

Kempsey Times



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

Issue 21

December 2025/January 2026

FREE



'Bleak Midwinter' by Peter Hodge

Christmas is coming and this makes me very happy. This is a great time of the year to enjoy with family and friends. Children, of course, find this time of the year very special, and Father Christmas is most important. The decorations in the town look very nice and give a feeling of welcome and joy.

The year has been filled with turbulence of one kind and another so maybe it's best to put these matters aside for a while and celebrate Christmas. This is a religious festival and a time to reflect and remember what this time of year is really all about.

We have lots to be thankful for, so let's enjoy ourselves. The New Year will bring challenges and opportunities for all of us. Above all, let's hope that the wars stop! A lot of negotiations are going on so we may start the year in a positive way.

We have had a very good year. We launched the Whittington and Broadway Times, and won a major international award for a book that we designed and produced. We have established our bookbinding section and are in the process of expanding our premises. We still have lots to do with our newspapers, including merging 'Villager' magazine with the Pershore Times and building on the good start we have made in Broadway. We have also introduced three months of free

advertising for new businesses in all of our newspapers. Very exciting times ahead!



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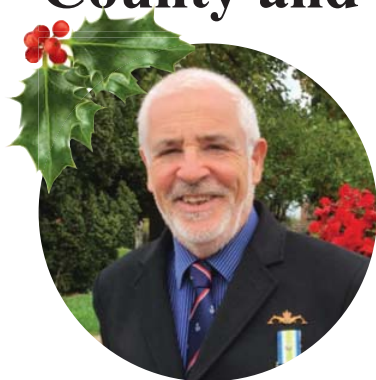
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County and District Report

Councillor Martin Allen



This year it feels like Christmas has arrived early for me. Four years back, I started campaigning so that serving members of our armed forces and veterans could ride commercial buses for free – similar to those who hold a pensioners' bus pass. Even though this plan was initially approved by the previous County Council administration in 2022, they did not implement it. Just before Remembrance Sunday, I brought my motion back to the council

and, this time, every councillor present supported it.

Worcestershire is taking the lead in honouring our veterans in a meaningful way, beyond simply purchasing a poppy. Beginning on 6th April 2026, the programme will mirror the pensioners' bus pass scheme. Since most veterans already qualify for that pass because of their age, I do not expect many new applicants. Nevertheless, for veterans living with PTSD or injuries from their service, this initiative could have a real impact. I can't think of a better holiday gift.

Free scrabble in the library



Upton's library scrabbles onwards and upwards; it now has three brand new Scrabble board games. Staff in Upton's library wanted to help bring more residents together, so they approached me for help.

I have found the funding for three sets, and now, every Friday between 11:00am and 1:00pm,

you can come along and play Scrabble. It's free, anyone can go and there is complimentary tea, coffee and biscuits! The event offers the opportunity to chat and make new friends. There is no pressure to play; if people just want to pop along for a brew and natter, that's great.

County Council News

Recent developments have brought increased activity to the County Council. Following the resignation of a councillor in Bromsgrove, Sam Ammar was elected to fill the vacancy. I extend my best wishes to her as she begins her term. Her inaugural council meeting took place one week after her election and proved to be a baptism of fire, offering a demanding and long introduction to council proceedings. During this meeting, the financial challenges facing the County Council were clearly highlighted: the council is experiencing significant fiscal constraints and has, I believe, exhausted its available credit options. To put it bluntly, it has maxed out on the credit cards.

The new administration proposed eliminating plans for a new school along with other cost-cutting measures, but these proposals were rejected by the full council vote. Moving forward, I anticipate, and urge, a series of discussions between administrative and opposition members to establish a pragmatic path. With the budget deadline approaching in February 2026, it will be essential for senior councillors from all sides to reach constructive compromises and set aside personal differences for the benefit of Worcestershire residents. I remain committed to fostering effective dialogue and, most importantly, to listening to all perspectives.

Paving the way in Kempsey

For too long, I have been aware that numerous residents of Kempsey have expressed the need for the muddy footpath from Windmill Lane and Aston Close to the town's sole shop to be converted into a proper pavement. Securing funding for this project has been a lengthy process, and, while my intention was to have the council complete the entire path up to Windmill Lane in one phase, resources were insufficient to achieve this. When the County Council offered to address the first section from the shop to Aston Close, I seized the opportunity. I remain committed to advocating on your behalf for the completion of the remaining segment from Aston Close to Windmill Lane and will provide further updates as information becomes available.



Upton's young readers are stars!



Earlier this year, Upton Library wrapped up its summer reading challenge with strong participation from children. I had the honour of presenting medals to recognise their achievements. The library is a key asset for the local community, especially for young people, and efforts that encourage youth literacy are incredibly valuable. Inspiring a love of books in younger generations is essential to keeping our libraries vibrant and introducing children to the wonders of reading. Building on these successes, the library now offers several regular programs.

The Lego Club, aimed at children aged 4–10, is held every Saturday morning at 11:00am. Children under five can join a Bounce and Rhyme session each Wednesday at 10:30am, as well as enjoy Story Time every Friday at 2:15pm. No advance booking is necessary – families can just turn up at the scheduled times. To learn more about these programmes or to find details about special activities during school holidays, visit the Upton Library Facebook page: www.facebook.com/UptonUponSevernLibrary

And finally ...

"Just one more mince pie, please – and don't forget the cheese board!" That phrase will probably haunt me as January rolls around. But let's not worry about that right now. It's time to savour the moment. Wishing you all a fantastic Christmas – you truly deserve it. Life's not always fair or easy, but it does offer

moments of beauty and happiness. I hope the coming year brings you laughter, the warmth of loved ones, and many reasons to feel hopeful. Here's to enjoying this festive season to the fullest, and to fresh starts in the new year. As ever, I'm here if you need me.

Martin Allen

A few words from... Dame Harriett Baldwin MP

Backing Worcestershire Parkway Expansion

Dame Harriett Baldwin MP has called for the County Council not to abandon plans to expand the Worcestershire Parkway train station car park. The station was opened to customers in 2019 and is performing well ahead of expectations, and the car park operates at full capacity during weekdays. Worcestershire County Council and Great Western Railways have stalled plans to expand the car park as GWR moves into public ownership. This decision has been compounded by the council's failure to support expansion plans at Pershore station, where Wychavon District Council was aiming to build a 250-space car park.

"I can't for the life of me understand why Worcestershire County Council and GWR would not want to move heaven and earth to expand this car park," said Dame Harriett. "It's already full at times and it is right in the area where housing growth is



planned. It must be a lucrative earner as it's so popular and could make money for years to come. In parallel, I have been supporting the ambitious plans of Wychavon District Council to expand the car parking at Pershore train station, which would allow more people to board trains to and from London, Hereford and the South East. I'm an enthusiastic supporter of public transport and getting more people onto trains and buses, and it's good the X50 bus now stops at Parkway every half hour, but drivers can be put off if they can't leave their car in a well-designed car park."

Cornflower Club

We are having a break from the club until January. Our first meeting is on Wednesday 14th January at 2.30 until 4.30 in the Parish hall, Kempsey.

We would love to welcome some new people and if you are a lady or gentleman over 60 years of age, it would be lovely to see you. We have a varied programme,

all arranged by Sally, who does a marvelous job of finding people to come and speak, show slides and entertain us with music. We meet up with friends to have a chat and enjoy a cup of tea and biscuits. Please, come and join us. You would be most welcome.

Sally Linsey 01905 820476

Julia Grant 01905 820138

Worcester Wheels

Worcester Wheels is working with Age UK Wyvern to recruit Social Volunteer Drivers in the villages who could offer a lift to take socially isolated and lonely residents to local social events and activity groups. Fuel costs will be reimbursed.

Please contact 01905 450654 or email enquiries@worcesterwheels.org.uk for more information.



Upton Community Care

Upton Community Care is working with Age UK Wyvern to broaden our service to support Mental Health and Wellbeing by offering lifts to local social events. We therefore need more volunteer drivers to help with local, short distance journeys. Fuel costs will be reimbursed.

To find out more about this please contact us on 01684 593633 or email: uccoffice@uptoncommunitycare.co.uk



Preparing your property for Winter



Five steps to help prevent insurance claims during the Winter months.

As the temperature drops, conditions worsen, and the winter weather sets in, now is the perfect time to make sure your home or business is ready. A little preparation can go a long way towards preventing costly damage and avoiding the stress of a claim during the winter period.

Check your roof and gutters

Clear away any leaves and debris, check for loose roof tiles, and make sure your gutters and drains are flowing freely. Blockages can quickly lead to leaks and water damage to your property when heavy rain or snow arrives. Note - flat roofs are particularly susceptible to wear and tear.

Protect your pipes

Burst pipes are a very common winter problem, so insulating all pipes that are exposed to the low temperatures is a must.

Service your heating system

Well-maintained boilers and radiators not only run more



efficiently – saving you money – but they also reduce the risk of breakdowns when you need them the most.

Secure outdoor areas

Checking fences, trimming trees, and storing garden furniture safely can reduce damage caused by high winds.

Keep vigilant of burglars

With darker nights, make sure you keep your property secure using window locks. Keep valuables hidden and consider the benefits of PRI lighting, CCTV, and intruder alarms.

While good insurance provides peace of mind, prevention is the best protection.

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From the Parish Council

Parish Councillors and volunteers gear up to clear waste

Community spirit was on full display in Kempsey as Cllr Chris Waller led a determined team, including our Cllrs Russ Varley and Rob Gardener, with our Community Builder, Cathy Garner, and local residents in tackling the rubbish dumped at the hard standing at Pixham Ferry Lane. Drawing on his former expertise, the Chair of the Council donned full Hazmat protective clothing to safely deal with the hazardous waste amongst the rubbish. Their hard work and commitment turned what could have been a daunting task into an example of civic responsibility, with volunteers giving up their time to restore safety and cleanliness to the space. The clearance not only removed dangerous materials but also highlighted the strength of collaboration between your councillors and the wider public in protecting the environment and well-being of the community. On day two, the effort was further strengthened by the coordinated support of the

Lengthsman team and Malvern Hills District Council, showing what can be accomplished when our community pulls together.

Your Parish Council

Kempsey Parish Councillors are elected representatives of the community. They are unpaid volunteers who give up their time, and sometimes considerable amounts of their time, to work for the benefit of the community. The role of the Chairman is to lead the Council and to chair legally-compliant meetings where the Council collectively and democratically makes decisions. The Council follows comprehensive procedural and financial rules. The role of the Clerk as Executive Officer is to implement the decisions of the Council. With limited resources, the Clerk relies heavily on Councillors for implementing the Council's decisions whilst, as Responsible Financial Officer, maintaining overall financial control. KPC's accounts are audited independently by two different auditors each year. KPC has an excellent audit record going back over many years.



The audit process includes publication of the Council's accounts as required by law. The Council Chairman, Vice Chairman and Chairs of the various committees are all elected in May every year. The current Chairman, Dr Chris Waller, has been re-elected unopposed seven times by fellow Councillors. Councils last for four years. The next Council election will be in April 2027. KPC currently has vacancies for four councillors by co-option and would welcome applications

from parishioners who believe in dialogue, debate, teamwork and commitment to make a difference in our community. Finally, we send heartfelt Christmas wishes to all our parishioners — may this festive season bring peace, laughter, and cherished moments with family and friends!

For more information regarding the activities of the Parish Council, please visit www.kempseyhub.co.uk

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A 'Latte' Love for new community café!



There's something powerful about people gathering together with a resounding 'Yes!'. In October, Kempsey Parish Councillors unanimously voted, 'yes' to a new, permanent, Community Café at the Sports Pavilion on the playing fields at Plovers Rise. The Council agreed that investing in a café for Kempsey is an investment in a thriving community. Saying 'yes' to a café, to coffee, to cake - is also saying 'yes' to connection, contribution and collaboration. 'Yes' doesn't just open doors to a new community facility; it opens hearts to possibility.

The café was piloted in May, as a pop-up in a horsebox, thanks to St Mary's and an army of dedicated volunteer bakers, baristas, and generous donors! 308 café visitors - neighbours, friends and families - came together to eat and drink, chat, laugh and enjoy the little things - a smile, a slice of cake, a seat in the sunshine. Thank you for coming. You made a big difference to the future of our community, and we are immensely grateful!

Conversation, tea and empathy are now set to become permanent features of parish life.

Our Community Café will be a welcoming space for everyone, a place to relax after a walk, meet a friend, warm up after a game, or simply sit and soak in the atmosphere. The café will provide training, volunteering, and

local employment opportunities, while creating an inclusive hub that reduces loneliness and strengthens community. The project moves ahead this winter, with refurbishment of the Pavilion's kitchen and clubroom. We plan to open once a week - every Friday - and expand, as people and volunteers allow. And the 'yes' doesn't have to stop here! There are so many ways to be part of Kempsey's growing wave of local initiatives: *Want to support the café?*

For a fiver a month, you could say 'Yes' to becoming a Founding Member, ensuring the survival, sustainability and growth of the café long-term. You'll get a special founding member, monthly cake and cuppa into the bargain! *Or become a Café Volunteer* Be part of a team serving great coffee, baking cakes, or offering a warm welcome to visitors. Flexible shifts and training provided.

Enjoy Multiplayer Gaming? You could say "Yes" to supporting our new Monday Youth Hub - giving young people a safe, social space to connect and grow.

Say "Yes" to our new History & Nature in Art Project

Coming soon! Help create a new focus for art, nature, and creativity around the historic village of Kempsey.

You could become a Food Bank Supporter



Donations and volunteers are always appreciated - a little help goes a long way.

Digitally Savvy? Say, "Yes!" to supporting our Digital Inclusion Project

Help local residents with their tech challenges - phones, tablets, and online forms at the 'Come on In' Coffee Morning (Mondays or alternate Wednesdays, 10.30am - 12 noon, at The Firs, Old Road North - just round the corner from the surgery). Or you could securely donate your old devices to be reused or raise funds for those suffering digital poverty. Better still, speak with your organisation about donating all their old tech and make an even bigger difference!

Say "Yes" to opportunities in Kempsey Parish Council

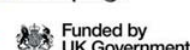
There are vacancies open for

new parish councillors. If you've ever wanted to make a lasting contribution to Kempsey, now's the perfect time.

There are more than 70 clubs and activities in Kempsey Parish, waiting for you to say "Yes" to! Every "yes" contributes to a stronger, more joyful community. Together, we're building not just a café, but a kinder, more connected Kempsey.

If you want to say, "yes!" and learn more about any of these projects, contact Cathy Garner, Community Builder: communitybuilderkempsey@gmail.com

Cathy Garner,
Community Builder,
Kempsey Parish Council



Upton Surgery News

Flu & Covid Vaccinations – Book Now!

Our flu and COVID clinics are still running, but spaces are limited.

Last clinic: December Book ASAP!

How to book:

- Phone: Call reception
- Online: use the self-book link or the NHS App. This app allows you to stay connected, protecting yourself and your loved ones this winter!

You can now get important messages directly via the NHS app, including:

- Appointment reminders
- Vaccination alerts
- Test results and health updates

Turn on notifications in your NHS app to never miss an announcement.

Winter Self-Care Tips

- Keep yourself healthy during colder months:

- Stay active: Even light indoor exercise helps immunity

- Eat well: Focus on fruits, vegetables and protein-rich meals

- Stay warm: Layer clothing and heat your home safely

- Hydrate: Drink water regularly, even if it's cold

- Rest and manage stress:

Adequate sleep and relaxation help your body fight illness

Tip: Small daily habits can make a big difference!

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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 4th December,
29th January & 12th February*



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Christmas Pudding and its friends

Tim Hickson



Looking back in history, I find it interesting to find the path things that we like to eat have had to travel to reach us. In Croome Court, for example, there is a cabinet of porcelain, two of whose items we like to show to visiting children. One of these is a small pot with a spout and a wooden handle bought from Paris by the 6th Earl. Chocolate was brought from South America by the Spanish in the 17th century. It became a luxury drink popularised by the French aristocracy in the 18th century. Roast beans were ground and dissolved in hot water. Then milk, sugar and sometimes spices were added before it was stirred with a stick to become frothy. As the ingredients became cheaper, its popularity spread, and nearly a

hundred years later, in 1847, Mr Fry, in Bristol, thought he might try selling solid chocolate bars. That worked so well that, two years later, Mr Cadbury joined in, then Mr Rowntree. The other item in the porcelain collection at Croome is the Flight and Barr (the forerunners of Royal Worcester) ice cream pail, one of a pair bought by the 7th Earl in about 1810. The outer bowl would have contained crushed ice from the Ice House (mixed with salt to lower its freezing temperature). Then the inner bowl would have been nestled into the ice and filled with ice cream. In those days, it would have been just that, frozen cream, stirred to break up the ice crystals, and if you wanted any flavouring, you added it

yourself from the jam pots alongside. Ice creams seem to have been invented by the Italians in the 17th century using snow from the mountains. We know King Charles I had some at a banquet.

