P. Ledger, Stow-on-the-Wold



The Queen, escorted by Admiral Sir Martin Dunbar-Nasmith, walking among the relatives of the fallen.



You can just make out the choir in white, surrounded by the 25,000 people invited to attend.

Closely following the coronation was the unveiling of the Runnymede Memorial to officers and men of the Air Forces of The Commonwealth by Her Majesty the Queen, on Saturday 17th October 1953.

The weather was grey and misty that day on Cooper's Hill, Runnymede.

The Runnymede Memorial was built by the Imperial War Graves Commission in memory of the 20,455 airmen who gave their lives in the 1939 – 1945 war and have no known grave.

The service was held outside on a site overlooking Runnymede, where King John had signed The Magna Carta in 1215.

The Memorial was to be dedicated by His Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury in the presence of Her Majesty, accompanied by H.R.H. the Duke of Edinburgh and H.R.H. the Duke of Gloucester.

Around 20,000 people attended, including the Secretary of State for Air, the Chief of the Air Staff, various

Commonwealth High Commissioners and the Chairman of the Egham Urban District Council, all of whom laid wreaths during the ceremony.

On the day, we choirboys of St. George's Chapel, Windsor Castle, had an early lunch and changed into our red cassocks, put on our Eton collars and collected our white surplices.

We walked out of the school gates to where the coach was waiting to take us to Runnymede. The weather was quite windy and our surplices blew around us as we waited for the service to start.

Before we sang, our choir master, Dr William Harris, gave us the note on his tuning fork. When Her Majesty arrived, we all stood as she was received with a Royal Salute before she inspected the Guard of Honour and while the National Anthem played.

The service was relayed on loudspeakers and went out live on the radio all over the world.

The service began with the choir singing 'The Lord's

My Shepherd', which was followed by the lesson read by the Principal Chaplain, United Board. After prayers, H.R.H. the Duke of Gloucester, President of the Imperial War Graves Commission, invited Her Majesty to unveil the Memorial. After the address by Her Majesty, we all stood for the unveiling and the Last Post and the dedication by the Archbishop of Canterbury.

One of the most moving parts of the service was when the R.A.F. Central Band played The Funeral March, which was composed by John Woolridge, an R.A.F. pilot who flew with Guy Gibson and the Dam Busters. John's brother's name is on the memorial.

For me, as a young chorister, the most moving part of the ceremony was when The Reveille was sounded and the singing of the hymn 'O God, our Help in Ages Past'. The Archbishop then pronounced The Blessing, which was followed by a general salute. During the wreath laying by Her Majesty, the Duke of Edinburgh, the Duke of Gloucester and others, we all sat down before we stood to sing the National Anthem. We watched Her Majesty as she inspected The Memorial and passed through the relatives' enclosure before taking the Royal Salute.

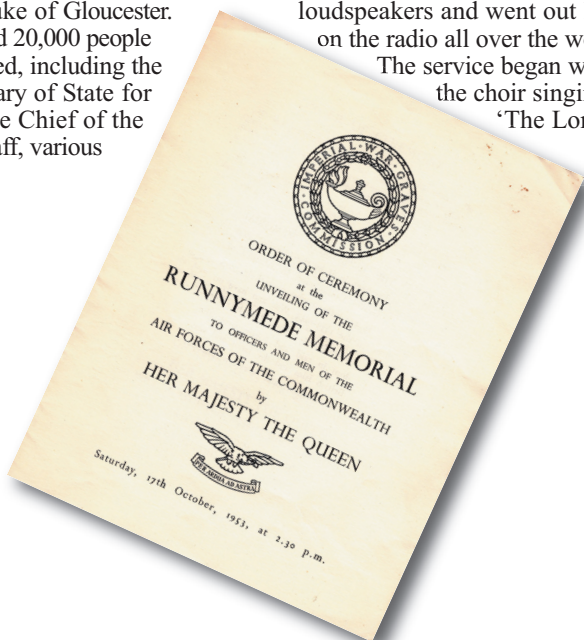
After the departure of Her Majesty and the Guard of Honour, we choir boys then left to return to school to sing the Evensong service in St. George's Chapel. There is a famous poem by Rudyard Kipling called 'The Reeds of Runnymede'. This poem encapsulates some of my Runnymede memories and its association with King John and

the history of England, which we were taught at St. George's School. The poem includes these words: "Forget not, all these years, The Charter signed at Runnymede".

At Runnymede, there are three memorials, situated on land that has a local connection to Oxfordshire. This land was donated by Lady Cora Saye-Sale of Broughton Castle. The Fiennes family goes back to the time of Magna Carta. It was Baron Geoffrey de Saye who actually signed the Charter. This Charter was in 1987 exhibited in the U.S. by the Dean of Lincoln Cathedral Oliver Fiennes. It forms the basis of The American Bill of Rights, which is why the second memorial at Runnymede is known as The American Bar Association Memorial. This was dedicated on 28th July 1957. Though by then, I had left Windsor for my public school. The third memorial known as The Kennedy Memorial was dedicated by Her Majesty and the Kennedy family on 14 May 1965.

Magna Carta is important as the concept of basic rights, which was spread round the world and with it the development of the U.S.A. and the Declaration of Independence, which is part of our British world, as much as Magna Carta is for political liberties, which are important to our economic growth and cultural confidence.

In 2015, Her Majesty once more visited Runnymede on 15th June on the occasion of the 800th anniversary of the Sealing of the Magna Carta. Windsor and Eton Beer Company launched their celebratory beer that same year.



Reminders of Home – A Blooming Border

We're delighted to share that I'll be creating a 'Blooming Border' at this year's RHS Malvern Spring Festival, which is on Thursday 7th May to Sunday 10th May 2026. The garden is titled 'Reminders of Home', the design is sponsored by Hughes & Company, proud owners of the Pershore Times, and brings together everything I love about gardening and family. The border is inspired by my childhood recollections of my parents' and grandparents' gardens. Those early moments of sowing seeds together, learning plant names, and simply enjoying being outdoors are woven into every part of the design. My hope is that visitors will pause, reminisce, and share their own stories of family gardens, favourite plants,

and the small rituals that sparked their love of growing. A classic cream picket fence frames the border, instantly evoking the warmth of home and the neighbourly chats that often happen over the garden fence. At the heart of the design sits a life-size willow dog sculpture, handwoven in Derbyshire from locally grown willow. This playful character represents the love of loyal pets and the joy they bring, while also showcasing natural, sustainable materials and traditional craftsmanship. The planting scheme is designed to feel both familiar and uplifting. I'll be incorporating cottage garden favourites such as foxgloves, tulips, thyme, forget-me-nots, honesty, geums and geraniums,

along with shrubs like viburnum and small trees including crab apples. This isn't the full list - the border will contain between 300 and 500 plants, and varieties may change depending on availability and quality. It can get a little stressful when you're a week from the show and only half the plants are ready, but that's all part of the fun and the on-the-spot problem-solving that makes show gardening so exciting.

Sustainability is at the heart of the design. All plants will be UK-grown to reduce transport miles, and materials such as the willow sculpture have been chosen for their low environmental impact. After the show, the plants will be sold, with any remaining specimens



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donated to a local garden so they can continue to be enjoyed by the community.

I've worked in horticulture for a decade and have been fortunate to receive recognition, including an RHS Chelsea Silver Medal and multiple awards at BBC Gardeners' World Live and RHS Malvern. The festival is always a wonderful opportunity to inspire people and show how a thoughtfully designed border can transform even a small space. This year feels especially meaningful, as it marks the 10-year anniversary of my very first show garden at Malvern. 'Reminders of Home' is a celebration of family, nostalgia and the joy of gardening - an uplifting space that feels both personal and universal.



March gardening tips

Reg Moule *BBC Hereford & Worcester*

Early March

Lift and divide herbaceous plants. Plant alpine and herbaceous plants. Lightly mow over the lawn. Prepare sites for new lawns. Prune rose bushes soon if not already done. Plant onion, garlic and shallot sets. Start Begonia and Gloxinia tubers into growth indoors. Buy seedlings or baby bedding plants to grow on at home.

Mid Month

Support all tall growing herbaceous plants from early in the season. Try growing some ornamental vegetables in the flower garden, e.g. red-leafed lettuce and runner beans. Prune Blueberries. Sow hardy annual flowers like Eschscholzia, Godetia, Clary, Mignonette etc. direct in the garden borders. Treat moss, scarify and aerate lawns. As well as feeding the grass, you can now get moss killers that digest dead moss, so no raking needed. You could

use traditional Lawn Sand. Prune late summer flowering shrubs, like Buddleia and Caryopteris, as well as Hydrangea paniculate varieties and Hydrangea arborescens Annabelle. Prune down hard shrubs with coloured stems like Cornus, as well as hardy Fuchsias. Trim over winter flowering heathers cutting to the base of the flower clusters. Buy and plant pots of herbs. Sow seeds of hardy herbs in the garden, like parsley. Plant seed potatoes – but beware of frost once the shoots emerge from the soil. Vegetable seeds to sow now include: broad beans, lettuce, leeks, parsnips, peas, radish, salad onions, spinach, Swiss chard and spinach beet. Sow summer bedding under glass: dahlias, impatiens, petunias, phlox drummondii, salvias, asters, tagetes, mesembryanthemums, alyssum, nicotiana, marigolds and zinnias. Plant lilies outdoors

in borders and tubs. Lay out growing bags in the greenhouse to warm up the compost before planting. Sow fruit and vegetable plants for growing on in a heated greenhouse, e.g. tomatoes, aubergines, peppers, cucumbers, etc. or you could decide to buy plants later.

Late March

Plant less robust hardy evergreen shrubs e.g. Hebe and Ceanothus. Lay turf or sow lawn seed. Start feeding pond fish more frequently as the water temperature rises. Vegetables to sow now include: Brussels sprouts, red cabbage, summer cabbage and summer cauliflower. Dwarf French beans can be sown under cloches. Watch out for the build up of pests and diseases. Treat pots against vine weevil attacks using Bug Clear Vine Weevil Killer. It protects your plants for three months. An organic answer is a half inch deep layer of



horticultural grit over the compost surface to deter egg laying. Marginal plants in pond can be divided if overcrowded, but watch out for frog spawn.

Remember

You can't race the seasons and seeds do not have to be sown exactly when the packet tells you. My advice, with outdoor sowings is watch the weather, not the calendar, as seed sown later when conditions are right usually catches up and surpasses crops put in earlier that had to suffer during bad weather.

Ailsa's Kitchen

Ailsa Craddock

It's March and the garden is really starting to wake up. Little shoots are appearing (I can never remember exactly what I planted where, so it is always a bit of a surprise what pops up) and the days are a little longer and lighter. There are plenty of lovely vegetables about, but what could be better than carrots - the unappreciated gold amongst vegetables? Too often presented as a sidedish of extraordinary dullness, they can be pepped up with herbs, lemon juice and butter - or made into any of the below recipes.

