

# Kempsey Times



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

Issue 24

April 2026

FREE



View out towards the Malverns

**W**e are living through some difficult times and things look rather gloomy. The war in the Middle East seems to be escalating, and the war in Ukraine continues to get worse, with increased bombing by both parties. We are feeling the results already in the UK with increased fuel and energy bills. We all want these wars to stop, but when things get to this stage, they always seem to go on for a long time. We just have to grin and bear it, get on with our lives and make the best of what we have.

We have a lot to be thankful for, Spring is here and Summer is on its way. The countryside is waking up and we are seeing rapid changes to our hedgerows, fields, trees and gardens. The

weather has been remarkably good, with beautiful Spring days and good times to come. If you are a gardener, you will be very busy now and many of us are behind nature already!

Everything certainly seems to be growing very fast, with the ground drying out and getting warmer. Let's hope the good weather continues and we have a great summer.

We have some big sporting events coming up in the near future. The Masters Golf tournament, the FIFA World Cup, Wimbledon, to name just a few.

We have lots of news for you and hope you enjoy this edition. We are grateful to our advertisers, contributors and readers.

Publishing our newspapers is a great privilege and we enjoy receiving your articles, emails, letters and telephone calls. Wishing you a very happy Easter!

Easter Sunday  
5th April



St. George's Day  
23rd April

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# County and District Report

*Councillor Martin Allen*



I admit, I feel some frustration as I write this - the county council's huge tax increase really makes my blood boil, especially considering how it was pushed through. But enough worry; let's focus on brighter news. It's always encouraging to see communities unite, such as Kempsey opening a new café and the festival season returning to Upton. Traders in Upton will surely be glad to welcome these events again.

## *Pavilion Community Café, Kempsey*



Kempsey Parish Council has established a Community Café at the Plovers Rise playing field, located within the Pavilion. As this initiative is in its early stages, the café currently operates on Fridays from 10:30 to 17:00. Patrons can purchase cakes, coffee, and savoury items, while newspapers and magazines are available for

complimentary reading. There are plans to expand the menu as experience is gained. Operated by volunteers, the café offers a welcoming environment for community members to gather. I am pleased to have supported Kempsey Parish Council with funding to facilitate the launch of this project.

## *8.98% County Council Tax Rise!*



On 26th of February, I watched with mounting horror as the county council raised its portion of your council tax by a massive 8.98%. I fully understand the angst and misery this will bring to many, who are only just managing. I voted against this rise, its too huge an increase,

especially during a cost-of-living crisis. Unfortunately, some parties shamefully decided to run away before the main vote, thus handing the ruling administration a free pass. Only one absent member had a valid excuse - a serious family medical emergency.

## *Hanley Road in Upton latest*



After dealing with a winter of challenges on Hanley Road, I have collaborated with Highways and involved Upton Town Council to pursue more solutions. Last year's improvements have been effective - the road now floods later than it used to, allowing vehicles continued access, sometimes regulated by a single lane traffic light system. The County Council is working hard to prevent spray and bow waves from damaging "Severn Cottages" located next to Warners Supermarket.

Looking ahead, there are plans to create and install a custom barrier gate between the cottages and Warners. Additionally, north of the flooding, fixed base plates have been installed, and removable posts are planned to be installed when needed. However, due to the current financial situation of the County Council, securing funding for the project remains a challenge. I will keep fighting for you and will ensure the residents of Severn Cottages are not forgotten.

## *Hey folks, the Folk Festival's back!*



Upton's internationally renowned Folk Festival returns; taking place from Friday 1st to Monday 4th May. The event promises a vibrant atmosphere, highlighted by the Traditional Sunday Parade, typically held at noon, which is regarded as a festival highlight. Activities throughout the May bank holiday weekend include Morris dancing, Ceilidhs,

performances by various dance teams, pub sessions, and concerts. This festival is a significant event for Upton, supporting local businesses and attracting visitors. In recent years, funding has been allocated through the County Council Divisional Fund to help sustain this important tradition. *For further information, please visit [www.uptonfolk.org](http://www.uptonfolk.org)*

## *And finally ...*

Currently, I'm in full planting mode. You name it, I am sticking it either in a pot or in the ground. It helps me unwind from the darker side of politics, the relentless games that some

in power play. I often compare planting seeds to proposing motions in the chamber. Some grow and flourish, others are wacked with blight. So, the cabbage king is back ... maybe! As ever, I'm here if you need me.

*Martin Allen*

# A few words from... Dame Harriett Baldwin MP



## Minister Confirms £5 million Flood Funding Project

Dame Harriett Baldwin MP has welcomed news that two key flood defence schemes will be able to move forward this year with nearly £5 million of public funding. Flooding Minister Emma Hardy MP has written to Dame Harriett confirming that the permanent flood defence scheme in Severn Stoke is able to proceed and nearly £2 million has been ring-fenced next year to support the installation of property-level protection for homes and businesses in Tenbury Wells.

The fund also includes support for Sedgeberrow, Upton-upon-Severn and a fund to support Worcestershire County Council.

The MP has lobbied the Minister and the chief executive of the Environment Agency to secure support for local schemes and she met with the chair of the English Severn and Wye Regional and Coastal Flood Committee to ensure that Tenbury's project would be able to move forward. Both schemes are expected to get underway this year with

spades in the ground in Severn Stoke shortly.

Dame Harriett commented: "These schemes have been my top priority since I was re-elected to be Member of Parliament for West Worcestershire in 2024 and it has taken a lot of time and effort to secure financial support at a national level. The pausing of Tenbury's permanent scheme was disappointing but I am pleased that in the interim, the Severn and Wye Flood Committee was happy to divert funding to allow the installation of individual property protection after I made an urgent intervention with both the Minister and the Chief Executive of the Environment Agency. The long-awaited flood bund in Severn Stoke seems to have been on the drawing board for a decade but I am grateful to Flooding Minister Emma Hardy MP for her intervention and today's confirmation that it is fully funded and ready to go. I plan to keep a close eye on both schemes and look forward to visiting both communities in the near future to see work underway."

## Christian Aid Week

Christian Aid Week starts on May 10th until the 16th. We will be having our annual Big Brekkie in St. Mary's church on Wednesday 13th May from around 9-30 a.m. This is open to everyone who would like to come and support Christian Aid, there is a charge for your breakfast and all the money will go to the Fund. There will be envelopes available for you to donate, these will be in church or obtainable from Owain Bell and Julia Grant. The crisis in South Sudan is dire. There are programmes and partnerships supporting people

who've fled the brutal Sudan War. This war has now displaced over 12 million people and is fuelling the most devastating humanitarian crisis in the world. The funding crisis has seen an international aid drop by 40%. It's seriously affecting Christian Aid's ability to be there to help people all over the world. Please, think about giving to this worthwhile charity, even a small amount goes a long way in helping. Thank you.  
Contact:  
Owain Bell 01905 820209  
Julia Grant 01905 820138

### Annual Revision of the Church Electoral Roll of St. Mary's Church, Kempsey

If you are not on the Roll but wish to be added you need to complete an Application Form. The forms are available in St. Mary's Church. To be put on the Roll, your form must be completed by April 14th and be placed in the "completed ER application forms" box in the Church.

### Annual Revision of the Church Electoral Roll of St. James' Church, Norton

If you are not on the Roll but wish to be added you need to complete an Application Form. The forms are available in St. James' Church. To be put on the Roll your form must be completed by April 18th and be placed in the "completed ER application forms" box in the Church.

## Cornflower Club

The club is in the Parish hall every other week. Wednesday April 22nd is when we will be entertained by a singer, then moving on to May 6th and May 20th, we are musically entertained also. If you are a lady or gentleman over sixty

years of age, please come and join us. We enjoy a cup of tea and biscuits with friends we also have a raffle. You would be made most welcome.

Sally Linsey 01905 820476  
Julia Grant 01905 820138

## Teddies for Tragedies

Christine Doncaster picked up eight large bags of assorted knitting in March from me. I now have lots of room for more bags in my small bedroom. Please, keep on knitting, we need hats, scarves and gloves in sets

in possible. Blankets, cardigans and of course the teddies. I know summer's coming but a few hours knitting would be useful. You can drop the items of to me. Please phone Julia on 01905 820138

## 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 9th & 23rd April,  
7th May  
For further details please contact Anne on 07931 636309

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# Solar in 2026: Is it still worth it?

Keith Thompson



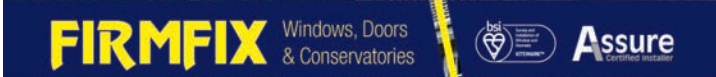
With energy prices still unpredictable, many homeowners are asking whether solar remains a sound investment. The short answer is yes — provided it's approached as a medium to long-term decision. In the UK, around 70% of annual solar generation occurs between April and October. Output peaks in late spring 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. After sixteen years serving our local community, 2020 Solar PV remains an independent specialist solar installer.



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# From the Parish Council

## Planning Report

We have reported previously on the progress of the South Worcestershire Development Plan Review (SWDPR), which was 'examined' last year.

In January this year, the Inspectors notified the three districts of numerous Main Modifications they felt were necessary to make the plan 'sound' and 'legally compliant'.

Following consultation on those, to which the Parish Council contributed, on 16th March, the Inspector's Final report was published. This set out the new plan with the finalised modifications. The notice calmly stated that 'the Examination of the SWDPR has therefore concluded'.

This is good news. Subject to ratification by each of the districts, it is anticipated that the new plan will be adopted on 26th March. By the time you read this, we should have an up-to-date Local Plan to guide where and how much new development should take place across South Worcestershire up to 2041, including in the parish.

The Inspectors have also agreed that – at last – there is the necessary Five-Year Housing Land Supply. Whether this will be enough to prevent other

proposals not planned for remains to be seen, but we will be in a much better place. Except – each silver lining has a cloud! The SWDPR was prepared under old national planning policies and work will have to start to ensure compliance with more recent updates. In fact, a new version of the government's policy framework has only recently been consulted on. Yes, the Review will have to be reviewed!

You may recall that the Parish Council objected to a SWDPR employment land site at Open Barn Farm alongside the A38 in the Significant Gap. We pointed out the obvious discrepancy between the gap policy, which requires it to be kept open to prevent merging with Worcester, and the allocation for industrial or office buildings in the middle of it. It seems that this sunk home since the Inspectors recognised it as an 'anomaly'. Even so, it has not been removed. Some fell on stony ground, for those of you who know the bible. Otherwise, there has been a constant supply of applications for various proposals considered at the regular Planning Committee meetings held on the first Monday of each month. All are open to the public if you want to keep



up with happenings. Oh, just in case you are wondering, at the time of writing there is still no appeal against the Bannut Hill/Napleton Lane refusal of permission for up to 99 dwellings. There is still time but the SWDPR should have some influence on what happens next.

## A host of golden daffodils

Kempsey is looking especially bright this spring thanks to the wonderful display of daffodils now blooming throughout the village and in some outlying areas. The bulbs were generously supplied by community members alongside the Parish Council, with planting carried out by volunteers from the Love Kempsey Working Party. Many thanks to all those involved, their efforts over the autumn months have created a cheerful burst of colour that residents and visitors alike are now enjoying.

## Pump Track Consultation

A well-attended public consultation on the proposed Pump Track took place at the Community Centre on 7th March.

Residents were invited to view and comment on four proposed designs, share ideas, and speak with councillors and Gary Vallance, a pump track expert from Worcester, about how the facility could best serve young people and families. All feedback gathered will help shape the next stage of the project.

*Monday Night Youth Club* Kempsey Parish Council, in collaboration with the YMCA, also reminds families that a Youth Club runs every Monday evening, 7pm to 8:30pm, at the Youth Centre, Plovers Rise for young people aged 12–15, featuring gaming activities and a welcoming space to socialise. Admission is free.

*For more information regarding the activities of the Parish Council, please refer to our website: [www.kempseyhub.co.uk](http://www.kempseyhub.co.uk) For all enquiries, please contact Sharon Dunn, Parish Council Clerk and Financial Officer on 01905 828183 or by email at [kempseyparishcouncil@gmail.com](mailto:kempseyparishcouncil@gmail.com)*

# Piano Legends: Forever Elton and Joel

*Celebrating The Greatest Songs of Elton John and Billy Joel*  
Swan Theatre, Worcester  
Saturday 9th May 7.30pm

This spectacular theatre show celebrates the timeless hits of Billy Joel and Elton John. Led by the multi award-winning composer and musical director Phil Mountford, this tribute band brings the magic of two of the greatest piano men to life with electrifying performances. From the soulful ballads of 'Your Song' and 'She's Always a Woman' to high-energy anthems 'Crocodile Rock' and 'Uptown Girl', 'Piano Legends: Forever Elton and Joel' delivers a powerhouse setlist that spans decades of chart-topping classics. With virtuosic piano playing, soaring vocals, and a dynamic live band, every note is infused with passion and precision. With so many hits to cover, the non-stop, back-to-back song list also includes 'Rocket Man', 'Bennie and the Jets', 'Piano Man' and

'We Didn't Start the Fire'. Phil Mountford's masterful arrangements and charismatic stage presence elevate the experience, offering audiences not just a concert but a journey through the iconic soundscapes that defined generations. Richard Alcock of EJB Promotions said: "This spectacular homage to two of the greatest musical icons celebrates the vast back-catalogue and timeless hits of these legendary musicians. Performed fully live, this truly is a show-stopping double tribute, led by the very talented, multi-award-winning Phil Mountford." Whether you're a lifelong fan or discovering these legends a new, 'Piano Legends: Forever Elton and Joel' promises an unforgettable evening of nostalgia, artistry, and pure musical joy. This concert evening is a celebration of two extraordinary legacies - where the piano takes centre stage and the music never stops.