So now we come to specific Christmas fare, Plum Puddings. To quote from Annie Grey's 'At Christmas We Feast': *'Before Christmas pudding, there was plum pudding, and before plum pudding, there was plum pottage. All three share a rich, spicy set of flavours, laden with dried fruits and thickened with breadcrumbs. Two are virtually unheard of today, and the third is under threat. Twenty-first century polls suggest that the popularity of Christmas pudding is age-related, and that the more youthful revellers amongst us do not fully comprehend its dark, delicious glories.'*

Back in medieval times, food was cooked in a pot, and every ingredient, including meat, was just chucked in. Hence the word 'pottage'. However, it seems that adding fruit to meat was as popular in Britain as it is now in North Africa. The word 'plum' did not necessarily mean plum but was a word used to cover the dried products of the grape. Thus, currents, raisins and sultanas would be included. Later, orange and lemon peel preserved in sugar, what we call 'candied peel',



A Flight and Barr ice cream pail

which had been invented by the Arabs centuries before, might be added too. Then, the method of cooking was changed.

Instead of cooking things in a pot, a greased cloth was used. Then, when the ends were tied together, you had a ball which gave us the traditional spherical shape of our Christmas Pudding. However, that changed to the use of moulds, which gave a rounded shape, but with a flat base, which made the next stage safer. By the middle of the 19th century, the custom of bringing the pudding to the table ablaze with brandy was well established. Then, by the 1890s, housewives began to put inside the pudding a thimble, a ring, a piece of money or a button, each of which was supposed to foretell the destinies of the recipient. That changed to putting sixpences in, when they were made of silver, as a bit of fun. I remember those as a child.

Not quite Rudolph



It's almost Christmas, and Rudolph the reindeer is appearing on festive jumpers and decorations all over the land. Reindeer aren't native to the UK,

but while you might find a reindeer to pet at nativity scenes, December is a good time to spot wild deer. In Worcestershire, the dainty roe deer, with its

reddish coat and striking white rump, can sometimes be seen. One of only two native deer species, they are solitary in summer but in winter, they come together in small groups, making them easier to spot. Roe deer are very shy and, if disturbed, will bound across the landscape, white rumps flashing, at impressive speed and jumping hedges with ease. In the early mornings, you may see them quietly grazing in meadows along the Avon.

Look for Muntjac deer too. These small, stocky deer were introduced to the UK and have quickly spread. Although solitary and secretive, they are noisy, so

Karen Rose



you may well hear them before you see them. Their nickname is the 'barking deer', as they call repeatedly and loudly to mark their territories, especially at dusk and dawn. So while Rudolph is the star of the show at the moment, why not step aside from the bustle of the festive season and see if you can spot a real-life woodland wonder – minus the glowing nose!?

Karen Rose is a biodiversity officer for Wychavon District Council.

Farming

Mike Page

Rain has continued, off and on, in more recent weeks such that moisture levels in soils have now risen to the point where most soils are 'workable' and can be (or have been) cultivated and drilled with seed conventionally or 'direct drilled' with a modern drill designed to place seed directly into undisturbed (or minimally disturbed) soil.

In many cases, arable crops have germinated already and are showing through. We have had two relatively poor harvest years in succession, resulting from exactly opposite extreme weather conditions: 2023-24 because of excessive rainfall, and 2024-25 because of drought. Yields this harvest have ranged widely across the country, from as high (in a few cases) as over ten tonnes/ha (four tonnes/acre – a very good crop), down to less than two tonnes/ha (less than one tonne/acre – a disaster not even covering growing costs). As a result, the need to import basic foods and feedstuffs (animal foods) will be particularly high over the coming months, bringing about a decided downturn in UK trade figures. Such a downturn might persuade the Government that policies designed to support continuing full home agricultural production should be high on their agenda. It has become known that many farm practices developed since the early days of mechanisation are actually (in the long-term) detrimental to soil and general environmental well-being: fields being cleared of all crops

and crop residues had become the norm, with many fields left entirely bare of any crop or vegetation of any sort until the planting of the next crop, even if that was not to happen until the following Spring. Nowadays, with many crops, the residue (straw/etc) is likely to be chopped up by the harvesting machinery and spread back out on the field to either rot down into the soil or be cultivated into the soil. Either way, a great part of the organic matter of the whole growing crop is returned to the soil, mirroring what happens in any natural environment and leading to soil improvement, as soil is the result of the interaction over many years between inorganic minerals (rock) breakdown and organic substances (vegetation) breakdown. As well as being of great benefit to the soil, this also has considerable climate benefit: across the world, many millions of tonnes of carbon dioxide are being sequestered rather than released back into the atmosphere; this is, in a sense, a win-win situation. There is also an expanding practice amongst farmers of planting 'Cover Crops', which can be deep-rooted or nitrogen-fixing plants designed to generally improve the soil both physically and biologically. Having served those purposes, they are replaced later in the Autumn or perhaps the following Spring with the crop intended for harvest. Modern seed drills have been developed, which allow seed

for the following harvest crop to be planted through the still growing Cover Crop, rather than the old-fashioned, time-consuming and expensive method of ploughing under all residues from any previous crop, and generating a new seedbed. Interesting (for me!) to watch crops being planted using machines developed to cope with field conditions that would have been an absolute no-go years ago with the machinery available then; all we are doing is attempting to replicate the way in which nature might do things for itself. In some cases, the Cover Crop being replaced will die off of its own accord. In other cases, it will need to be killed off by being sprayed. In either case, its organic matter will be returned to the soil – another win-win situation.

And lastly, not to forget the

livestock. Recent rain has permitted grasslands to recover from the drought conditions of previous months, and continuing warm conditions for the time of year have resulted in some new growth. As a result, both sheep and cattle can continue to thrive outside with the grazing that remains available, supplemented by some long fodder harvested back in the summer. With relatively low yields of grass harvested in the summer resulting from the drought, it did look like the availability of fodder to last the coming winter might be a serious problem, but if mild autumn/early winter conditions continue, providing some grazing, then the fodder needed to last the winter will be much less. The optimist in me (which I have spoken of before!) is hoping for a reasonably favourable and short winter this time. We will see!

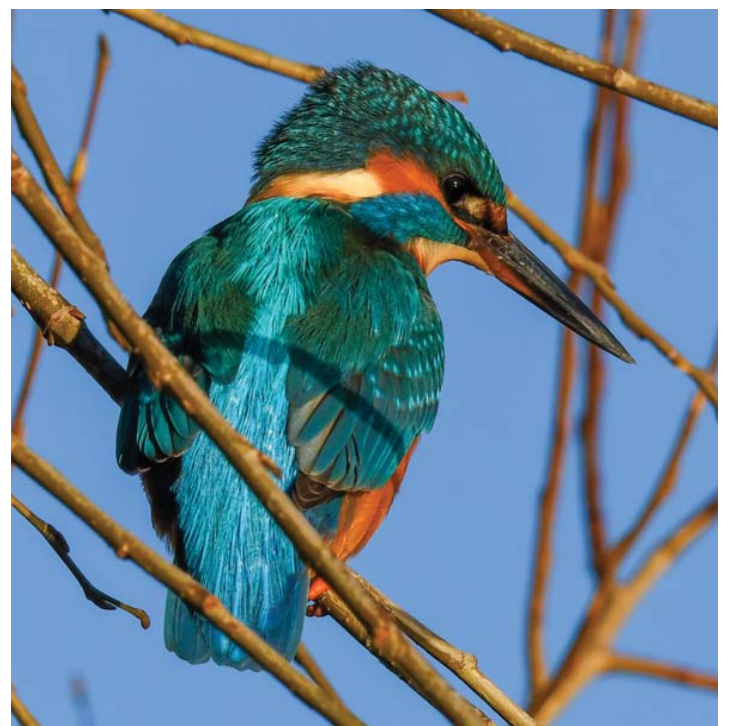


Recently emerging wheat, planted after a crop of beans harvested this year. The new growing wheat crop will benefit from the Nitrogen 'fixed' from the atmosphere by the beans. Beans are particularly advantageous to farming as they not only provide Nitrogen for themselves, but leave surplus Nitrogen in the soil for the following crop.

Photos for the Editor

Dear Editor,
I don't know if these are of any interest for your Pershore Times magazine. They are all taken by me on the Avon in Pershore in the last few days.

Regards
Mark Everett





Surprises

Surprises, surprises
In all shapes and sizes.
The best is a good one
It really is such fun
To have.
A nice friendly greeting
Or maybe a meeting.
By chance it might be
With someone you see
Not often.
A gift or a present
Is really so pleasant.
A note from a friend
You were meaning to send
One yourself.

Susan Catford

Monthly Reflection

On the day John the baptist appeared, he was a bit of a weirdo, dressed in camel's hair, eating locusts and wild honey, living in the desert, and he gave a strange message: people were to prepare for someone coming after him, someone more important than him. The person coming was Jesus, and John tells us that if you can't be number one in anything, make sure you are the best second best you possibly can be.

David Bray, Pershore Abbey



The flip side - What about emigration?

In today's political discourse, the word 'immigration' and its many associations evoke strong feelings and contentious debate. There can also be a great deal of confusion across the board. Interestingly, the Office for National Statistics reported earlier this year that long-term net migration in this country has dropped by 50%. Their website defines 'long-term' as 'people chang[ing] their usual place of residence for a period of 12 months or more'. The number of people coming into this country minus the number of people leaving it is approximately 431,000 in the year ending December 2024. In 2023, the number was 860,000.

This decrease has been linked to a reduction in the numbers of people who are coming into this country, likely because of changes to visa application rules late last year. The provisional estimate for the number of people who immigrated last year is 948,000 (766,000 non-EU nationals; 122,000 EU nationals; 60,000

British nationals). Work and study are the largest drives behind immigration of non-EU nationals.

There is so much focus at the moment on how many people are entering our country, but the number of people leaving it is also surprising.

The number of people emigrating from this country in the 18 months leading up to December 2024 also saw an increase of approximately 11%, increasing from roughly 466,000 people in 2023 to 517,000 people a year later. The Census 2021 website compared 2024's emigration numbers with those of June 2017.

Old study and work visas are expiring, and fewer people are arriving on new ones. The impact of recent budgets and tougher attitudes towards non-doms may also affect these figures, and will likely continue to have a visible impact for data for next year and beyond.



Do you ever get stung?



Most social insects have methods of defending their nests against attackers. In the case of honeybees, there are different levels of response dependent on their perception of the level of threat. At the lowest level, the bees will fly around the head, face and eyes, emitting a high-pitched buzz. This can be alarming, but if the attacker withdraws, the bees usually return home, although they will stay 'on alert' and will rapidly resume patrols if need be. Sometimes they persist and will chase the attacker up to two hundred metres before backing off. Beekeepers call this 'following behaviour' and try to eliminate it by breeding queens from non-following colonies.

Frantic waving of the arms or trying to swat the bees is likely to raise the response to the next level, as would 'opening a colony clumsily or banging on the hive'. The bees are now intent on stinging, and they have an uncanny knack of finding gaps in clothing or areas of thin clothing through which they can sting. They emit a distinctive aroma like pear drops or ripe bananas, and this recruits other bees to join the fight.

The sting is barbed and not easily removed from human skin, so that when the bee is flicked off, the tip of its abdomen is torn away, leaving the sting in situ, while the venom sac still pumps venom in. The bee will often continue to attack, but cannot sting again and will die in a few hours. The aroma left at the site of the sting encourages other bees to sting at the same site, which increases the efficiency of this defensive behaviour. Factors which may cause a colony to jump straight to the stinging phase include impending thunder, colony starvation, queenlessness, vibration from machinery like

mowers, robbing by wasps or other bees, or by beekeepers! The immediate effect of the sting is a sharp pain. As soon as possible, the poison sac should be scraped away with a fingernail. This will minimise the amount of venom injected, but a raised white lump is likely at the injection site, and over the next minute or two, while hunting for home remedies, the pain will subside. (Neither vinegar nor bicarbonate of soda will have much effect, but locally applied heat can ease the pain.) For most people, there follow several hours with few symptoms, but then the affected part may feel hot with swelling, reddening and itchiness, and this may be very uncomfortable on ankles, wrists and elbows. Stings on the head may cause fluid to collect around the eyes so that they close. These effects can last for a couple of days and can be minimised by the use of anti-histamines. These local symptoms can be very mild or quite severe, but they are normal reactions. A few people react quite differently. Within a minute of

Martyn Cracknell

being stung, they may begin to have symptoms in parts of the body quite remote from the location of the sting. Intense itching in the palms of the hands and in the toes, itchy spots all over the body, hot, itchy and red areas in the groin, the armpits and the throat and tongue. This is an allergic reaction, and this can also be mild or severe. If severe, it is an emergency requiring urgent attention, or the patient may die. The condition is called anaphylactic shock and involves a sudden drop in blood pressure, leading to collapse and loss of consciousness. If a beekeeper develops an allergy to stings, they may have to give up the hobby. There is a programme of desensitisation, involving regular injections of measured doses of venom, but it takes two or three years.

So the answer is yes, I do get stung. I don't like it, so I try to be very careful when I am opening the hives and try not to squash any bees. Also, I only open the hives when there is a good reason to disturb them.



Local Conflicts: Part Two

Tim Hickson



'The Battle of Lewes, East Sussex, 14th May 1264'
by James Hardy (1801-1879) (Image credit: Lewes Town Council)

In the 1260s, during the reign of the very unpopular King Henry III, Simon de Montfort, 6th Earl of Leicester, led the barons' revolt against Henry. At the Battle of Lewes, de Montfort won and captured the King and his son, Edward. Later, de Montfort, with his captives, had moved to Hereford, where Edward escaped and headed east. The King's son raised an army to fight de Montfort and rescue his father. Simon de Montfort also headed east with his Welsh allies. They crossed the Severn, possibly at Clevelode, and he spent the night at Kempsey before heading on, probably crossing the Avon at Pershore to reach Evesham.

There, he planned to meet his son, also Simon, who had gathered a force at Kenilworth. However, Edward attacked young Simon and prevented him from taking his forces to join his father at Evesham. Then Edward headed south with twice the force that de Montfort had brought. So, when, on 4th August 1265, that battle commenced, Simon de Montfort was outnumbered, overcome, killed and mutilated. This de Montfort is celebrated for initiating the idea of the nation being ruled by a parliament containing representatives of the people. However, he also encouraged hatred of the bankers of the day, the Jews, and, amongst



'The Battle of Worcester, 3rd September 1651'
by Thomas Woodward (1801-1852) (Image credit: Worcester City Museums)

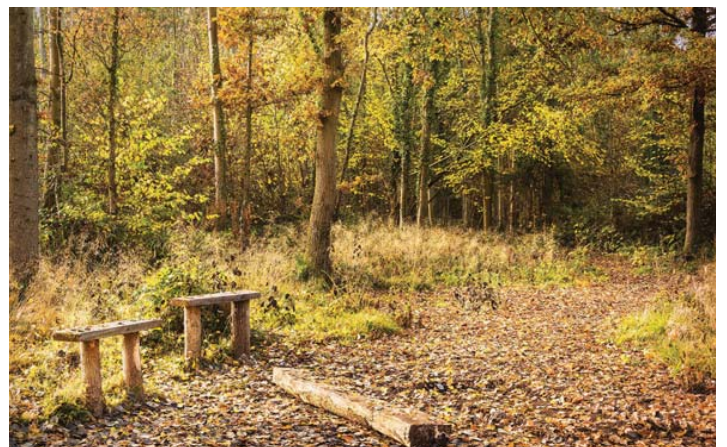
other appalling acts, massacred the 700 Jews living in Worcester. At that time, Christians were not permitted to lend money for usury. The Jews' religion did not forbid it, so they developed that business because of the demand. If a king wanted to fight a war, he had to pay the soldiers, so he either raised the money by taxation or he borrowed it. It is human nature, however, to dislike people to whom we owe money, and in those days, an effective way not to have to pay it back was to kill the Jews. Once that started, there were massacres in many towns. Less than two centuries later, there was the English Civil War between King Charles I and Parliament. Skirmishes started the war, and the major one was on the edge of Worcester at Powick Bridge on 23rd September 1642. Here, Royalist troops on the north side surprised and repelled the Parliamentary cavalry trying to cross. Much later, in 1651, the Royalist troops in Upton had destroyed the central arch of the stone bridge across the Severn (just as had been done at Pershore

across the Avon). But, at Upton, they put down planks so they could still cross the river. Then, because they left it unguarded, a small band of Parliamentary soldiers got across, followed by a larger force that had found a ford. This allowed a substantial Parliamentary force to move north on the west bank of the Severn to Powick and so to Worcester. Worcester was held by Charles I's son, also Charles, many of whose troops were Scots. On 3rd September, the Parliamentary army, now commanded by Cromwell, was able to win the Battle of Worcester, and so the war ended.