Spiced Carrot and Lentil Soup

1 tablespoon butter

1 onion, finely chopped

1-2 cloves of garlic

1 dessertspoon grated ginger

1/4 teaspoon each chilli flakes,

ground turmeric, ground

coriander, ground cumin

2-3 carrots, peeled and chopped

1/2 tin chopped tomatoes

80g red lentils

500ml vegetable stock

Melt the butter in a saucepan and gently fry the onion, ginger and spices and cook until soft. Add carrots, lentils and stock and slowly bring to the boil. Cover and simmer for about 40 minutes until tender. Serve, with toasted sourdough, in a bowl with a swirl of yogurt and mint or parsley for garnish.

Quick Carrot and Walnut Bread

350g plain flour

150g wholemeal flour

1 teaspoon salt

2 teaspoon bicarbonate of soda

150g carrots, peeled and grated
walnut or pieces a handful,
toasted

300ml Greek yoghurt

125ml semi-skimmed milk

Heat oven to 230c/fan 210/gas 8.

Mix the flours, salt and

bicarbonate of soda, then stir in

the carrot, walnuts and yoghurt,

followed by enough of the milk

to make a soft, quite sticky dough.

Tip onto a floured surface and

form a flat ball, put on a baking

sheet, slash the top and bake

for 30 minutes until risen and

cooked. It'll sound hollow

when you tap it.

Carrot Muffins (makes 6)

75g margarine

125g carrots

100g sugar

100g Self raising flour

3/4teasp cinnamon

1 teasp baking powder

1 large egg

60g sultanas

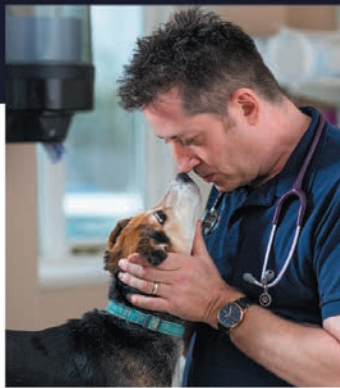
25g nuts



Above: Carrot and Walnut Bread
Below: Carrot Muffins

Preheat the oven to 200C/gas mark 6/fan 180C. Melt the margarine in the microwave. Top and tail, then peel and grate the carrots. Combine the carrots, sugar and margarine in a bowl. Sift in the flour, cinnamon and baking powder. Beat the egg in a small bowl and then add to the

mixture. Also mix in the nuts and sultanas. Line a muffin tray with 6 muffin cases and divide the mixture equally between them. Bake for 20 minutes. Allow to cool - and either enjoy them as they are or mix a little cream cheese and icing sugar together as a topping.



Paws in Cold Weather - Hints and Tips.



These days winter seems to arrive later each year but still in our coldest months temperatures do sometimes plummet. These can be times for us all to enjoy, especially if it snows but we must also remember to keep ourselves and our furry friends safe.

Dogs love playing in the snow and if they are running around a lot may even be pleased that they are staying cool. But, be wary of where they walk. Frozen ground can be slippery and snow can hide deep holes. Rivers may be tempting for dogs to go in but can be freezing cold and difficult to get out of. Do not allow dogs to walk on frozen ponds, the ice may not hold their weight. If pets do fall into ponds or rivers don't go in after them, call the emergency services and try to encourage them to swim to the bank near you.

Think about paws after cold walks. Wipe them off as salt grit from the roads can be irritating. Every time the weather gets really icy I get calls from owners concerned about their dogs unusual behaviour after walks or going outside - being restless and suddenly kicking their feet out as if they are experiencing electric shocks. The behaviour can be quite concerning and is more common in young dogs with softer foot pads. The cause is coming in from the very cold to the lovely warm house. As the feet warm up and the blood flow returns it causes a 'pins and needles' sensation, tingling and sometimes pain. I remember experiencing similar myself as a child after building a snowman without any gloves then coming back in to the warm. Even the water from the cold tap felt warm to my frozen hands and the tingling sensation in my hands was so strong!

In pets, like with me, the problem usually goes away after an hour or so. If your dog does develop this problem after a very cold walk try to warm their paws up more slowly, massage the feet and stand the pet in a cool water bath to relieve the immediate irritation. Do not panic, the problem does go away after a few hours and without any need for veterinary intervention.

Best wishes *James and Izzy* x

When the light begins to return

Emily Papirnik

This winter has felt different for me. Not dramatic. Not catastrophic. Just ... heavier. The kind of heaviness that creeps in quietly. Mornings that feel harder to begin. Afternoons that seem to close in too quickly. A sense of moving through thick air rather than open space. I found myself wondering how many grey days it takes before the spirit starts to dim a little. For me, it wasn't one event or one difficult moment. It was simply the long stretch of muted skies. Weeks of cloud cover. Fields saturated and muddy. Walks shortened. Light scarce. The truth is, we are not separate from the seasons. Our bodies are rhythmic. Light regulates our sleep, our hormones, our energy. When daylight is reduced for long periods, it makes sense that motivation dips and tiredness increases. This winter, I have felt the "winter blues" in a way I hadn't before. A lower hum of energy. A stronger pull toward comfort food and early nights. A little less sparkle for things that usually lift me. What I am noticing now - and what feels hopeful - is the subtle shift toward spring. The evenings are stretching. There is a softness in the air that wasn't there in January and February. The ground, though still damp, is beginning to firm. Soon the fields will be less soggy, the



paths more welcoming. For me, more walking! Walking is medicine for me. Open skies, birdsong, the feeling of moving forward on steady ground. When winter mud limits that, I feel it. So the promise of lighter evenings and drier fields feels like renewal. Spring offers light in two ways. Literally, more daylight and more possibilities. I am acknowledging that winter is naturally inward. Nature rests. Trees conserve. Perhaps feeling a little slower is not something to criticise, but something to honour. If you have felt the heaviness too, know that it doesn't mean something is wrong with you. Sometimes it simply means you are human, responding to months of grey. And now - slowly - the light is returning. The fields will dry. The evenings will stretch. The air will warm. And with each small step on firmer ground, energy rises again.

100 years ago ...

On 7th March 1926, the first wireless transatlantic telephone call was made from AT&T HQ in New York City to the British Post Office in London.

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me helping me

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Citizens advice - Avoiding financial scams

Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) research shows that approximately 800,000 people reported losing money to investments or pensions-related scams in the twelve months to May 2024. The ways people learn about investments have changed with the advent of social media, making consumers vulnerable to fraud or scams. For example, the research found that those who had experienced Authorised Push Payment (APP) fraud or unauthorised consumer investments or pensions-related fraud were most likely to have heard about it by seeing it promoted on social media - around 1 in 6 (17%) - or via a telephone call (17%). Others may have been initially approached via text or other messaging services. To help fight this financial crime, the FCA has launched a new tool to help consumers avoid scams on its website called Firm Checker: <https://www.fca.org.uk/consumers/fca-firm-checker> This will enable the public to check if a firm is authorised and

has the correct permissions to provide services. This should help people to reduce their chances of falling victim to fraud. Scammers whose methods are evolving can make it difficult for consumers to know if they are dealing with the real firm. In addition to checking if a financial services firm is authorised by the FCA for the services being offered, people should also confirm that the contact details match those listed on the FCA Firm Checker. Firm Checker is just one of a number of ways people can seek to protect themselves from scams. Using an authorised firm can also bring other benefits as they must meet the FCA's standards and rules. Consumers can also take a complaint to the Financial Ombudsman Service and are more likely to benefit from protection from the Financial Services Compensation Scheme. For further information, contact your local Citizens Advice South Worcestershire office on 01684 563611 or visit www.citizensadvice.org.uk

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Romy's Uni Life

Romy Kemp *Liverpool University*



My Final Semester

I cannot believe that I'm nearly done with my university course. Three years is nearly up and I do not want to leave. I'm still not sure where I will be after this summer, but I don't think I'll stay in Liverpool or Worcestershire. I'm still looking into jobs and whatnot. It is nearly the time to decide. I've already started to apply for certain jobs, but I definitely need to apply to more. Overall, I'm not too worried about my future at the minute. I'm sure everything will fall into

place once I have a better idea of what I want to do and where. Since I've been back at university, I've had been trying to stay healthier. Obviously, Christmas is a time for weight gain and bulking, but I was really annoyed that I did actually put on a bit of weight. My goal has been to lose some weight by eating healthier and going on a long daily walk. This has also helped my state of mind because third year can be quite stressful, as well as living with five other people. My stress levels have been significantly high recently,

which is slightly concerning but I'm sure I'll eventually find out how to lessen it. I just have to remember that not everything is within my control and some things have just got to happen, so power through! I was panicking about my exams in January, but I got my results recently and was super happy, so it just reminded me that it is okay to calm down. I ran into my housemate from first and second year the other day on the bus, and we had a well overdue catch up. A lot has changed for both of us this year and we both reminisced on how great our time was in the university accommodation and a student house. Fewer people tends to mean a calmer and cleaner environment, and this was definitely the case for second year. My house this year has definitely been more chaotic. We will be catching up with our other housemate, from second year, in a few weeks time and I cannot wait! I've just recovered from a cold, so I should be energetic and feeling better by the time we meet up. My boyfriend was super



helpful whilst I was sick and made me dinner and bought me some essentials. He is always great when I get ill. Now that I am better, I can crack on with my university studies. I cannot wait for summer to begin. I am not usually one to look forward to summer or wish the present days away, but I just have a feeling that this summer and the future are going to be great! Maybe it's just that I want to get out of coats and get into dresses. I would say that my first year of being in Liverpool was the year that it rained the most because, since then, I don't think it's been overly bad. Yes, it still rains a lot here, but I really don't think it's as bad as it was in first year. It will be great to get out of the jumpers and start feeling the warmth of summer 2026.

A Place to Meet



My last shift at the café was a slow one. The first Sunday of half-term usually brings a kind of cheerful chaos, but the grey sky and steady rain kept most people indoors. The regular dog walkers ventured out regardless, of course, and it was comforting to see those familiar, smiling faces. I say, "last shift", but I'll be back in a few weeks. Still, there's something about saying goodbye, even temporarily, that makes you notice the small things more.

With nine hours to go before I set off, I'm writing this having just packed my bags, trying to let the nerves settle. Why must I leave packing till the last possible minute? Though my suitcase clearly has other ideas, refusing to shut unless I sacrifice half my clothes.

Tomorrow, I leave for Japan. It has long been on my bucket list, something that always felt distant in my travel plans, yet it suddenly feels very real. For those I haven't yet properly introduced myself to: I wrote my first column for The Whittington Times last month, and I'm delighted to now be writing here regularly. I've lived in Worcester most of my life, aside from a few university years in Bath, and I've spent the last few years working at The Orchard, in a place where people are always passing through. It's strange, then, that I will be the one passing through now. There's comfort in familiar places and faces, in the rhythm of the café and the predictability of routine. But there's also something necessary about stepping away from it. Swapping the known for the unknown feels both unsettling and exciting. By the time you're reading this, I'll be across the world, hopefully enjoying a bowl of ramen and wandering beneath cherry blossoms. Next month, I look forward to writing from Japan itself. For now, I'll sit with the nerves and take the plunge.