*'Piano Legends: Forever Elton & Joel' will be at the Swan Theatre in Worcester on Saturday 9th May at 7.30pm. Tickets cost just £25.00 and are*

*available from: [worcestertheatres.co.uk/swan-theatre](http://worcestertheatres.co.uk/swan-theatre) Or call the Box Office on 01905 611427*

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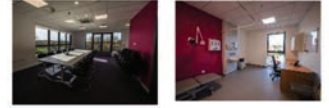
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## Milestones and so on

Tim Hickson



*Milestones on Allesborough Hill and Defford Road*

Driving back from Worcester and climbing Allesborough Hill to Pershore, I noticed again the milestone on the left, halfway up. That reminded me of the one in Pershore, just into Defford Road after leaving Broad Street. Both of them were signs of the times before cars and, therefore, interesting. I realise that many have been destroyed by road widening, flails, theft and so on. I wondered whether Ordnance Survey maps still showed them. As you may know, these maps began in 1791 when the Government was afraid that the Revolutionary Forces in France might invade. The Board of Ordnance, founded in Tudor times, was responsible for 'the lands, depots and forts required for the defence of the realm ... and as supplier of munitions and equipment to both the Army and the Navy'. This organisation was told to make a detailed survey of the vulnerable southern regions of England. In the end, in spite of Napoleon assembling a large number of barges to carry his army across the Channel, there was no invasion. Our Royal Navy was too strong. However, the maps that were made proved so useful that the work was extended to cover the whole of Britain. This major project has been compared, in scope, to the compiling of the Domesday Book and took nearly 100 years to complete. If you want to see what these early maps showed, I suggest you go to Upton's famous Map Shop,

which stocks the Cassini Old Series of Historical Maps from 1828 - 1832. Even the pictures on their covers are fascinating. On these maps, where I know there are still milestones, there are, instead, numbers. Heading along the road from Worcester to Upton, on the west side of the Severn, are numbers from 1 to 8. From Worcester to Pershore, they are numbered the other way, from 110 to 102. Where did you think that route's number 1 might be? As well as being made of stone, later milestones were made of cast iron attached to stones or even entirely of cast iron. See what sort you can find. Also, there were signposts to aid travellers, some of which were finger-posts. Signposts come in a range of styles. Some are wooden, some are metal, and a few are red. The reason for this occasional use of red paint seems to be unknown, but one possible reason is that red marks the spot where gallows once stood. The best example of a finger-post that I know of is above Broadway, on what is now the A44, at the crossroad with the B4081 that leads to Chipping Campden. Its arms, with fingers on the ends, are strikingly high, level with horse riders or someone on a horse-drawn carriage. It was, apparently, the oldest surviving finger post in Britain. The one shown on the right is an exact replica. During World War Two, when this country was again in danger



*The Map Shop in Upton*

of being invaded, in May 1940, following the Dunkirk evacuation, the Government ordered the removal of all signposts. They were either painted over or taken down and either buried nearby or stored elsewhere. Anything to make the invaders' job more difficult and slow them down. Milestones were also ordered to be removed or painted over. Another reason why some milestones may have gone.

In 1964, the Government proposed that all signposts should be of a standard form and non-standard ones should be removed. Typically for the British, this was ignored by several counties. Somerset has retained a number of splendid examples, as have Cornwall, Surrey, Dorset and Cumberland. Others, such as Gloucestershire, only replaced some. Which ones can you find?



*The finger-post sign above Broadway*

# SOUTH WORCESTERSHIRE Development Plan

## Commitment to Wychavon Town remains

Wychavon has confirmed its commitment to developing Wychavon Town after the Government announced it would not be one of its flagship New Towns.

The proposed development around Worcestershire Parkway Railway Station was one of twelve sites the Government was assessing following the New Towns Taskforce Report. The Government has now confirmed just seven locations will be taken forward as New Towns during this Parliament, with Wychavon Town not on the list. Wychavon Town will still be part of the Government's New Homes Accelerator programme and will receive specialist support from Homes England, the Government's housing and regeneration agency, to unblock barriers and speed

up delivery of new housing and infrastructure. Several planning applications have already been submitted for Wychavon Town and will be considered later this year. A consultation on the Infrastructure Planning Application, to ensure Wychavon Town has the schools, roads, and other facilities needed to support new housing, will take place this summer.

Cllr Emma Kearsley, Wychavon's Executive Board Member for Planning, Infrastructure and Urban Design, said: "We began work to deliver Wychavon Town long before the Government decided it would include us in its New Town programme, so this announcement changes nothing for us. However, the process behind this decision has been shambolic and simply doesn't stand up to scrutiny. Wychavon

Town is better placed than several of the locations on the list to deliver the kind of infrastructure-led development the Government says it wants. The assessment used to justify this decision contains clear inaccuracies while ignoring strong evidence supporting the site in the South Worcestershire Development Plan Review, which has been tested through public examination. In contrast to the Government, our work on Wychavon Town has been built on partnership and proper consultation. We have worked closely with Homes England, landowners and local communities, giving people real opportunities to have their say and shaping proposals around that feedback. We remain committed to delivering Wychavon Town and are confident we are well placed to move forward.

The Government has indicated support will still be available for Wychavon Town, and we will be seeking assurances about what this means in reality, particularly around funding. Really, ministers need to explain how a process that should have been guided by evidence - including the findings of their own Planning Inspectorate - has ended in such a deeply questionable decision."

Wychavon Town will see 10,000 high-quality, energy-efficient homes built on the site, with 5,000 of them delivered by 2041. There will also be a new town centre, four parks, primary and secondary schools, a sports hub and sports pitches, a GP and healthcare centre, flexible community spaces and fifty ha of employment land.

*Ian Dipple  
Head of Communications*

## Village Life

*John Driscoll*

I often describe our village as sleepy, but our slumbers are currently being disturbed by a collective sense of foreboding about the impending invasion represented by the development of Wychavon Town. This will be very close to us. A lack of clarity around the development and how it will be achieved has added to our unease and we have so far lacked a collective focus for our concerns. This now seems to be changing, with more and more residents getting involved and planning resistance. An early disquiet is blossoming into a far more organised and cohesive group, within our village and beyond, determined to bring locals together to share information and to develop action plans. Strange to say, this has resulted in a greatly improved sense of community. Strange because it has brought together neighbours who previously didn't have much contact. Strange also for the revelation that we have so many hidden talents and resources available to us from within our community, many of which would otherwise have remained unknown. Hitherto quiet folk are finding their voice among kindred spirits who we had no idea were on our doorsteps. There, I've found

a positive from a seemingly very negative situation, and one that I suspect will result in us forging a more closely aligned community based on shared opposition. 'United we Stand' etc.

Alongside that, a very British activity has recently also helped reinforce community spirit - again a response to an unwelcome outside intrusion. A village litter pick was organised one Saturday morning, with residents encouraged to also get out and pick during the following week so we can cover the whole village. An amazing amount of litter was gathered, and we have to assume virtually all of this was left by people passing through. Did they really have no time - or inclination - to take their food wrappers, cans, bottles and various other detritus home or to the nearest bin? A few less savoury items were also found, not to mention a couple of discarded tyres and a chunk of steel that could have caused severe damage if it had strayed onto the road. The main motivation was to rid our hedges and verges of eye-sores, with the equal aim of reducing the risk of harm to wildlife. The results have been fantastic, and those involved have a renewed determination to repeat



*Painting by Susan Catford*

the picking on a regular basis. The possibility of participants winning a prize draw may have helped motivate some - a little encouragement goes a long way. Brilliant job all round! Our next event? Maybe a chance to display Easter decorations around the village - think eggs, bunnies, spring flowers. An Easter egg hunt should be popular and encourage our younger residents to ditch their phones for a few minutes. The Easter message should also not be forgotten and a visit to church will of course be important to many. For others, it will be a great opportunity to gather family and friends for a good, long weekend of quality time. Of course, our spring weather will be a wild card as usual, with fingers firmly crossed for no rain and a little sunshine to get us in the mood to spend

time outdoors. We live in a very uncertain world and need to put our tribulations in context compared with those facing life-threatening conflict. We may not be able to stop invading developers, but we should remember they don't actually threaten our lives, even if they do attempt to ride roughshod over our lovely surroundings. We need to cherish the communities we enjoy and embrace every opportunity to work together, putting aside our differences and remembering our collective strengths. Happy Easter everyone, and here's hoping it brings a taste of proper spring weather with abundant wild flowers and everything else we so look forward to through the long winter months.



# South Worcestershire Development Plan update

## Wychavon New Town

The government's planning inspectorate approved the concept plan of the SWDP on 16th March. The creation of this new town is a certainty, albeit with the ignored protests and objections from local residents. The folks of Wadborough, Pirton and Drakes Broughton met to discuss its implications and noted some reservations and criticisms made in the report. A summary of the key concerns raised are as follows:

- a) Although the target of 40% low-cost, social housing is clearly established, the total number of dwellings is unclear.
- b) There is no clear plan for the implementation of Wychavon town. As it stands, it requires a clear and unambiguous policy for its build and ongoing development.
- c) This more detailed plan does not comply with the original Concept Plan (proposed before Christmas). There exist vague references to general policies, particularly in regard to the special distribution of land use

- where commercial houses and open spaces are to be created. In short, the plan ignores these important details.
- d) The plan fails to set out how new proposals should be dealt with; the order, sequence and timescales involved. In particular, the planning and implementation of major road alterations is unclear. Locals at the meeting also noted the lack of policies for crime prevention, nor reassurance regarding emergency access to properties in traffic-free neighbourhoods
- e) Infrastructure including schools, medical clinics and other community facilities (e.g. waste and recycling) requires monitoring and a managed approach. This is too important to ignore and left to rest on assumptions.
- f) Planning for flooding and green spaces was also identified as in need. This catchment area already suffers from flooding from Bowbrook and its tributaries. There are several low-lying sumps. The impermeable surfaces of any urban development will exacerbate this important threat.



These points give the residents of affected villages a focus to raise concerns. Whilst we accept change is coming, we do not want our villages to become casualties of shoddy planning or decision-making. It's going to be a long process; it has already started. We recommend our local district councillors to reject the current plan until the issues raised above are dealt with. There seems to be a desperate rush to push this new town proposal through. In the

meantime, talk to others about the SWDP. Email parish and district council members about your concerns. Keep abreast of development. We are about to open up a Facebook page and involve other media. One important point was raised at the meeting; more young people should be made aware of this situation and encouraged to voice their feelings. Pershore Times will also play its part in keeping you up to date.  
*Richard Catford*

## Wychavon Planning - a busted flush!

In the past week, Wychavon District Council approved two new planning applications that will see more sewerage running down the streets of Drakes Broughton and Little Comberton. Shockingly, another 80 new houses for Drakes Broughton and another 100+ Chalets on the golf course at Little Comberton got the go-ahead from the District Council Planning Committee. To a casual observer, the genuine concerns raised by local councillors fell on deaf ears. Councillors Rob Adams and Emma Kearsey argued valiantly for their local residents but ultimately could not convince their fellow Councillors to support them. The Council planning bigwigs and legal beagles were clear - sewerage is a matter for Severn-Trent and the water regulator OFWAT - it's not our problem. The fact that out-of-control building approvals are overwhelming utilities designed in the last century for small villages seems to be lost and irrelevant. As Councillor Emma Kearsey said: "We can't protect our local villages", we have to accept "that's the way it is". Councillors seem to have no grounds for refusal. If we deny permission, we then subsequently

lose when the applicant goes to appeal. Yet, there is a basis to deny development, or at least to approve development subject to conditions precedent - one of which is that development should only commence, or homes be occupied, once service infrastructure, e.g. drains and sewers, are capable of managing the total flows. Why are these conditions not being imposed? Until the Council gets serious about representing local people rather than serving the system, this nonsense will continue. Village sewerage systems will continue to be overwhelmed, the Council Officials will continue to wring their hands in mock horror, and the people of Wychavon will ultimately pay the price. There's something smelly about the way local democracy isn't working in Wychavon. Our local Council officials - elected by the people, to represent the people, seem paralysed with fear, constrained by the system and unwilling to fight for what is right. The Council's Planning Leadership is a busted flush - and the people in Wychavon's villages are paying the price. We deserve better.

*The Raging Plum*



# Farming

I have mentioned a number of times in more recent articles the need for the winter of 25-26 to be perhaps uncomfortably wet, to make up for the shortfall in soil moisture levels and to give some assurance of a return to adequate moisture levels, ensuring good growing conditions and a reasonable harvest for all crops in 2026. It might sound like a typical farmer's attitude (no matter what happens, it must be wrong and something to complain about!), with some areas within the UK having so far passed through 2026 having recorded rainfall on every single day since 1st January, right up until the last day of February. And it might seem my wish has been granted, but the problem is that the rainfall we have had has usually been too heavy and too often, resulting in much of it not soaking into the soil profile to become the reserve that may be required for the 2026 growing season, but just finding its way by direct surface run-off into drainage systems and then into streams and rivers, resulting in frequent flooding; only a relatively low percentage has gone into enhancing soil reserves, most rainfall has been nothing more than a real nuisance to us and a real problem for many wildlife

species. Travelling down to Pershore a few days back was more like driving through a shallow ford rather than over a tarmac road. The High Street was doing its best imitation of a river in full flow.

The weather has been a little more relaxed recently, and lambing season is with us: from such reports as I have heard, it seems to be going okay, helped a little bit by that improvement in general weather and field conditions since the start of March. Grass has continued to recover from last year's drought during the relatively mild times we have experienced this winter, and newly lambed ewes can be turned onto short but reasonable grazing, which, along with a helping of concentrated grain-based food in a feed trough every morning, will help ensure they are able to feed their own lambs satisfactorily.

That raises another possible problem: last year's drought resulted in much reduced long-fodder crops (hay/silage/haylage) which are the core item in any ruminant's diet. It is easy enough to fill a ruminant animal's stomach with grass substitutes such as oat or barley straw, which are, to them, quite acceptable and digestible and a



necessary part of rumination, but they lack the nutrition needed for production such as putting on flesh or providing milk.

We must hope that this year's spring is going to be kind to us and provide the early grass needed by both sheep and cattle where on-farm reserves of high nutrition fodder from last year are already running out. There were a few times when, after joining my father on the Farm after my school days were over, I would try and persuade him to sell surplus farm fodder (all available as baled hay back in those days) off the Farm towards the end of winter and he would almost invariably say no: "You don't know what next year is going to be like," was his regular reply.