In recent times, a conflict that seems to me to threaten the idea of Democracy has been taking place over land near Tiddesley Wood. Here, developers wanting to build large numbers of houses alongside this ancient, scientifically important woodland have been given permission to do so. This, in spite of the opposition by the local people, by the local Councils and by our Member of Parliament. Clearly, here there is another local conflict.



Simon de Montfort (1208-1265)



Tiddesley Wood



Scented shrubs for a winter garden

Winter gardens often get overlooked, seen as dormant spaces waiting for spring's revival. But with the right planting, your garden can be a sensory delight even in the coldest months.

Scented shrubs are the secret to creating a winter border that not only looks beautiful but also smells divine, which really lifts the spirits on grey days.

Winter-scented shrubs offer:

- Fragrance when little else is blooming
- Structure and evergreen interest
- Pollinator-friendly blooms for early insects

Here are my top four shrubs:

Daphne odora

The Queen of Winter Fragrance, this evergreen shrub produces clusters of pink or white flowers from late January into March, each one bursting with a sweet, citrusy scent that can fill the garden.

- Best for: Part-shade, sheltered spots with well-drained soil
- Height: Up to 1.5m



- Tip: Avoid moving it once planted - daphnes dislike disturbance
Pair it with hellebores or snowdrops for a soft, romantic look. Its glossy leaves and compact habit make it ideal for borders near entrances or patios.

Sarcococca confusa

Often called 'sweet box' or 'Christmas box', it is a compact evergreen shrub with tiny creamy-white flowers that bloom from December to February.

Though the flowers are insignificant, the scent is intensely sweet and lovely.

- Best for: Shady areas, underplanting larger shrubs or trees

- Height: 60cm to 2m, depending on variety

- Varieties to try: 'Purple Stem' for added colour, or 'Dragon Gate' with red berries.

Its low-maintenance nature and tolerance for shade make it perfect for tricky corners or north-facing borders.



Lonicera fragrantissima (Winter Honeysuckle)

Unlike its climbing cousins, this bushy honeysuckle shrub offers creamy-white flowers with a lemony scent from January onwards. It's easy to grow and is tolerant of most conditions.

- Best for: Informal borders or near seating areas
- Height: 1.5–2m
- Bonus: Attracts early pollinators. Its relaxed habit makes it ideal for cottage-style gardens and wildlife-friendly spaces.

Edgeworthia chrysantha (Paper Bush)

A close relative of daphne, Edgeworthia produces clusters of tubular yellow flowers with a rich, sweet scent in late winter, around February to April. It's deciduous and has bare stems and silvery buds, which add winter sculptural interest.

- Best for: Sheltered, sunny spots with moist, well-drained soil
- Height: 1.5–2m



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- Tip: Mulch well in autumn to protect roots. They can tolerate temperatures down to -5°C, but in colder areas it is best to plant them against a sunny, south-facing wall.

Edgeworthia is a showstopper and ideal for gardeners who love something a little different.

Designing Your Winter Scent Border

- Layer heights: Use taller shrubs like witch hazel at the back, with compact varieties like sweet box at the front.
- Mix evergreen and deciduous: For year-round structure and seasonal interest.
- Add underplanting: Hellebores, snowdrops, seasonal bedding plants, such as pansies and cyclamen, complement scented shrubs beautifully.

December gardening tips

Early in the month

Overgrown deciduous hedges can be cut back hard while they are still dormant. Put netting over winter greens to keep pigeons off. Alternatively, stretch hazard warning tape across the crop in a zig-zag formation, fixing it to bamboo canes. New deciduous hedges can be planted now. It is best to cut the new plants back hard after planting. Avoid getting greenhouse plants too wet, as they are much better kept on the dry side over the winter.

Feed flowering houseplants weekly using a liquid fertiliser. Avoid walking on frozen lawns, as this damages the grass, leaving brown footprints until the spring. Float a rubber ball, or a chunk of polystyrene, in your pool to prevent it from freezing over completely, or buy a pool heater. Put your sawn-off Christmas tree in a stand which holds water, as this aids needle retention.

Mid December

Feed garden birds and make sure that water is also readily available. Frost and wind can loosen newly-planted shrubs and trees. Check and re-firm them. Alpines and other seeds needing a cool period in order to germinate can be sown now. Whitloof chicory roots can be dug up, potted and brought into the warmth and darkness in order to produce "chicons". Geranium seeds can be sown now, if you have suitable conditions to grow them in. Go through the greenhouse every week and dispose of dead leaves and flowers. Repair fences while climbing plants are still dormant. Plant new trees and shrubs when weather conditions are favourable. Try to hoe off weeds whenever you see them, as this will pay dividends later. Grow some sprouting seeds in jam jars for an easy, nutritious addition to meals. Cut some berried holly

Reg Moule BBC Hereford & Worcester

for house decoration and keep it in a bucket in a cold greenhouse to prevent birds from taking the berries. Take root cuttings from herbaceous plants like phlox, oriental poppies, and Japanese anemones. Ventilate the greenhouse on sunny days to reduce the risk of fungal infections.

Later in December

Winter is a good time to plan next year's crops and ornamental displays. Prune free-standing apple and pear trees. Prune greenhouse grapes when all the leaves have fallen, cutting back the side shoots to one bud long. Christmas pot plants – remember Cyclamen and Azaleas like it cool, Poinsettias need more warmth. Clean pots, seed trays and service tools ready for the new season's work. Cover a sheltered area of your vegetable garden with clear polythene to warm it up for early spring sowings. Sow onions suitable



for exhibition, like Robinson's Mammoth or Kelsae, in a heated greenhouse. Winter wash dormant fruit trees, using Vitax Winter Tree Wash, or Growing Success Winter Tree Wash, for a clean start next spring. Start winter digging on the vegetable garden but keep off very wet soil – it ruins the structure. If snow is expected, encircle vulnerable conifers with hoops of wire to hold branches in place that could, otherwise, be bent outwards by heavy falls.



Ailsa's Kitchen

Ailsa Craddock

We live in the country where, like it or not, there is a lot of shooting this time of the year. If given any game birds, remember to respect them as free range, organic pieces of meat who have at least flown and been part of the countryside for most of their lives. Cook the meat to the best of your ability and use all of it.

Pheasant Casserole with apples

25g butter
2 tablespoon sunflower oil
Salt and pepper
6 pheasant breasts, skinned
(use the carcass to make stock with some carrots, onions and water)
2 onions, thinly sliced
150ml apple juice (cloudy is best)
300 ml game stock – see above but you can also use a cube
2 dessert apples, peeled and cut into wedges
2 tablespoon double cream
1 tablespoon lemon juice

Heat half the butter and all the oil in a non-stick frying pan until very hot. Season the pheasant breasts and fry them in the hot pan until golden. Set aside. Heat the remaining butter in the unwashed pan and fry the onions until tender – about 10 minutes. Sprinkle in the flour and gradually blend in the apple juice and stock. Bring to the boil stirring and add apples

and breasts. Cover and simmer over a low heat for about 12 minutes until the pheasant is just cooked through. Do not over cook! Stir in the double cream and lemon juice and serve with mashed or baked potatoes and a green vegetable.

Pheasant Stroganoff

Another quick and delicious way of using pheasant breasts!
4 pheasant breasts, sliced
1 shallot, finely chopped
2 grated cloves of garlic
6 – 8 chopped mushrooms
200ml double cream
2 teaspoons paprika
4 cornichons, finely chopped
1 tablespoon capers, finely chopped
1 teaspoon grained mustard
Juice of 1 lemon
Salt and pepper
Handful of parsley, finely chopped
Pasta or rice to serve

Fry the pheasant strips on a high heat until they have a



good colour. Put aside. Gently fry the shallot and garlic until soft, add mushrooms, then the cream, mustard and paprika and put the pheasant strips back in. Turn up the heat until they are simmering and the pheasant almost cooked through (you

want it to be little pink or it will taste dry). Add the cornichons, capers and lemon juice, seasoning and parsley.

Above:

Pheasant Casserole with apples

Below:

Pheasant Stroganoff



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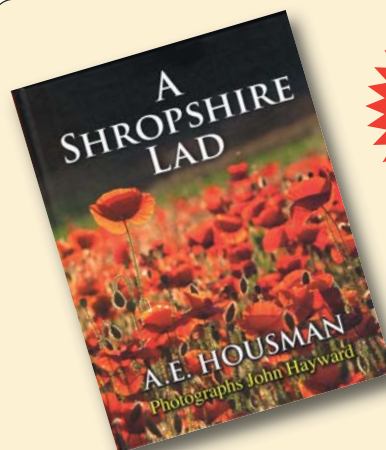
'I am as light as a feather, I am as happy as an angel, I am as merry as a schoolboy.

I am as giddy as a drunken man.

A merry Christmas to everybody!

A happy New Year to all the world!

Charles Dickens, 'A Christmas Carol' (1843)



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Village Life

Life in the village has now definitely moved into winter mode after the battering from Storm Claudia. Mercifully, I believe there was very little damage in our neighbourhood, though a very well-established creeper outside my house was dislodged by the change of wind direction and fell unceremoniously across the dining room window and onto the driveway. This has left me with a marathon pruning session and the unenviable disposal task, including numerous trips to the greenbin at the Lower Moor recycling centre. Thank goodness for the extra oomph provided by ratchet-action loppers for dealing with chunky ivy and pyracantha stems! Counting blessings, I'll spend less time up a ladder in future pruning the higher growth - hardly an annual highlight! Thankfully, we have been spared the flooding that has hit parts of Herefordshire and Monmouthshire so badly after the storm. What heartbreaking news coverage of shattered homes and businesses, many suffering repeat events. We have more than our fair share

of flood exposures in this part of the world, so let's hope there aren't any further episodes this winter. Bizarrely, at the same time, we're being told that we're probably heading for a drought next year unless we soon have significantly more rain - 'Topsy-Turvy' hardly covers it! Our thoughts and prayers are with those hit by flooding, with the hope that they recover in time for Christmas and have no more episodes to deal with. Fickle weather still seems to be the theme. Just days after Claudia passed through, we had a few glorious sunny days, though with more than just a hint of chill in the air, and as I write this, we're forecast sleet among days of heavy rain. Having cleared frost from the windscreen for the first time, it seems we're definitely heading for a wintry spell. White Christmas, anyone? Activities in the village have certainly moved indoors, even as chainsaws and hedge cutters make their presence felt. I've mentioned our village hub/pub before, and there has been no lack of fun on offer. 'Sip and Paint' afternoons

are held, and I took the brave step out of my comfort zone and into the unknown to join one of these sessions during November. Relaxing and mindful - well, eventually, but only after the panic of not knowing what on earth I was doing subsided. Huge relief when the finished product looked pretty good among the other efforts, and I've signed up for the next session in the hope the initial blind panic won't be repeated. We've also had a baby shower for an arrival due just after Christmas, a birthday party (for the landlady), and international rugby screenings. The golf society has continued to play in defiance of the weather, though I suspect this is largely accounted for by the post-round refreshments and curry supper! Now, by the time you're likely to be reading this, we'll be cantering towards Christmas. I always love seeing the annual display of lights that adorn many of our houses in the village. We may not have street lights, but through December we've no need for them. We'll also have a Christmas sing-along



around the village Christmas tree with a chance to enjoy mince pies and maybe a warming glass of mulled wine - but mostly we'll be enjoying meeting up with friends and neighbours to share the festivities and spread good will. Now, any chance of snow to give us the ultimate Christmas cheer? Merry Christmas, everyone!



Curiosity: A Shift That Can Change Everything

Emily Papirnik

Curiosity is one of the simplest yet most powerful shifts we can make in any moment. It changes how we see, how we feel, and how we respond. When something feels uncomfortable - an emotion, a physical sensation, or a thought - our natural tendency is to judge or resist it. We tighten, we analyse, or we try to make it go away. But when we replace judgment with curiosity, everything softens. Curiosity invites us to notice rather than fix. Instead of

asking, "What's wrong with me?", we begin to ask, "What's happening for me right now?" That simple reframe turns self-criticism into self-understanding. By becoming curious, we also slow time down. Curiosity creates a small pause between stimulus and response - the space where choice lives. Within that space, we can breathe, observe, and choose to respond with more awareness, compassion, and care. Curiosity also encourages openness. It helps us lean

towards experience instead of away from it - even when that experience feels challenging. It invites discovery, movement, and growth, where before there might have been fear or resistance. When we bring curiosity to our inner world, we start to experience life with more lightness. We stop needing to have all the answers and begin to explore instead. Next time you notice discomfort, pause and ask yourself: What might this be showing me? You may find



that curiosity itself is a form of healing. One gentle question at a time.

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Romy's Uni Life

Romy Kemp *Liverpool University*



Getting Cold

The temperature in Liverpool has suddenly dropped. I always forget how bitter and windy it can be here, as it is a little warmer back in Worcestershire. I really hope it snows this year. I don't recall there being snow in Liverpool last year, but there was in my first year, so I'm hoping for some this Christmas.

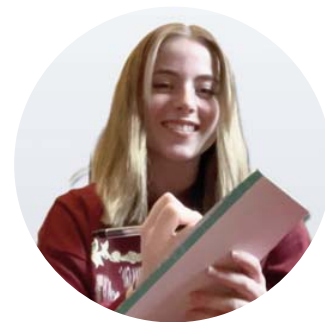


Even my thickest coats don't stop the cold from getting in, so I've decided that scarves might be the way to go: tuck them in and vacuum all the warmth in. I wear scarves every year, but I've decided to buy more, as well as a hat.

My birthday was on the 17th November, so I went home for the weekend to spend time with my family and friends. My dad made me a cake and my mum set up the house all celebratory. I just turned 21 and it was nice to get a massive 21 balloon! The cake was delicious and I took half of it back to university with me: I thought it seemed fair for my family to keep the other half at home. I saw my friend whilst I was at home. It was nice to catch up. We talk every week, but it's different to meet up in person. It is always great to go home so that I can see my pets, and I've already bought my dog a toy for Christmas, but I tend to struggle a bit more as to what to get my bird for Christmas. I'll make them both some sort of fruit salad. I will definitely get my bird a toy too, I just don't know which one because he is easily spooked. I've been trying to get a head

start on my Christmas shopping and I'd say I'm about 50% done with it. Liverpool has been pretty successful for buying presents, which is quite unusual because I never seem to find much. Sometimes it is hard to know what to get people when you're away from home for months at a time, but eventually you get used to it. By connecting the dots and sometimes even asking what people want, it saves everyone some time. It is shocking how much people change when you're at university, but then again, you are changing so much too.

Assignments this month have really been taking over my life. I've never had such difficulty writing an essay. I'm hoping that all my hard work is rewarded with an amazing grade because that essay nearly crushed me.



I really enjoy all of the university work that I do, but third year has been really tough compared to last year. All the reading that I do is super interesting, and I have really been captivated by my modules this semester, but it has been hard to stay on top of it all, as well as everything else that has to be done.



Hazards of Christmas



Christmas is an exciting time of year for us all with many changes throughout the home. This can bring challenges in terms of keeping our pets safe through the festive season. Below are some of the top hazards of Christmas to be aware of for our pets.