Chloe Pickstock



Gregory's World!

Flavours of Farringdon

People in Farringdon smell so good! And it's a good job they do, fellow reader, because we're on the tube, home to Britain's finest jostling shoulders, tetchy elbows and armpits that open inexplicably in your face. I was heading to Farringdon to meet my sister. She's been studying music production in London since September. En route, I enjoyed a ride on the smoother, sleeker, shinier Elizabeth Line (opened by the late Queen during her Platinum Jubilee). Then I reached my stop and the crowds swept me into a network of cavernous, space-age tunnels. I shivered with excitement. The scope, the magnitude, the energy of the city! At this stage in my life, it beckons to me. Everyone had a mission. Taking business calls on AirPods; wielding enormous Gucci shopping bags; swooshing with dark professionalism in ankle-length coats; saying: 'Yeah, we

should totally do that sometime'; sprinting like Bugs Bunny down the platform, squeezing onto a train that hit full capacity two stops ago, and risking being dismembered by the closing doors – all for a ride they could've caught again just three minutes later. Being able to hop on a train that runs every three minutes is euphoric. Not that I'm completely dew-eyed. I'm sure London life is relentless. The commute fries your noggin. Fewer people say hello or look up. I bet sitting at a table-for-one in the window of Pret a Manger, munching a sandwich while watching YouTube on your phone gets old quite quickly. That's if you're even fortunate enough to have a job. Still, on the whole, the idea of the city makes me feel magnetised. My sister was outside the station, looking very independent and worldly. I was wearing the smart, puffy coat I got for Christmas (which makes me look just a tiny bit

Gregory Sidaway

jacked) and, as she hugged me, she said: "Urrghh-ewww, you look like a man!" Good to know. Seeking somewhere warm to caffeinate ourselves, we stumbled into a joint called Farmer J's. Sixteen of these shops have sprung up around London in recent years. Associating farming with home rather than the metropolis, I couldn't help but smile at their quirky branding. Farmer J's packages the idea of farming into a boutique, health-food aesthetic. Move over, pie and chips! Make way for Gochujan salmon and spiced date sweet potatoes! How about some ponzu sesame broccoli and lime leaf tofu with passion fruit kombucha, served in a grab-and-go field tray. All I wanted was a coffee, but I was contending with a rice pudding-flavoured matcha latte! Instead of straw and rustic beams, I was surrounded by rubber plants and pastel-coloured tiles. The 'staff only' door to the kitchen said 'farmers only', but



there wasn't a wax jacket, fleece or flat cap to be seen. It made for a fun and hyper-real backdrop for a catch-up. It was over too soon, of course. This is the life we live at the moment, straddling two worlds. But before you start worrying that all of this possibility and ponzu broccoli might've got to my head, let me assure you I was brought back down to earth as soon as I checked my trainline app. My train home was disrupted. A rail replacement bus service (ambling through every twist and bend of the Cotswolds) would add another hour onto my journey. Finally, I thought, some normality.

Evie's Teenage Focus

February is, without question, one of my favourite months. I know we're just stepping into March and should be turning our attention toward what lies ahead. Still, a part of me lingers in February, as if some small piece of my heart has chosen to stay behind in its quiet, fleeting days. February doesn't arrive with the loud fireworks of New Year resolutions or a golden haze of summer holidays and breaks from school or work. Instead, it slips in quietly, carrying something softer and hopeful. The month lies dormant between the winter's hush and the first few magical whispers of spring. This sense of tenderness is perhaps most visible on Valentine's Day. I'll admit, being alone on Valentine's Day can sting, but being able to see love all around me is one of the best things I'll ever get to experience. Between my friends and their partners at University, my own parents, and also my Grandparents (who celebrated their 62nd wedding anniversary in the month of February).

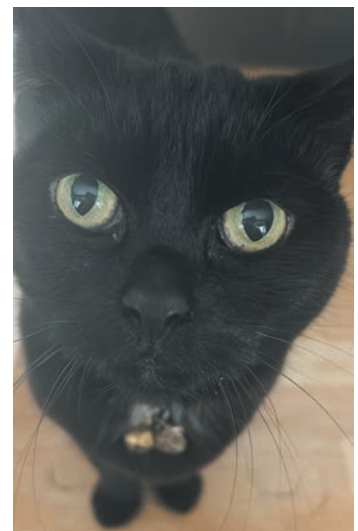
Seeing so many forms of love between the people I know, and couples I've never met wandering through the street on Valentine's Day, wrapped in the warmth of their love, I cannot help but feel happy seeing the day being celebrated. February doesn't just spotlight romance - it illuminates connection. And that's what makes the month feel fuller rather than lonelier. And that spirit of celebration doesn't end with Valentine's Day. In fact, it spills over into the rest of the month, as February holds so many birthdays for the people I love. Almost every week brings about another cake or a party, laughing with friends and family until our cheeks hurt. There is something especially comforting about winter birthdays. Outside, the air is still sharp and harsh, yet inside there is warmth - the fire flickering, hands wrapped around mugs of tea, rooms filled with familiar voices. Even my darling cat was born in February, the day before Valentine's Day, to be exact, which somehow seems purrfectly fitting (please excuse my bad pun), she

embodies the same quiet cosiness the month carries. Celebrating her may seem small, but it fills my heart with joy. When I came home, she got lots of extra treats, extra fusses, and her soft purring as she sits on my lap reminds me that love doesn't always need grand gestures. As all these celebrations unfold, my own 20th Birthday included, February begins to change almost imperceptibly. The days stretch longer, and darkness creeps in later each evening. It's subtle at first, mostly going unnoticed, but then the ground starts stirring, and the daffodils push bravely through the soil. Snowdrops bow their delicate white heads in the morning dew. These first subtle signs of spring, which connect the cosiness of winter gatherings and anticipation for the future of the year, seem like a promise that something brighter is about to begin. Perhaps that is why seeing my first butterfly this year felt so significant. It fluttered past me unexpectedly on my walk back from my University campus. Its delicate yellow wings whispered the future's secrets as it passed. February may be the shortest month, but it carries a depth that the others so often miss.

Evie Aubin Oxford Brookes University



It holds longing and joy in the same breath, winter and spring in the same moment. A gentle balance, it becomes the best month of all. Until next time, Toodles!



Post-Brexit Britain

Joe Bowsher

Joe Bowsher, a Year 10 student from Pershore High School, recently did a week-long work experience placement with us. I'm sure you will be as impressed by his article on Brexit as we were. He was six years old when the referendum was called, allowing him to offer an balanced, statistics-based analysis.

- Editor



Brexit occurred due to a referendum called by David Cameron in 2016. Along with the Conservative Party dividing under the EU question, he was under pressure from the rise of UKIP under Nigel Farage and feared he would lose members of the Conservative party to Farage if action wasn't taken as the party became split over the EU. He set out to settle the "European question". The majority of Parliament wanted to remain in the EU, with the Conservatives at 56%, Labour at 95%, the Green Party at 100%, the Liberal Democrats at 100% and the SNP at 100% when it came to MPs wishing to remain. Democratically, the public decided by a 51.89% vote to leave the EU.

Ever since Brexit, there have been certain economic effects. Adding onto this, it was estimated that the GDP in the United Kingdom was 6 – 8% lower than before. Simultaneously, investment is also measured to be 12 – 18% lower. The workforce has decreased ever since due to the end of free movement policies that were previously provided by the EU. In particular, sectors that were more reliant upon workers who have moved for work via the free movement policies have reported labour shortages because of Brexit. These sectors include agriculture, construction and hospitality. According to the House of Commons library, construction experienced a labour shortage of 20.7%.

To contrast this, ever since Brexit, the UK has independently created free trade deals with Australia and New Zealand, which was one of the reasons why some of the public wished to leave the EU: freedom of trade deals. Along with this, the United Kingdom can now set its own tax rates without input from the EU. However, despite the freedom of trade, UK trade intensity ultimately decreased and, in 2022, stayed below the 2019 levels. Ultimately, this affects the UK economy.

Following Brexit, there has also been certain political division between parties and within the public. For example, the Green Party have stated they wish to rejoin the EU, with their current leader, Zack Polanski, claiming

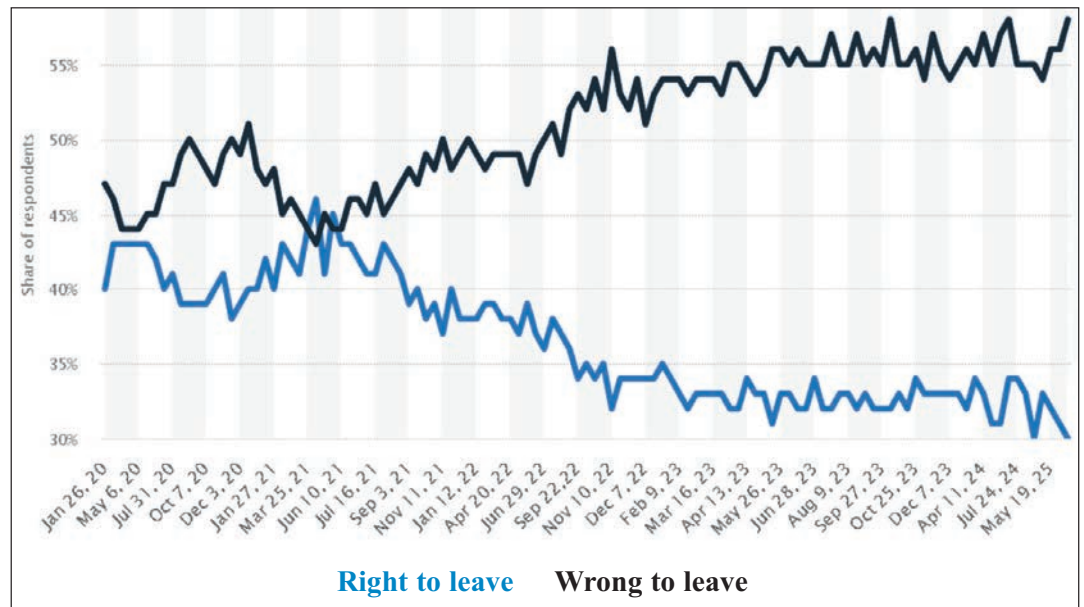
that Brexit was "catastrophic" and a "disaster". He says in the long-term he would want Britain to fully rejoin the EU. On the other hand, the current Prime Minister, Keir Starmer, says that it is not his intention to rejoin the EU and that Labour's official position is to remain where we are today. His reasoning for this is that he doesn't want to cause more political division and move Britain backwards into debate and disagreement. Zack Polanski has accused Labour of not offering a real alternative to Brexit. In alignment with this, the Liberal Democrats offer a

December 2019 and March 2023 (London School of Economics). This constantly affects families in the UK as many will have more strain on their finances which will affect mental health. Additionally, ethnic minorities living in areas who strongly voted to leave the EU have reported a rise in hate crimes. Despite this being not fully researched, it can be estimated that social environments for ethnic Minorities within the UK may feel less safe because of Brexit.

