

Broadway Times

A free monthly newspaper for Broadway and surrounding villages



Issue 3

December 2025/January 2026

FREE



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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A few words from... Nigel Huddleston MP



It was a pleasure to join veterans, serving members of the armed forces, civic leaders and local residents at the poignant Service of Remembrance in Droitwich. Thank you to the Royal British Legion and all who helped organise the event. I rotate each year between the two main towns in my constituency

(Droitwich and Evesham) for Remembrance Sunday services, but I always endeavour to pay my respects at the war memorials in each location. I attended the service in Droitwich this year, but I am grateful to Cllr Andrew Dyke for laying a wreath on my behalf in Evesham, which I visited this afternoon.

Local Property Market: November 2025

Broadway and the North Cotswolds have a rhythm of their own, which is why our local property market often behaves differently from the national headlines.

While the papers focused on caution ahead of the November Budget, what we have continued to see here is steady interest in well-presented homes that are sensibly priced and marketed with real care.

Average UK house prices have risen by roughly 3% over the past year. In the Cotswold district, the increase has been around 1.3%. That may appear slower, but it is exactly what you expect in a high-value area where people buy for lifestyle, long-term quality and the unique character of our villages.

The latest data from the Office for National Statistics places the average home in the Cotswolds at about £447,000, with detached homes averaging around £711,000. National forecasts suggest UK prices could rise by roughly 22% over the next five years. High-value rural markets typically grow more steadily but tend to hold their value through periods of uncertainty.

We saw this first-hand when we recently sold a beautiful home in the heart of Broadway. Several agents had advised that the market was too slow and the price unachievable - the result proved the opposite. With the right presentation, a clear story and proactive buyer matching, the outcome exceeded expectations. It reinforced something we tell clients every day: there is no single property market, there is a market for each home. Special homes in special locations deserve special treatment. If you are considering a move, even quietly, then Chartwell Noble are best placed to offer honest, friendly and confidential advice.

Welcome to the 'New Standard'.
Sarah Harper

CHARTWELL NOBLE

ESTATE AGENTS

Honeybourne Parish Council News



Cllr Heath Jobes with a representative from Great Western Railway at Honeybourne Station as the Poppy Train departs to London Paddington

Joining Poppies to Paddington Tribute

On Armistice Day, Tuesday 11th November, the Chair of Honeybourne Parish Council, Cllr Heath Jobes, had the honour of presenting a wreath at Honeybourne Railway Station as part of the Poppies to Paddington initiative, organised by Great Western Railway (GWR). This national remembrance event, now in its sixth year, honours the vital role of the railway during wartime. Wreaths from local communities across the UK were transported by train to London Paddington Station, where they were laid at the War Memorial during the national Remembrance Service. This year's event coincided with the 80th anniversary of the end of the Second World War and formed part of the Railway 200 celebrations, marking two centuries of railway heritage.

"We were proud to see our community represented in such a meaningful act of remembrance," said Cllr Heath Jobes, Chair of Honeybourne Parish Council. "Our thanks go to Great Western Railway for continuing this important tradition and for including communities like ours in this moving tribute." The Parish Council extends its appreciation to all who supported and took part in the event. Lest we forget.

For further information, please contact:
Linda Stanton,
Parish Clerk to
Honeybourne Parish
Council

Email:
clerk@honeybourne-pc.gov.uk



Her Majesty The Queen attends Poppies to Paddington, where 250 wreaths were transported to London from 60 stations across the South West, South Wales and the Cotswolds

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.

If you'd like advice on your insurance, get in touch by contacting enquiries@sutcliffeinsurance.co.uk.



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Choosing and caring for your Christmas tree



A real tree takes pride of place at the heart of Christmas celebrations. With so many types to choose from, finding the right one can be tricky. British Garden Centres have put together these top tips.