- **Chocolate** – this is toxic to dogs and cats. Take particular care with darker varieties of chocolate as these are stronger in the toxic component
- **Raisins** – contained in so many Christmas treats but sadly toxic for dogs and cats
- **Tinsel and ribbons** – particularly tempting for cats to play with. If consumed this can cause life threatening blockages
- **Bones** – cooked bones are brittle and can splinter. This can cause problems with the digestive tract. Stick to lean cooked meat as a special treat for your pets.
- **Christmas plants** – such as holly, ivy and mistletoe can all cause vomiting so are best kept out of reach
- **Sweeteners** – most are non-toxic but xylitol causes a very low blood sugar in dogs which can be life threatening. Look out for and avoid xylitol containing products
- **Rock salt (grit)** - This is best rinsed off pets feet if they walk in it to avoid over consumption
- **Anti-freeze** – Ethylene glycol is highly toxic to cats and tastes sweet so they are attracted to it. Be very careful when using this and avoid spills

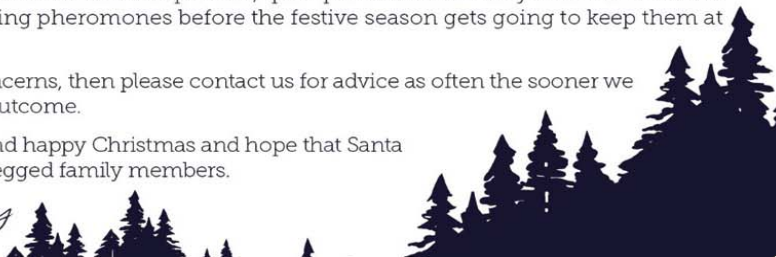
With so many decorations going up and visitors coming and going Christmas can also be a stressful time for pets. Remember to keep a safe, quiet place available they can retreat to and think about using calming pheromones before the festive season gets going to keep them at their happiest.

If you ever have any concerns, then please contact us for advice as often the sooner we can help the better the outcome.

We wish you all a safe and happy Christmas and hope that Santa Paws visits all the four-legged family members.

Merry Christmas *Amy*

info@martinandcarrvets.co.uk
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Gregory's World!

Maine-iacs

"Okay, guys, are you ready for an inside scoop?"

That's Noel. He was our tour guide at the Ben and Jerry's Factory in Waterbury, Vermont. It was 5pm and our group consisted entirely of adults, but he had a cartoonish grin on his face and was talking to us as if we were in an episode of *Barney & Friends*. He cupped a hand to his ear.

"I can't hear you!"

"... Yeah ..." Tough crowd.

"Then let's get a moooooo-ve on!" He threw his head back and actually mooed. "I'm sorry, I really am milking this one, aren't I? No photos for this part of the tour, I'm afraid – we don't want spies from Häagen-Dazs discovering our secrets."

Noel's grin was present, but the lights in his eyes weren't. I suppose that's what happens when you live your life exposed to manic visiting school groups and hallucinogenic levels of cookie dough. I hoped he was alright in there.

After tasting a few 'freebies' along the tour (a pot of cookie dough pieces and an exclusive 'ultraviolet' ice cream flavour), I braced myself for the gift shop. I ordered an 'Americone Dream' and asked for a large, forgetting for a second which country I was in. The girl handed me what

was basically an entire tub of Ben and Jerry's, tipped into a waffle cone the size of an Olympic torch. Dinner sorted. We ate our massive ice creams overlooking the mountains of Vermont, deep green and glazed with gold.

Then it was time for another inside scoop: the flavour graveyard. We could basically see it from where we were, but the Americone must've been getting to me, because I suggested we drive to it. (I am ashamed to this day.) The graveyard was an interesting touch. Mock tombstones displayed B&J's flavours that were either never successful or had to call it a day. 'Vermonty Python' and 'Cool Britannia' sounded appetising, but 'Wavy Gravy' and 'Schweddy Balls'? Not so much. For the record, though unbeknownst to me and Natdog at the time, we actually visited the factory at the end of an era. Exactly one week later, after forty-seven years in the business, Jerry left the company. Who knows? Now, there's probably a mock tombstone in the graveyard just for him.

From there, we got back inside our Volkswagen Atlas, 'Marylou', and back onto the open road towards New Hampshire, a mountainous state of rocky gorges and covered bridges, blueberry

Gregory Sidaway

muffins and pumpkin pies.

In Maine, the place names read like a best-of compilation of Europe: 'East Sweden', 'Norway', 'South Paris', 'Oxford'. Maine's speed limit signs are the only ones I really had to stick to. The roads climbed and plummeted past pine and pool. It was like driving along the tail of a tarmac serpent that was trying to flick us off. Only in America can you drive along a byway deep in the wild, and then be suddenly sprung upon by a huge grocery store with a sign outside advertising: 'GUNS – WEDDING DRESSES – COLD BEERS'. I mean, what an afternoon me and Natdog could have had in there!

Strangely enough, B&J's wasn't our only ice creamy immersion into New England culture. On our last night, we headed to Portsmouth, New Hampshire, to take in a scenic waterfront, only to find it had already been taken by a blockade of expensive restaurants. We were passing Annabelle's Natural Ice Cream when their sign caught my eye. It listed 'Graham' as one of their flavours. Graham happens to be my Grandad's name (and my middle name), and I was baffled and fascinated by what on earth Annabelle's thought a 'Graham' tasted of. Here's an inside scoop! The sign actually referred to the popular U.S. flavour 'Graham



Central Station', named after the graham cracker – a cinnamon or honey-based sweet treat.

On the shop wall was a chalkboard with 'Where have you come from?' written at the top. There were mostly U.S. place names on the board. I spotted 'Worcester, MA', so I took the chalk and, underneath it, scribbled: 'Worcester, UK'. It felt a bit like signing off. There. We'd done it. The America I experienced was loud and beautiful, unapologetic and proud, and to live a fortnight on its open roads was nothing less than a dream.

Towards the end of our trip, Natdog made a very good point. This country was so big, so overwhelmingly busy or mesmerisingly empty, that to explore it for too long would soon become a lonely experience if you didn't have a buddy to share the driving, the laughs and the brownies with. I'd always been okay though. I was very lucky to have my buddy, fellow reader – but don't tell him that.

Evie's Teenage Focus



As the year draws to an end, I'm reminded of why I hate the lead-up to our Winter Holidays.

Please allow me to let you in on the secret as to why. Put yourself in my shoes, imagine you're a University student, I'm sure many of you have been there. Every day is getting colder, you've pulled out your thick winter coat, scarf and gloves from wherever you store them, ready for your 8:30 am walk up to campus. There's a crisp bite in the air, the sun's only just come up, but by the time you make it all the way to the top of that dreaded hill, as well as the five flights of stairs to get to your first lecture hall, you



are now at least somewhat warm. You get through your first lecture and

seminar by 12 o'clock. You nip to the university Café, get a coffee, get a snack and hunker down somewhere warm with some friends - and I'm being completely transparent with you here, it's only an hour break we get - we are not doing any work in this hour. Sorry, Mum. But no, we don't do work; we have a bit of a gossip, have a little natter, before making our way to our second module lecture of the day. Luckily, it is my favourite module of the semester, and so it goes by quickly and easily, and before you know it, it's 4 o'clock and we are bundling back up to leave. Yet here is where my problem lies. We walk out of our building in herds, rushing to get to wherever we need to be next. Some are going home, some are going to the shops to get their bits and bobs. Or, like me, a lone person, I stand gaping at the now darkening sky. I go to my lectures in the dark, and now, as I leave,

I am once again left in the dark. This could be construed as a dark and ironic metaphor, but I'm currently choosing to ignore that. My day has started and ended, and all I have achieved is writing notes and adding an additional comment in a lecture theatre. Now, whilst I do recognise this as an accomplishment during the colder winter months, my day is still nowhere near being over. This is where problem two starts to become an issue. With the lead-up to the winter break, assignments come in hard and fast. I learnt it last year and it has remained true. The sun goes up. I have my lectures. The sun goes down. And somehow I still need to write and complete another five assignments. Luckily, they are not all writing assignments this year. Whilst I do have a 2000 and 3000 (luckily broken into two parts) word essay to complete, I do have two other formats to hand in. One is a video assignment, and the other

Evie Aubin Oxford Brookes University



is to design a website based on the first part of our assignment, which we handed in last month. But either way, I'm powering through, and the finish line is in sight. Soon, I'll be home with family and no assignments looming over me!

On another note, I'm wishing all who celebrate a very Merry Christmas, and I'll write to you all in the New Year! Until next year! Toodles!





Christmas Short Story Competition Winner!

'A Christmas Walk'

By Zoey Baker

Zoey Baker's entry takes the winning spot for its goosebump-inducing atmosphere and evocative descriptions of a walk through the snow, as well as its clever twist of perspective at the end.

Merry Christmas to all!

This is new. At this time of year, a walk usually consists of crispy leaves underfoot, or more likely, a sliver of ice over puddles. But this evening, I crunch and crackle, the white puffs of snow flattening as I leave home for the first time today. The air is still, great waves of nothing until I listen carefully enough to pick out a few signs of life. It must be teatime by now.

Though the sky is dark, small specks of stars glitter in a sea of navy blue. I can hear a buzz, not a fly but an electric fizz of fairy lights cascading down from the guttering of a house, flashing blue then red then green and round they go again. Staring at

them makes my eyes go blurry, so I carry on with my walk. A door creaks open and the scampering of feet can be heard, but not seen, behind a wooden fence. A dog darts to a slim gap at the bottom of the gate, rough, wet nose poking out to sniff out food, or other dogs, or me?

I freeze, confident that it can't get to me but bracing myself for the inevitable barking. It doesn't come. He quickly loses interest, hurrying away whilst his owner stands shivering in the cold, a mug of freshly roasted coffee steaming in his hands. He gives me a quizzical look as I walk past. I cross the road at the end of the street, intending to turn

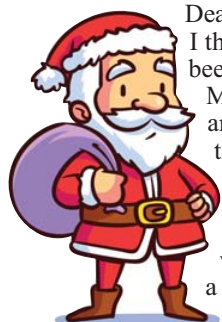
back the way I came. It will be a short stroll tonight. As my family readies the house for Christmas Day, the presents will be being tucked underneath the tree, ready for opening in the morning, the turkey will be defrosting in the fridge, and the children will probably be arguing over which festive film to put on tonight before bed. My tummy makes a grumbling sound at the thought of tomorrow's dinner. The best part of the day, in my opinion. A child squeals in excitement to my right. Her mother calls for them to come back inside the house, it's freezing! The little girl has one wellington boot on, her red coat haphazardly thrown over her shoulders, bobble hat askew on her head. Her mother is smiling as she watches her daughter pick up the snow and

throw it in the air, creating a small snowfall. She's standing at the door when I arrive, rattling my bowl of biscuits. I've made it back home. "There you are! Get back inside, it's too cold to be out here tonight."

I hop up onto the front doorstep, curling around her leg as she reaches down to scratch my neck. "They've left a space for you on the sofa, kitty. The film will be starting soon," she says, and I do as I'm told. It's a beautiful night outside, but I'd much rather be in the warmth of my family this Christmas.



A letter (intercepted) from a Mum to Santa



Dear Santa,
I think I have been a good Mum all year and ask you to consider my following Christmas wish list as a reward for my efforts.

I'm sitting here, in my garage, next to the tumble dryer, writing my request on an old cereal packet with my son's red crayon. It's a long list, so it may be best delivered over the next fifteen to sixteen years or so.

1) I'd like my waist back. I lost it in the last pregnancy. It was considered a good one.

2) Can I have a pair of legs that don't ache? In any colour - but not purple, I already have these.

3) Reduced Bingo Wings, but no diminution in the strength of my arms, so I can pick up a screaming toddler in the sweetie aisle at the supermarket.

4) I could use a talking 'Daughter Doll' that says, "Yes, Mummy!" to boost my parental confidence, two kids that don't fight, along with a potty-trained toddler, and a pair of jeans for me that will zip up all the way without the use of power tools.

5) I would also find a recording of Tibetan monks chanting, "Don't eat in the living room." and "Stop hitting your sister."

My voice seems just out of their range and can only be heard by the dog (who's deaf).

6) Please don't forget the Travelling Play-Doh Kit. We are having New Year at the in-laws. It comes in fluorescent colours and is guaranteed to crumble up on any carpet, making the in-laws' house seem just like mine. This is essential.

7) If it's too late for all these products, I'd settle for enough time to brush my teeth and comb my hair in the same morning or at least on the same day. I'd also like to eat all my food warmer than room temperature. Hot coffee, turned cold, I'm almost used to, but it would be nice.

8) Thinking of food, can you supply me with a tasty alternative to Brussel Sprouts that my kids would take to? Alternatively, perhaps you could declare Ketchup to be a vegetable.

It will clear my guilt complex immensely.

Well, Santa, the tumble dryer is coming to the end of its cycle, and my son has spotted my feet under the garage door. I think he wants his red crayon back. Have a safe journey.

Yours always,
Mum

P.S. One more thing: you can cancel all my requests if you can keep my children young enough to still believe in Father Christmas.

Editor's comment:
Santa, take note. Mums certainly do deserve all they desire. Thank goodness for Mums, especially at Christmas time. Merry Christmas!

Richard Catford

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Adventure Woods at Christmas

A Children's Story

Poppy's Rescue

by Peter Moore

(Broadway Author)

Chapter One

Christmas was arriving again at Adventure Woods, which had seen some exciting events and some unwanted happenings. The weather was cold and frosty, but so far, there was no snow, unlike last year. Some animals were getting excited for the upcoming time of year. But, as you know with some of our furry friends, their detective skills are sometimes needed and this Christmas, this will be their most important job. As you read on, our friends will meet up with a special Elf who works for Santa. But this Elf has lost an incredibly special present for a sick little girl who has asked for this present for a long time. Did the Elf lose the present, or was it stolen? Read on and find out if it is a happy conclusion.

On this frosty night, Badger, Foxy, and Ron the owl were sitting in their special place by the ice-covered lake just on the edge of the woods. "I am bored," said Badger.

"How can you be bored? It makes a change for us to have some peace and quiet. All we seem to have done lately is rescue other animals out of situations," said Foxy.

"I know, but I would like some kind of adventure. It keeps you and your mind active. Another small adventure would be nice," replied Badger. "I agree with Badger. Since our last rescue, life has been a little too quiet. All this time with Doris (Ron's sister) is hurting my ears as she does not stop talking," said Ron.

"I don't really have that problem now my mother is back. Vivien (Mrs Fox) is always talking to her," said Foxy.

"How about Hilda (Mrs Badger)? Is she a chatterbox?" asked Ron. "No, not really," replied Badger.

"If you're bored, Badger, why don't we go down to the village and see what the humans are up to?" asked Ron.

"What a great idea! You up for it, Foxy?"

"Why not? I think we deserve a bit of fun."

The three friends made their way to the village, but they had to pass the hunting stables and the hunts dogs, so they had to



pass as quietly as possible. On the way, Ron spotted something sitting up against a fence post in the field. Foxy walked over to it and sniffed it and then gave it a poke with his paws. "Must be a children's toy," said Foxy.

"Who are you calling a toy? You're a big furry fox!" yelled an little doll-like creature who was wearing green trousers and a striped jumper. The three friends jumped back in amazement. "It talks!" cried Foxy.

"Yes, I talk. I am a very special Elf, actually. I am Chief Elf who is very close to Santa."

"Santa?" asked Badger.

"Santa is really called Father Christmas, who makes magical things happen all over the world," replied the Elf.

"He sounds like an amazing person," said Badger.

"He is, but my furry friends, I have a big problem."

"Problems seem to be our thing," said Ron.

"So, what type of problem do you have?" asked Foxy.

"There is a sick little girl in the village who all she wants is a small puppy from Santa. The problem is that Poppy the puppy has gone missing. She was last seen near the village," said the Elf.

"How could she go missing? Was she not kept somewhere safe?" questioned Ron.

"One of the other elves left a door open, so she must have walked out and got lost. It is Christmas Eve tomorrow. We need to find her before Santa delivers his presents," said the Elf, who was starting to get upset.

"Mr Elf, we will find Poppy and that sick little girl will have her new puppy. It is Christmas, and wishes can come true. Foxy, Ron, it looks like we have another rescue," said Badger.