With hindsight (where nearly all of us have 20:20 vision),

I think he may well have been right: fodder supplies for us got tight on a few occasions, but never problematic.

It is perhaps right to be a bit cautious in farming, as many of the more important influences on our activities are way beyond our control. We can but hope – and here comes the optimist (yet again!) – that season 2026 is going to be a favourable one. There is no way you will ever please all the people all of the time, that is too much to hope for, but seeing early lambs in the field, thriving well with mothers providing adequate milk and grass now starting to green-up nicely, and overwintered crops looking mostly in reasonable order or late planted crops emerging in good order, fills me with high hopes. We will see!



## VETERINARY ADVICE ESPECIALLY FOR YOU!



### The Importance of Vaccination

Vaccinations are an important part of our pets' healthcare requirements. They are there to protect our pets from potentially deadly diseases, such as canine parvovirus, feline enteritis and rabbit haemorrhagic disease. As well as stopping the potential spread of diseases like leptospirosis to humans.

Unfortunately, there has been a worrying trend of a reduction in the numbers of both pets and humans being vaccinated in recent years. This has led to regional outbreaks of serious diseases that have not been seen in large numbers for some time. Up to a third of pets are not kept up to date with their routine vaccinations. Vaccination, in part, works by 'herd immunity' – the more animals that are vaccinated the less likely those vulnerable to the disease will become infected. With fewer animals being vaccinated the more at risk our animals are, even those that are routinely vaccinated.

#### Recommended vaccinations:

##### Dogs

- Core vaccinations (those recommended for any domestic dog worldwide) are for canine parvovirus, canine adenovirus (hepatitis) and distemper, after the initial vaccination course these are needed every 3 years.
- In the UK countryside leptospirosis is not only a potentially fatal condition but can also be spread to humans, this vaccine is needed every 12 months.
- Kennel cough can lead to a debilitating cough and is very contagious, it is recommended for dogs in any setting where there are multiple dogs present e.g. kennelling or training classes, or for dogs that are particularly sociable and enjoy greeting every dog. It is a 12 monthly vaccine usually given up the nose.

##### Cats

- Core vaccinations are for feline enteritis, feline herpesvirus and feline calicivirus (cat flu). Enteritis is given 3 yearly and the flu viruses are needed yearly.
- Feline leukaemia virus vaccine is given 3 yearly and is recommended for any outdoor cats.

##### Rabbits

- Rabbits have a single combined vaccination yearly which covers for rabbit haemorrhagic disease 1 and 2 and myxomatosis.

Most vaccination appointments will include a general health check to catch other conditions early, such as dental disease and heart disease. Contact your vet to make sure your pet is up to date with their vaccinations.

Best wishes *Eliza*



# Welcoming beautiful spring in the garden!

Spring is the most exciting time of year for gardeners.

After months of cold, grey weather, the garden begins to wake up - bulbs are flowering, buds swell on branches, and borders start to show signs of life. It's also the season when a little preparation goes a long way. Whether you're refreshing established beds or planning new projects, here are some practical, effective tips to help you make the most of the months ahead. Start with a thorough tidy-up before planting anything new, take time to clear away winter debris. Remove fallen leaves, cut back dead stems, and tidy the edges of borders. This not only improves the appearance of the garden but also reduces hiding places for pests. Improve your soil as it's the foundation of a thriving garden.

Early spring is the ideal moment to add organic matter such as well-rotted manure or soil improver. Spread a generous layer over beds and borders and let the worms do the hard work of pulling it down. This boosts fertility, improves structure, and helps retain moisture during the warmer months. As perennials and shrubs begin to grow, apply a balanced slow-release fertiliser around the base. Roses, in particular, benefit from an early spring feed to support strong flowering later in the season. Mulching afterwards helps lock in moisture and suppress weeds. Plan for pollinators as spring is a crucial time for bees and other beneficial insects. Plant nectar-rich varieties such as pulmonaria, primroses, heather, and flowering herbs. Even a small patch of pollinator-friendly

plants can make a meaningful difference. If you're visiting local garden centres to buy some spring colour for your pots and borders, here are three beautiful plants that work wonderfully together:

### *Japanese quince (Chaenomeles)*

A beautiful deciduous shrub that can be grown in borders or trained against a wall. It prefers well-drained soil in sun or partial shade, copes with most soil types, and flowers from March to May- providing early nectar and a welcome splash of colour.

### *Cephalaria gigantea (giant scabious)*

A tall, clump-forming perennial with soft yellow flowerheads from May to August on sturdy



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upright stems. It adds height and movement to a border and is loved by pollinators. Deadhead regularly if you want to prevent self-seeding.

### *Geum 'Mai Tai'*

A hardy perennial with beautiful peachy apricot flowers held on dark stems. Flowering from late spring into early summer, it's a wonderful mid-layer plant that ties the whole scheme together. It grows to around 45cm tall and thrives in full sun with moist but well-drained soil.

With a little preparation and timely action, spring sets the tone for a vibrant, healthy garden all year long. It's the season of possibility - and the perfect moment to get growing.



## April gardening tips

Reg Moule BBC Hereford & Worcester

### Early in the Month

Sow annual climbers, e.g. Asarina, Eccremocarpus, Cobaea, Ipomoea, Tropaeolum and Rhodochiton. Dead head daffodils and narcissi – feed them, but do not cut off the foliage! Keep an eye out for slugs and take steps to control them. Prune out any frost-damaged shoots on less hardy shrubs such as Pittosporum. Plant summer-flowering bulbs outdoors, e.g. Gladioli and Nerine bowdenii. If you already have overcrowded clumps of Neries in your garden, lift and divide them now. For trouble-free roses, spray with one of the safer rose combined pest and disease treatments, like Roseclear 3 in 1 or Uncle Tom's Plant Tonic, for an organic solution to rose diseases. Prune Forsythias and winter Jasmine after flowering. Finish dividing overcrowded herbaceous perennial plants. Straggly silver foliage plants can be cut back now, e.g. Saintolina (but not down into old wood - that is risky). Lift and divide pond plants.

This is also a good time to introduce new plants too. Plant Asparagus crowns and Jerusalem artichokes. Divide overcrowded clumps of Siberian Iris. Vine weevils will be laying eggs now; they can be curbed organically by laying a half-inch layer of horticultural grit on top of the compost to prevent successful egg laying. Otherwise, known infected areas can be treated by watering on Nemasys Vine Weevil Killer nematodes. Cover some established strawberry plants with cloches to get an early crop. Plant new conifer hedges and trim established ones.

### Mid April

Tackle pernicious weeds, like bindweed, with a systemic weed killer containing glyphosate or Vitax SBK. A similar organic-based product would be Neudorff Weedfree Plus. Hardy annuals can still be sown in situ outdoors. Plant dormant dahlia tubers 10cm (4in) deep outdoors at the foot of support stakes. Undertake lawn

renovations by repairing damaged edges and removing bumps and hollows. Watch out for whitefly appearing in your greenhouse; hang up some yellow sticky traps to monitor them. Plant some French marigolds or Coleus cannina near your tomatoes to deter the pests. Take conifer cuttings. Pull off 7.5 – 10 cm (3-4 in) side shoots. Trim up the base. Dip in hormone and insert in free-draining compost. Watch out for attacks of gooseberry mildew and gooseberry sawfly; these devastate bushes. Plant out cabbage, cauliflower, Brussels sprout and celery plants. Finish planting sprouted maincrop potatoes. Sow tomato seeds now for outdoor planting in June. Begin planting up hanging baskets, keep them inside until frost risk is minimal. Check your greenhouse regularly, as watering, shading and ventilation are important. Sow Basil indoors, but do not plant outside until there is no risk of frost. Start successional sowings of salads, eg. Lettuce, carrots and radishes.



### Late April

Sow tender veg indoors for planting out next month, e.g. courgettes, French and Runner beans. Sow marrow, courgette and squash seed on its side and soak sweetcorn seed in water for four hours before sowing. Prune early-flowered Clematis after blooming, e.g. C. alpina and C. macropetala. This is only necessary where space is limited. This is a good time to re-pot any houseplants that are pot-bound. Store unused seeds left in open packets in an airtight container in the refrigerator. Treat your lawn to an application of lawn food. Miracle Gro Thick and Green is my favourite. Its food is released according to weather conditions.

## Ailsa's Kitchen *Ailsa Craddock*

We have just come back from holiday, where plant-based food was offered as much as the meat and fish options, and we really enjoyed choosing them. Since being home, we have decided to cut down on meat. Plant-based diets are those which are predominantly made up of wholegrains (including wholegrain cereals, breads and pasta, oats and rice), fruits and vegetables, nuts, seeds, beans and pulses. These foods offer a range of nutrients, including fibre, vitamins and minerals, and can provide essential fats and protein. It doesn't necessarily mean you need to give up all meat and dairy, just that you give greater consideration to plant-based foods in your diet.

*How many plant-based foods should you be aiming for?*

- Aim for a minimum of five fruits and non-starchy vegetables per day – that's 80g per portion or 400g per day.

- Try to eat a diet that provides at least 30g of fibre per day.

- Plant-based foods should make up the majority of your diet.

*How can you increase the amount of plant-based foods that you eat?*

- Aim to eat a variety of plant-based foods – opting for wholegrain versions of rice, breads and pasta where possible.

- Increase your intake of beans, pulses/legumes.

- Try to include a plant-based option with every meal so that you build in plant-based foods throughout the day.

- Choose plant-based snacks e.g. fruits, dried fruits and vegetables. Aim to get a range of different nutrients.

Whilst not suggesting you give up meat entirely, try making the usual side dishes the main one.

### **Celery Gratin (Oven 200C)**

*1 head of celery, trimmed and cut into short lengths*

*25g butter*

*1 small onion, chopped*

*25g plain flour*

*½ teaspoon dry mustard*

*150ml milk*

*75g cheddar cheese*

*25g breadcrumbs*

Bring a large pan of salted water to the boil and add the celery. Cover and simmer for 20 minutes. Drain, reserving the water. Put the celery into a shallow dish. Melt the butter in a pan, add the onion and cook till soft. Add the flour and mustard, stirring for a minute. Remove from the heat and gradually stir in the milk

and 150ml of reserved cooking water. Return to the heat and bring to the boil, stirring until the sauce is thick. Stir in half the grated cheese and pour over the celery. Mix together the remaining cheese and breadcrumbs and sprinkle over. Bake for 30 minutes and serve, garnished with tomato wedges.

### **Carrots with lemon sauce**

*700g carrots*

*1 lemon*

*1 teaspoon granulated sugar*

*25g butter*

*200ml fromage frais*

*2 teaspoon fresh chopped dill*

*1 tablespoon chopped parsley*

Slice the carrots into large matchsticks. Zest the rind from



*Celery Gratin*

the lemon and squeeze the juice. Put 3 tablespoons of water, lemon juice, sugar and butter into a large pan. Heat gently until the butter melts and add the carrots. Bring to the boil, cover and simmer for 10–12 minutes until tender.

Arrange carrots onto a serving dish, reserving the cooking juices. Mix the fromage frais, 5 tbsps of cooking juice and seasoning and heat gently. Pour a little of the sauce over the carrots and sprinkle with dill, parsley and lemon zest. Serve the rest of the sauce separately.

### **Spiced Carrot and Lentil Soup**

*1 tablespoon butter*

*1 onion, finely chopped*

*1 -2 cloves of garlic*

*1 dessertspoon grated ginger*

*¼ teaspoon each chilli flakes,*

*ground turmeric, ground*

*coriander, ground cumin*

*2-3 carrots, peeled and chopped*

*1 tin chopped tomatoes*

*160g 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 yoghurt and mint or parsley for garnish.



*Spiced Carrot and Lentil Soup*

## Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor

I read the article about Post-Brexit Britain with interest. Although the article is well written by a 16 year old, it seems only fair to point out the discrepancies if one is to offer an unbiased view. Firstly, the graph shown from the "Statista" website screams a vast shift in opinion, even regret since Brexit. On closer investigation, the graph shows that the percentage of respondents is only in the range of 35 - 55 and not 0 - 100.

Secondly, the graph makes no reference to the age of respondents, but according to Statista's website (and I quote) "In January 2026, most young adults thought Brexit was wrong." Although I am unable to access the exact percentage without a

signing-in code, I would deduce that there is a definite age split since the website states:

"By contrast (\*%) of those over 65 thought it was the right decision." Finally, the survey only had 2043 respondents, which doesn't seem to be a very good representation of the 70 million population of the UK.

As a scientist, I am profoundly aware that graphs are open to interpretation depending on many variables. Also, statistics are open to interpretation, which is clearly shown in the break down of parliamentary votes for Brexit - for example, there was only one Green MP at the time, so 100% of 'Green Votes' is a misrepresentation.

I am afraid that I know little about 'The Economy', having no

interest in money matters at all, but I will point out that our economy was surely effected by the Government-funded Furlough scheme which ran from the spring of 2020 until late 2021, effectively paying vast swathes of the population 80% of their wages for doing nothing and destroying many small businesses.

I would also be so bold as to claim that the United Kingdom achieved Brexit in name only - with Boris Johnson negotiating a new Withdrawal Agreement in 2019, which according to many threw Northern Ireland 'under the bus'.

It is important to remember that there are always many facets to arguments, and many people voted for Brexit to retain British sovereignty (not rule by unelected

bureaucrats, incurring great cost to the taxpayer) and control over our borders as well as independent economic policy. It is also important to take into account the political landscape at the time, the decline in manufacturing and the specific characteristics of local areas as well as "migration concerns"

I have decided that I am actually an "anarchist" since I believe in as little government intervention in my life as possible and favour self organisation, responsibility and freedom of the individual. I certainly think that our current "top down" political system needs an overhaul.