- 1) Measure the area where your tree will stand. Trees appear smaller outdoors in the plant area, so knowing your ceiling height and available space will help you find the perfect fit. Remember to factor in the height of the stand and decorations for the top of the tree.
- 2) The Nordmann Fir is very popular. It has well-spaced branches and excellent needle retention, making it ideal for families with children and pets. Your local shop will also stock the Norway Spruce, a traditional-looking tree that emits a long-lasting fragrance. Fraser Firs are also popular for their needle retention and dark blue-green colour; the Blue Spruce, for its distinctive blue foliage.
- 3) When choosing your tree, give it a light shake. A fresh tree should hold most of its needles. A heavier tree generally means it's well hydrated and freshly cut.

A sturdy, water-holding stand is essential. The taller the tree, the wider the base you'll need.

Choose one with a generous water reservoir, as this will reduce the need for constant refilling.

- 4) Keep your tree outdoors or in a cool garage for as long as possible before bringing it inside. Saw off about 3cm from the trunk to open up the pores, helping the tree absorb water efficiently. Keep it away from radiators or fireplaces, so a cool, well-ventilated corner is ideal. Real Christmas trees can last up to six weeks. Water daily, as they can take up to two or three pints in the first few days. Regular topping-up keeps it looking its best and reduces fire risk and keeps your decorations safe throughout the season.
- 5) After the celebrations, place it in a garage or porch for a few days to acclimatise. Once the ground is frost-free, choose a sunny, sheltered position with lots of space to grow. Plant firmly, backfill with compost, and add a few centimetres of mulch to retain moisture. Water well and feed in spring to help it thrive for the seasons ahead.

Planning Notices

Planning Application

Ref W/25/00234/FUL
Land South Of Pershore Road, Evesham, WR11 2XG
Full planning application for 62 affordable dwellings and associated works, including landscaping and access via Hamilton Road.

Mr Luke Webb,

Living Space Housing

Ref W/24/02574/FUL

Mill End Racing Stables, Netherton Lane, Elmley Castle, Pershore, WR10 3JF
Development of 27 residential dwellings and replacement of

the existing dwelling and stables/barn for the commercial training of racehorses, plus associated access arrangements, landscaping and infrastructure.

*Ian O'Gorman,
Amare Estates*

Ref W/24/02258/FUL

Land at (OS 0569 4604), Three Cocks Lane, Offenham. Full application for 42 dwellings including formation of access, landscaping, public open space and associated works.

*Mrs. Tamsin Almeida,
Terra*

The Queen Elizabeth Inn bucks the trend



Located in Elmley Castle, a quintessential Cotswolds village at the foot of Bredon Hill, The Queen Elizabeth Inn is a community-run pub that continues to thrive despite difficult economic conditions.

The pub, which takes its name from the visit of Elizabeth I to the village in 1575, is run by a community group that took over the lease twelve years ago with the goal of being a centre of social activities for Elmley Castle and the surrounding villages, as well as a destination venue for all. The pub is popular with walkers and cyclists alike, and is family and dog friendly, catering for everyone. Working alongside a great team of paid staff, volunteers help with day-to-day management, maintenance, gardening, marketing and work front-of-house. The pub focuses on providing good quality, homemade meals made from locally sourced and produced

ingredients, as well as locally reared meat and game when in season. On offer is a wide range of dishes, from traditional pub food, daily specials and breakfasts to regular Theme Nights. They also showcase a great selection of local real ales, wines and spirits. "Bessies" café is open all day, serving fabulous homemade cakes and a wide choice of teas and coffees. The "Queens", as it is locally known, has been recognised for its excellence, being awarded Visit Worcestershire Pub of the Year twice (and a finalist for the next round) as well as the Good Food Award for seven years running. Engagement with the community is at their heart, with monthly pub quizzes and backgammon nights, hosting of local groups such as the Rotary Club, charity events and craft workshops. Their latest venture is to offer the experience of being a "Pub Landlord for the Day", which is bringing in visitors from far and wide.

Christmas is a very special time for the Queen Elizabeth, starting with the Christmas Lights Switch-on, attended by hundreds of people from the villages and the surrounding area.

Their Festive Menu is available for lunch and dinner throughout December, with special menus on offer for Boxing Day and New Year's Eve.

Book early, as it gets very busy! Enquiries from volunteers or anyone looking for work are also welcome!