"Here we go again, why can't we be like normal animals and have a quiet life?" said Foxy.

"Come on, Foxy, you know you love danger and excitement in our adventures," Ron butted in.

"We need a plan, and I think I have one," said Badger.

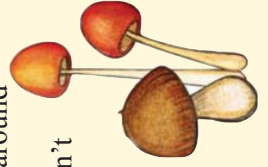
"All ready? That was quick thinking of you," replied Foxy.

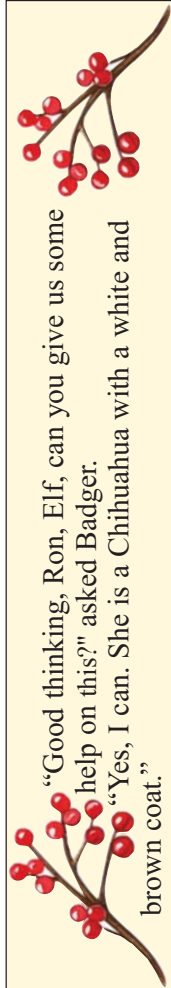
"We need as much help as we can get. We need eyes everywhere. Ron, can you get your feathered friends to keep a lookout all around the area?" asked Badger.

"Yes, of course, but there is one important issue which we don't know," said Ron.

"What is that?" asked Badger.

"What type of puppy are we looking for and what colour is she? This would be very helpful," replied Ron.





"Good thinking, Ron, Elf, can you give us some help on this?" asked Badger.

"Yes, I can. She is a Chihuahua with a white and brown coat."

"Okay, guys, let's get to work. Time is not on our side," said Badger.

Chapter Two

Ron made his way back to his home to find Doris, his sister, who is an owl.

"Doris, are you at home?" Ron called out.

"Hello, Ron, you sound out of breath. Is everything okay?" she asked.

"Not really, Doris, but listen very carefully."

As Ron explained to Doris, she looked very intent to take in all the information he gave her.

"I will go and round up the Fox and Badger families and meet you by the paddock."

"On your way, can you alert as many other owls as possible and birds to keep their eyes peeled? The more help, the better. I am going back to Badger and Foxy."

With that, Ron and Doris flew off in their different directions.

Meanwhile, back at the paddock, Elf asked: "What's the plan, Badger?"

"I think we should go down into the village and see if we can discover any clues as to where Poppy may have gone."

"I think we should stay here for a few more minutes until more help comes along," interrupted Foxy.

"Why? I think we should go now," said Elf.

"I am with Foxy on this, Elf. We need more than just us three, and Ron is not back yet. Give it a little while longer," replied Badger.

Within a few minutes, Ron had come back. A brief time after that, in the distance, you could see the Fox family running as fast as they could, with the Badger family bringing up the rear, lumbering along. Bonnie and Junior ran up to their father and greeted him with a nuzzle as they always do.

"Hello, kids. Hope you have been keeping out of trouble."

"Yes, Dad, we have both been on our best behaviour," said Bonnie.

"Excuse me, but can we now please get on? We are running out of time," requested the Elf.

The Fox and Badger families looked at each other in shock.

"Don't ask. We will explain everything later," said Foxy.

Badger cleared his throat before he started.

"For those who have turned up, which is now the deer, otters, and rabbits, I thank you. The plan is that Elf, Foxy, Owl, and I will go into the village from the right. Fox and Badger families will go left



into the village. I would like the rest of you (which must be quite a few) to watch the woods and form a semicircle around the village, so we should have eyes in most places. We also have eyes in the sky from our feathered friends."

"I would like to have my mother with us as she is the most experienced hunter among us, if that is okay with you, Vivien?" asked Foxy.

"That is fine with me, Foxy."

"Up for the challenge, Mum?"

"Yes, son, I am. Let's go hunting and get a little girl her present," Mum said.

With the plan in motion, everyone knew their role and went on their way to find Poppy. On the way, Badger and his group stopped near the church. They could hear music coming from outside. As they stopped to listen, they could see a large crowd of people standing around in a large group, wrapped up in coats and scarves, and the children had bobble hats and gloves on, as it was a very chilly night. With every word spoken or sung, you could see their steaming breath rising into the clear night sky.

"That music sounds wonderful and quite relaxing," said Foxy.

"They are called Christmas Carols, and the people who sing them are Carol singers," replied Elf.

Foxy was getting a little closer, having a good look around. The church was lit up by an exceptionally large Christmas tree, which made the old church stand tall and proud. And so, it should! It had stood in the village for around five hundred years.

"So, Elf, are all these people called Carol, or is it just the females?" asked Foxy.

Elf looked at Badger in a weird way. "Is he serious or joking?"

"Oh, he is serious, Foxy has a strange sense of humour which we have got used to," replied Badger.

"Come on! Let's go! This is our chance to have a good scout around while some of the humans are busy," said Gwen (mother fox).

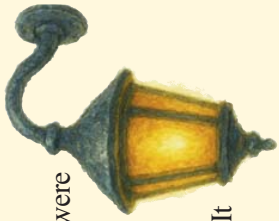
Bonnie and Junior persuaded their mother to let them go off on their own to look.

"Okay, you two. Any sign of trouble, you come back to me," said their mum.

"Yes, Mother, we promise," said Junior.

As the two foxes walked through the village, managing to stay out of eyesight, they were amazed at how beautiful it looked. The main high street had shops and cafes that were bustling with people going about





shopping and getting something to eat and drink. Children were laughing with their parents or in small groups with their friends. The high street was lined with tall trees on either side of the road, bright lights hanging from the branches. The shops and cafes had lights and decorations in their windows, and over all of this was a light covering of frost. It would have been better if it were snowing.

"This looks so wonderful. Junior, if only it were like this every day," said Bonnie.

"I agree, but I don't think life is that easy," remarked Junior. As the foxes walked down a dimly lit alley at the back of the main village pub, they could hear a faint whimpering coming from behind some dustbins. They carefully approached the bins, but suddenly a door at the back of the pub opened and the foxes came face to face with a very noisy man.

"Get out of here, you annoying foxes. Go and scavenge elsewhere!" yelled the man at the top of his voice.

This made Bonnie and Junior run back towards the place where they last saw their mother.

"Hey, you two, what's the rush for?" asked their mother.

"A man from inside the building came out and spooked us," replied Bonnie. "But, Mother, we heard a whimpering from behind the dust bins down an alley, could you come and look?"

"Where is the alley?" asked Mrs Badger.

"It is behind the restaurant," Bonnie said.

"Okay, let's go," replied their mother.

The foxes and Mrs Badger made the journey back to the restaurant to see if they could find anything behind the bins. Mrs Fox and Mrs Badger walked down the dimly lit alley, being careful not to be seen. Mrs Badger walked to the dust bins as she also heard the whimpering. She looked behind, and what she saw was a small puppy shaking with the cold and being very scared. She looked at the puppy, and it looked like the description of Poppy ...

"Hello, little one, don't be afraid. I'm Hilda. I'm here with Vivien."

"Hello, my name is Poppy, and I am lost and afraid."

"How did you get here?" asked Vivien. "I do not know. I was in a big building. The elves there were nice and caring, but I found an open door, so I walked out. When I turned round to go back, the door was shut, so I just walked, and I ended up here."

"I think we know where you are going to be, and you will be very happy there," remarked Vivien.



Chapter Three

Bonnie and Junior were pleased to see their mother and Mrs Badger coming along with Poppy in between them.

"Oh, Mum, she is so cute," exclaimed Bonnie.

"Yes, she is, but very tired and hungry, so I think we should take her to the old rickety barn by the paddock. No one goes there, so we should be safe. Could you two find your father and Badger and tell them where we will be?"

"Yes, we will go now, but I am not sure where to find him," said Junior. Before anyone could say anything else, Ron and Doris came flying down out of the night sky.

"Hello, you two! How glad we are to see you," said Hilda.

"Snowy owl, who lives not far from here, had you all in his eyesight most of the night, so he came and found me, and we both came to see what we could do," said Ron.

"Thank him when you see him, please, Ron," said Vivien.

"So, what is the plan? The village is still remarkably busy, so we must keep to the shadows as much as possible," said Junior.

"Shame we have to go to the village," replied Bonnie.

"I know, but we must get Poppy to the barn. Ron, can you go back to the others and tell them to meet us at the rickety barn?" asked Vivien. "I will do that now, and you all take care. See you soon!" replied Ron as he flew off.

Chapter Four

After a long walk to the barn, everyone was feeling tired but kept on going. Poppy was hitching a ride on Junior's back as her little legs could not keep up. They all got safely to the barn, where Poppy was taken inside to rest and have some food, which had been stored away a couple of nights ago. After a brief time, Badger, Foxy (who was carrying Elf on his back) and Ron turned up at the barn. Word had gone out that the puppy was found, and most of the animals who had joined in the hunt for Poppy were outside waiting to see her.

"Well, for such a small puppy, you have given us the run-around, young lady," said Badger as he greeted her with a Badger-like hug.

"Thank you, Mr Badger, and to your families who found me."

"Poppy, I think it is time we went outside to thank everyone who helped find you, then we must be on our way, as it is Christmas Eve tomorrow," said Elf.

With all the animals waiting outside, Elf and Poppy came through the barn door. Elf stood on a wooden crate and cleared his throat.

"Poppy and I would like to thank everyone for your help tonight. If it were not for you, Poppy may not have been found. A special thank



you must go to Bonnie and Junior, who heard a whimpering, then went and told their mother and Mrs Badger, who then found Poppy. I have the letter from the little girl who wrote to Santa asking for a puppy for Christmas.

Dear Santa,

My name is Samantha, and I am seven years old. I am young, but I have always believed that you are an incredibly special person, and you live in Lapland making toys for every child, rich or poor, sick or healthy. I am extremely sick, as I was born with a heart condition which stops me from playing like other children. Hopefully, one day, I can run around and be a child like my friends. My Mummy and Daddy are very tired from looking after me, and I love them very much, so could you bring them a special present to say thank you? Then, if you could, can I have a little cute girl puppy (girls are prettier) so I can play and cuddle her?

I love you, Santa.

From Samantha xx

After the Elf read the letter, most of the animals went back into the woods to their homes. Badger, Fox, and the Owl families stayed at the hut.

"Thank you again, my furry friends. It is time for us to go. How can I repay you for all your help?" asked the Elf.

"Can we meet Santa?" asked Bonnie and Junior in unison.

"I will see what I can do, as you have been so helpful. Meet me here tomorrow night just before midnight," replied Elf.

As Christmas Eve passed, it was all quiet in Adventure Woods. When nighttime came, the three families met up at the rickety barn.

"It is very quiet and no sign of the Elf," remarked Badger.

"Perhaps he will not be here. It is a busy night for him," replied Ron.

"Do not be glum, my friends. I am here. I promised I would do what I could, and I have. Look skywards and watch."

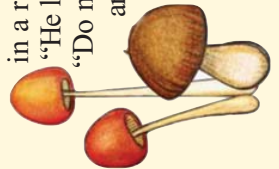
And, as if by magic, flying in front of a full glowing Moon were reindeer pulling Santa's sleigh. They followed the sleigh down until it landed near the barn. Elf walked off to the sleigh, where a big man in a red suit and a long white beard sat.

"He looks so big," said Foxy, hiding behind the corner of the barn.

"Do not be afraid, my friends. You and your families and the other animals have helped save Christmas for a little girl," said Santa.

"You are real," said Bonnie.

"Yes, I am real if you believe in me."



"Where is Poppy?" asked Vivien.

"She is here!" called the Elf. "She has been bathed and groomed, and she has her own collar with a bow and her name on it."

Everyone crowded around the sleigh to see her. Poppy walked off the sleigh to say goodbye to her new friends and promised she would see them again in the future.

"If you go to the village where Poppy will be living, you can see her with her new family, where she will be loved forever," said Santa.

Santa got back in his sleigh, turned and waved and, as if by magic, he took off into the night sky again. The party of animals made their way to Poppy's new home but kept to the shadows so as not to be seen.

Daybreak was making its entrance with a glowing sun in the sky and big, fluffy snowflakes starting to fall.

This would be a Christmas day to remember!

"Shall we go?" asked Foxy.

"No, let's stay a little longer and see Poppy go inside," replied Badger.

"Look, there is a small cage with a big red bow on it on the doorstep," said Vivien.

The door of the house opened. A man came out and read the card.

"Happy Christmas, Samantha. This little puppy is called Poppy, and she is looking for a new loving family to take care of her.

Merry Christmas - Love Santa."

Before the front door was closed, the little girl came to the door and picked Poppy up and gave her a huge hug. The smile on the girl's face could not be put into words. The magic of Christmas is real if you dream. After that emotional event, the three best friends went off to their favourite place by the lake.

"Badger, I think we should keep this detective stuff going," said Foxy.

"I agree it gives you a good feeling inside when you help others," said Ron.

"I have been thinking of an ad we could do," said Foxy.

"Oh yeah, this should be interesting," remarked Badger.

"If you need help and no one can help, then don't call us as we do not have a phone, just ask for the Badger detective club who live in Adventure Woods," laughed a very funny Foxy.

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Christmas Jigsaws

Angela Johns

This is such a busy time of year for most and some of it has to be done in the dark. It won't be long until the shortest day of the year and we can be glad that the days will start to get incrementally longer. Never mind that it will take a while until we can see the difference, we can still know that it is happening as we get on with our normal routine. It's not until it crosses with a regular moment in our day that we realise it. When it seems that the days are forever short and dark, one day we wake up at the usual time and it is a noticeably lighter morning. The Earth has been making its way around the Sun, whether we take notice or not. But we are not there yet. If we wish it to rush towards us, we use up our time and attention, and so miss out on what is happening right now. What is happening for you right now? Is it planning and shopping? Is it fitting in the socials? Is it winding down for some well-earned time off? Maybe it's business as usual. Maybe you are taking each day at a time until you are on the other side of it (in which case I am sending you much love and healing). I am doing a little of all the above, as well as that great winter evening pastime of doing a jigsaw. The challenge, the back ache, the satisfaction. There are so many sky pieces that you can't imagine you will work out where all those non-edge pieces will go! Then the odd two will click together, followed by several more. My sons will walk by, pick up a piece and slot it in. My partner



will say not to do any more without him! Any visitors that call in want to help. Gradually, over several days, the fuller picture emerges as the "one more piece before bed" turns into many. The busyness of the season sprinkled with quiet times of focus. Thanks so much for reading this past year. I am always touched to hear when something has resonated with one of you. I wish you all good things in precious moments over the coming weeks. See you in 2026!

Angela is a qualified Emotional Therapeutic Counsellor registered with the FETC and NCPS.

Also a Reflexologist and Reiki Practitioner, she is passionate about her therapies and spends quality time with her clients to facilitate their wellbeing. You can find her at angelajohns.co.uk



Celebrating Christmas

Carol Draper

As I write this, the hype about what may or may not happen in the budget increases daily. When you read this article, the budget will have occurred, analyses will have happened, and decisions will have been taken about how badly or not we will all have been affected. I don't have a crystal ball, so that is all I am going to say. On a lighter note, Christmas is coming, so no matter what Rachel pronounces, if you are an employer, what could you do to add a bit of sparkle for your employees that won't cost them in tax? If you are holding and paying for a Christmas Party for your employees, to avoid it being treated as a benefit in kind and taxable on your employees, it needs to be an annual event and open to all your workers, even if they don't all attend. There is also a financial limit. The total cost of the party, including room hire, food, drink, accommodation, transport and VAT, paid for by the employer should not exceed £150 per attendee. If the total cost of any Christmas Party exceeds £150 per head, the value of the party is treated as a benefit in kind, and employees who attend will



be taxed on the total cost per head. If you would rather give a present, then you can spend up to £50 including VAT, and as long as the present is not given as a reward for work completed and cannot readily be converted into cash, it is not taxable. Such gifts, known as trivial benefits, can be given at other points in the year too, for example, to celebrate birthdays, anniversaries or other holidays. If you want to give a Christmas Bonus, then irrespective of value or whether it is paid in cash, it is taxable and should be included in the payroll. Cheapest of all is showing your appreciation and saying thank you to your staff. Have a very Merry Christmas!