According to "Understanding Society". They compared data

(Understanding Society).

As a result of this, we can see that some voters' reasoning for voting to leave the EU wasn't economically influenced, yet possibly a social factor due to their negative attitudes towards immigrants. Consequently, I can assume that following Brexit it has left ethnic communities feeling unsafe and has created a division between British citizens. Additionally,



similar viewpoint of rejoining the EU and, as of their 2024 manifesto, they say they wish to fully rejoin the EU (however, their process of achieving this is slightly different to Green's). They propose a four-stage plan that focuses on rebuilding relations first, then rejoining (which would include joining the Single Market). Furthermore, the Conservative Party's current leader, Kemi Badenoch, says that the previous leaders failed to consider a growth plan concerning immigration despite their promise to. The party has said they have no intention of rejoining the EU. This has caused considerable disagreement between parties and the supporters.

Following the referendum, there has ultimately been specific social effects as well. Food prices have surged up by an estimated £250 per household between

from 2016 and now reported from local authorities analysing mental health before and after Brexit. The results show a deterioration among minorities' mental health on the GHQ scale.

Along with this study, there are also studies to show negative attitudes towards immigrants having a positive correlation with voters who voted to leave the EU (website: *Economic Observatory*, data from

an opinion poll by "Statista" has been released stating if Britain was right or wrong to leave the European Union. (The results are shown above.) As we can see, certain public opinion has changed since Brexit which shows that possibly the social effects have taken their toll on voters which is shown through the positive correlation between time since Brexit and those who believe it was wrong to leave.

'The Soviet Union was about prisons and gulags, borders and walls, violence against citizens and neighbours. The European Union is about freedom and human rights, prosperity and peace, life without fear, it is about democracy and pluralism - a continent without internal borders and walls.'

Donald Tusk

President of the European Council (2014 - 2019)

Whether you do or don't Payrolling benefits in kind

Angela Johns

I waited on the train station platform for twenty minutes with my back to the sign that said to wait for the replacement bus back up on the main road. Just before the bus arrived, I sneezed. Using my reflexive instinct to contain it, I turned around. I opened my eyes and not only saw the sign but read it too. I hotfooted it back to the main road in time to catch the bus – just!

Whether an angel tickled my nose in an effort to save me from all sorts of inconvenience, or whether my very sophisticated brain used body and mind together to try to move something from the subconscious to the conscious (I had seen the sign when I arrived but was too busy thinking about other things for me to acknowledge it), I can still feel gratitude and relief. I can wonder at the unknowable mysteries of the brain, or be content with the unknowable mysteries of another dimension that seems to have my back. I can even simply notch up another fortuitous coincidence, if I didn't want to think too deeply. Any which way, it's a good story that is fun to retell. Whenever I suddenly remember something just in the nick of time, I do like to say a thank you for the reminder. To whom, though? I normally direct it at the Universe – a quick look upwards and a nod of thanks for the nudge, for saving my embarrassment/bacon. I could just as easily thank myself, for the work my brain does in the background, picking up clues and cues and sending them through chains of energetic reactions via neuron cells, seemingly miraculously pulling



to the surface of my consciousness, that I need to pick up my prescription/son/bottle of wine on the way home from work, just as I'm about to pass the turning. It is not infallible, of course. The Universe or my brain can point, shout or hold up a placard and I still won't shift out of autopilot in time. What I do know is that if I spend time in my week in quiet reflection, giving my mind a chance to dial down and rest, I am much more likely to hear what I need to hear, see through the mist what is right before me, and join the dots in what seems like the chaos. The messages are there, I just need to clear my inbox of junkmail to pick them up more easily.

Angela is a qualified Emotional Therapeutic Counsellor registered with NCPS. Also a Reflexologist and Reiki Practitioner, she is passionate about her therapies and spends quality time with her clients to facilitate their well-being. You can find her at angelajohns.co.uk

Carol Draper

If you are an employee, then it is possible that you receive some benefits from your employer. Benefits such as private healthcare, a company car, use of company assets, low-interest loans or gym membership are all taxable and are known as benefits in kind. If you receive benefits, you will be used to receiving a P11D in about June or July each year. I think it is safe to say that many employees do not understand P11Ds or the tax implications of a P11D. It is not helped that a P11D relates to benefits received in the past year but tax on those benefits will not be paid until the following year. While it has been possible to include benefits in payroll since 2016, from April 2027, it will be mandatory for all employer benefits other than employment-related loans and accommodation to be included and taxed in real time through the payroll. The annual cash value of the benefit must be calculated by the employer and divided equally between pay periods. For example, a benefit with an annual cash value of £240 for a monthly paid employee would be included in the payroll at £20 per month to allow the relevant tax and the employer's national insurance



to be collected. As an employee, this means you will be taxed on both income and benefits as you receive them, so it should be easier to plan financially. If you are an employer, you will need to be aware of the benefits you are providing and their cash value at the time they are provided so those benefits are accurately included in the payrolls you run. This will have the advantage of not having to remember what happened up to a year ago and should improve payroll accuracy. The advantage for HMRC is that they receive tax at the time it is due rather than it being delayed. If you have queries about what will be required and what you need to do, contact your payroll provider or accountant.

*Carol Draper FCCA
Clifton-Crick Sharp & Co Ltd*

'Plans have little importance, but planning ahead is essential.'

Winston Churchill

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Jazz News

Peter Farrall



Free time Old Dixie Jassband

A double Dixieland bonanza in Pershore for March. We have the Free time Old Dixie Jassband (yes, Jass!) from Enkhuizen, Holland, dropping by during their UK tour and, shortly afterwards, Dave Browning's Jazz Cats will be raising the roof at Pershore Town FC. Enkhuizen is a historic harbour town on the Markermeer lake, about thirty miles north of Amsterdam, known for its fishing industry and local bulb and seed nurseries. It has a thriving programme of cultural and leisure activities, including a summer jazz festival where some of the top musicians from the world of vintage and classic jazz perform over four days in June. No effort is spared in making the festival the best of its kind in Europe; even to temporarily renaming some of the streets in the Old Town after

legendary streets in New Orleans. A regular series of concerts over the year is presented by Sgt Pepper's Jazz Club, who also have a major input to the summer festival and who created the Jazz Walk of Fame. The walk is a series of tiles let into the pavement in the centre of the Old Town, each tile dedicated to memorable musicians and bands past and present, from Kid Ory to Ken Colyer and all including, of course, the Freetime Old Dixie Jassband. All this dedication to traditional jazz has earned Enkhuizen the title of the "mini New Orleans of North Holland".

The Freetimers have been part of it all for many years – don't miss this chance to catch them in Pershore.

With scarcely time to catch our breath after the hot jazz from



Dave Browning's Jazz Cats

Holland, we have another high-octane Dixieland session with Dave Browning's Jazz Cats, a band renowned for their energetic driving style playing in the style of Wild Bill Davidson and Eddie Condon. This good-time jazz would have been echoing around Chicago a hundred years ago when many jazz musicians were indirectly employed by the big-time gangsters who owned the illegal

"speakeasies" where alcohol could be bought during the prohibition era. Speakeasies were so called because they were hidden behind legitimate shop or storefronts, often behind false walls or in cellars, and regular customers were expected to exercise quiet discretion as to their location.

Perhaps this month will be Pershore's turn to be mini New Orleans.

Freetime Old Dixie Jassband Friday 20th March

&

Dave Browning's Jazz Cats Wednesday 25th March

Doors open at 7pm, music at 8

Admission £12.50 to include a raffle ticket.

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Visit www.pershorejazz.org.uk Tel: 01527 66692

find us on Facebook.

Music Matters

You may not have heard the name Michiru Aoyama, but he must be one of the most prolific artists currently making music. Every day since 31st December 2021, he wakes up at 5am and spends eleven hours recording a new eight track album. The albums are ambient and unique, with individual artwork and titles. He releases them daily onto Spotify with little quality control, preferring his audience (129k monthly listeners) experience the full raw output. Due to the Spotify algorithms, his tracks are automatically added to many playlists, meaning he has been able to give up his banking job and live off his earnings from streaming. With musicians struggling to make a living nowadays, it's refreshing that he's found a way to make his art work for him.

New releases

Chapter 1
by Sault

This is the band's first release since the acrimonious lawsuit between Inflo and Little Simz. The album has Sault's typical soulful, warm and gospel feel, the songs seem to have lost the protest themes of previous releases but the mantras, melodies and production are top quality. Standout track - 'Puppet'

Wild God Live

by Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds
Nick toured the Wild God album throughout Europe and the USA last year and this is the album from the tour. All of Nick's energy and performance is captured here and it's a joy to listen to. It may be missing a few big hits (Jubilee Street & Mercy Seat) but it's an amazing journey with emotional depth and spirituality. Standout track - 'O Children'

Steve Ide

Attitude Adjustment
by Buzzcocks

It's no mean feat for Buzzcocks to produce an album this entertaining and relevant, fifty years after they formed. Steve Diggle may be the only member left from the original lineup, but it manages to be catchy and melodic without being nostalgic.

Stand out track - 'Queen of the Scene'

Add to playlist

Unforgettable
by Natalie Cole & Nat King Cole

May you never
by John Martyn

In Pursuit of Happiness
by The Divine Comedy

The Crazy Song
by Jackie Leven

Samaritans
by Idles



From the Boundary

Peter Jewell

England's World T20 campaign has been fraught with issues and some great play. England beat New Zealand with three balls to go, Pakistan with five balls to go; they had a good win against Sri Lanka. Here is the kicker: England beat Italy - just! Scotland, with ten balls to go, lost to the West Indies. With all that, England now have a good chance to win the World T20. If England or Worcestershire get any worse, perhaps John Reynolds should put up a Fossils team for them to play them! There is a man who deserves a gong for the good work that he has done and still does! Now, at home, banks are closing and have hubs in some places with bank personnel who are unable to make decisions to do anything. With greater use of AI, there will be fewer people-facing staff to talk to. When eventually a call is answered, it is by a machine and then in what country? It is clear that banks do not want local Joe's business. Our country goes into greater turmoil with yet more U-turns.

As for the Chagos island debacle, perhaps readers cleverer than me could explain why we are paying Mauritius to take the Island over? I put this to you. Follow the money, who has made money from this? Starmer sends out gunboats to evict Chagossians from their own country. Now, Iran. Starmer with another U-turn has allowed the USA to use our Air Bases, and so he should have made that decision in the first place. The oil and gas prices will rocket. Milliband wants to stop oil, gas, etc. We are beholden to a world crisis we need to be independent. We have further offshore oil we have gas through fracking and we have buckets load of coal. Drill, baby drill and become totally self sufficient. Coal producing power stations with carbon capture!



Thoughts from the Snug

New Year Resolutions. Pha!