Best Wishes

*Julie Reynolds (Worcester)*

# The Season of Renewal

What Might Be Calling You? Emily Papirnik

As we move into the fourth month of the year, renewal and rebirth appear everywhere in the natural world. Buds are opening, birds are busier, and the landscape seems to be quietly stretching itself awake after the stillness of winter. It's something we witness every year, yet each time it arrives, it carries a gentle question for us: what might renewal mean for you this year? For some, it might be a time for change. For others, a time for adventure. And sometimes it simply opens the door to opportunities we previously didn't believe were possible. Nature doesn't rush its transformation. It unfolds gradually, in its own rhythm. Perhaps we can take inspiration from that. As the days grow lighter and a little warmer, many of us begin to feel a shift inside ourselves too. There can be a subtle return of energy, curiosity and motivation. A sense that we want to move more, do more, and spend more time outside in the world again. Even the small things begin to change. The activities we choose. The clothes we reach for. The simple pleasure of stepping outside when the day stretches a little longer. In my work through Intention Therapy, I often notice how closely our well-being mirrors the rhythms of the natural world. When nature awakens, something in us awakens too. The question is not whether you should suddenly



reinvent your life or push yourself into dramatic change. Instead, it might simply be worth asking:

- What feels ready to grow in my life right now?
- What small step could bring a little more energy or joy into my days?
- Where might I allow myself to be a little more open to possibility?

Sometimes renewal begins with something very small: a walk you didn't take before, a conversation you might have avoided, or a quiet decision to try something new. Just as the natural world gently reawakens, perhaps this time of year invites us to softly reconnect with our own sense of aliveness. And sometimes, that is more than enough.

# Worcestershire Wooding

Karen Rose



Placks and Pikes, Rides and Trigs, Poles and Bangles - this is the lost language of the highly skilled coppice workers who once shaped Worcestershire's woodlands. At a time when wood was essential for almost everything - building, farming, cart parts, tool handles, logs and charcoal - coppice woods were a vital part of the local economy. Woods were divided into small compartments and cut during winter and early spring on long, carefully planned rotations. Each year, different areas produced both older, thicker stems and younger, thinner ones. The thick poles were prized for building and hedge posts, while the slender rods became hurdles, thatching spars and pea sticks.

These cycles repeated for centuries, creating a constantly shifting patchwork of light and shade across the landscape. Coppicing is one of the most wildlife friendly forms of woodland management ever developed. When sunlight reaches the woodland floor it sparks a burst of wildflowers, bramble and young shrubs, providing perfect conditions for birds, insects, fungi and mammals. When coppicing declined in the mid-20th century, acres of nature-rich woodland were lost, along with the wildlife that depended on these rhythms. Today, coppicing is enjoying a small but meaningful revival in Worcestershire. Near Pershore, part of Stoulton Community Woodlands has recently been coppiced. The woods are open to everyone, so you can take a close-up look and ramble the paths and copses. The hazel will begin to reshoot within weeks, but not before the spring sunlight has touched the woodland floor and encouraged a fresh wave of life to return.

## 100 years ago ...

Princess Elizabeth (later Queen Elizabeth II) was born in Mayfair, London, on 21st April.

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## Romy's Uni Life

Romy Kemp *Liverpool University*



What shall I do?

I only have a few months of university left before my degree is over, and I am still unsure of what I want to do after my degree. The next couple of weeks are crucial for me to look at career avenues. In these upcoming weeks, I shall be sending many emails to find out more information about jobs that I may want to do. It may sound bad that I haven't decided yet,

but honestly, it isn't unusual to not know at this point. I don't want to rush into something without knowing what other opportunities are out there for me. I want something that suits me, something I can be proud of and that brings about good change for others as well as the environment and nature around us. Easter is approaching quickly, and I will soon be at home. Over this period, I will be looking into jobs as well as cracking on

with university assignments! I also have a trip planned to visit my best friend in Nottingham soon, and will definitely include this in next month's issue. I've been to visit her before, but I cannot wait to meet all of her flatmates and go out clubbing with them! So far, my Easter plans are scattered, but I plan on meeting up with all my friends and chilling in the sun (hopefully), but also trying to get my life together (still). Over Easter, I plan to get back into golf and bring my clubs up to Liverpool so I can play with my mates and boyfriend before going home for the summer, where I will then play with family and maybe some friends too. I used to go to the driving range quite a lot with my dad, but I have only picked up a club again recently. Having to use my boyfriend's clubs wasn't the easiest after not holding a club for a few years, but it turned out to be just fine! So, over Easter, I will be going to the driving range



with my dad to try and get back up to standard, before bringing my clubs up to Liverpool. My English course group met up at the pub to catch up and, while we were there, we entered into a pub quiz. What started off as successful and positive ended up rather laughable. It was nice to catch up with my mates, who I haven't seen for a while because of different university timetables and modules. When the weather brightens, I'm sure we will go to the pub more and maybe even take a trip to the beach! I definitely want to explore more of Liverpool before I leave (although I may decide to stay in Liverpool after the summer).

## A Place to Meet: Letters from Japan

Chloe Pickstock



Something I have done throughout my travels is collect postcards from every single destination I have been to. Every one reminds me of a place and a story. And like a postcard, I have collected memories from my trips in all kinds of forms, the picture-perfect and the messy ones.

As I am writing to you now, I am sitting on a plane with Japan's soft skyline fading into memory. I'm excited to be carrying on my journey to a new destination, South Korea, but I am sad to be leaving Japan. I enjoyed the bustle, the smells of the street food, the dizzying array of lights, and the convenience of having a vending machine on every corner. I had the full experience of Japan, and sometimes the unconventional too.

The journey started on a high, with my good friend and I spending our first few days in Tokyo exploring the city, and the evenings making our way

through karaoke bars, belting out 'Everybody wants to rule the world' with a group of strangers. After a few days, we were supposed to join a group tour for a week. However, when we arrived, it wasn't quite what we expected. I won't get into the details, but the tour had let us down and scared us off joining for the rest of the journey. After several major red flags in a short amount of time, it was enough for us to turn to each other and say: "We have to get out of here!" We gathered our belongings as quickly as we could, and sneaked downstairs, trying to dodge the hostel manager on our way down. We bumped into members of the group who were sitting outside, and awkwardly announced that we were heading out to 7-11 for snacks, with our bags that were obviously packed. They probably knew we were making a great escape. It was 11pm and we were on the streets of Tokyo, with nowhere to go. Eventually, we found a hotel with a 24-hour desk and didn't look back. Escaping the tour wasn't the only thing to go wrong on our journey, but there were also so many amazing memories too that made up for the messy ones. That's life though, I guess. Things are bound to go awry when travelling, and honestly,



it's these messy moments that actually end up being the most memorable. Not all postcards are in perfect condition. Some are bent, worn, or picked up in strange places, but they end up

carrying the best stories. That chaotic night in Tokyo might not be the postcard I'd send home, but it would be one I'd keep for myself and laugh about later.

## Gregory's World!

### Close Shave

There comes a point when my hair gets so curly and so long that it starts to feel like a passenger hitching a ride on my head. When that happens, fellow reader, I know it's time for a shearing.

I don't know about you, but I go to the Turkish Style barbers in Pershore. It's cool, down-to-earth, and the guys there are great. It was my reintroduction to the world of gents haircuts. Before that, during Covid, my sister used to sit me and Dad down on the patio, wrap a towel around us, and let rip with the clippers. And before that, I'd grown up with the more traditional understanding that guys' haircuts never took longer than ten minutes. It was a deft, no-fuss procedure. Chop it back, get it out of your eyes and off your ears, and if it looks patchy in places, give it a few days and it'll sort itself out. So, when I reintroduced myself to the world of gents haircuts, I was blown away to discover that it's an

expanding and exciting field. I entered the Turkish barbers: hexagonal strip lighting, mid-2010s pop, shelves filled with sprays, products, potions and lotions, and – woah! I jumped as I glimpsed my shock of hair in the mirror. Wow, I'd outdone myself this time. Then again, I always get my money's worth. (I still remember walking into Steve's barber shop one time with an equally impressive shock of hair. He told me to take my hat off.)

Result! There was only one customer ahead of me. Give it a few minutes, I thought, and it'll be my turn in the chair. Ten more, and I'll be out of here! Imagine my surprise, therefore, when this customer didn't just get a trim. Over half an hour, he underwent a metamorphosis. I looked up from my phone, and he'd disappeared under a hot towel. Next, under a whipped blob of shaving foam. Pop a cherry on top, and this ice cream sundae would be complete. The barber shaved him, styled him, sculpted him, blow-dried him, misted him

### Gregory Sidaway

like a prize-winning fern. How much more could they shear, prune and pluck off this man? As if in answer, the barber went for his eyebrows next.

I scratched my head. What exactly did I want done to me? I could reinvent myself, emerge from this emporium of gels and product a new person.

Nowadays, I've found my groove in this environment. I swung by the barbers recently. What is Easter if not a time for new beginnings? I stepped up to the podium, took off my glasses, and a blurry barber wrapped a blurry cloak around me.

"Grade two at the sides, shortish on top ... Please."

Somehow, he translated my basic description into a satisfying end result. Getting my hair into a workable state was like tilling old soil. The barber sprayed it and raked it, sprayed it and raked it. Eventually, it flopped and swayed to the strokes of his comb. He combed it forward and pinched a tuft between two fingers.

"*This short?*" His expectant eyes asked.



I encountered the same problem I always do. My glasses, like my hands, were trapped under the cloak. All I could see in the mirror was a blur of my floppy, wet hair. "That's great," I said, just like when we all guess the letters in the opticians. I put myself in the hands of his barbering instincts. After all, they'd never let me down. He sheared away. I became more aerodynamic by the second. I tapped my feet to the 2010s pop and daydreamed as the clippers buzzed around my ears. "Anything else?" he asked. "Oh." Eyebrows! "No thanks." Close one. We Sidaways are renowned for our impressive eyebrows. I couldn't jeopardise the family inheritance, could I? Maybe next time.

## Evie's Adventures

Evie Aubin Oxford Brookes University



Stepping into a new city with a purpose never fails to make the experience feel so much more meaningful. My university trip to Amsterdam, as part of our fashion journalism module, was exactly that: an incredible and insightful blend of academic learning, cultural immersion, and moments of unexpected inspiration.

From the moment we arrived in the city, dragging our suitcases behind us (completely exhausted from our 4am departure from Oxford), the city felt alive with possibilities. We spent the first day sightseeing and meandering through the city, walking the canals, grabbing the ever-so-popular Fabel Friets, and ending the day with a nighttime boat tour along the canals. The tour took us to the dancing houses and the

bridge of fifteen bridges, which was spectacular to see lit up at night with fairy lights.

The following day, our academic mission started! We began the morning by sitting in on one of our exchange group's lectures and getting to know them. The afternoon, however, was one of the trip's highlights. We visited the Amsterdam Fashion Institute, a building dedicated to the creativity and innovation of fashion, where we got the opportunity to roam the building and attend a Q&A lecture with Nancy Steeman and Mandie Gower. Both spoke honestly about their journeys, the challenges they've faced, and the importance of finding your own path within this (or any) competitive industry. On the third day, we returned to the Fashion Institute for another

lecture, this time hosted by Lydia Van De Kreeke; her lecture added an entirely new perspective on what was spoken on the previous day, and with that, we said our goodbyes to the Amsterdam Fashion Institute. But our trip wasn't over yet.

In the evening, we visited the Rijksmuseum, once again adding an entirely new level of inspiration to our trip. Walking through rooms filled with art and history is something I could lose myself in entirely, yet with the purpose of this trip on my mind, I was constantly reminded of how closely fashion is connected with culture and time; and before I knew it, I had - as I always do - lost myself entirely in this museum and the thirty minute warning from the speakers broke me out of my mesmerized gaze and we hurried to leave. With all the excitement of the previous days, I hardly had time to blink before I was waking up to our last morning in Amsterdam. On our final day, I woke up early with a friend to wander around the lake we were staying near, watch the sunrise, and see the world come to life. It was a peaceful, reflective moment, contrasting heavily with the busier moments of the trip.



Allowing us time to breathe and appreciate everything we had experienced so far, and what the day ahead of us would hold. Which just so happened to be one of my favourites. The Van Gogh Museum. For as long as I can remember, he has held his spot as one of my favourite artists, so this was a dream come true. Seeing his work up close was an experience in itself; the brush strokes, the emotion, the intensity, and the use of colour are things that will remain engraved in my mind and soul for eternity. However, all good things must come to an end. We slowly drifted back to our meeting point, making a stop by Vondelpark and seeing some adorable geese before hopping back on the EuroStar and saying goodbye to Amsterdam. It was an incredible trip. If you have ever thought about booking that trip and going, I would certainly urge you to do so! But for now, toodles!

# Digital Legacy

Three and a half years later, and we still don't really know when our daughter, Emma, died. The only certainty is that it was sometime between leaving work on a Friday in October and just before midnight on the following Wednesday. The police had to break down her door. That moment will never leave me, and the image of Emma that night forces its way to the front of my mind whenever her name is mentioned. She didn't take her own life, and the police did not treat her death as suspicious. The post-mortem was not definitive on the cause of death and offered no help in terms of time of death. It was a month before we could have her funeral. In that time, the undertakers, the crematorium, the celebrant, and the solicitor caringly and professionally carried us through the process of wrapping up Emma's life.

Like her, tens of thousands of people are dying in the UK every year without a Will. There are strict rules for inheritance when someone dies intestate, and for whether you need to apply to the court for probate (the legal right to deal with someone's estate). In Emma's case, she had no husband or children, no property or shares. Just savings. I suspect that thousands of people die every year under the same scenario and hence a close relative has to deal with their loved one's estate on top of the splintered emotions of loss and grief. So we tried to manage her estate the best we could. We emptied her rented flat. Most went into storage for sorting out later. We gathered up all her valuable possessions, including her phone and her iPad.

It was emotionally draining, but we knew how to sort through the tangible assets such as clothes, savings and furniture. But digital assets turned out to be a totally different thing. Big tech companies don't comply with the practices which have been around for centuries. We had her phone and iPad, but no PIN, no passwords and, therefore, no access to her photos, documents or cloud storage. And we had no way of seeing her social media activity, such as WhatsApp, in order to try to narrow down when, in that five-day window, she died. Whilst the individuals at EE, Facebook, Apple etc., with whom I've spoken on the phone, in their high street shops or via email, invariably offered their condolences (genuinely, I don't doubt), they would then refer me to their rules. That's when the big techs cruelly close ranks, with a "see you in court" attitude.