Recycle your Christmas tree with Cancer Trust

Worcestershire-based Grace Kelly Childhood Cancer Trust launched its 6th year of recycling Christmas trees this November. For a voluntary donation, your tree will be taken away by the Grace Kelly Childhood Cancer Trust's team of volunteers to local recycling sites. The trees will then be chipped into mulch, scattered on pathways, used in animal enclosures at West Midlands Safari Park, or turned into biofuel. Last year, the Grace Kelly Childhood Cancer Trust collected over 600 trees from around Herefordshire and Worcestershire in just three days, raising over £12,000 for local families facing childhood cancer.

Tree-cycling is good for the environment. In 2025, with each tree collected and recycled, the Grace Kelly Childhood Cancer

Trust saved approximately 3,600kg of CO₂ from being released into the atmosphere – the equivalent of making 60,000 cups of tea!

Kirsty Murray, Treecycling organiser and fundraiser, says, "This year, we are aiming to beat last year's record of tree recycling. Without campaigns like Treecycle and the generosity of the community, the Grace Kelly Childhood Cancer Trust simply wouldn't be able to offer the services or fund the vital research that is needed right now to find kinder and more effective treatments for children with cancer in the future."

If you would like to recycle your tree, you can check whether the Grace Kelly Childhood Cancer Trust can collect from your



postcode and book your collection by visiting: www.just-helping.org.uk/register-tree

Volunteers are needed to support the scheme. The Grace Kelly Childhood Cancer Trust is incredibly grateful to the dozens of local businesses and volunteers

who donate vans and drivers during the collection period. If you can volunteer your time, a van, or both for a day or more between 10th and 13th January, please contact the team at fundraising@gkct.org or call 01905885777

Christmas Comedy in Fladbury

Daisy Earl grew up in Fladbury but has a Scottish Mother. She is a former Scottish Comedian of the Year Winner and Chortle Best Newcomer Winner. She has been a professional stand-up comedian performing regularly across the most prestigious comedy clubs in the UK and abroad for the past ten years. She is also a regular at the Edinburgh Festival. However, Daisy's onstage career started almost twenty years ago when she played Jack in 'Jack and the Bean Stalk' at Fladbury Village Hall as part of the village pantomime.

This Christmas, Daisy is returning to Fladbury Village Hall to host a night of live stand-up comedy with some of her favourite acts from across the circuit. The headline act is Christian Reilly, one of the UK's most celebrated musical comedians, described by The Stage as 'blisteringly funny'. Main support is provided by James Ellis, tour support for Angela Barnes and former South Coast Comedian of the Year. Also featured is Micheal McKensie, a comedian and

one-legged NHS doctor, and Griff, who are two of the most exciting new voices on the UK comedy circuit. Daisy and her husband, Ben, started running Laughter Lane Comedy nights in Fladbury and the local area shortly after the pandemic. In Fladbury, the proceeds from the bar and raffle go to support Fladbury Football Club. Tickets are £18.50, but this Christmas, and due to the cost of living crisis, there is also a limited number of £10 'lower income' tickets.

"In a small community, we also don't want anyone to be excluded," says Daisy. "We have even posted on local community pages that we can give away some free tickets if £10 is a barrier to entry. We just want everyone to have a good night and no one to be left out."

Date:

Friday 5th December, 7:00pm

Fladbury Village Hall, Church St, Fladbury, WR10 2QB

Tickets: £18.50

www.ticketsource.co.uk/booking/select/bazrkoayoopv

LAUGHTER LANE STAND UP COMEDY

MICHAEL MCKENZIE
"Rising Star" -Chuckle

CHRISTIAN REILLY
International Musical Comedy Legend.

JAMES ELLIS
South Coast Comedian of the Year.

GRIFF
"Funny Bones" -Miles Davis

FLADBURY VILLAGE HALL
FRIDAY 5 DECEMBER 2025
7.00PM - 10.00PM
TICKETS £18.50
E: laughterlanecomedy@gmail.com

PLUS DAISY EARL MC

Jayne Gale - Art Psychotherapist



Art, Drama and Music therapy are often used when individuals struggle to access talking therapies because of complex trauma or communication difficulties. Unfortunately, the NHS has seen a steady decline in funding for our services, and many of us are forced to work freelance now. Adult talking therapies seem to have taken up most of their budget to the detriment of children and individuals who need more support with communication or trauma.