Buddy Bach

The New Year and the setting of New Year resolutions seems ages ago. Here in the Snug, we recalled our failure in this tradition. One particular New Year toast went: "May all your troubles last as long as your New Year resolutions!" A prophetic statement, and not without merit. Late February and early March is a time when reflecting on NYRs is a good idea. It coincides with Lent, another opportunity to beat ourselves up on another failed goal that often proved unachievable. However, the confession of such failure here in the Snug is not regarded as wholly shameful. Indeed, they are often the source of ironic humour. Self-deprecation is leapt upon by listeners who compound one's mock shame and confession. It becomes an opportunity to wholeheartedly berate you as a weak, feeble-minded and totally misguided moron. Teasing someone about their failures can be a sport here in the Snug. Some examples:
 NYR: "I was going to procrastinate less!"
 Confession/reason:

"Just couldn't get started".
 NYR: "I was going to help out more in the kitchen."
 Confession/reason: "If only she'd asked me."
 ("I'm fed up with asking you," came an added reply.)
 NYR: "I'll join a gym and drink less."
 Confession/reason: "I did join a gym, went twice, but I'm not giving up the Snug."
 NYR: "I'm going to give up chocolate."
 Confession/reason: "Why? - I don't know!"
 NYR: "I'm going to use my new watch which counts my steps. I'll get fitter."
 Confession/reason: "Work in progress admittedly, no positive effect yet!"
 Whether it be New Year or Lent, don't give up on the ambition or tradition of such resolutions. In the Snug, we regard them as casual promises to oneself to which we are under no legal obligation to fulfil. What's the harm in breaking a few resolutions? Politicians do it all the time. 'Carry on regardless', that's our collective motto.

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Village Life

John Driscoll

Daffodils will soon be giving way to the full range of spring flowers, and we can look forward to new signs of life all around us. A beautiful time of the year when green shoots are vibrant and nature looks clean and bright – as it should after all the rain that's fallen throughout the winter! Life in our currently sleepy village has been, well, sleepy. That is, until one night recently when I was rudely awoken at 2.30am by blue lights and car headlights playing across the bedroom curtains. Obviously, curiosity got the better of me, and I was awake by now so I had to have a look. The headlights weren't moving and belonged to two cars parked across our lane, forming an effective road block. The blue lights reappeared a few minutes later, and this time it was clear they were on a police patrol car - not to disperse the blockage but to reinforce it. Officers could be seen conducting a torchlight search of nearby gardens. The police left after about thirty minutes and peace returned, but we were left questioning what we'd just witnessed. All was revealed the next morning when we learned that close neighbours had been

woken by a gate clanging followed by a security light bursting into life in their garden. They found two intruders trying to break in via the back door, who fled when the occupants knocked on a window and let them know they'd been seen. Very unnerving, but a lucky escape for our neighbours and a timely reminder to all of us to check our security – it's likely that car keys were the prime target, but then (as others pointed out) it may be better to leave them downstairs rather than risk intruders going upstairs to search for them while you're asleep. So reassuring to hear that the police arrived about three minutes after they were called, despite us being 'out in the sticks'. Be that a warning to others that we may be sleepy, but we're not a soft touch! This sleepiness that we so value is sadly likely to be shattered when the imminent development of Wychavon Town starts. I'll avoid the politics and high dudgeon felt by so many local residents, as the plans will now surely go ahead at speed. However, our immediate concerns mainly focus on the need for 'the planners' to consider the well-being of existing residents



'Fields of Gold' by Susan Catford

during both planning and construction phases. Concerns have been raised about the disruption of the landscape and natural drainage, leaving previously flood-safe properties and land vulnerable. We are also acutely aware that existing lanes, most barely passable for two oncoming cars, are likely to see a huge rise in usage including heavy construction traffic. In the longer term, we fear our villages and lanes will become rat-runs for new residents of the development. There's a growing sense of inevitability and sadness at the scale of loss of our beautiful surrounding countryside, with concern bubbling over to anger that the impact we will be

expected to absorb may just be ignored. Meanwhile, life goes on and those of us who hanker after longer days can hang onto the thought that the sun won't set before 6.00pm again before late October. Who knows what the spring and summer will bring, but please can we have a bit less – no, a lot less – rain and a chance for the land to dry out. My trusty mower has been serviced, and soon enough, it'll be time for the first mow. To think that just a few months ago, the grass was a patchwork of concrete-hard yellowness! Let's value what we have as long as we have it, stay safe, and revel in the glories of springtime.

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Lighthouses, Thrones and Bargains

Brian Johnson-Thomas



Cantick Head Lighthouse, Orkney

It's around 800 miles from here by car and ferry to the nearest bit of the Mediterranean Sea and, this Summer, a lot of folk will be heading that way, despite motorway tolls, an estimated four-hour wait to be processed at the international border and, basically, a lot of hassle. It's just under 800 miles from here, north to the Shetland islands, by rail and ferry, takes about a day, with the added bonus of a mini cruise along a coastline as good as the Norwegian fjords – and costs a lot less than you might think. Plus, there's some really interesting accommodation on offer. How about staying in a lighthouse? All the lighthouses around our coasts have long been automated; this leaves a couple of cottages per light, which have been turned into second homes or are let out as holiday cottages, typically sleeping four to six people. A charity called Shetland Lighthouses (just add a '.com' for their website) offers one at Sumburgh Head on Shetland's main island with stunning views over the sea and the chance of day trips to Fair Isle

and the famous bird observatory there. You could, of course, fly direct to Sumburgh from Birmingham with one change, but that's quite expensive, and anyway my way is more fun ... leaving home after an early breakfast, take the train from Worcestershire Parkway to Aberdeen via Birmingham. That, in itself, is a lovely run right along the backbone of Britain with an eclectic mix of our industrial heritage and stunning sea views. Book early for the best price and book yourselves a table seat, spread out and enjoy the ride in Cross Country's newly refurbished carriages. On arrival in Aberdeen, take a taxi to the ferry port and board the North Link ship. Most days, it sails at 19:00, reaches Kirkwall in the Orkneys just before midnight and docks at Lerwick in Shetland around 07:30. Travelling in the early Summer and most of that spectacular trip is in daylight so you'll see some spectacular scenery. Then hire a car locally (we found the rates quite cheap) and, after loading up with groceries, head off to your

lighthouse. If you don't want to travel overnight on the ferry, then get off in the Orkneys, where Cantick Head lighthouse cottage is for rent from £240 a night, sleeping 4/5 people in three bedrooms (again, just add a '.com' to Cantick Head). Either way, you'll find an esoteric mix of a slower, more relaxed way of life punctuated perhaps by long coastal walks and evenings spent looking and wondering at the ever-changing sky. Plus, it's not expensive, train tickets cost from about £45 one way for an early booking and the ferry crossing for a foot passenger is also just under £30. Allowing for the vagaries of the ticket price and factors such as whether you have one of the many railcards, you could safely plan on a figure of £100 a head each way, to include the hire car.

For full details, see:

www.crosscountrytrains.co.uk

and www.northlinkferries.co.uk

Finally, if you fancy the lighthouse idea but want somewhere nearer, then Lighthouse Cottage in Happisburgh, a coastal village in Norfolk might be an idea. Sleeping up to five in two bedrooms, it's also pet friendly and features a private hot tub. Prices from £955 a week, see: www.selfcatering.co.uk.

Next, specially for *Game of Thrones* addicts, comes news that the Royal Shakespeare Company will stage a new play: 'Game of Thrones: The Mad King' which will have its world premiere in Stratford this coming Summer. The advance PR says: "Family bonds, ancient prophecies, and the sacred line of succession will be tested in a dangerous



George RR Martin, the original mind behind *Game of Thrones*

campaign for power" and so on. Sounds intriguing?

Booking opens next month, see www.rsc.org.uk

If you're lucky enough to be flying somewhere exotic and long haul, then you might like to hear about a jet-lag-busting supplement called Good Flyte, designed to keep you calm from check-in to landing and combats the excessive dryness of aircraft cabin air. It costs £9.99 for a tube of 20 tablets. Each tablet is dissolved in water and then drunk. Just go to <https://goodflyte.com/> Last, but not least, we've found a cheap, warm, and welcoming cafe in Pershore, ideal for visitors to the Hospital or Pershore Medical Practice and situated on the ground floor of the Civic Centre with an entrance directly from the car park. Not only do they offer super salads every day, along with other meals and snacks, on Fridays, they offer Fish and Chips with Peas or Sausage, Egg and Chips plus a cuppa Tea or Coffee for only £4.95. How good is that? Maybe see you in the queue?

Changing nature's clocks

Karen Rose



By the time you read this, we'll be bracing ourselves for the clocks to change. On Sunday 29th March, time officially springs forward,

bringing brighter mornings and a spell of grogginess while our internal rhythms catch up. For us, it's a mild inconvenience; for wildlife, the challenge of

adjusting to spring is far greater. Since 1900, spring has advanced by around eight days, and recent UK records show seasonal events shifting more than two days per decade as temperatures rise. In nature - where finely tuned timing underpins survival - these changes matter. When spring comes early, the delicate balance between species begins to unravel. Insects may emerge earlier, creating a mismatch between when young birds hatch and when caterpillars peak. Trees and hedgerows may leaf or fruit ahead of schedule, disrupting long-established patterns for migrating species. Mild winters add further confusion, rousing

hibernating animals before conditions are stable and prompting reptiles and amphibians to appear while cold snaps still linger. Even pollinators can be stirred into activity before the plants they depend on are ready. There are simple ways to help: offer high-energy bird food, shallow water for insects, natural shelter like twig or leaf piles, and early-flowering plants. So on 30th March, when you feel slightly out of step, spare a thought for the wildlife navigating far greater shifts, and lend a helping hand.

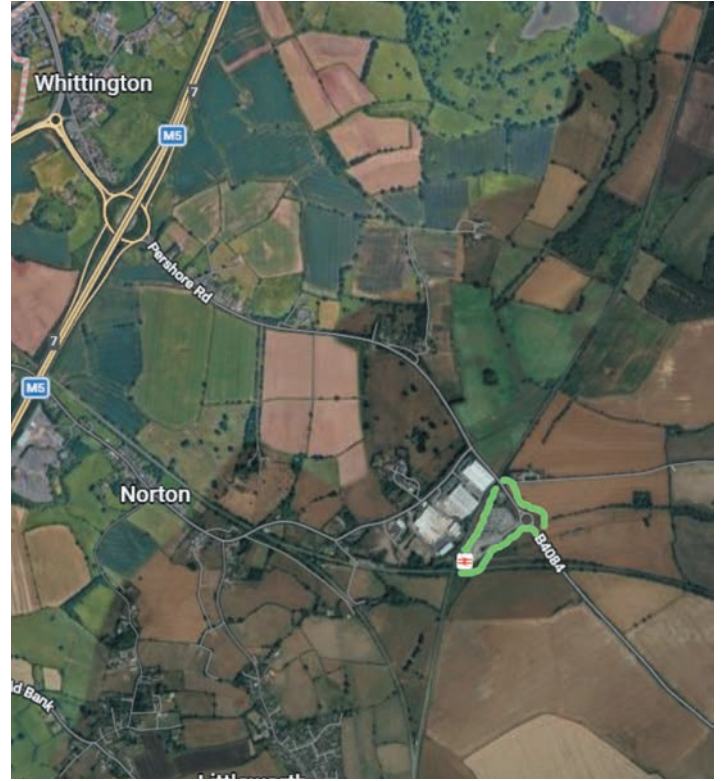
Karen Rose is a wildlife and biodiversity officer for Wychavon District Council.