I've trawled through many terms and conditions (T&Cs) to find a way to get hold of Emma's data. What I have learnt is that, whilst the big techs comprehensively cover the ownership, management and use of "your data" when you're alive, they don't do as thorough a job, if any, when you're not. And after three years, I'm not sure I've got the emotional strength to keep on beating against the door of big tech to gain access to Emma's data. I certainly don't want others to go through this. Some sources estimate that less than 10% of us have made formal digital legacy plans. Nearly everyone I have spoken to has not heard of it. Unfortunately, the big techs don't appear to be very keen for us to set this up. Unlike pensions, for

example, we're not encouraged by the big techs to nominate someone. I believe this needs to change but, in the meantime, we must nominate someone to 'inherit' our digital assets. Sharing passwords might seem an obvious solution, but I have read that this is definitely not advisable. Apart from many big techs forbidding it in their T&Cs, it can be considered breaking the law and lead to complications in dealing with someone's digital estate, which, I can assure you, is difficult enough as it is. The Property (Digital Assets etc) Act 2025 has provided legal clarity on how digital assets are treated when someone dies. If you do a web search such as "digital assets in Wills UK", you will be able to find plenty of advice to help you include your wishes in your Will. This includes stating who should deal with your online assets (your digital executor), creating an inventory of all your accounts where your property exists online (e.g. banks, subscriptions, social media, cloud storage) and making it clear how you want each account to be treated by your digital executor. Different social media and cloud storage platforms have different rules about what happens when a user dies. Some, such as Facebook, allow account memorialisation (still visible but not accessible). Some allow data downloads but data protection requires "formal legal authority" which varies from one platform provider to another. One example is Apple. If you go to your Apple device Settings, Apple Account, Sign-in & Security, Legacy Contact, you can add someone from your Contacts list who will

Martin Honess



be able to access your data via an "access key" and a copy of your death certificate. This will then allow you to access your deceased loved one's property on iCloud, for example. You'll find that all the big techs use different terminology for how to nominate someone to inherit your data. However, if you search "how to set up a legacy contact on XYZ account uk" (insert at XYZ the platform you're interested in e.g. Facebook, Microsoft OneDrive, Google, binternet etc), that will get you started. In each case, you should be able to find out what level of access your digital executor will obtain, from only being able to advise the provider of the death, to gaining full access to your data (photos, videos etc.). Having been through this truly awful experience only to discover that not all your loved one's property is accessible to pass on, I strongly believe we need to pay attention to both the digital asset piece in our Wills and setting up a legacy contact with each and every online account which holds your digital property. We need to get that 10% figure up. Encourage your parents, your children, your friends to do it now. If we don't, I believe this problem will continue and many families will continue to lose big chunks of their history. Don't put it off. Do it for the Emmas in your life.

## Joe's Teenage Focus

The Under-16 social media ban

The Under-16 social media ban was an idea that MPs met to discuss in March 2026. A ban in the UK could've been a flat-out ban like in Australia, where anyone under the age of sixteen will be restricted from social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok. However, this idea was declined by our MPs by a 307-173 vote, who instead decided to move forward with discussions about more restrictions on the app and increased safety measures. The idea is that social media is a threat to children's welfare,

contributing to addiction, anxiety, unrealistic social standards and self-esteem issues. Therefore, MPs believe action must be taken. Those who supported the ban included the Conservative Party, who moved for a swift ban due to their desire to protect children's mental health. Despite this ban not going forward, I do believe that it has sparked more conversations about social media restrictions and the negative effects that social media can cause. In my opinion, the concept of a flat-out ban has shed light on what was previously a darker, ignored side to social media, which was certainly not as visible before.

Joe Bowsher (15)

However, to cultivate more of a youth perspective on the concept of a social media ban, I took it upon myself to ask some of my peers about this idea. Here's what they had to say: Oscar Williams (14) stated that: "I feel that the ban is a diversion to take attention away from our country's more important issues like climate change." Another teen, who chose to stay anonymous, stated: "I think the social media ban would be unbeneficial. It's a modern way of communication and a way of expressing yourself." Finally, my brother, Charlie Bowsher (18) said:



"Social media influencers often create unrealistic and harmful narratives which have a negative impact on teens." Based upon this, I would say in general some teens recognise the ban as problematic and flawed. However, I do think that we as teens can begin to see two sides to social media due to its recent attention in the news.

# It moss be love!

Angela Johns

Hopefully, by the time you read this, we will have had some long-awaited sunshine. You may have even gone abroad in search of it. For sure, sunshine is a salve and a facilitator of an elevated mood. It brings hope and optimism, especially after such a long stretch of wet and mizzle.

Ever the searcher of the silver lining and the glass half full, I have found the wonder of a wet start to Spring - moss.

Moss simply glows green with pleasure in the wet. And, if you look, it is everywhere living its best life just now, especially on my lawn. I am hard pushed to find another who loves moss on the lawn the same as me (no surprise, it's my partner).

From afar, it is vibrant and rich. Up close, it is fine and delicate.

It is soft like a velvet cushion, springy like a memory foam pillow. Maybe that sounds like I am romanticising, but what a wonderful way to keep your lawn green and cool in the hottest of weather, provide nesting material for the birds, and a micro-environment for all manner of tiny important living things.

Like blackbirds and the way sunlight filters through the leaves of a lime tree, moss is one of my very favourite things. Moss is not loud and showy. It quietly and slowly gets on with the business of growing in what can be the most challenging circumstances – the dim, the wet, the bare.

Its wonder is that it thrives in such conditions. Its beauty is in the close inspection of its tiny leaves and tendrils. Some of its usefulness is that it absorbs water and carbon dioxide. It speaks to me of resilience



and patience, of quietly thriving, not just surviving. Part of me, and maybe part of you, speaks that same language. Could it be time to stop and appreciate those strengths?

We don't need big milestones or achievements to showcase these parts of us because all the small and quiet wins add up. Set-backs don't take away from our progress, they just divert our attention from it. We are craving warmer, sunnier days, but you can't have it all one way. You can't have moss without the damp, you can't have a conversation if you are the only one talking, and you can't fall in love unless you let go.

*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](http://angelajohns.co.uk)*



# HMRC Simple Assessments

Carol Draper



It is a fact almost universally acknowledged that the arrival of a brown envelope from HMRC leads to feelings of worry and possibly even panic. I deal with HMRC brown envelopes every day, but receiving one at home is different and is almost always accompanied by the question "What have I done now?"

If you feel the same, you are not alone, but leaving brown envelopes unopened on the dining room table in the hope they will miraculously disappear is not the best way forward.

Many of the brown envelopes received over the past few weeks have contained Simple Assessments, HMRC's calculation of your tax liability for the prior tax year. A Simple Assessment will detail the income HMRC believes you have received from employment, pensions and bank interest, the tax that has been deducted, and will calculate whether you are due a repayment or if you owe additional tax. As state pensions rise and the personal allowance remains frozen, and as banks are mandated to provide HMRC with details of interest paid on bank accounts, the number of Simple Assessments being issued is increasing. It is not, however, an exact science, and you should always check the details HMRC have declared match your own records.

Ideally, additional tax liabilities

will be collected through PAYE by a change in tax code.

However, if that's not possible, a payment must be made, direct to HMRC.

If you are owed a tax refund, it is up to you to reclaim it.

Simple Assessments are prepared and calculated by HMRC and should not be confused with Self-Assessment returns, which are prepared by the taxpayer.

If you completed a Self-Assessment return, you should not receive a Simple Assessment.

If you have, this is a mistake and, to avoid being taxed twice, you should speak to your tax adviser or HMRC to ensure your records are updated.

Do not assume HMRC will sort it out internally, they won't, as the two types of assessment are dealt with by different systems in HMRC. If you have any queries relating to a Simple Assessment you have received, speak to your accountant.

*Carol Draper FCCA  
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'April hath put a spirit of youth in everything.'

*William Shakespeare*

*Sonnet 98*

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# Jazz News

Peter Farrall



Duke Ellington (1899 - 1974)

This month's club session falls on April 29th, the birthday of Duke Ellington, one of the greatest names in jazz.

Duke was known for his elegance, refined manners and calm, forgiving attitude towards his musicians, some of whose behaviour did not deserve such a tolerant leader. These personal attributes contributed to his ability to keep his orchestra one of the most stable on the jazz scene, some of them spending a near lifetime with the Duke. But jazz, being a fluid, spontaneous and passionate form

of expression, has also included its fair share of temperamental characters, most of whom may be forgiven because of their superb contribution to the music. The ill-famed public slanging match between Miles Davis and Wynton Marsalis on stage at the 1986 Vancouver jazz festival can still be recalled on video, but it should be remembered that Miles was a frail, grumpy sixty-year-old and Wynton was a twenty-something upstart at the time. Bassist Charles Mingus was justifiably known as the angry man of jazz because of

his hair-trigger temper directed at musicians, instruments and audience alike. Of his many, many outbursts, perhaps the wrecking of a thousand-dollar bass or the destruction of a piano with his bare hands are the most shocking. Nevertheless, the man produced awesome compositions and performances over the years and is probably best regarded as a crazy genius. In contrast, perhaps two of the most equable jazz personalities were Louis Armstrong, whose joy for life and music infected all who listened to or played with him. He never seemed to have a bad word for anyone or anything (although he did once express a dislike for bebop). Ella Fitzgerald, whilst holding an audience conquering stage presence, in her private life was described as a sweet and gracious lady who supported a number of children's charities. The world's greatest jazz singer could well have been a member of the Women's Institute!

No antagonism at this month's club night; Nick and Zoltan have been friends for thirty years and have spent time together in the Big Chris Barber Band and The Pasadena Roof Orchestra amongst others. Andrzej's trio are an easy-going bunch of guys, including Mike Green (well known to Pershore fans) on bass and our own Graham Smith, drums, making a formidable rhythm section. Swing Summit takes inspiration from the "Soprano Summit" series by revered US reedsmen Kenny Davern and Bob Wilber. Nick Payton was a student of Bob Wilber, who, in turn, was mentored by the giant of New Orleans jazz, Sidney Bechet. No doubt Nick will have some happy memories of his esteemed teacher as he entertains us with the music they made together on a tour of the USA. Incidentally, Wilber moved to England, taking up residence in the Cotswolds for his later years. He died in 2019 at his Chipping Camden home.

**"Swing Summit"**  
**Nick Payton and Zoltan Sagi (saxes)**  
 with  
**The Andrzej Baranek Trio**  
**Wednesday 29th April - Doors open at 7pm, music at 8**  
*Admission £12.50 to include a raffle ticket.*  
*In the Function Room, Pershore Football Club.*  
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*Visit [www.pershorejazz.org.uk](http://www.pershorejazz.org.uk) Tel: 01527 66692*  
*find us on Facebook.*

## Music Matters

Steve Ide

The War Child charity was formed in 1993 to raise funds and awareness of the struggle that children in war zones face. In 1995, they released the compilation album *Help!*, composed of songs by artists such as Paul Weller, The Boo Radleys and Radiohead. It was recorded in just twenty-four hours and it sold over 70,000 copies in its first week, raising more than £1.25 million, enabling the charity to start working in Yugoslavia. This March, the charity's second album was released titled *Help(2)*, featuring tracks from Fontaine's DC, Beth Gibbons and Young Fathers, among others. 'Warning' by Cameron Winter and 'Obvious' by Wet Leg are just two of the standout tracks. Described by Under The Radar as "a heartfelt response to a fractured world", not only does it succeed as a charity record, it

is also a cohesive collection of tracks from some of the best talent around. Sounding great, with an unarguable message, no child should be exposed to war.

### Notable New Releases

To Whom it May Concern  
 by Jill Scott

The themes on this, her sixth studio album, have a self-assuredness that covers self confidence and non-conformity, using soul, jazz and hip hop styles. With honest and deep lyrics, this is an inspiring album. Standout track - 'Pressha'

The Mountain  
 by Gorillaz

Influenced by Indian instruments and featuring a roster of well-known guests such as Johnny Marr, Sparks and Dennis Hopper, this is one of their best releases yet. This is a fascinating album, inspired by grief, a musical adventure from start to finish.

Stand out track -  
 'The Happy Dictator'

Trixie's  
 by Squeeze

They wrote this concept album about a fictional nightclub when they were teenagers, but couldn't play it properly, so it took fifty years to be released. It sounds like a musical, but feels like a club you'd like to visit.

Standout track -  
 'You Get the Feeling'

### Add to playlist

Laughter in The Rain  
 by Neil Sedaka

Levi Stubbs Tears  
 by Billy Bragg

Breeze blocks  
 by alt-j

Tea for the Tillerman  
 by Cat Stevens

Chinese Rocks  
 by Johnny Thunders &  
 The Heartbreakers



# The Byrds and the bees?

Martyn Cracknell



In the glorious spring sunshine a few days ago, there were plenty of honeybees out collecting pollen from the pussy willow catkins, which are plentiful near here. This would have been taken back to the hives to feed the young bee larvae. Alongside them, there were several large bumblebee queens which had emerged from their overwintering quarters to take advantage of the warmth and find a little nectar or pollen for themselves. They have not yet

started to build this year's nests, but will be seeking suitable sites, like disused mouse nests, in the next few weeks. The solitary bees will also emerge in an orderly sequence, with each species taking its turn. There are some species of bumble bees called Cuckoo bees which lay their eggs in the nests of others, but these will remain inactive for a few more weeks so that, when they do emerge, their hosts will have up-and-running nests ready to be parasitised. Wasp queens

may also be tempted out of hibernation by warm sunshine to visit flowers for nectar, but they also will not start to form this year's nests because their larvae are carnivorous and there are not yet any colonies of greenfly or small caterpillars on which to feed them. As it says in Ecclesiastes: 'For everything there is a season, and a time for everything under heaven ...' I find it utterly amazing that all these creatures emerge from winter at the right time and in the right sequence. What makes it doubly astonishing is that the weather changes so dramatically from one week, or even one day, to another. There was sleet today, and it was just 4°C, but 18°C is forecast for tomorrow! An environmental factor which is much more reliable than temperature for determining the time of year, is the changing day length, and in temperate latitudes, this is probably the main influence for when a particular species will become active. Honey bees are able to regulate the temperature within the hive and are more independent of the weather than



most insects, but they still have seasonal phases of activity. I could not resist taking a look inside the other day and was encouraged to see that the queen had started egg laying for the new season. (In the photo on the left, one little whitish egg can be seen at the bottom of each cell of the honeycomb.) So, I'm celebrating the new spring and singing along to that classic track, 'Turn, Turn, Turn' by the Byrds.