*Carol Draper FCCA
Clifton-Crick Sharp and Co*

'A Psalm of Life'

Let us, then, be up and doing,
With a heart for any fate;
Still achieving, still pursuing,
Learn to labour and to wait.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow



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Jazz News

Peter Farrall



'A great day in Harlem', taken in 1958

"It was a very good year," sang Francis Albert Sinatra. He didn't specify the year, but 2025 was a very good year for jazz in Pershore. Every monthly club session was full to capacity with fans enjoying a wide selection of jazz by the best of bands and artists from Britain and abroad. A generous helping of Dixieland and Traditional jazz with due deference to the earlier New Orleans bands, interspersed with "mainstream" (which is really a synonym for no specific style – just darned good jazz!), including a jazz/classical fusion and a fun-making band from Italy. Not forgetting another fabulous edition of "Pershore Jazz on a Summer's Day" at Number 8 in August.

The year is not quite finished because we have the Christmas special finale, featuring the Harlem Jazz Orchestra, on 10th

December. They will treat us to the music which came out of New York in the 1920s and 30s during the period known as the Harlem Renaissance, when Harlem shrugged off its seedy, run-down atmosphere and became the place to go in the vibrant new Jazz Age. A host of the leading jazz names of the time and indeed, later years, took up residence in the district, which is illustrated in the famous photograph in a 1958 edition of Esquire showing fifty-seven of the most celebrated musicians in jazz all together in front of a brownstone tenement, including the great Count Basie, who is sitting on the kerb with some of the local kids. Probably the best-known venue was the Cotton Club, which, disgracefully, admitted a white audience only until 1935. The Duke Ellington Orchestra was the resident band here for four years, and we can



The Harlem Jazz orchestra

hear music from this and other great bands of the period at December's Pershore Jazz Club session, played by the leading British musicians in the style. Two of the musicians from the Harlem Jazz Orchestra, Zoltan Sagi and Graham Woodhouse,

will be back in Pershore in January with the Hot Tamales, a hot spicy New Orleans band.

All at Pershore Jazz wish you a Merry Christmas and Happy and Prosperous New Year! Keep Jazzin'!

Harlem Jazz Orchestra Wednesday 10th December

Function Room, Pershore Football Club
Doors open at 7pm, Music at 8 pm
Admission £15 (to include a raffle ticket).
Advance booking and payment only

The Hot Tamales Wednesday 28th January

Admission £12.50 to include a raffle ticket.
Book in advance and pay on arrival
Visit www.pershorejazz.org.uk Tel: 01527 66692
find us on Facebook.



Music Matters

Christmas means different things to everyone, but there's nothing

quite like a Christmas song to bring everyone together. So put on your favourite festive jumper, pour a glass of eggnog and enjoy some rocking, swinging, jazzy and soulful Christmas crackers.

For your playlist

Christmas Can-Can
by *Straight No Chaser*

A fun song about all the good things Christmas brings us. Shopping, Christmas trees covered in lights, Christmas jumpers and more.

Sure, Christmas starts earlier every year, but let's spread some fun and joy to everyone by doing the Christmas Can-Can!

Bells, Bows, Gifts Trees
by *Todrick Hall*

A hip hop Christmas song, why not? This one moves along, celebrating everything festive. "I don't dance, I prance / I don't sled, I slay" He hits all the important Christmas icons.

Christmas Unicorn
by *Sufjan Stevens*

Yup, even Sufjan has made a Christmas song, and this one's about a Unicorn in a gold uniform. Our unicorn may not be perfect, but he knows there are others out there like him, and he wants to find you. Maybe we should all be a Christmas Unicorn, just for one day a year.

Christmas photo
by *John Williamson*

Christmas in Australia is a bit different to how we enjoy it, but from the sounds of this song,

Steve Ide

it's just as much fun. Full of family, festive routines, cricket and people missing from the photo.

Frosti
by *Bjork*

Okay, so this one is cheating a bit, not really a Christmas song, but she does come from Iceland (nearly Santa's home) and it's called Frosti, so that counts too. There aren't any lyrics, and it's a duet of two music boxes, one to enjoy during the wind down on Christmas evening.

Up on the house top
by *The Jackson Five*

This one is sure to get your Christmas party rocking to a happy Motown beat.

What does Michael want for Christmas?

"Love and peace for everyone" and why not?



Whatever you listen to or however you choose to celebrate Christmas, have a wonderful festive season!

From the boundary

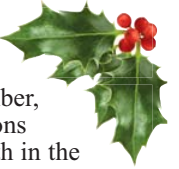


Out of the jaws of victory came defeat in the first test in Australia. It was blatantly pathetic. Whilst I agree that an aggressive style is good, playing as if it were a T20 is ridiculous. Formula One is becoming interesting. It clearly shows that Verstappen is the best driver in the world, especially when his teammate hardly scores a point. It clearly shows that with an inferior car, he can win (this Lewis Hamilton has never done). Ferrari needs to sign one of the new breed of young drivers to the team, and it will save them money. English football seems to be on the up, successfully qualifying for the World Cup. Our local team, Aston Villa, are also doing well. In Rugby, the autumn internationals show that England may be becoming a

serious force. Ireland and Scotland have lost ground in my view, with Wales slightly on the up. I was at Cardiff for the New Zealand game on Saturday, and whilst it was not New Zealand's strongest side, I thought Wales had some signs of light. We will see what happens against South Africa. On the home political front, chaos still reigns. The Budget, which is leaked from day to day and changed as we go along, has created turmoil in the market with the pound falling. The Media claim that the government will call an election in two years. I cannot see that happening given their huge majority. Turkeys don't vote for Christmas. The Conservatives are showing no signs of becoming a force again and may make a further slide.

Reform may be ahead in the polls, but Farage will need to show that he has quality within his ranks by appointing spokesmen from within his ranks. To his credit, I think he has realised that. Also, Danny Kruger moving to Reform is a great asset. He is undoubtedly a man of quality. I think the country is in for a rough ride next year. I now turn to matters of Law. In a judgement last Thursday, Mrs Justice Eady made a deferred quashing order concerning Ruben Barnard. Barnard is twenty-two with no previous convictions. He has been accused of 1) Putting a person in fear of violence by Harassment, 2) Five counts of assault by beating, 3) Criminal damage. The quashing order determined that unless the defendant was brought to Trial

Peter Jewell



before 4th December, all these accusations could be dealt with in the Magistrates court. The defendant appeared on 5th March, and bail was refused on the grounds that there were substantial grounds for believing that the defendant would interfere with witnesses. On the current custody time limit, the defendant should at the latest have the case heard by the 3rd October. On September 30th, the CPS applied successfully for the time limit to be extended to March 2026. The Solicitors brought the matter before Judge Del Fabbro at Snaresbrook Crown Court and submitted that the underfunding of the legal system has caused the delay and, of course, Justice Delayed is justice denied. The Judge made various excuses and set the trial date for 2nd March 2026. In my judgement, prospective quashing orders would give the quietus to what has been called the "metaphysic of nullity", the constraining theory that any legal error makes a decision or instrument not merely voidable but void ab initio. The defendant has been on remand for twelve months, and the likely sentence may not even be custodial, given his lack of previous convictions, of course, even if he were found guilty. Suffice to say HMCTS are in a mess, especially the Probate office and the office of the Public Guardian, who operate from a box number because they all work from home! Because cases are listed badly, the court do not operate effectively.

Thoughts from the Snug . .

"Here's a Christmas myth exposed!" said one lady member of the Snug as she read from her mobile phone. "Both male and female reindeer grow antlers in the Summer. However, male reindeer shed their antlers at the beginning of winter in early November. Female reindeer retain theirs until they give birth in the Spring. So" she added, "almost every image we see of Christmas reindeer has to be female! Logic! Donner, Blitzen and Rudolph! All female!" Indifferent nods of the heads from the men in the Snug, but a round of applause from the three ladies in the group when

one says, "We should have known it. Only a female would be able to drag an obese man, dressed in red velvet, all around the world, not get lost, and achieve it all in one night!" "Yeah," said another. "That resonates with my experience of dragging Hubby around shopping this Christmas. If I could borrow the reindeer, I would." A short silence followed, broken by one chap who, trying to counter the cutting remarks, said, "Perhaps we should adopt the Christmas tradition of 'Drachenfute!' Puzzled expressions all around. 'It's a present a German gives

Christmas Traditions



to his wife to apologise for his mistakes: like being out late, or stopping off for a beer on his way home. Drachenfute translates as 'Dragon Fodder'."

A longer silence followed, but bouncing shoulders, displaying quiet mirth, were observed. Touche. Merry Christmas!

Buddy Bach

Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor,
I would like to record my thanks to all those who came together at Gordon's Gig in Pershore Abbey on 18th October to celebrate the life and musical legacy of Gordon Hartley-Bennett. The Concert was a sell-out and raised £3200 for local charities. The local Parkinson's Disease Support Group will receive £1600 (some of which they will forward to Parkinson's UK). The remaining £1600 will be split evenly between Pershore Plus Volunteer Centre, Pershore Wellbeing Hub, Pershore Riverside Centre and Wick Care Farm. Almost 60 of Gordon's

musical friends played at the Concert, and many of the audience were ex-students, now in their mid-thirties to early fifties, and their parents. The finale, led by Alcester Victoria Silver Band, was a piece called "Twiggybank" (music that Gordon had written for Perscoran Brass in its heyday). It was emotional to see many ex-Perscoran members from the audience join the band on stage for a rousing end to the night. Thanks are also due to the comperes, Pershore Rotary, for dealing with all monies and stewarding, and friends of Gordon who helped organise the Concert.
Sue Hartley-Bennett

Dear Editor,
What do I do with thirty years of the Fossils Cricket Team's history? Have any of your readers any ideas or help on the above? Having started the Fossils in 1995 and kept all the scorebooks, photos, newspaper reports, magazine articles, trophies, letters and other information on the

Fossils' first thirty years, at the age of 84, I am now wondering what to do with it all. I can't just bin it all, can I? Your readers' suggestions would be most welcome before it's too late.

*Regards,
John Reynolds
Founder and President of the
Fossils Cricket Team*

Dear Editor,
Another year has flown by and we find ourselves fast approaching what those of us in the retail industry call "Silly Season". This is when people effectively lose their marbles in the manufactured pursuit of a "Perfect Christmas". There is no such thing. At least, not in a commercial sense. Why the obsession with buying "stuff" only to receive more "stuff" that eventually you will have to get rid of? There are even programmes on television telling you how to "declutter". How about not accumulating clutter in the first place? In reality, most of your clutter is irrelevant to everyone except possibly you, and then it is unimportant in the grand scheme of things. When you eventually shuffle off this mortal coil you can't take your "stuff" with you!

We have been taken for fools. Our consumer-driven society, now actively backed by the ever encroaching influence of social media, preys on the natural ego of human beings. The permanent need for self validation and the fear of missing out has created a society of individuals who know the price of everything but the value of very little.

I urge you to stop participating in "Silly Season". If you are not actively "religious", perhaps the question should be: "Why are you celebrating Christmas at all?" Maybe the answer is to enjoy the season without the hype? Go to a carol service at your local church - you will be surprised how uplifting it is. Spend time with family and friends, enjoy good food (although maybe don't buy so much you end up throwing vast quantities away?), have a drink if you like, buy your close ones a small gift as a token of your appreciation for them and not to show how ostentatious you are.

I cannot take credit for them, but, for me, the lyrics of 'Let it be Christmas everywhere' by Alan Jackson sum up how I feel about Christmas perfectly. I urge you to read them, listen to the song (it's on YouTube!) if you can, and enjoy the simple pleasures of the season.

Merry Christmas!
*Julie Reynolds
(Worcester)*



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Letters cont.

Dear Editor,

It is always a pleasure to pick up a copy of the monthly Pershore Times and yesterday was no exception. You can imagine my delight in reading the article on page 2 by Willow Pinchin about "Worcestershire's Men: 1918". As a military historian by inclination and hobby, I am always very pleased to encourage others who share those interests and I hope she is enjoying her MA studies in "History: First World War" at Wolverhampton University. My purpose in writing to you, understanding GDPR, is to ask you to forward this email to Willow Pinchin. Education is a

core function of all museums and I would be delighted if our Museum in Worcester can help her with her studies and interests.

In Dancox House, we have a wide collection of effects as well as copious amounts of letters, diaries and photos that she may like to access as part of her studies.

Very best wishes

*Lieutenant Colonel (Retd)
Mark Jackson OBE
Chair, Board of Trustees
Mercian Regiment Museum
(Worcestershire)*

Dear Editor,

I was delighted to read your advert offering three months free advertising to start-up companies from 1st December edition of the Pershore Times. Supporting small businesses is key to the economy.

I am poised to launch my Celebrancy business within Pershore, where I live, and the surrounding areas.

I appreciate the opportunity you offer,

Louise Brand



'Tis the season



For as long as people have lived in these islands, we have celebrated Midwinter. First, we called it by its pagan name, Beltane, and now we call it Christmas. By any name, though, it is an excuse to break up the tedium of long, dreary nights and mark the turn of the year, for after the Winter Solstice, the nights will again begin to get shorter and shorter until Summer arrives. So now is a time for feasting, possibly also for travel and certainly for the giving of presents. Here's a very brief Worcestershire take on all three. Firstly, for feasting, we sampled the Swan at Broadway and were delighted. It fitted perfectly into my perception of what a British pub should be like at Christmas – warm, welcoming and nicely presented. The Festive Set Menu, which had plenty of choices, began with superb starters, followed by superior main courses (I had the nicest pork tomahawk) and culminating in superlative desserts – my wife felt that her crème brûlée (see picture) was so pretty it was almost a pity to eat it. The cooking of Chef

Marcel was ably complemented by the impeccable table service provided by Karl.

The Festive Set Menu is from £39.95 for three courses.

Email

enquiry@theswanbroadway.co.uk or phone 01386 852278

As regards 'travel', many of us are seeking to avoid the hassle of flying by taking 'no fly' cruises, and I recently heard from Ambassador Cruise Line, who operate out of London's Tilbury docks with their ship, the 'Ambience', and also from a range of UK ports with their second ship, the 'Ambition'. The company say that they offer "the warmest welcome at sea" and, certainly, their prices seem nicely affordable. I particularly like their Christmas Market Voyage, with the Ambience sailing from Tilbury on 14th of this month, returning on the 20th and visiting Hamburg (I don't know it, but if it was good enough for the Beatles it's good enough for me ...), then Amsterdam (really good for seasonal shopping?) and finally, Bruges (romantic and charming at any season), allowing guests to savour not just the distinctive charm of each destination, but also to enjoy sailing along the northern European coastline between ports. *Prices start from just £449 per person sharing an inside cabin. For details, see www.ambassadorcruiseline.com* That takes me to my, perhaps, idiosyncratic suggestions for Christmas presents. Having trawled the Web, I've come up with one a day ... Sunday: Pocket walking guides. I chose Oxfordshire because it's

got a lovely walk from Charlbury Station (on the Cotswold Line from Parkway, Pershore or Honeybourne stations). *£6.99 and free postage from pocketmountains.co.uk.*

Monday: Get those brain cells working! Try the new smart games – IQ Deluxe. For adults facing a real challenge. (And, no, I'm not telling you how I got on!) *£12.99 from www.smarttoysandgamesuk.com.*

Tuesday: time for some food. I tried Toast'ems, warm, sweet toaster-ready treats. *Available from Amazon and also Iceland.*

Wednesday: time for drinkies! Really like the new Christmas pudding rum from Tiptree (yes, that's right – the jam people). It's a rich, warming rum that also captures the essence of Christmas pudding and comes in a rather nice bottle.

Get it from *www.tiptree.com/collections/english-rum/products/christmas-pudding-rum-liqueur*

Thursday: I found a fudge Christmas cracker that's a bit of a showstopper, made by a small start-up company.

Brian Johnson-Thomas

These stocking fillers are available via John Lewis stores.

Friday: another Christmas cracker, this time from Fever Tree (the mixers people). It includes a fever tree mojito mixer and also a spiced rum, not to mention a festive hat and, of course, a joke! *Costs £10 – again from John Lewis.*

Saturday: a satay and spice set from Makan Malaysia. Well, I thought that I could make a mean nasi goreng until I tried these ... really opens up new horizons in the kitchen.

Available online from makanmalaysia.co.uk/pantry.

This just leaves me space to quickly mention Gloucester and its Christmas activities. For some reason, we tend to forget that this city's so accessible to us but their Christmas markets run until the 21st and are located across Gloucester quays and the historic docks, with over 120 traders offering craft, gifts and food from across the southwest. There's also an outdoor ice rink until 4th January.