Stop Wychavon Town!

Dear Reader,
I am writing to ask for your help. The very fabric of what makes Pershore an amazing place to live and work is about to be wilfully torn apart by the creation of Wychavon Town. Every shred of character we value in our local town risks being ripped out and replaced by yet more major brands as they muscle in and turn the Pershore district into yet another overspill. Nigel Huddleston and our local councillors have turned their backs on us all to bow down to planning frameworks and the party line and, in doing so, have turned their backs on the people of this wonderful area. Too many times, I read that the public are in some way supportive of Wychavon Town. This is smoke and mirrors. I have yet to see any real evidence of that support. What we do see is consultation material framed and worded in a way that creates the illusion of backing where very little exists on the ground. Join the fight! Sign the petition! New housing should be focused on brownfield land and appropriate extensions to existing

towns, in line with brownfield first policy. The scale and location of Wychavon Town would cause irreversible damage to the countryside and the historic landscape between Worcester and Pershore. The current plans fail to provide a clear and binding package for roads, schools, health care, policing and other essential infrastructure. The crime and community safety risks of placing a large, commuter-led settlement at a strategic transport hub have not been properly considered. We call on Wychavon District Council, Malvern Hills District Council, Worcestershire County Council, Homes England and Nigel Huddleston MP to reject the Wychavon Town proposal in its current form; halt further work on the Wychavon Town SPD; bring forward alternative options focused on brownfield regeneration and smaller scale, infrastructure led growth. For more information, email bstopwychavontown@gmail.com We can make a difference. Kind regards,

Greg Beachim
Pirton



The envisioned Wychavon Town will comprise of several large estates surrounding Worcester Parkway Station (outlined in green), which will reach as far as the M5, across to areas of Stoulton.



Chernobyl: Forty years on

The Chernobyl nuclear disaster of 1986 claimed many lives and severely affected the health of residents across Belarus, Ukraine and today's Russia. The world's humanitarian response showed the best side of human nature and included immediate treatment for victims and rehabilitation and restorative help for many. Nowhere was this more evident than in Malvern where The Chernobyl Children Lifeline, a national charity was helped by many local people to provide holidays and health assistance for well over one hundred children over more than twenty-five years. Dorothy Knights and her late husband, Jim, helped to organise the arrangements for accommodating the large number of children and planning the programmes for their stays during the annual visits. Denys Bielov, a Ukrainian architect, recently visited Great Malvern Priory and

presented Dorothy with a framed print of a painting by Whittington resident Margret Hallmark. "The Ukrainian Child" is the first painting in a triptych which will be introduced to the public soon. With the theme 'Give peace a chance', Margret shows in the three paintings aspects of the war in Ukraine with a strong appeal for peace. Denys was delighted to have had the chance of meeting Dorothy and expressing his thanks to all the people of Malvern for their friendship and help. Affected himself at the time of the disaster, Denys received treatment for the removal of a brain tumour in Marseilles, France. His father, a radiologist, was seconded to Chernobyl to assist with the clear-up operation and suffered from the after effects of radiation. With the Russian invasion of Denys' hometown



Denys Bielov presents Margret Hallmark's painting to Dorothy Knights with his grateful thanks

of Dnipro and its subsequent destruction, he moved to Mariupol, where the events were repeated. Denys' parents

passed away, starved of the necessary medication by the Russian invasion and inhumane treatment by the invaders.

Escape from Mariupol, Ukraine: Part Five

Denys Bielov



*'Red Sunset on the Dnipro River' (1905-08)
by Ukrainian artist, Arkhryp Kuindzhi*

Warning:
The following describes details you may find disturbing.

Without food, you cannot survive and you become desperate. The Russian occupiers brought supplies to the remaining residents of Mariupol. There were long, slow queues. There were only a few points of delivery for the whole city and no deliveries to homes, even to those who could not walk. Most of us had to travel up to four miles. One cardboard box per person, per month. Everyone had to show passport data, which took a lot of time and was written down again, apparently on purpose, so that the queues would last even longer. The wardens explained that it was necessary to keep a record and a census. Maybe they were going to count tinned food, so that later they could present bills to everyone? It was like some kind of absurd theatre in the ruins. Moreover, the occupation administrators aggravated the situation by constantly changing the process. At first, they announced that they would distribute by numbers - people came and signed up in order 1, 2, 3 ... 987, 988 ... and put their surnames and initials against the numbers. Then suddenly it would be announced: "Now, there will be a live queue!" This shuffling led to chaos and confusion ... disturbances ... scuffles. In all this, the occupiers blamed the people for not organising themselves. It was as though they wanted to constantly provoke us into quarrelling and prove how stupid we all were, with the 'liberators' trying to teach us intelligence. You cannot argue with them when there were supervisors with machine guns around. It was very humiliating when they shouted at us, saying

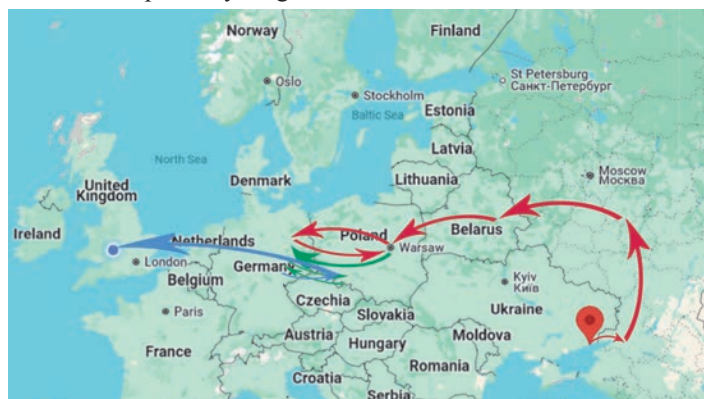
we were like a herd of sheep: "Everybody take two steps back. Otherwise, you'll get nothing!" People were treated as if they were in a Gulag. The cardboard box per person weighed about 15kg. People had to carry everything home on their own in rucksacks, wheelbarrows, bicycles, or cars (if they were lucky). People had to wait for days, returning to the queue several times a day ... in the heat, in the cold, in the rain. The weakest became sick and left with nothing. Sometimes they lost consciousness in the queue. No help from the 'liberators'. Of course, we tried to help the weakest. But there were just too many elderly for the few younger ones to cope. Also, there were single mothers with children; they also needed help, but mostly they had to manage alone. To get provisions for someone unable to travel, for health reasons, you had to show their original passport with a recent photograph to prove that they were alive. The quality of the food was sometimes disgusting. The tinned food contained soya meat and lots of preservatives. Bread was often mouldy, and cereals were spoiled. In peacetime, I wouldn't even feed it to my dog. But there was nothing else to eat, so we had no choice. What saved the city were private traders from the nearby settlements, who continued to operate their farms. We could buy normal products for money: salo (or slanina, consists of salt-cured slabs of pork fat) meat, vegetables, milk products, bread and butter. Spontaneous markets appeared where everyone traded directly from the back of a car or on a homemade counter. It was all very tasty and healthy, because it was our Ukrainian food. True, it was



*'Life Goes On' (1970)
by Ukrainian artist, Tetyana Yablonska*

expensive, but people in Mariupol were ready to give up anything just to have a good meal. Those who had children were given children's packages, but it was necessary to present the child's birth certificate and the child itself to prove that they were alive. Once, while queuing for water, I saw a girl riding an old bicycle on the highway. She was holding the handlebars with one hand and cradling a baby with the other. It was clear she was on her way to get a baby pack. At that time, the pack could be obtained in only two places in the city, and the nearest point was another eight to nine kilometres away across such dangerous terrain. Kadirovtsy (the military personnel from Chechnya serving Ramzan Kadyrov) did not observe any traffic rules and behaved unpredictably. But the girl just had no other way out and no one to ask for help. Two young

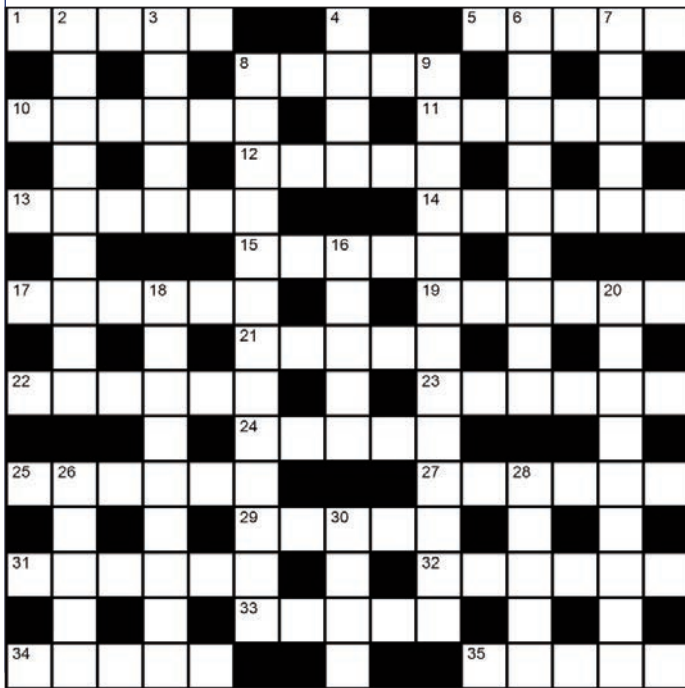
Russians, with automatic guns, who were guarding the queue for water, pointed their fingers at her and laughed. They shouted: "Look how Khokhlushkas (a Russian derogatory name for Ukrainian women) with children drive here." They thought it was very funny, but they did not realise that it was they and their army of occupation that had created such hellish conditions. Only those with a Mariupol registration were allocated a monthly allowance of 7,800 rubles (about £65). These pennies were rapidly spent because of unjustifiably expensive prices for goods and services. Russian propaganda: "What we give to Mariupol residents for free, we film and publicise in the media in every possible way. What we rob and steal from the survivors, we leave behind the scenes in secret."



Denys travelled from Mariupol into Russia, through Belarus, to the Polish border. After several trips between Poland and Germany, he finally flew to the UK.