## Are you protected?



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# From the Boundary

Peter Jewell



HMS Dragon

The England T20 was not quite a disaster as it was set out to be. England lost in the semi-finals but showed a much better fight of it. Jacob Bethell, 105 in 48 balls, showed the extraordinary talent that he has. I would say that, had Bethell had more support, England might have beaten India. The West Indies must seriously regret in not keeping both Bethell and Archer. England Rugby Six Nations was a calamity for England save for the last game against France, which was a great game. Thank goodness Wales are beginning to show great resilience and, hopefully, they will be back where they belong on the world stage.

We are now at war - well, sort of - with Starmer again changing his mind about what we do. It takes a ship in Portsmouth three weeks to get operational. We have seven minesweepers, three non-operational, three around our shores and one somewhere else. We build two new aircraft carriers with diesel engines that are having to be refitted with nuclear at a great cost. Our national defence force could fit into Villa Park. This is a country that had thousands of aircrafts and now we do not even have one hundred. In my earlier article, I said that this country could be held to ransom by fuel and gas. I take no credit for saying "I told you so". Miliband will crucify this country. Petrol, diesel, and heating oil is likely to increase to £3.00 a litre. We have to open our own oil fields; we must frack our own gas and finally reopen our own coal-fired power stations and become fairly independent. 53.2 % of the price we pay at the petrol pumps is duty. Duty should be set as a figure not a percentage. Fifty pence in every litre sold that includes VAT. This war must end,

forcibly or otherwise.

The war has diverted attention away from Starmer. But for how long? More questions will be asked about Starmer, Mandelson, Lord Patel, rent boys, the Chagos Islands - and who benefited from the Chagos money? Your views are welcome with a letter to the editor.

Lammy has reduced Jury trials. This is dangerous. However good or bad juries may be, they are directed on the law by a judge of considerable experience.

A possible reform could be a greater use of district judges, an increase in their sentencing powers to, for instance, three years, and letting them sit with two magistrates who may not be legally trained but are trained as magistrates. The three could decide innocence or guilt and the district judge could decide the sentence. There could be Deputy District Judges with two magistrates on the same basis, who have the powers to bestow a sentence of up to eighteen months, and twenty-four months for two or more either way offences. There are plenty of courts. This alone would achieve far better efficiency, speed, and justice.

## Latest situation report

HMS Middleton and HMS Lancaster have been withdrawn from service due to expired safety certificates. HMS Dragon was going to the Gulf, but it is understood that it has broken down. Our new HMS Queen Elizabeth has been delayed due to the propellers not working properly. A Royal Navy Officer said that this was symptomatic of decades of under investment and that supposedly one of the world's major fleets could not sustain a presence in the Gulf. It has been suggested that Royal Navy motor boats could be used to detect mines. This has become ridiculous. Whether you agree or not, Iran is a problem and we are in it and the oil price will rocket. We can't even stop little boats from coming across the channel. What has happened to this once great nation? I agree with Trump on one thing: Starmer is no Winston Churchill.



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# If only the stones could talk

Brian Johnson-Thomas



Carreg Cennen

Sometimes I think that maybe we've got this Stonehenge business back to front. Granted, the stones came from a quarry in west Wales (at Carn Melyn in the Preseli Mountains, to be exact), where they were certainly transported some 140 miles to the site of Stonehenge, sometime after 2000 BCE. But what if they were taken there by people slowly moving eastwards and colonising the land as they went, rather than an existing culture, for some reason going to the trouble and expense of importing them?

Let's look at the facts: when the last Ice Age ended some 12,000 years ago, the immediate effect was to cause sea levels to rise, thus forming our islands. As the land slowly came to life, so people began to come back to these shores – but they came by boat, of course, because there were no roads, so all trade and travel came by sea. Indeed, it has been suggested that the very name 'Britain' comes from a Phoenician root 'Bar-Tinak' (Land of Tin). Tin was scarce in the Mediterranean, so certainly by 500 BCE, the Carthaginians (themselves of Phoenician origin)

were regularly plying the Celtic Sea, trading their goods for locally mined tin. We know, too, that in West Wales, civilisation was quite well advanced. The cromlech at Pentre Ifan, at the heart of the Preselis, was the centre of a large burial ground dating from before the time of Stonehenge, so doesn't it make sense to assume that the area we now call Wiltshire was settled firstly by immigrants from what is now Pembrokeshire? If we look back at the old myths and legends, then Stonehenge was founded by the wizard Merlin, that's King Arthur's mate and (would you believe?) there's still a fragment of Merlin's Tree in Carmarthen, which indeed holds an annual Merlin Festival, complete with wizards and magicians! Which leads me, finally, to the point of this page, namely that West Wales is a good place to visit for a short break. Looking for a budget break which was also family friendly, we stayed at Parkdean Resorts' Carmarthen Bay Holiday Park, south of the town itself and on the seaside near Kidwelly, itself a town with a lovely old castle to explore. We paid just £99 for a weekend

break in March but, at the time of writing, they do have availability from just £139 this Easter at some of their parks and generally their Spring prices are around £33 a night across the country. That's for a whole caravan, of course, and includes bedding, heating, lighting and a fully equipped kitchen. I understand that you can also do an add-on for food and drink with such all-inclusive packages starting from £25 per adult and £10 per child per day. The parks have all the facilities you'd expect for families.

For details, see

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

Should you indeed decide to visit that part of the world, then please ignore Google and don't just run along the motorways and main roads. We went via Hereford, Brecon, Llandovery and Llandeilo, all of them towns well worth the stop, not just for the loos and coffee breaks but also for some lovely little local shopping experiences. Should you take my advice, then you could also visit Carreg Cennen Castle en route. Set in the countryside on a rocky crag near Llandeilo, it's a paradigm of what a mediaeval castle ought to be and its rich history is almost a précis of the history of our island nation. The farm at its foot is famous for the Longhorn cattle bred there and has a nice tea room to boot.

For details, see

[www.carregcennencastle.com](http://www.carregcennencastle.com)

Of course, the region also has some lovely coastlines and coastal towns such as Tenby, Fishguard and Pembroke. Should you fancy leaving the car behind, then an 'Explore West Wales' Ticket gives you a day's travel by train for just £15 for adults and £7.50 for

children (plus, of course, the usual railcard discounts on top) See [www.tfw.wales](http://www.tfw.wales) for details. Finally, if you're really feeling adventurous, then, during the Summer months, it's possible to take a day trip to Ireland from Fishguard port, with the added chance of stocking up on those Duty Frees!

See [www.stenaline.co.uk](http://www.stenaline.co.uk).

Meanwhile, don't forget that booking is now open for the RHS Malvern Spring Festival, which this year runs from the 7th till the 10th of May – and that's next month already!

See [www.rhsmalvern.co.uk](http://www.rhsmalvern.co.uk) for ticket prices, etc.

Booking is now also open for the 2026 season of the Longborough Festival Opera up in the Cotswolds, near Stow, with an eclectic mix of Handel, Verdi and Wagner on offer.

See [www.lfo.org.uk](http://www.lfo.org.uk) for full details.

Also, we receive news of an addition to the Cotswolds Vintage Weekend on 11th and 12th April at the Gloucestershire and Warwickshire Steam Railway, based at Toddington. They have enticed out of retirement one of the few surviving examples of a 1930s vintage diesel railcar of the type which used to run express services from Birmingham to Cardiff via Toddington from 1934. Because of their distinctive chocolate and yellow livery, the class became known as the Flying Bananas. (Since Hitler's Germany had a similar express diesel service running between Berlin and Hamburg, called the Flying Hamburger, one presumes the two services were just chips off the same block.)

For further details, go to

[www.gwsr.com](http://www.gwsr.com)

To Hell with Trump!

Spring is here, let's enjoy it!

## Thoughts from the Snug

### Gardening Failures - Not always a sad story!

Spring and early summer prompt discussion about gardening. The QI Elves (BBC QI programme) say the British subjects who are happiest in their work are gardeners and florists. We have a Snug regular who enjoys floristry and she attests to that, adding: "It's jolly hard work! What every gardener needs is a cast-iron back with a hinge in it." This prompted a Chinese proverb from another: "You should plant no more garden than your wife can hoe." Ignoring this slightly misogynistic

tone, the discussion moved on to what, and when, to plant out. "Perennials are the ones that grow like weeds, biennials are the ones that die this year instead next, and hardy annuals are the ones that never come up at all." A fatalistic outlook but delivered with an honesty that encouraged another to confess he too had the miraculous ability to turn perennials into annuals. Failure in gardening is par for the course. You are not really entering the spirit of adventurous horticulture without taking some risks.

For example, when is the best time to take cuttings? When nobody is looking! What emerged from our deliberations was that there are two types of garden fanatics. The first are those who love to toil the soil, the second are those who appreciate that toil by others. One thing we all agreed upon is that almost anyone who really loves gardening has hardly ever been guilty of a serious crime. Perhaps that's because most serious gardeners are somewhat mature, or even elderly.

Best advice for an elderly gardener? If the plant is slow-growing and you are getting older, you may want to consider buying a larger plant.

Buddy Bach

P.S. For Sale: one Bonsai Tree. Large. £90. Please contact the editor if interested.

Who said failure can't be fun!



# The Order of the Garter Ceremony - I was there!

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



*Her late Majesty, the Queen, and His Royal Highness, the Duke of Edinburgh, in their Garter ceremony attire.*

*My wife and I were greatly honoured to be presented to them quite recently on a private occasion at Windsor*

The Foundation of the Most Noble Order of the Garter was by King Edward III in 1348. It served a double purpose to bring together the sovereign and twenty-five of the outstanding military leaders of the country in the 14th century. Edward III was inspired by the ancient tradition of King Arthur and The Knights of the Round Table. King Edward's sword of state can still be seen today in the ambulatory of St. George's Chapel. As can William Shakespeare's initials, with the date '1606'. Shakespeare even wrote a sonnet about the Order of the Garter. Certainly, he knew Windsor well, for in 'The Merry Wives of Windsor', he refers to the Garter Inn. This play was produced at Windsor for Queen Elizabeth I's amusement. It is said the Virgin Queen wished that Falstaff might fall in love, which was apparently the inspiration for Shakespeare's play. It is no doubt fitting that from the time of Edward III, all the kings and queens of England have placed themselves at the head of the Order, whose members pledge themselves to support the laws of God and of the realm and to stand up for all that is noble and true. Her late Majesty, the Queen, did this for us over the seventy years. Up to the 20th century, the choirs of St. George's Chapel were paid for singing at the Garter Services through the Lord Chamberlain's office. This payment was called Spur Money and it encouraged the boys to sing their best. In a book written a century ago by

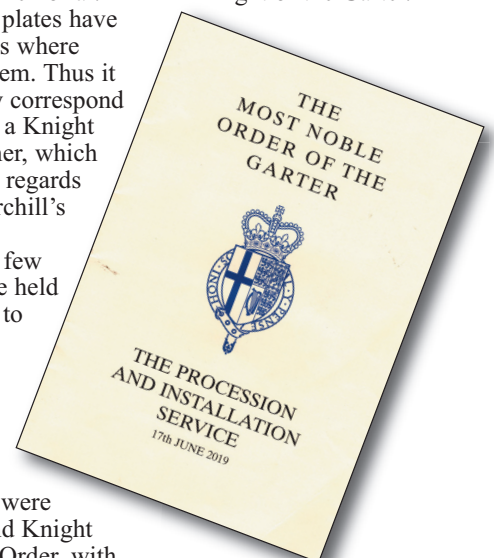
Russell Thorndike called 'Children of the Garter' about the choristers, Thorndike wrote that it was a shame when Spur Money was stopped due to the Naval Knights of Windsor. These naval knights used to live in the buildings below the castle walls, where St. George's School is now and where I spent five years as a boy chorister. In my first two years as a chorister, we practised before the services in a room with ancient choir stalls, on which many choristers had carved their initials and the red cross of St. George over the years. When the choir school practice room was moved to its present position near Horseshoe Cloister, Doc H (our choir master) forbid any more carvings, especially as our old practice choir stalls had been replaced by new ones. Other memories concern Sundays when the choristers were invited to tea before evensong by members of the clergy. These included an ancient Canon of Windsor, who with a twinkle in his eye would invite us to visit the vault in which King Charles I was buried, so that we might observe him carrying his head under his arm! Upon this, the Canon's wife would smile sweetly and remind us that it is now time for evensong and that she would not wish to keep Sir William Harris our choir master waiting. Another aspect of life at Windsor which struck me later was how little we were taught in our history lessons about the history of Windsor Castle. Though I do remember that our

history date list which we had to learn by heart included both the Wars of the Spanish Succession, the Battle of Blenheim (1704) and the Battle of Waterloo (1814). Today, if you visit the Castle and its famous Waterloo Chamber, you will see the busts of the Duke of Marlborough and the Duke of Wellington, both with their quit rent standards. When Queen Anne received the news of the victory of Blenheim over Louis XIV's armies by John Churchill, 1st Duke of Marlborough, she was sitting at a window overlooking the North Terrace, which overlooks the Royal Park and St. George's School - the Royal Park where we played our games of soccer and cricket. Some of my memories about my time as a boy chorister can be found on The Churchill Foundation internet site which is primarily all about the life of that great man. After the Royals had gone, we choir boys made our way back to school and were happy to let off steam on the playground in a game called 'kick-the-can', also known in a certain royal circle as 'kick-a-tin'. Today, the visual impact of the choir of St. George's Chapel with its high altar and the banners, helms and mantlings of the KG's and the splendid 15th century wood carvings of the stalls enhanced by the plates of gilded metal, on which are displayed the painted or enamelled coat of arms of the KG's. Originally, the function of the stall plate was not, as now, to indicate the occupant of a stall while he was alive but to be fixed to his stall after his death as a memorial. More recently, stall plates have been affixed in stalls where there is space for them. Thus it does not necessarily correspond with the position of a Knight of the Garter's banner, which is the situation with regards to Sir Winston Churchill's plate and banner. In the 20th century, few Garter services were held till 23rd April 1948 to celebrate the 600th anniversary of the Order by King George VI. This was when Princess Elizabeth and the Duke of Edinburgh were installed as Lady and Knight Companions of the Order, with



*Churchill's Garter stall plate*

thirteen new Garter Knights. They were then invested with the Garter riband and presented with their dark blue Garter robes and collar, which are adorned with the Cross of St. George, surrounded by the Garter motto on the left breast. Their robes also included a red velvet hood worn on the right shoulder. The robe is open at the right arm to give it freedom of movement, as traditionally the right arm is the sword-bearing arm. Over their robes, they wear the Collar of the Order on which is suspended the emblem of St. George and the dragon. Their hats are velvet bonnets with swaying ostrich plumes. The robes look to be very heavily embroidered with fine detailing. When Prince William was installed, he became the 1000th Knight of the Garter.