We work on an unconscious level to explore what is happening for individuals. The brain sometimes shuts down, and individuals are unable to access why or understand when their mental health was triggered and started to decline.

It's like advanced counselling with image making. I look at the process and symbolism of art making, and it often reflects what is happening for them. Like a microcosm of their outside world and reveals what has led to their issues. With Alzheimer's, it's sometimes unfinished business and trapped guilt. With individuals who have learning disabilities, it's sometimes being able to label confusing feelings that are revealed in the artwork. They can then apply these outside the therapeutic space. Sometimes, it's just stress relief.

You don't need any art skills to attend. I am not an art teacher, although I am an amateur artist and love the Broadway Arts Festival. I have been in business for fourteen years, but never over in the West. I quit all my jobs to move over this way. No regrets, it's beautiful! I have a part-time role with Capstone Foster Care, but it's been seven weeks, and I have yet to be allocated a student. I can offer 1:1 or group work. Adults or Children. I can do adults on a 1:1 in my home on the High Street, work in schools, hospitals, and care



homes. I am fully registered with the HCPC and BAAT and have indemnity insurance and enhanced DBS.

Thank you,

*Jayne Gale MA, BSc, RNLD
Art Psychotherapist, Supervisor;
151 High Street,
Broadway,
Worcestershire
WR12 7AL*

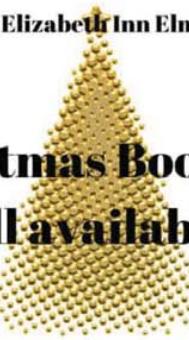


December and January Events at community run The Queen Elizabeth Inn

**VISIT WORCESTERSHIRE PUB OF THE YEAR 2022/23
GOOD FOOD AWARD 2024/25**

Who knew that a rural community pub could be so exciting !!

The Queen Elizabeth Inn Elmley Castle



**Christmas Bookings
still available !**

See website for menu. Lunch/Dinner
2 courses - £27.95, 3 courses- £35.95



CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR OPENING

Christmas Eve – Festive Menu available from 12.00- 16.00. Open for drinks only thereafter. **Christmas Day** – Open for drinks only 11.00-14.00. **Boxing Day** – Book now for our special Boxing Day lunch from 12.00-16.00. Limited availability so call early to avoid disappointment. Open for drinks until 20.00. **27th to 30th December** – We will be open and operating as normal. **New Years Eve** – Celebrate with our New Years Eve Dinner and Party. Please book for dinner. Lunchtime menu as normal. **New Years Day** – breakfast 10.00-11.30 and our normal lunch menu from 12.00-16.00.



Winner

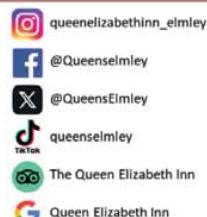
We are a multiple award winning, dog friendly, community-run, 16th Century Inn. We aim to provide a sustainable 'heart' for Elmley Castle and the surrounding villages, and a friendly destination venue for visitors. Thank you for your support

All information correct at time of printing, but please check for latest information at
www.queenelizabethinn.co.uk or call us on 01386 710251



The Queen Elizabeth Inn
Main Street, Elmley Castle WR10 3HS

01386 710251
qe@queenelizabethinn.co.uk
www.queenelizabethinn.co.uk



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 chuck 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, currants, 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



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.