Coffee Break

Crossword



Across

- 1 Eyots (5)
- 5 Rubbish (5)
- 8 Incantation (5)
- 10 Russian sleigh (6)
- 11 Defence covering (6)
- 12 Having the form of a song (5)
- 13 Sister of Mary and Lazarus (6)
- 14 Resident of e.g. Nairobi (6)
- 15 Stage play (5)
- 17 Scratched (6)
- 19 Plan (6)
- 21 Cuban dance (5)
- 22 Die from lack of food (6)
- 23 Professional killer (6)
- 24 Locations (5)
- 25 Workshop machinery (6)
- 27 Pressed (6)
- 29 Grecian architectural style (5)
- 31 Go back (6)

32 Beast (6)

33 Porridge (5)

34 E.g. Tarka (5)

35 Is inclined (5)

Down

2 Rill (9)

3 Throw out (5)

4 Not in any circumstances (Poetical) (4)

6 Recall past experiences (9)

7 Sweat room (5)

8 Mayonnaise (5,8)

9 Lazy (13)

16 Allow to enter (5)

18 Storage building (9)

20 Cemetery (9)

26 Representative (5)

28 Oil source (5)

30 Part of speech (4)

Sudoku

Each row and column must contain the numbers from one to nine, without repetitions.

1	2		5				3	8
		6		1				
9	3			7	6		5	
	8	2						7
	1	4	7		2	8	9	
7						3	1	
	7		9	2			8	1
			8		7			
8	4			7		2	6	

5				1	7	9		
							6	
	6			4			2	
			8	9			4	1
		2				3		
1	8			5	4			
	9			7			8	
	7							
		3	5	8				9

	7	9						
2						8		7
	3			6			2	
			7	8		1		
3	5					7		4
		1		2	4			
	6			7			1	
1		3						6
							3	9

Countries of the World Wordsearch

P	D	A	A	I	B	A	R	A	I	D	U	A	S
I	U	L	I	S	A	G	B	A	I	U	K	H	I
I	N	G	S	U	P	T	H	D	I	N	T	A	R
I	I	E	Y	K	B	A	U	A	L	A	D	A	U
G	G	R	A	R	R	I	I	N	E	I	I	G	
I	E	I	L	A	E	E	N	N	A	A	K	D	A
A	R	A	A	I	C	A	N	A	D	A	A	I	N
P	I	A	M	N	G	T	H	A	I	L	A	N	D
E	A	A	N	E	N	T	A	N	Z	A	N	I	A
R	I	H	A	I	A	C	H	I	N	A	G	D	C
U	N	B	U	R	M	A	A	U	B	H	A	O	H
N	U	G	P	H	I	L	I	P	P	I	N	E	S
G	U	N	I	T	E	D	K	I	N	G	D	O	M
A	R	G	E	N	T	I	N	A	O	A	K	E	I

- GHANA
- ALGERIA
- INDIA
- UNITED KINGDOM
- TANZANIA
- NIGERIA
- PHILIPPINES
- CONGO
- SAUDI ARABIA
- PERU
- UKRAINE
- CHINA
- MALAYSIA
- BURMA
- THAILAND
- ARGENTINA
- IRAN
- CANADA
- SPAIN
- UGANDA

Brainteasers

- 1) What can you put in a bucket to make it weigh less?
 - 2) What is faster, hot or cold?
 - 3) Who is bigger: Mr. Bigger, Mrs. Bigger, or their baby?
 - 4) What five-letter word becomes shorter when you add two letters to it?
- 1) A hole.
2) Hot is definitely faster.
3) Their baby, because he is a little bigger.
4) Short.

Poets' Corner

A Shropshire Lad

LIV

With rue my heart is laden
For golden friends I had,
For many a rose-lipt maiden
And many a lightfoot lad.

LV

Westward on the high-hilled plains
Where for me the world began,
Still, I think, in newer veins
Frets the changeless blood of man.

Now that other lads than I
Strip to bathe on Severn shore,
They, no help, for all they try,
Tread the mill I trod before.

There, when hueless is the west
And the darkness hushes wide,
Where the lad lies down to rest
Stands the troubled dream beside.

There, on thoughts that once were mine,
Day looks down the eastern steep,
And the youth at morning shine
Makes the vow he will not keep.

LVI

Far I hear the bugle blow
To call me where I would not go,
And the guns begin the song,
Soldier, fly or stay for long."

Comrade, if to turn and fly
Made a soldier never die,
Fly I would, for who would not?
Tis sure no pleasure to be shot.

But since the man that runs away
Lives to die another day,
And cowards' funerals, when they come
Are not wept so well at home."

Therefore, though the best is bad,
Stand and do the best my lad;
Stand and fight and see your slain,
And take the bullet in your brain.

A. E. Housman 1859-1936

Quiz!

- 1) What is the birth flower of March?
- 2) Which UK Saints Day is on March 1st?
- 3) The lives of the four March sisters feature in which famous novel?
- 4) March is called 'maaliskuu' in which European language?
- 5) The March Hare is a character from which book?
- 6) Which annual health awareness day takes place on the second Wednesday in March?
- 7) What is the full name of the actor that won Academy Awards for Best Actor in both 1946 and 1932?
- 8) Symbolizing courage, name March's birthstone?
- 9) March is named after Mars; what is Mars the Roman god of?
- 10) What's the zodiac sign for early March until 20th March?
- 11) On the first Thursday in March, every child in full-time education in the UK is given a voucher to spend on what?
- 12) The Ides of March is a day on the Roman calendar that corresponds to which date?
- 13) 'March comes in like a lion and goes out like a'!
- 14) On the 5th of March 1946, what did Churchill warn was falling across Europe?
- 15) 'Dear March - Come in', was a poem by which reclusive 19th Century American poet?
- 16) On what date in March is Saint Patrick's Day?
- 17) St Piran's Day, held on 5th March every year, is the national day of where?
- 18) Which Commonwealth nation was granted independence from Britain in March 1986?

Answers: 1) Daffodil 2) Saint David's Day 3) Little Women 4) Finnish 5) Alice's Adventures in Wonderland 6) National No Smoking Day 7) Fredric March 8) Aquamarine or bloodstone 9) Marlon Brando 10) Pisces 11) Books (for World Book Day) 12) March 13) Lamb 14) An Iron curtain 15) Emily Dickinson 16) 17th March 17) Cornwall 18) Commonwealth of Australia

Did You Know?

Mothering Sunday was established in the 1500s to encourage people to return once a year to their 'mother church' in order to renew their faith. The pilgrimage occurred on the fourth Sunday in Lent. From the 1700s, going 'a-mothering' included visiting the family home after church, with a 'mothering cake', wayside flowers and other small tokens.

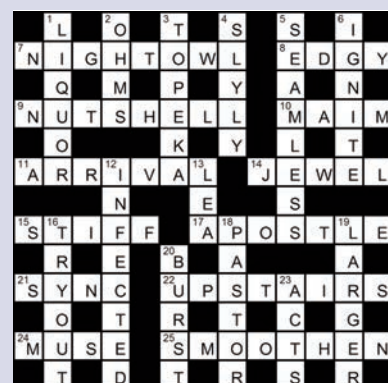
Famous March Birthdays!

- Daniel Craig (2nd March 1968)
- Dame Vera Lynn (20th March 1917)
- Dr Roger Bannister (23rd March 1929)
- A.E. Housman (26th March 1859)

Word of the Month 'Gephyrophobia'

Definition: The fear of bridges or crossing them.

February Answers



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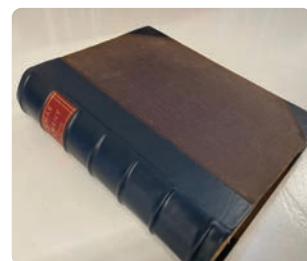
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Copy Deadline for

April Issue - 20th March 2026

Severn Stoke & Croome D'abitot News

Happenings in Severn Stoke and Environs

John Henderson

St. Denys' Church, Severn Stoke

Here we are in 'Preparedness for Flood' mode, with great thanks to all those who answered the call to help 'uplift' the Church furnishings onto vegetable crates and tables. The whole operation only took less than an hour. We have rearranged the Church, so that whilst it remains free of flooding, we continue to hold services in the Nave, using the chairs, which are flood resilient, instead of pews. All who attend say what a lovely space it offers, and we can still have coffee and biscuits after the service! Remember, our services are on the 1st and 3rd Sundays each month at 10.30 am, and Easter Sunday falls on 5th April. We look forward to welcoming you. We are saddened to record the deaths of Mrs Pam Hartland of

Severn Stoke and Mrs Maureen Rimell of Dunstall, both of whom gave so much to family, friends and the Parish and we keep in our thoughts those who mourn them.

Friends of St. Denys, Severn Stoke

Raising funds to modernise the church! The Committee is much encouraged by the news that the Flood Bund has received approval to be built around the Church, Rose and Crown and several houses, which flood regularly now. A good selection of events is being planned for this year to raise funds for the inevitable repairs and maintenance of the Church and for the long-awaited improvements for worship and community space. We look forward to recruiting new members to continue these projects.



Kempsey WI



Kempsey WI members were transported back to 1812 when local performance historian, John White, took on the role of Adams, a butler at The Nash, who also ran an academy instructing students in the Georgian Honours of the Table. 'Adams' explained the complicated procedures of different mealtimes and, using many genuine pieces of Georgian tableware, demonstrated the strict, symmetrical layout of the dining table. This included always having an even number of guests, so if someone invited did not turn up, the governess of the house was called upon to fill the space. He explained the types of cutlery and glasses used and showed how the table was completely relaid - including cloth changes - between each of the three large courses, which

comprised batches of different foods. This meant meals went on at great length, creating a need for a line of chamber pots behind a screen outside the door, or even male and female versions passed round under the table! The etiquette of the day required new wax candles to be put out each day for dinner, so the butler benefited from being able to sell the used ones. Other servants had their perks - the cook had the fat and bones, and the housekeeper the used tea leaves, which would be bought by slop shops. There, the dried leaves were made more attractive by adding copper to green tea or lead to black tea - and resold. The March meeting will be an Easter crafting session, on Monday 16th, 2pm at Kempsey Youth Centre, Plovers Rise playing fields.

Spot & Shop February Winners

- | | |
|---------------------|----------------------|
| 1) Bob Dipple | 5) Steve Hull |
| 2) Rosemary Prosser | 6) Mrs Pat Armstrong |
| 3) Diane Wicks | 7) K. Lowe |
| 4) Mrs M. Harris | |

Last month's answer: **The Gutter Consultant**

COMPETITION TIME!