# Escape from Mariupol, Ukraine: Part Six

## Prologue to Escape, Goodbye to Illusions

Denys Bielov



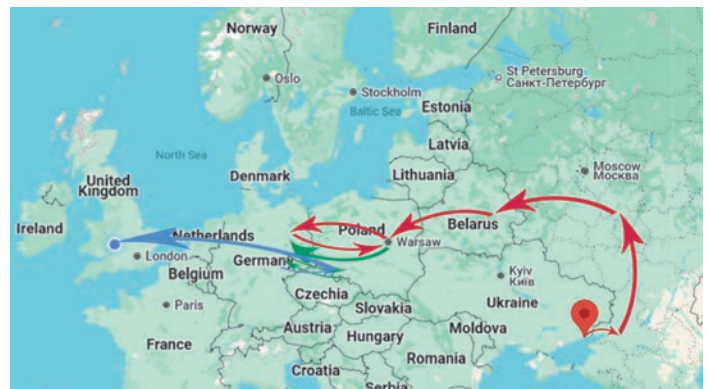
### Warning: The following describes details you may find disturbing

My mother died on 8th October 2022, and darkness and desolation descended on me. It was very hard to find any meaning to life. Mum was my closest and dearest person to me. Encircled by enemies, traitors and madmen, we supported each other, charged with faith in the victory of goodness and justice over evil. I could not come to terms with this terrible loss for a long time. It was unclear how to live, for what and why to live? Remember what I said about that man on the bicycle screaming a horrible scream? At the time, I just thought that man had gone mad. But after my Mum died, I understood, because now I was in the same position. I felt that I had lost everything that I had lived for and cherished, and nothing good was going to happen. I'll be honest, I had suicidal thoughts during those terrible days. It was as if you were standing on the edge of the abyss, and around you, a vast darkness without the slightest ray of hope. To take a step forward, to plunge seemed the easiest way to quickly end all this unbearable torment ... But somehow, I stopped, as if some fuse had gone off inside. Just on autopilot, like a zombie, I started to deal with the funeral and some household issues.

My relatives from Russia helped me collect money for the funeral. My Ukrainian friends, with whom I was in contact, found out about my tragedy and supported and comforted me in every possible way, for which I am very grateful. Though at that moment, I could hardly hear their voices. It was like after a blast wave: your friends shout at you, looking you straight in the face, but you cannot hear them, because there is a deafening noise in your ears. So, inside me, everything was buzzing and hurting from the cruelty, hypocrisy, injustice and hopelessness around me. I prayed a lot for my Mum and Dad's souls, in the mornings and evenings, during the day. I will pray for them for the rest of my life. It helps me feel that my parents are still with me. After a few weeks, the despair subsided, and I desperately searched for a new meaning of life, clinging to every opportunity to busy myself with something creative. I began to help the elderly people I knew. I helped them dig their vegetable gardens, trim trees, for a small payment, and I even learnt how to lay laminate flooring. I started secretly to develop a project for the burnt-down building of the children's club in our neighbourhood, and it helped me a lot. One of my friends, Tanya, supported me very actively from

the very first days of the Russian invasion. We had studied Architecture together at the construction academy. I graduated in 2009, and she in 2010. After that, we collaborated for ten years, creating many wonderful house and interior designs, working remotely together online. She lived in Kyiv (capital of Ukraine), and I lived in Mariupol. She, her husband and children had moved from Kyiv to Great Britain at the start of the invasion. She told me how great it was in the UK and how wonderful the people were, saying how much I would like it there. At the time, sitting deep behind the lines of occupation, I had no idea how it was possible to get to Britain. I realised that I had done my duty to my mother and was with her to the end. And now I had to get on with my life. But I had no international passport, no British visa, no escape plan. My English was very poor. We learnt English at school and a little at the academy. It would take a lot of time, effort and money to be ready for such a big and dangerous trip. What if something went wrong? It was scary. Meanwhile, Tanya gave me a link to online English courses for refugees. I grabbed these courses enthusiastically. It was like a breath of fresh air among the madness that was continuing in Mariupol. I joined the lessons to distract my mind from mental torment. Fortunately, my friend's wife's mother, who stayed in Mariupol, like many other pensioners, had restored WiFi at home. I travelled to her with my laptop for lessons, and at the same time, I helped her with some things around the house and the vegetable garden. But

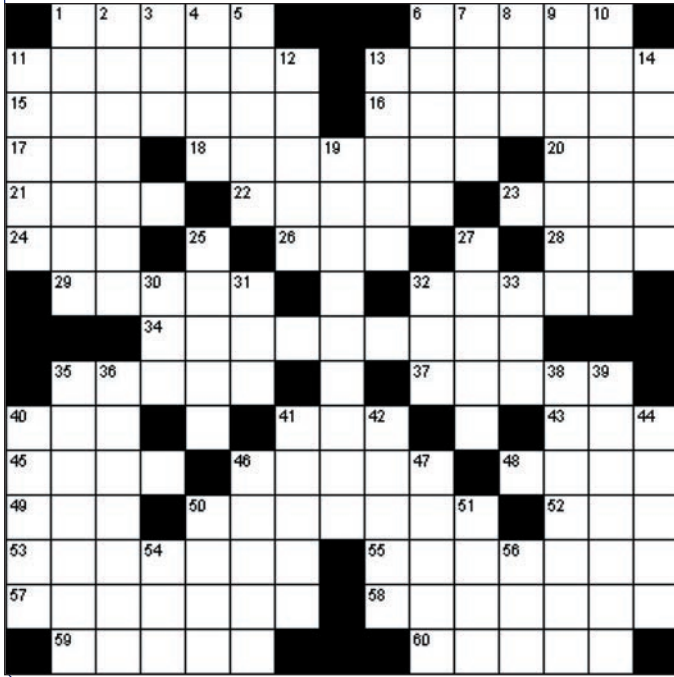
the thought of travelling to Great Britain still seemed unattainable. At the end of 2022, there was talk of a Ukrainian counter-offensive. Considering that this autumn we had managed to free huge territories in the Kherson and Kharkiv regions, this was my last hope that Mariupol would soon be liberated. In the spring and summer of 2023, I donated from my savings to purchase equipment (e.g. mine-clearing devices) for the Armed Forces of Ukraine and to the military volunteers. But by the end of the summer, it was clear that our counter-offensive had failed. The enemy was very heavily entrenched and prepared. We lost a lot of people and forces. The last ray of hope for me was gone, and darkness once more descended. But this time I did not fall into despair. I said goodbye to my illusions, gathered my thoughts, what next? If the Russian occupiers trace my donations and pro-Ukrainian position, I will be in very big trouble. They were already actively looking for Ukrainians who had not betrayed their Motherland. I decided that I had to get out. Otherwise, my life could end very badly. I wrote to Tanya: "Tanya, what do you think? Do I still have a chance to get out? I feel that I'm starting to smell fried ...". From that moment on, Tanya took my escape plan very seriously. I wanted to escape to the territory controlled by Ukraine, but Tanya insisted that I must go to the UK. I was frightened by the difficulty of the journey, but realised that this might be my last chance. Tanya was a bright light in the darkness and hopelessness I was in.



*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. Stop
- 11. Glowing
- 15. Set of necessary skills/talents
- 16. Pelvis
- 18. Whim
- 21. Fare or tariff
- 22. Darlings
- 24. South southeast
- 26. Seat oneself
- 28. Golf-ball support
- 29. An analytic literary composition
- 32. Urns
- 35. Assemble
- 37. Clever and facetious
- 40. Faster Than Light
- 41. A swindle
- 45. Wild African sheep
- 46. Blisters
- 48. 10 cent coin
- 49. It is (poetic)
- 50. Pried
- 52. Scottish for "Uncle"
- 53. A part of a broadcast serial
- 55. Caused sorrow
- 57. Instruments
- 58. Women's tops that fasten behind the back
- 59. Writing tables
- 6. Sea eagles
- 13. Wound
- 17. Watch chain
- 20. Be able to
- 23. Gashes
- 27. Anxiety
- 34. Deletions
- 43. Stammer
- 60. Category

### Down

- 1. Last car on a freight train
- 2. Consumables
- 3. Be unwell
- 4. A Levantine ketch
- 5. Inward
- 6. Long narrative poems of heroism
- 7. Braided cord
- 8. An elegantly dressed man
- 9. Declaim
- 10. Anagram of "Sateens"
- 11. Floating log platforms
- 12. Kinds or sorts
- 13. Garment of the upper body
- 14. Compact
- 19. Deluge
- 25. Cardigan
- 30. Drunkard
- 31. Bark in a high-pitched tone
- 32. Oath
- 33. Supersonic transport
- 35. Decorated with long colored bands
- 36. Evasive
- 38. Robbers
- 39. Whines
- 40. Destined
- 41. Arrives
- 42. Horse sound
- 44. Unwanted plants
- 46. The borders of an object
- 47. Ice pinnacle
- 50. Athlete
- 51. An aromatic Old World herb
- 54. Female sibling
- 56. 7th letter of the Greek alphabet

## Sudoku

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

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

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

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

## Easter Wordsearch

J	P	D	J	M	F	K	R	P	C	O	R	I	S	E	N	A	B	K	K	
A	K	G	M	P	S	K	Y	W	K	H	F	S	C	V	E	I	S	G	G	
O	T	A	B	U	Y	A	O	O	L	Q	O	R	O	D	H	N	R	N	X	
R	D	M	S	L	D	N	A	E	W	B	O	C	I	L	O	A	I	V	S	
S	E	E	T	R	I	C	N	I	E	G	G	S	O	I	D	R	H	A	X	
A	J	S	I	C	J	A	I	U	X	R	G	Z	T	L	P	I	R	V	A	
L	S	H	U	X	H	U	T	N	B	O	G	A	P	S	A	S	E	L	H	
V	T	O	Y	R	T	I	Z	N	O	H	R	D	O	H	K	T	W	R	S	
A	H	C	N	U	R	B	C	D	O	O	V	N	P	W	Z	K	E	Y	S	
T	A	U	R	O	B	E	F	K	C	S	T	V	I	C	H	U	R	C	H	E
I	M	J	S	R	F	R	C	E	S	Y	T	F	L	H	X	X	O	H	F	
O	P	C	P	V	I	G	D	T	K	C	N	O	A	V	X	T	M	S	I	
N	A	A	E	D	A	W	O	Y	I	S	A	P	C	H	G	J	K	S	L	
V	H	G	A	Q	F	P	E	D	N	O	P	Z	Z	R	J	N	T	L	W	
M	Z	Y	R	L	R	Z	Q	E	G	Y	N	J	O	P	F	T	T	U	E	
V	T	S	E	V	E	I	H	T	N	A	T	S	W	I	E	O	H	F	N	
C	V	L	J	P	T	I	U	S	P	P	S	Y	D	S	H	N	R	P	P	
K	N	A	A	X	D	S	N	A	E	B	Y	L	L	E	J	O	I	O	I	
P	J	G	B	M	N	L	S	P	U	T	R	A	T	I	O	N	S	T	R	
K	Z	J	C	V	B	F	E	N	E	R	Y	C	F	O	N	O	M	I	S	

- BRUNCH
- BUNNY
- CHICKS
- CHOCOLATE
- CHURCH
- COTTONTAIL
- DECORATIONS
- EGGS
- GAMES
- GOOD FRIDAY
- HOT CROSS BUN
- JELLY BEANS
- JESUS
- LAMB
- NEWLIFE
- RESURRECTION
- RISEN
- SALVATION
- SIMON OF
- CYRENE
- SOLDIERS
- SON OF GOD
- SPEAR
- SPRING
- STONE
- THIEVES

## Brainteasers

- 1) What's in the middle of March and April but never at the beginning or end?
- 2) It has keys, but no locks. It has space, but no room. You can enter, but can't go inside. What is it?
- 3) Where is the only place where today comes before yesterday?

- 3) The dictionary
- 2) A keyboard
- 1) The letter "R"

# Poets' Corner

## A Shropshire Lad

### LVII

You smile upon your friend to-day,  
 To-day his ills are over;  
 You hearken to the lover's say,  
 And happy is the lover.  
 'Tis late to hearken, late to smile,  
 But better late than never:  
 I shall have lived a little while  
 Before I die for ever.

### LVIII

When I came last to Ludlow  
 Amidst the moonlight pale,  
 Two friends kept step beside me,  
 Two honest lads and hale.  
 Now Dick lies long in the churchyard,  
 And Ned lies long in jail,  
 And I come home to Ludlow  
 Amidst the moonlight pale.

### LIX - The Isle Of Portland

The star-filled seas are smooth to-night  
 From France to England strown;  
 Black towers above the Portland light  
 The felon-quarried stone.  
 On yonder island, not to rise,  
 Never to stir forth free,  
 Far from his folk a dead lad lies  
 That once was friends with me.  
 Lie you easy, dream you light,  
 And sleep you fast for aye;  
 And luckier may you find the night  
 Than ever you found the day.