See www.gloucesterquays.co.uk





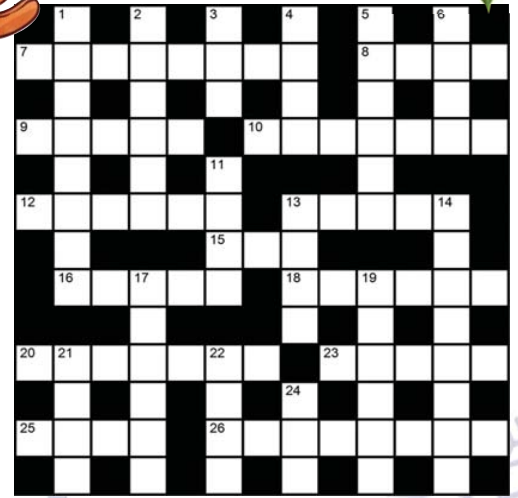
Christmas Crossword

Across

- 7 Provided with protective covering (8)
- 8 Speck (4)
- 9 Gather (5)
- 10 Boat race (7)
- 12 Type of variable electrical control (6)
- 13 Embarrass (5)
- 15 Stimulus (3)
- 16 Expiry (5)
- 18 Yield post (6)
- 20 Wool fat (7)
- 23 Crowbar (5)
- 25 Hardens (4)
- 26 Pertaining to a school (8)

Down

- 1 Quivered (8)
- 2 Israeli intelligence agency (6)
- 3 Illustrative craft (3)
- 4 Verge (4)
- 5 Largest desert (6)
- 6 Wood (4)
- 11 Mischievous (4)
- 13 Relating to aircraft (4)
- 14 Sanitary (8)
- 17 Excite (6)
- 19 Scandinavian kingdom (6)
- 21 Second son of Adam and Eve (4)
- 22 Formerly Mesopotamia (4)
- 24 Grass (3)

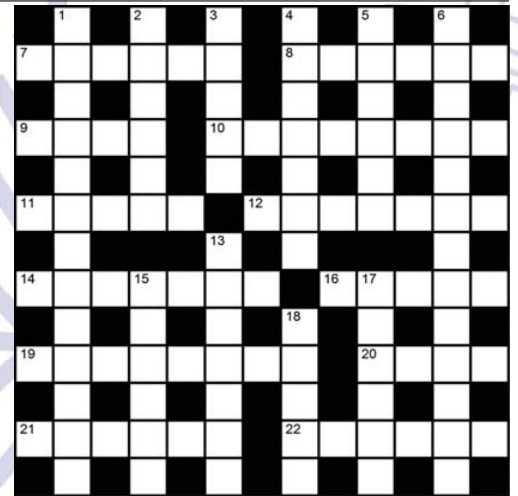


Across

- 7 2nd smallest continent (6)
- 8 Microphone inventor (6)
- 9 Probability (4)
- 10 Fragile (8)
- 11 Join (5)
- 12 Couple (7)
- 14 Long established (3-4)
- 16 Mature (5)
- 19 Yes (3,5)
- 20 Profane expression (4)
- 21 Reduce (6)
- 22 Vestige (6)

Down

- 1 Painful abdominal complaint (8,5)
- 2 Maiden Castle county (6)
- 3 Is inclined (5)
- 4 Colours developing in Autumn (7)
- 5 Performing animal show (6)
- 6 Reflection (13)
- 13 Conceive (7)
- 15 Shove (6)
- 17 Gadget (6)
- 18 Hiding place (5)

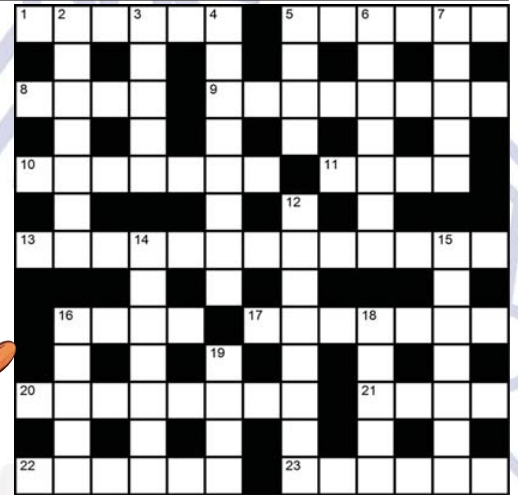


Across

- 1 South North American republic (6)
- 5 Warning (3-3)
- 8 Version still being developed (4)
- 9 Boss (8)
- 10 Packages (7)
- 11 Literary work (4)
- 13 Donkey (5,2,6)
- 16 Close (4)
- 17 Commander in chief of a fleet (7)
- 20 Parasol (8)
- 21 Wicked (4)
- 22 Gorge (6)
- 23 Loftier (6)

Down

- 2 Lift up (7)
- 3 Hebrew patriarch (5)
- 4 Fail to notice (8)
- 5 Class (4)
- 6 Flourish (7)
- 7 Eats (5)
- 12 Submissive to authority (8)
- 14 Soft and moist (7)
- 15 Scrutinise (7)
- 16 Sweatbox (5)
- 18 Standard of perfection (5)
- 19 Futile (4)



Christmas Magic Squares

Fill in the grids, so each column, row and diagonal add up to the same number!

2					2
7				5	
6			8		4
			8		

Did You Know?

'Jingle Bells' was the first song played on an instrument in space. On 16th December 1965, it was broadcast during NASA's Gemini 6A space flight, played by Wally Schirra and Thomas Stafford.

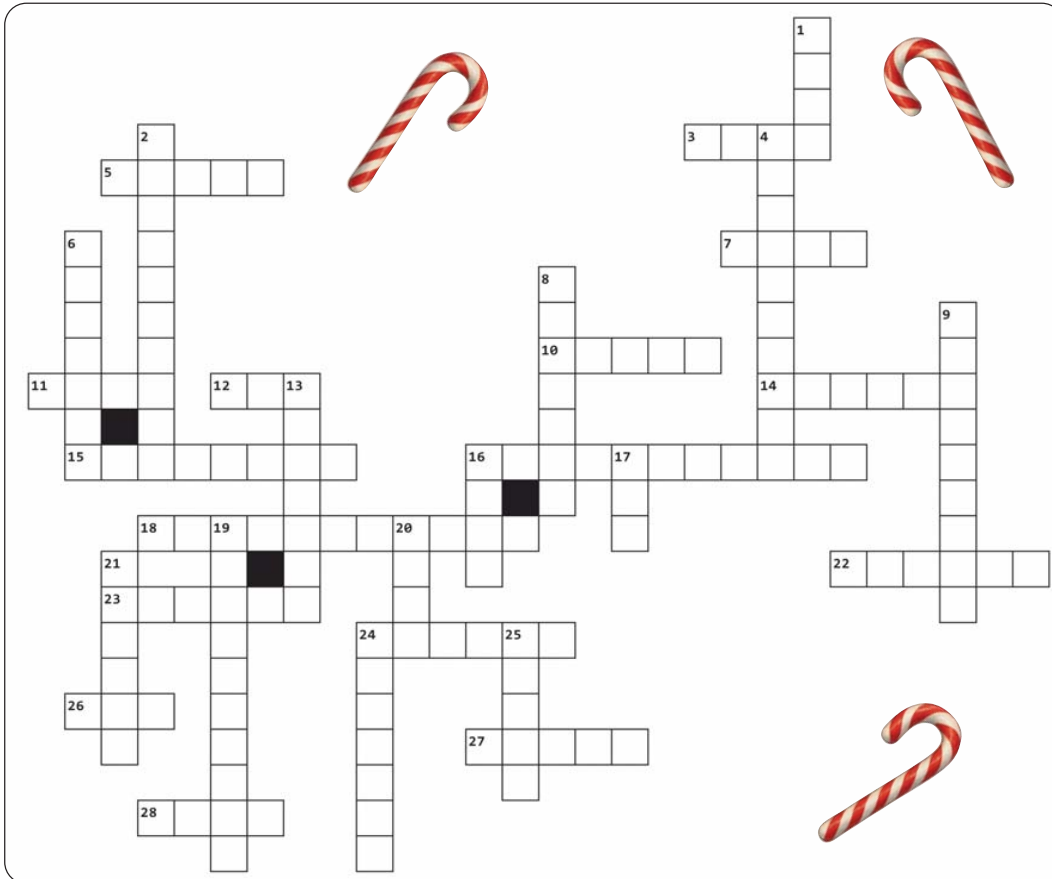
Word of the Month

'Erubescence'

becoming a reddish colour or blushing
Definition:



Christmas Crossword



Down

- 1) Traditional Christmas dessert often filled with dried fruits
- 2) Famous Christmas ballet
- 4) Traditional Christmas plant with red leaves
- 6) British Christmas food
- 8) Christmas' country of origin
- 9) "Bah Humbug"
- 13) Reindeer with a glowing nose
- 16) Santa's mode of transportation
- 17) Christmas movie featuring the character "Buddy"
- 19) Festive candle holder with multiple branches
- 20) Christmas tree topper
- 21) Traditional Christmas drink
- 24) Christmas market country of origin
- 25) Christmas carol group

Across

- 3) Christmas gift wrapper
- 5) Popular Christmas cookie
- 7) Seasonal winter precipitation
- 10) Traditional Christmas color
- 11) Another name for Father Christmas
- 12) Christmas tree material
- 14) Popular Christmas tree decoration that sparkles
- 15) Festive wreath often hung on doors
- 16) Christmas gift-giving tradition in some European countries on 6th December

Across (cont.)

- 18) Kevin from 'Home Alone'
- 22) Christmas season
- 23) Who - Famous Christmas cartoon character
- 24) Christmas character who tries to steal Christmas
- 26) Holiday season greeting
- 27) Christmas song with "Silent" in the title
- 28) Christmas Eve visitor

Famous Writers Wordsearch



AA MILNE	CAMUS	KAFKA	PROUST
AESOP	DANTE	KEATS	SARTRE
ANN B. ROSS	DIDEROT	LUCIAN	SHELLEY
BUCHAN	GRIMM	MARLOW	WAUGH
BUNYAN	HARDY	PASTERNAK	
BYRON	HOMER	PLATO	

Christmas Maths Brainteaser

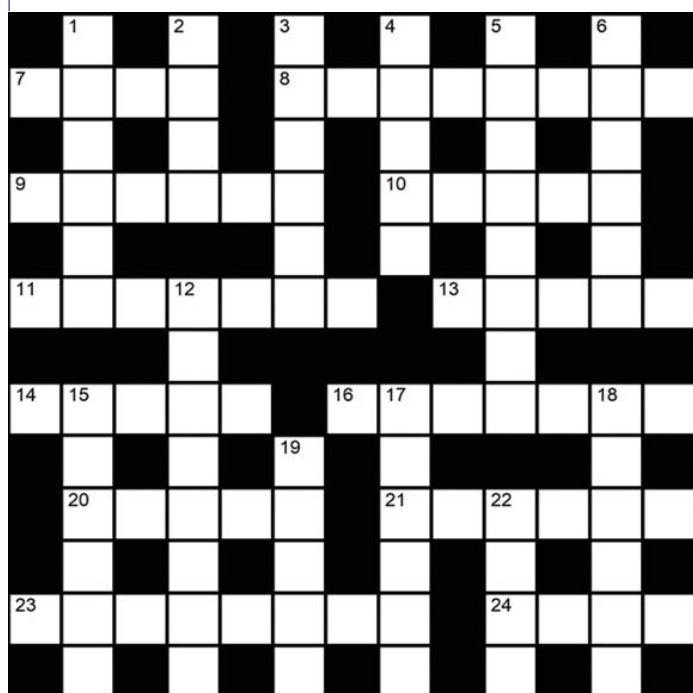


Answers:
Ornament - 6
Mitten - 2
Tree - 7

How does Good King Wenceslas like his pizzas?
Deep pan, crisp and even!

Christmas Coffee Break

Anagram Crossword



Across

- 7 Abet (4)
8 Corseted (8)
9 Devote (6)
10 Pinot (3,2)
11 Chasing (7)
13 Stars (5)
14 Rites (5)
16 Natives (7)
20 Hires (5)
21 Disuse (6)
23 Ancients (8)
24 Meat (4)

Down

- 1 Create (6)
2 Afro (4)
3 Define (4,2)
4 Croat (5)
5 Stir wine (6,2)
6 Are men? (6)
12 Starship (8)
15 Nan hid (2,4)
17 Biased (6)
18 Not see (4,2)
19 On sea (2,3)
22 O E Ms (4)



Sudoku

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

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

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

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

Musical Instruments Wordsearch

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

ANVIL
BANJO
BELL
BONES
BUGLE
CHIMES
CRWTH
DRUM
FIFE
GONG
HARP
LUTE
LYRE

MOOG
OBOE
ORGAN
PIPE
REBEC
REGAL
SHAWM
SHENG
SITAR
TABOR
TUBA
VEENA
VIOLA

Christmas Maths Brainteaser



Answers:
Lamposts - 15
Snowmen - 4
Trees - 3

Quiz!

- 1) What is the name of Santa's reindeer named after the German word for 'thunder'?
- 2) Which actor stars as Scrooge in the 1951 film adaptation of 'A Christmas Carol'?
- 3) Which monarch delivered the first Christmas Broadcast to the BBC in 1932?
- 4) What is the title of the comedic Christmas song by Benny Hill that describes a festive chase scene?
- 5) What is the original meaning of the French word 'Noel'?
- 6) In 'Blackadder's Christmas Carol', who plays Ebenezer Blackadder?
- 7) Which country traditionally eats KFC for Christmas dinner?
- 8) In 'Gavin & Stacey', which character is obsessed with Christmas and often goes overboard with festivities?
- 9) In the song 'The Twelve Days of Christmas', how many presents are given in total?
- 10) Which famous scientist was born on Christmas Day, 1642?
- 11) What is the original title of the 1823 poem commonly known as "'Twas the Night Before Christmas"?
- 12) Which states in the U.S. have a town called Santa Claus?
- 13) The movie 'Miracle on 34th Street' is based on which real-life department store?
- 14) The first artificial Christmas tree was made from what?

Bonus Round!

- 1) In which century was the use of an 'X-' instead of 'Christ-' for the word 'Christmas' first recorded?
- 2) Which BBC show holds the record for the highest number of Christmas specials?
- 3) What popular holiday song was written during the Cuban missile crisis as a plea for peace?
- 4) Which environmentalist U.S. president discouraged Christmas trees at the White House?

Answers: 1) Donner 2) Alistair Sim 3) George V 4) Ernie (The Fastest Milkman in the West) 5) Birth 6) Rowan Atkinson 7) Japan 8) Pam Shipman 9) 364 10) Isaac Newton 11) A Visit from St. Nicholas 12) Indiana, Arizona, and Georgia 13) Macy's 14) Goose feathers

1) 11th century - The first known use of "Xmas" is from the Anglo-Saxon chronicle (1021), where a scribe wrote "Xp̄es m̄esse" to save on paper.

2) Blue Peter - The show had 59 consecutive specials between 1958 and 2016

3) Do You Hear What I Hear? - Music by Gloria Shayne Baker, lyrics by Noel Regney, written in n October 1962.

4) President Theodore Roosevelt - Roosevelt was a conservationist and wanted to set an example by not displaying any Christmas trees in the White House during his tenure. In 1902, his son, Archie, hid a small fir tree in his closet and decorated it.

What athlete is the warmest during the winter?

A long jumper!

Why don't you ever see Father Christmas in hospital?

He has private elf care!

November Answers



Poets' Corner

'Twas the night before Christmas,
when all through the house
Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse;
The stockings were hung by the chimney with care,
In hopes that St. Nicholas soon would be there;
The children were nestled all snug in their beds;
While visions of sugar-plums danced in their heads;
And mamma in her 'kerchief, and I in my cap,
Had just settled our brains for a long winter's nap,
When out on the lawn there arose such a clatter,
I sprang from my bed to see what was the matter.
Away to the window I flew like a flash,
Tore open the shutters and threw up the sash.
The moon on the breast of the new-fallen snow,
Gave a lustre of midday to objects below,
When what to my wondering eyes did appear,
But a miniature sleigh and eight tiny rein-deer,
With a little old driver so lively and quick,
I knew in a moment he must be St. Nick.
More rapid than eagles his coursers they came,
And he whistled, and shouted, and called them by name:
"Now, Dasher! now, Dancer! now Prancer and Vixen!
On, Comet! on, Cupid! on, Donder and Blitzen!
To the top of the porch! to the top of the wall!
Now dash away! dash away! dash away all!"