Take a look at the anagram
The answer is the name of a business that is advertising in the Kempsey Times this month



- This month's prizes!**
- 1st - £50 cash**
 - 2nd - £25 cash**
 - Donated by Hughes and Company*
 - 3rd £20 Food Voucher**
at The Queen Elizabeth, Elmley
 - 4th £10 Voucher**
at Revills Farm Shop, Defford
 - 5th £10 Voucher**
at Craftypyro, Bakers Arcade, Pershore
 - 6th Reg Moule Gardening Book**
 - 7th Pat's Pantry -**
Jar of home-made marmalade/jam

Complete and return this form or email:
news@hughes.company for your chance to win!
Kempsey Times closing date: 20th March 2026

Answer: _____

Name: _____

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Camera Club

With the hope of Spring around the corner (and an end to all this rain!), the members of the Club are looking forward to more opportunities to get out and take some photographs. In the meantime, we have a number of interesting events in March to keep us engaged. As in February, our March programme commences on Wednesday 11th. On that evening, Richard Hemming, one of our own members, will be demonstrating the editing software provided by Capture One and DxO, which he regards as successful alternatives to the products of Adobe and others. This will be followed, on Thursday 19th, with our longest-standing inter-club battle (30 years and counting), that with our friends at Digibox CC of Worcester. To conclude March, on Wednesday 25th we have our second themed projected image competition of the season. On this occasion, the subject agreed was 'In My Garden' and the judge will be Phil Peat. As with our judge in late February, Phil is a new face to the Club, so we again look forward to finding out how he critiques and ranks our images. We would be delighted to welcome anybody interested in the evenings listed

above; please make contact via our website (<https://www.kempseycameraclub.uk/>), where you will find further details of our programme for the rest of the season. In the meantime, we hope that you will take pleasure from these two quite different images, 'Tobermory in the Mist' by Simon Brackenbury and 'Outside of the City' by Mike Parkinson, the former the outright winner and the latter one of three highly commended images, respectively, in our 'Urban Landscape' projected image competition held in late January.



Above:
'Outside of the City' by Mike Parkinson

Below:
'Tobermory in the Mist' by Simon Brackenbury



Upton Surgery News

Upton Surgery in Worcestershire is launching an innovative new Restorative Garden Project designed to support the health and well-being of patients, staff, and the wider community through engagement with nature. The project has recently been selected as one of only five initiatives nationwide to receive funding through the Elsie Wagg Innovation Scholarships, part of the Community Nurse Innovation Programme run by the Queen's Institute of Community Nursing and supported by the National Garden Scheme. Led by Advanced Nurse Practitioner Elaine Bevan-Smith and Dr Brett Roberts (GP), the Worcestershire-based project aims to explore how a restorative garden environment can improve both physical and mental health. The funding programme supports innovations that use gardens to improve well-being. Upton Surgery's project was selected following a competitive application process for the five funded places. The restorative

garden will provide a calming and therapeutic outdoor space designed to reduce anxiety, depression, and social isolation while encouraging gentle physical activity and social connection. The garden will also allow therapy groups - including pulmonary rehabilitation, men's mental health support, and pain management - to take place outdoors, helping patients benefit from time in nature as part of their care. Upton Surgery staff said: "This project is about creating a space where people can pause, connect with nature, and support their well-being in a simple but meaningful way. As a rural community with limited access to specialist services, it's important that we develop local ways to support people's health and prevent problems from getting worse. We're incredibly proud to have been chosen for this programme. This is about offering a new and positive approach to health and well-being for our patients and our community."

Upton Surgery Restorative Garden
Volunteers wanted!

Help us create a restorative garden at Upton Surgery as part of our new Research Project to support the wellbeing of our patients.

No experience needed.


Anyone with time to spare and an interest in gardening or community wellbeing can help!

The garden will be open to patients, staff, and rehabilitation groups and will include features designed to promote biodiversity and sustainability. Patients visiting the surgery will be encouraged to pause and enjoy the space, while structured activities and horticultural therapy sessions will also be introduced. The project starts on Saturday 7th March and will run throughout 2026, with findings and outcomes due to be reported in 2027. *Community Involvement* Upton Surgery is inviting members of the local community to get involved by volunteering to help design,

create, and maintain the garden. No previous gardening experience is required. The surgery is also welcoming offers of donations such as plants, seeds, and garden tools. *For further information, interviews, or expressions of interest: Upton Surgery Email: uptonsurgery@nhs.net Upton Surgery, Tunnel Hill, Upton-Upon-Severn, Worcestershire, WR8 0QL Tel: 01684 592696 www.uptondoctors.co.uk*




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Severn Stoke and Croome d'Abitot Parish Council

We bid cheerio to a much-loved Parish Councillor and former Chairman, Laurence Freeman. Throughout his time in office, Larry worked closely with the National Trust at Croome Court, strengthening relationships, advocating practical context and focusing on how things work in practice rather than in theory. Larry's knowledge of the parish proved invaluable when providing context for planning applications, helping to guide thoughtful development while preserving the character of our area. It is not a complete goodbye, however - his commitment continues through his volunteer work to maintain our parish speed awareness signs - a quiet testament to Larry's enduring care for the safety and well-being of residents. Good luck with the singing, Larry!

We are delighted to warmly welcome Simon Bott to the Parish Council - a familiar and much-respected figure in the community through his dedicated service as our erstwhile Parish Lengthsman. Simon has long demonstrated a practical commitment to the upkeep and well-being of the parish, and he now hopes to continue that dedication in his new role as Parish Councillor. His knowledge and hands-on experience will transfer seamlessly to council work. We look forward to this new chapter of service to the parish.

As I write (17th Feb), a joint Environment Agency (EA) and County Council (WCC) flood bund Q&A drop-in session is planned for next week in St Denys' Church. The parish council has requested to see the budget and costs of the project in advance of that meeting. Three Officers from the EA are due to attend, as well as Members from WCC and the contractor: Griffiths.

Any information received will be disseminated on our website <https://severnstokeandcroome.dabitot-pc.gov.uk/>

The parish council has been liaising with WCC about many aspects of the project, including diversions, site infrastructure, signage, etc., but still has many questions to ask and be answered. We are aware of the difficulties experienced with visitor parking at Croome during recent wet weather, and particularly this half term. We have requested that the National Trust, Police and the County Council look again at possible control measures and enforcement and that the District Council enforces the existing yellow line restrictions. Thank you to everyone who has helped with recent flytipping incidents and we are very grateful to see the number of residents who continue to volunteer with litter picking. It really makes a difference to our wonderful parish.

Severn Stoke & Croome D'Abitot Parish Council Meeting Dates 2026

Please double check meeting dates/times before attendance, as details may change at short notice. Venue for all meetings (unless otherwise stated): SOQ meeting room at Croome National Trust Visitor Centre.

Satnav: Near High Green, Worcs, WR8 9DW.

What3words location: ///alleyway.rescuer.perfect

Wed 25th March - 7.30pm

Annual Parish Meeting of Residents of the Parish Areas of Severn Stoke and of Croome d'Abitot

Venue: St. Denys' Church, Severn Stoke

A standard Parish Council meeting will occur afterwards at approx. 8.30pm. This is a meeting of the parish electors organised by the Parish Council. Residents may set the agenda.

Wed 20th May - 7.30pm

Annual Meeting of Parish Council. Appointments take place for: chairman, vice-chairman, committee members and reps to other bodies. The public are cordially invited to attend to observe proceedings.

Wed 10th June - 7.30pm

Audit Approval Finance Committee, full parish council present.

Wed 15th July - 7.30pm

Wed 30th September - 7.30pm

Wed 25th November - 7.30pm

Next Meeting:

Annual Parish Meeting of Residents of the Parish Areas of Severn Stoke and of Croome d'Abitot on 25th March 2026, 7.30pm at St Denys' Church, Severn Stoke.

This meeting is an opportunity for parishioners to raise any matters of concern. It would be helpful to have a written notice of any matters to be raised, but it is not essential. A Standard

parish council meeting will occur afterwards at 8.30pm approx.

You can contact Parish Council Clerk, Lisa Stevens by ringing 07950256363 or via email: parishclerk@severnstokeandcroome.dabitot-pc.gov.uk

Your councillors are: Richard Hill (Chair), Simon Bott, Ian Daly, Laura McEwan-Hill, Pat Preston and Raymond Williams. We have six vacancies for immediate co-option.

Local Dad running for Worcestershire Maternity Services



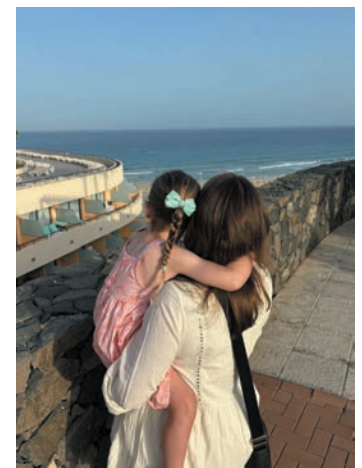
At Worcestershire Acute Hospitals Charity, we are incredibly proud to champion local Kempsey Dad, Ollie Betteridge, who is preparing to take on the 2026

London Marathon in support of our Hold the Moment – Maternity Appeal. Ollie aims to raise £3,000 in heartfelt gratitude for the maternity teams at Worcestershire Royal Hospital who saved the lives of his wife and daughter five years ago. Thanks to the generosity of our community, local donors and valued grant funders, the appeal is already over three-quarters of the way towards its £223,000 target. So far, the appeal has funded twenty-one buddy beds for the Lavender postnatal ward, and nine jaundice meters for our Community and Continuity of Care teams. It has also supported the extension of the maternity bereavement suite, including a dedicated memory-making room. Ollie is determined to help

bring the appeal to completion because for his family, the impact of Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust maternity services could not be more profound. When what began as a normal labour suddenly became life-threatening, our teams acted with remarkable speed and expertise. "If they hadn't acted immediately, I could have lost them both," Ollie shared. "Running the London Marathon has always been on my bucket list, but running to give back to the people who saved my family makes it truly meaningful." By backing Ollie, you can help us bring comfort, dignity and hope to families across Worcestershire at life's most powerful moments.



To support Ollie and help him reach his £3,000 target, you can donate via Ollie's JustGiving page: <https://www.justgiving.com/page/ollies-maternity-london-mara>



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Springtime at the Lawns



We are currently enjoying a week of Valentine's Day activities.

The glam squad were back, with our hairdresser, Karen, here and manicures for our ladies. We are decorating heart-shaped biscuits, flower arranging and making Valentine's Day cards. And there will be love songs when Clive visits for a big sing-song to round off the celebrations.

With it being so wet outside, we have thrown ourselves into lots of craft projects, including making windchimes, stained glass pictures and blossom branches. We are keeping fit in our new Monday Zumba classes. And our ladies are enjoying their new Patchworking Group, working on a project together. Thank you to residents' families who have donated fabric and cotton, needles and fabric scissors. We have some very accomplished seamstresses among our residents.

We had a great visit from 'Walks with Hawks'. It was a new experience for some residents, to be so close and to even hold a bird of prey. They were completely in awe of the majesty of the birds. It is lovely being part of making memories like these. On 19th March, we have AG Magicians, the Masters of Mischief, Comedy and Magic,



Walks with Hawks at The Lawns

visiting to entertain residents. We are taking part in the Kempsey Church Daffodil Event from 21st to 22nd March. Residents are making a daffodil collage, which will be displayed with other local groups' works. The local Kempsey School children, who visit us every

Wednesday, are also taking part. Residents are popping along at the weekend to see all the exhibits. Then, as we approach Easter, we are having an Easter bonnet craft competition and are making our own chocolate eggs. We are welcoming new admissions for long stay or respite care.

Please give us a call for more information and see our new video on our website.

<https://www.heritagemanor.co.uk/our-homes/the-lawns>

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