A. E. Housman 1859-1936

# Quiz!

- 1) Who wrote The Tale of Peter Rabbit?
- 2) How many Easter eggs are bought and consumed in the UK each year?
- 3) Which chocolatier produced the first hollow chocolate Easter egg?
- 4) Which country does Easter Island belong to?
- 5) What goes on top of a simnel cake?
- 6) What dried fruit is in hot cross buns?
- 7) Which country did the idea of the Easter bunny originate from?
- 8) On what date in April is St George's Day?
- 9) 'April is the cruellest month', is the first line of which T.S. Eliot poem?
- 10) In a TV prank from 1957, the BBC broadcast Swiss farmers picking freshly-grown what?
- 11) Who wrote 'Oh to be in England now that April's there'?
- 12) What is the gem associated with April?
- 13) In 1581, which English sailor, privateer and explorer was knighted by Queen Elizabeth I following his circumnavigation of the world?
- 14) In April 1897, Physicist J.J. Thompson announced his discovery of which tiny, negatively-charged sub-atomic particle?
- 15) What professional sport begins its season in April in the US and Canada?
- 16) When is National Pillow Fight Day?
- 17) What famous car did Ford unveil in April of 1964?
- 18) What meteor shower happens over ten days in April running from approximately the 16th to 26th of April?

Answers: 1) Beatrix Potter 2) 80 million 3) JS Fry & Sons 4) Chile 5) Marzipan 6) Raisins 7) Germany 8) 23rd April 9) The Waste Land 10) Spaghetti 11) Robert Browning 12) Diamond 13) Francis Drake 14) Electron 15) Baseball 16) 6th April 17) The Mustang 18) The Leonids

## Did You Know?

The first chocolate Easter eggs were produced in France and Germany in the early 19th century. John Cadbury produced 'French eating chocolate' as early as 1842, but - due to business preoccupations and difficulties getting chocolate to flow into the moulds - the first Cadbury Easter egg wasn't produced until 1875.

## Famous April Birthdays!

- Sir Alec Guinness (2nd April 1914)
- Isambard Kingdom Brunel (9th April 1806)
- Charlotte Bronte (21st April 1816)
- William Shakespeare (23rd April 1564)

## Word of the Month 'Hirsute'

Definition: To be covered with large amounts of hair.

## March Answers



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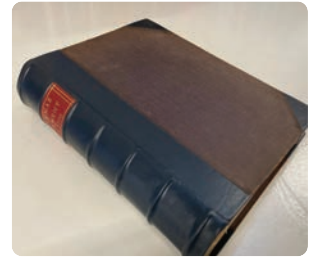
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**Copy Deadline for**

**May Issue - 20th April 2026**

# Severn Stoke & Croome D'abitot News

## Happenings in Severn Stoke and Environs

John Henderson

### St. Denys' Church, Severn Stoke

Thanks to all those who helped to put the Church furnishings in place following its 'up-lifting' because of a flood threat earlier this year. We are ready for our twice-monthly services on the first and third Sundays at 10.30 a.m. to welcome those who need to gather their thoughts in these uncertain and unstable times. The Church itself has seen such times before in its nine-hundred-year history, and it has always provided a place of calm for prayer and introspection. Use the small Chancel door; it is always open from 9.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. every day. Please visit our Parish Church. We appreciate that there may still be hurdles to be overcome with final approvals, access, contracts and sourcing materials to enable

construction of the Flood Bund to get underway, but we plead for all parties to work together to see this long-awaited project successfully completed.

### Friends of St Denys' Severn Stoke - Raising funds to modernise the church!

With the anticipated construction of the Flood Bund, the Friends are hopeful that modernisation of the Church building can become a reality and we are beginning again to raise funds towards this end, as well as for maintaining the Building. *Our forthcoming event will be the Worcester Choir to entertain us in the Church at 7.30 p.m. on Saturday 16th May, offered with toe-tapping verve and light refreshments. Please make a note in your diaries and look out for further publicity. We look forward to seeing you.*



## New employment laws

New measures to provide additional protections and rights for employees came into being in April 2026 following the introduction of The Employment Rights Act which became law in December 2025. This legislation builds on and updates the existing Employment Rights Act of 1996. In the short term, the changes effect entitlement to Paternity Leave and Ordinary Parental leave & sick pay as follows:

### Paternity leave and Ordinary Parental leave

When you take time off because your partner's having a baby, adopting a child or having a baby through a surrogacy arrangement, you might be eligible for Paternity leave and Pay (although you might not get both leave and pay). On 6th April 2026, Paternity leave will become a 'day one right', allowing someone to give notice of leave from the first day of employment – currently someone must have worked for their employer for 26 weeks.

Ordinary parental leave in the UK is a statutory, unpaid right for employees with one year's service to take up to 18 weeks off per child (up to age 18) to care for them. It is usually taken in one-week blocks, limited to four weeks per year per child. This will also become a day one right – currently someone must have worked for their employer for a year to be eligible.

There are further changes to Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) rules. From 6th April 2026, this SSP will be paid from the first day of illness, instead of the fourth day as is currently the case. Additionally, the lower earnings limit will be removed – currently, workers must earn a minimum amount to be eligible for statutory sick pay.

A Fair Work Agency will be established on 7th April 2026, to bring together existing enforcement bodies, take on enforcement of other employment rights, such as holiday pay and statutory sick pay. It centralises enforcement of employment rights - including National Minimum Wage, statutory sick pay, holiday pay, and GLAA modern slavery functions - into a single body to protect workers and support compliant businesses.

Further changes brought in by the bill will take effect in the coming months.

*For further information and advice, please contact your local Citizens Advice South Worcestershire office on 01684 563611 or visit [www.citizensadvice.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk)*



### Spot & Shop March Winners

- |                       |                     |
|-----------------------|---------------------|
| 1) S Plant            | 5) Viv Moss         |
| 2) Barbara Washbourne | 6) Jane Machin      |
| 3) W Wanewright       | 7) Margaret Colloff |
| 4) J Phelps           |                     |

**Last month's answer: Serenity Roots**

### 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!

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**Kempsey Times closing date: 24th April 2026**

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# Camera Club



Above: 'Atlantic Puffin in Rain'  
by Aaron Dodd  
Right: 'Point of Impact'  
by Phil Morgan

Now that Spring seems to be with us (and the rain does seem to stop occasionally), we are trying to make the most of the greater opportunities to be out and about - and to take some photographs! As our formal season begins to wind down towards the AGM in May, there are still plenty of interesting events in April which you might find worth attending. April for the Camera Club commences on Wednesday 8th with another Members' Evening. On this occasion, the evening will consist of talks on their work by a number of members. The first half will see David Lowe take us through his preferred genres of photography, while the second half will allow some more of our recent recruits (Phil

Morgan, Angie Villers, Aaron Dodd, Cliff McFarlane & Kerry MacFarlane) to give us some insight into their interests. On the afternoon of Saturday 18th, we will be hosting our second Print competition of the season, at Defford Village Hall, with our good friend Aleks Gjika taking on the role of judge, and on Wednesday 22nd, our final meeting before the AGM will take the form of a talk by Vanda Ralevska, a photographer of note who has stated that her work embraces both landscape and emotion. We would be delighted to welcome anybody interested in the occasions listed above; please make contact via our website (<https://www.kempseycameraclub.uk/>), where you will also



find further details of our programme for the post-AGM 'summer' season. In the meantime, we hope that you will take pleasure from these two quite different natural history images, 'Atlantic Puffin In Rain' by Aaron Dodd and 'Point Of Impact' by Phil

Morgan, the former one of five top placed images and the latter one of five commended images, respectively, in our second 'Open' projected image competition of the season held in late February.

Malcolm A Hay  
Secretary

## Worcestershire Source

Sam Williams



'Oh you're from England? Where exactly?' It's the question that anybody outside of a big city hates when meeting somebody from outside the country, and one I've had to field many times. Usually, I would just give the answer 'Birmingham' or, if they still didn't know that, say 'it's somewhere in the middle'. But the answer which garnered the most surprising


reactions was the simplest one - Worcestershire! Considering I've even had British people give me a vacant look when I tell them my home town, it was initially confusing to hear recognition from those from as far as Indonesia or Canada. What could a small, fairly quiet corner of Britain offer up to the rest of the world? One of the world's most popular sauces of course! I was unaware of the global reach that the humble Worcestershire sauce had achieved. It is a staple of cuisines varying from Japanese to Mexican, and a vital ingredient of cocktails like a Bloody Mary. I have been startled multiple times across the world by the iconic orange label staring back at me from a supermarket shelf, or across a cafe.



In some ways, it gives me a strange sense of pride- that my small county, a place so often forgotten, has created something so globally recognised. When I lived on the other side of the world, in Hong Kong, that small bottle provided me with a reminder of where I'm from.

In such an unfamiliar city, it was nice to feel that home wasn't so far away. Although in my opinion the most interesting, and indeed enjoyable, part of it all is hearing everyone's questionable attempts to pronounce the word 'Worcestershire'.


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If you haven't explored it yet, the new Severn Stoke and Croome d'Abitot Parish Council website: <https://severnstokeandcroomedabitot-pc.gov.uk/> is an easy way to stay informed, get involved, and access local services. Whether you want to check the date of the next meeting, follow a planning issue, or find contact details - it is a good starting point. What you'll find on our website: council meetings & minutes; parish councillors and contact information; planning applications; links to other councils where you can report things like potholes (report to county council) or flytipping (report to district council); news and local information including the latest Environment Agency flood bund updates; and reports & policies

offering full transparency about how the council operates and how public funds are used. Tell us if there is something that you would like to see added! Scan the QR code under our meeting dates and add a quick link to our website on your mobile phone.

*Next meeting:*  
Annual Meeting of the Parish Council, 20th May 2026, 7.30pm at the SOQ meeting room, Croome National Trust Visitor Centre.  
Parish Clerk, Lisa Stevens,  
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## 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.  
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### 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



## Kempsey WI

Good and bad memories of the Sixties were recalled when Philip Bowen spoke to Kempsey WI members about the changes to traditional ways of life during that decade. He introduced his talk by questioning whether the 60s were really that revolutionary, suggesting many of the experiences of those years represented repeated or recycled ideas from earlier times. Then he took members through some of the key moments of the 60s, including music, broadcasting, transport, architecture and scandals. The first year of the decade gave an indication of the changes to come. The end of National Service, the farthing ceasing to be legal tender, the first nuclear submarine, black plastic bin bags were introduced, and the 'Imperial News' section of The Times changing its name to 'Overseas News'. Many members had vivid memories of the Big Freeze of 1962/63, when temperatures did not climb above freezing day or night for 64 days in a row. Broadcasting and publishing saw a revolution, with hard-hitting satire in 'That Was the Week That Was' and 'Private Eye', and the start of BBC 2, which became the first colour TV channel in Europe. The Beatles dominated music and played in a Tenbury Wells pub

in 1963 despite having had two no 1 hits by then, after manager Brian Epstein decided they must honour summer tour dates booked before their fame skyrocketed. Philip's 'vandals' section of the talk included Beeching's slashing of the rail network and the demolition of many fine buildings, to be replaced by brutalist towers and ring roads. Laws passed during the 60s focused on education, health and morality, including the Abortion Act, Race Relations Act, Divorce Act and legalisation of the Pill and homosexuality. Politicians misbehaving were recalled in the Profumo Affair, and when an extremely drunk Foreign Secretary George Brown asked the Cardinal Bishop of Lima to dance to the Peruvian National Anthem during an official visit. Denise White thanked Philip for a very thought-provoking speech.

### In other news ...

It was craft all the way for Kempsey WI in March. At the meeting, Julie and Christine introduced members to the therapeutic art of ink stamping. Using only a few stamps and inks, the ladies learned how to build up quite complex designs to use on cards or (as on the day) a notepad cover. Having a cuppa and biscuit at the same time made it a very social



afternoon. Two members modelled Easter bonnets at competition time - Marian won the points. WI members, and many other crafters from the Kempsey Community (groups and individuals), have knitted or crocheted daffodils for a "Cascade" which will be displayed in St Mary's church at the inaugural village daffodil weekend. The WI is both amazed and thrilled by the response to their call for crafted blooms. Hundreds of "flowers" were subsequently assembled into shape by a WI team led by

Julie. The meeting also discussed the complete lack of extra secondary health care provision in the published plans for the new Wychavon Town. Members are very concerned that already stretched local healthcare will be totally overwhelmed when the town is built.

*The next meeting will be on Monday 20th April 2pm at Kempsey Youth Centre, when members will hear about the Fleece Inn, Bretforton and asparagus.*

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# Kempsey Times



## Out and about at the Lawns!

After all the gloom and rain, these blue sky days have been very welcome.

Thank you to the many volunteers and the residents' family members who assist our Wednesday Walks for Wellbeing. Their support means that every resident who would like to take part can. Most recently, it was a walk to Kempsey Church to admire the stained glass windows – just glorious with the sun streaming through. Residents are currently busy putting together their daffodil collage for the Church daffodil event. We have also made cards for Mother's Day and are doing papiermache craft, making and decorating bowls for residents' rooms. A huge thank you to singer Clive Webb for his continued voluntary support. Every Friday, he comes to The Lawns to sing and play his guitar. Also, thank you to our volunteers, Heather and Sarah, who are always on hand on a Wednesday to assist on our walks, and then they run our ever-popular poetry and prose group every other Wednesday afternoon. Our next big event is a new type of entertainment, with AG Magicians, the Masters of Mischief, Comedy and Magic coming in to entertain residents.



Enjoying Springtime at The Lawns

Plus, we have singer Ian Hardman coming in on 16th April. We are having an Easter holy communion service in our lounge on 2nd April and lots of Easter craft, including our bonnet competition, in the run-up to Easter. Then, towards the end of the month, we are starting our armchair travel adventures. First stop: Paris. We shall be looking at the sights, brushing up on our best Franglais and enjoying French patisserie. 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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