Clement Clarke Moore 1779 - 1863

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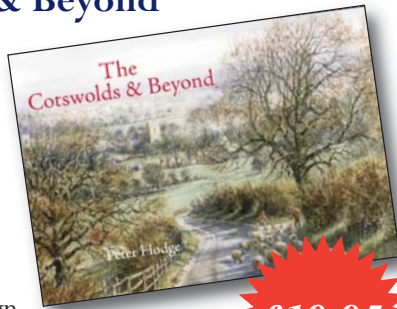
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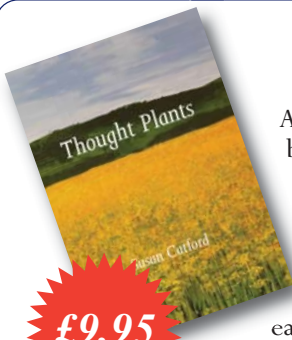
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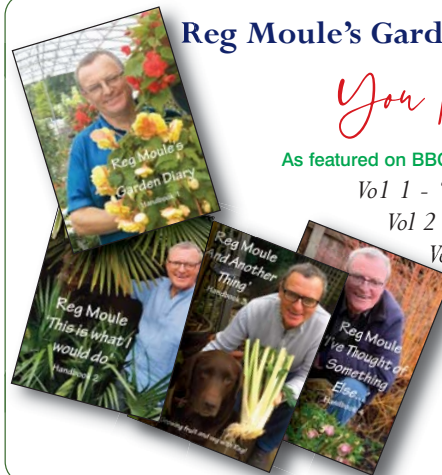
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Severn Stoke & Croome D'abitot News

Happenings in Severn Stoke and Environs

John Henderson

St. Denys' Church, Severn Stoke

All are welcome to join the 1st Troop Severn Stoke Brownies and their parents for the annual Christingle Service, which they lead, on Wednesday 3rd December at 6.00 p.m. This will be followed by light refreshments, for which donations are requested from the congregation participating.

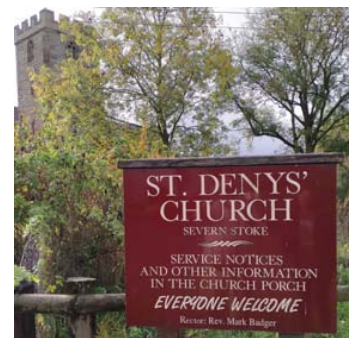
Our annual Carol Service will be held on Sunday 21st December at 6.00 p.m., always a joyous occasion.

Friends of St. Denys' Church, Severn Stoke

Raising funds to modernise the church! The traditional 'Carols at The Nash' will be held at The Nash, Kempsey, WR5 3PB, by kind permission of

Drs. M & K Sweeney on Friday 5th December at 7.30 p.m. The Chase Brass Band will accompany us as usual, with Carols and readings, followed by delicious seasonal light refreshments.

Tickets at £12.00 each, whilst vacancies last, are available from John Henderson on 07905 927928



Kempsey WI



Male and female visitors were welcomed to Kempsey WI's first Open Meeting, to hear antiques dealer, Nigel Christie, delve into the stories behind his collections. Nigel, from Leominster, explained how his boyhood hobby of collecting things gradually developed into a business, when a need to free up shelf space at home made him start selling pieces, only to experience the joy of then buying more. He told how the UK was the first country to

introduce assaying, testing the purity of precious metals, and maintains a hugely popular interest in antiques dealing, with the third highest annual turnover value in the world. After giving tips on how to check items when buying, he passed around various objects for the audience to try to work out their use or age. He also showed items that catalogued social history – such as tiny clogs for a three-year-old workhorse child and exquisitely-made calfskin gloves for a three-year-old from an upper-class family. Nigel also held an Antiques Roadshow-style Basic, Better, Best quiz, featuring three very different glass bottles. He then judged entries in the members' competition for a quirky antique item (pictured), which was won by Julie Smith with her example of The World's Smallest Dictionary. *The next meeting will be a Christmas party with shared food and games, on Monday 15th December at Kempsey Youth Centre, Plovers Rise, 2pm.*

Free Advertising

All start-up businesses will be eligible for three months free advertising.

The size of the free colour advertisement will be 70mm x 100mm and the first advertisement will have a 250-word editorial.

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Please telephone Joy Clee 01905 820317

Spot & Shop November Winners

- | | |
|---------------------|-------------------------|
| 1) Kelsey Coward | 5) Lorraine Middleburgh |
| 2) Katherine Harvey | 6) Jodie O'Sullivan |
| 3) J. Burrows | 7) A. Dufty |
| 4) Nicola Smith | |



Last month's answer: RSB Decorations

**SPOT
and
SHOP!**

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

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Kempsey Times closing date: 19th January 2026

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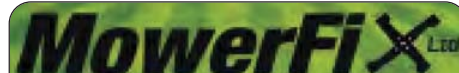
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Camera Club



'Red Kite' by Cliff McFarlane

With autumn definitely here, and with winter apparently due shortly, the Club is delighted to enable you to enjoy being out of the cold, wind and rain by participating in our regular online programme of interesting evenings. December is (given all that is otherwise in train) one of our quieter months. We will have only one formal meeting, which will be held on Wednesday 10th. This will take the form of a talk by well-respected photographer, Roger Hance FRPS, on the subject of "Photographing Wildlife in your Garden".

However, January should, we hope, make up for the quiet end to the year, as we will have three formal meetings (two of our own and one shared with multiple clubs from across the region). Our first meeting of 2026 will be held on Wednesday 14th January, and will again take the form of

a talk. On this occasion, the speaker will be Ashley Franklin ARPS, who will be giving us an illustrated guide to "The Wider World of Photography", covering the development of portrait, fashion, industrial, war & social documentary photography. On Tuesday 20th, we will be involved in a five-way photographic battle, hosted by Bromsgrove PS, where we hope we might do better than our third spot last year, and then on Wednesday 28th, we have our first competition of the year, with the subject of 'Urban Landscape', the medium of digital images and the judge, Martin Pinches. *We would be delighted to welcome anybody interested in the evenings listed above.*

Please make contact via our website www.kempseycameraclub.uk where you will also find further

details of our programme for the rest of the new season. In the meantime, we hope that you will take pleasure from these two natural history images, 'Kestrel' by Richard Parkes & 'Red Kite' by Cliff McFarlane, both from the group of eight

top-placed images in our first (Open) competition of the new season held in early October, and both by recently-joined (albeit experienced) members of the Club.

*Malcolm A Hay
Secretary*



'Kestrel' by Richard Parkes

District Councillors, December Report



Here, I try to give you a brief update on District Council and other items that we have been involved in within the Ward of Kempsey. The contents of this report are provided by David Harrison, who is the sole person responsible for them.

I am afraid that I have a lot of planning and Flooding going on at present, with over thirty local planning applications for Severn Stoke and Kempsey. I am

also fighting for the flood defence at Severn Stoke, the upgrade of the Kempsey flood defence, and trying to get the planning for the new Pump Track and community facilities in Pixham Ferry Lane planning approved and many items within the Ward. We continue to assist anybody in our Ward of Kempsey and Severn Stoke.

South Worcestershire Development Plan Review (SWDPR) – Update

Hopefully, we will have submitted the "Main Modifications" for the development plan to the Inspectors when you read this, and also agreed that these amendments can go out for Public Consultation in January 2026. We will then adopt them in March 2026 by Malvern Council after the Planning Inspector after the Planning Inspectors have agreed.

Grants to Community Groups
We still have £1000 each for

community group funding, so please apply before the end of January. Details from us via email, there is only a two-page form to fill in.

Kempsey flood defence

Over thirty people attended to see what the Environment Agency had done to make the defence more resilient. Thank you to all officers, Police, Contractors, Environment Agency staff, Councillors and residents who attended.

Remembrance Day

This year, John laid a wreath at Severn Stoke and I laid one in Kempsey.

Christmas and New Year

John Michael and his wife, Rita, would like to wish you all a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year. My wife, Jan, and I would also like to wish you all a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year, and also thank you for the support for both our major



operations that we have had to undergo. Many, many thanks for the messages of support.

*John Michael
01905 317930
18 Meadow Close, Kempsey
john.michael@malvernhillsc.net
David Harrison
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8 Brookend Lane, Kempsey
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8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

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Severn Stoke and Croome d'Abitot Parish Council

Parish Councillors joined residents at St Denys Church, Severn Stoke, for the Sunday Remembrance Service on 9th November. Your parish clerk attended the similar service at St Mary's, Kempsey. At both events, everyone joined to gently begin the shift of focus from living veterans to instead sharing stories and reflections and to commemorate those who continue to serve in modern conflicts. Thank you to our lengthsman and residents who helped to get the Severn Stoke war memorial spick and span in readiness.

We have recently had a spot of wet and windy weather, and everyone has hopefully stayed dry. Thank you to all residents for keeping the parish council informed of every individual situation – how close the waters got, which roads were beginning to flood, locations that needed additional signage, and where trees and branches had come down. We really appreciate the information and try to act upon

it as fast as we can. We have a Flood Action Plan that we work through to alert the higher authorities when needed, and we cannot do this without the support of residents, so thank you.

If you would like a copy of our plan or would like your name and phone number added to it for a flood emergency within the parish, please contact the parish council on 07950 256363.

The parish clerk has had a few communications about fireworks over the past month. For many pet owners, fireworks are a source of significant stress and fear for their animals, leading to calls for stricter regulations. For others, fireworks are enjoyable family time, a beloved tradition and a matter of freedom of choice. The parish council cannot enforce the law regarding fireworks – which can be found on the gov.uk website. The Government has recently responded to a petition calling for a ban on sales of fireworks with a statement that

they intend to minimise the negative impact of fireworks and to support their considerate use. Social media is often used to vent frustration, but this can often only escalate the conflict and dig everyone's heels in. It is more effective to use social media and routes such as this news article to raise positive awareness and to encourage residents to advise their neighbours when they are planning a fireworks event. While no firework is completely silent, there is now a wide range of low-noise options that focus on the visual element of sparks and colour.

At the time of writing (20th November), Malvern Hills District Council has not yet published specific 2025 Christmas bin collection dates. The district council will post the updated schedule on its website, in the local press, or via its e-newsletter. *If you need help or information with your waste and recycling collections that you cannot find on the district council website,*

then please call the district council on 01684 862490 from 8am to 4pm, Mon - Fri or email

depotadmin@malvern hills.gov.uk Please consider joining our parish council in the New Year. We have seats ready and available for immediate co-option. We are a lovely little council that is continuing to slowly make a difference, even more so as Devolution progresses. The job is as involved or light-touch as anyone wishes to make it – the workload falls on the team, not the individual.

A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to all our residents!

Our next meeting: dates to be decided, most likely 28th January 2026, 7.30pm – Croome National Trust Visitor Centre, SOQ room.
Parish Council Clerk,
Lisa Stevens,
07950256363
parishclerk@severnstokeand croomedabitot-pc.gov.uk

Teddies for Tragedies

With winter setting in, I'm hoping my knitters are busy making teddies, hats, scarves and mittens, jumpers and blankets. I also get crocheted blankets, large and small, which are most welcome.

We need many items to donate to people who have nothing to keep themselves warm. Thank you to all who support this charity. Keep knitting.

Julia Grant

2026 collection dates: Mon 23rd - Fri 27th February / Mon 8th - Fri 12th June / Mon 12th - Fri 16th October

Save the Children

Heather and the team would like to thank all those who came to our Coffee Morning on Saturday 15th November. It was a lovely morning with over 50 people joining us for coffee and cake. You helped us raise £425.10, which is a wonderful amount. This money goes to help those in many places where people have

nothing. It helps children to attend a school provided by Save the Children. Kempsey villagers have always supported S.T.C. since we started our group back in 1984(ish) and have helped to raise thousands of pounds for this charity. Thank you once again.

Heather Davies 01905 821040
Julia Grant 01905 820138

In memoriam

KEMPSEY RESIDENTS OF 57 YEARS LAID TO REST

We wish to announce that Frank and Mina Tallett have been laid to rest together in St Mary's Church, Kempsey, following a memorial service that was held on 13th November 2025. Mina and Frank lived on Bannut Hill for 57 years, where they raised their family. They were a huge part of the close-knit community of Kempsey village.

Mina worked at The Lawns as a care assistant and was an active member of the Cornflower club. Frank was well known for his hobby of racing pigeons and was a long term member of the Upton-Upon-Severn Racing Pigeon club, meeting each week at The Anchor pub in Kempsey.

They will be forever missed by family and friends left behind.

In Memoriam notices are free of charge
email: news@hughes.company

A letter shared by Julia Grant



Dear Supporter,
Many thanks to you, and anyone who was involved, for the beautiful items you knitted and donated during our October collection week. Your handmade gifts bring comfort, warmth, and a deep sense of care to women who have suffered from childbirth injuries, often for years without knowing that healing is possible and that they can return to a normal life. Your kindness and generosity mean so much to the women who receive your lovely creations.

Nurse-Aid Almaz from Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital told us about the impact of the blankets: "When the women arrive, they often feel confused and uncertain about what to do. We reassure them that we are here to support and comfort them throughout their journey in our hospital. We help them take a shower and provide them with fresh clothes, sending their old ones to the laundry. This simple act can transform their feelings. There is a noticeable difference in their feeling before and after. The Comfort Package, especially the hand-knitted blanket, symbolises warmth and care. It makes the women feel welcomed and valued

from the very moment they arrive. This small gesture can have a significant impact on their emotional well-being during a challenging time." This was our final collection for 2025, and thanks to wonderful supporters like you, we collected 1,144 blankets, 104 baby blankets, 298 cardigans, and 238 hats this time. Across all three collections this year, we gathered an amazing 2,494 blankets, 192 baby blankets, 676 cardigans, and 788 hats in total. You have been a special part of this wonderful effort. Over the coming year Hamlin Fistula Ethiopia is aiming to treat over 3,500 women so the need for blankets is great. Please do keep knitting and spread the word to family and friends who may also like to help. Every stitch you knit carries more than warmth. It carries love, encouragement, and the reminder that someone truly cares. Thank you for giving your time, talent, and heart to the women we support. With warm thanks and wishes,

Misirach Yacob
Finance and Supporter
Care Officer

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**SPOT
and
SHOP!**
See Page 31

Looking a lot like Christmas

It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas at The Lawns!

Thank you to all friends and family who replied to our "You Said, We Did" survey in October. Surveys are a requirement of our regulator, the Care Quality Commission, and we were delighted to receive such positive feedback. Our team "genuinely care" are "warm and friendly," "approachable and helpful." They have "little conversations, encouragements and friendly smiles" for residents. "The staff are wonderful and Mum actually said to me that she feels like she has another family here."

"Dad has thrived and has now lived at The Lawns, happy and safe for 2.5 years. He is happy to be and stay there for years to come, he says. Thank you."

Congratulations also to our home manager, Melanie Dawson, and carer, Issy Gamble, who were both finalists at The Great British Care Awards 2025, in the categories Best Care Innovator and Carehome Newcomer, respectively. Two of our ladies, Eva and Betty, made bags of sweets for the trick-or-treaters we hoped to see on Halloween. And we were in luck as lots of children stopped by to admire



our spook-tacularly decorated reception and popped in for treats and to meet residents. For Bonfire Night, our games afternoon had a twist; residents loved using Nerf guns in our tin can alley shooting game! Things got very competitive, and Annette and Don stood back-to-back with their Nerf guns, looking like The Avengers! We have lots of festive plans, including a visit

from the Kempsey Primary schoolchildren, entertainment from The Malvern Singers and Stringers Ukulele band, festive family bingo, a special Christmas Jumper Day for Save the Children and lots of mince pies, mulled wine and carolling. We are welcoming new admissions and do appreciate that Christmas can be a lonely or overwhelming time for some people.

Admissions can be for long stay or respite care. Please give us a call for more information and see our new video on our website.

www.heritagemanor.co.uk/our-homes/the-lawns

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