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

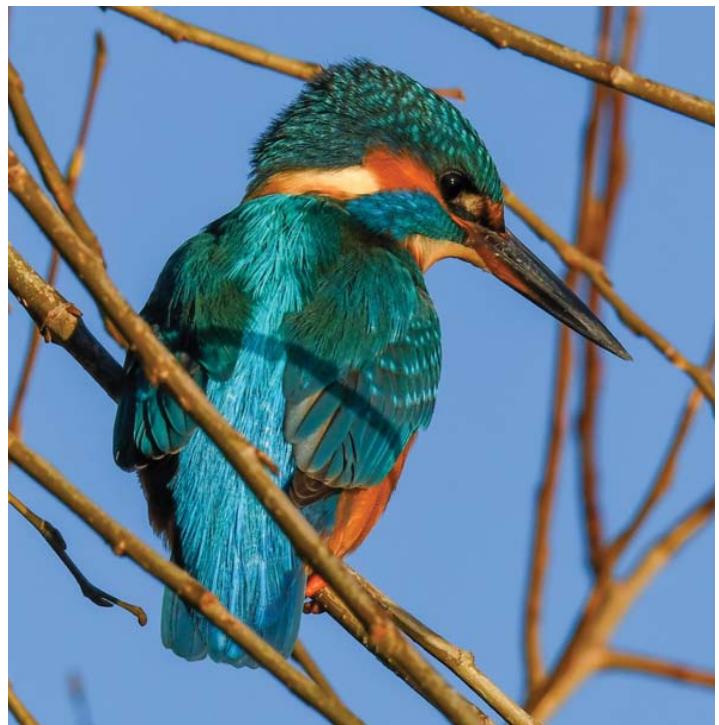
livestock. Recent rain has permitted grasslands to recover from the drought conditions of previous months, and continuing warm conditions for the time of year have resulted in some new growth. As a result, both sheep and cattle can continue to thrive outside with the grazing that remains available, supplemented 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!

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

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

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 an visible impact for data for next year and beyond.

Martyn Cracknell

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

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.

It's semi-evergreen or deciduous.

- 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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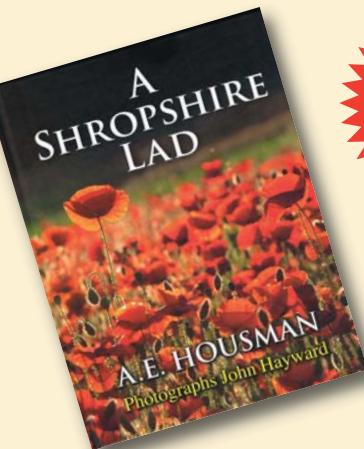


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'I am as light as a feather, I am as happy as an angel, I am as merry as a schoolboy.

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)

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

John Driscoll

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 minced 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



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.



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 mooooo-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 'Schwedy 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,

Evie Aubin Oxford Brookes University



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

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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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.

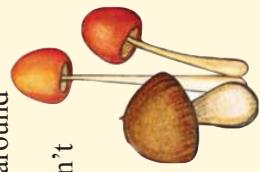
“All ready? That was quick thinking of you,” replied Foxy.

“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.



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





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?"

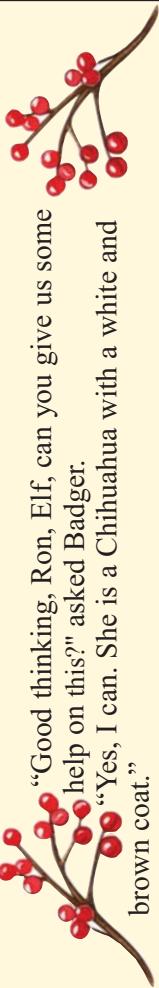
"Oh, he is serious, Foxy has a strange sense of humour which we have got used to," replied Badger.

"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



"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 owllet.

"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



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

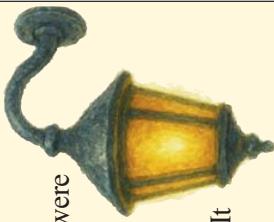
After a long walk to the barn, everyone was feeling tired but kept on going. Poppy was hitching a ride on Junior’s back as her little legs could not keep up. They all got safely to the barn, where Poppy was taken inside to rest and have some food, which had been stored away a couple of nights ago. After 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



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.



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



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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



'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.



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.

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 'Drachenfutle'!" Puzzled expressions all around. "It's a present a German gives

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.

Christmas Traditions



to his wife to apologise for his mistakes: like being out late, or stopping off for a beer on his way home. Drachenfutle 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

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





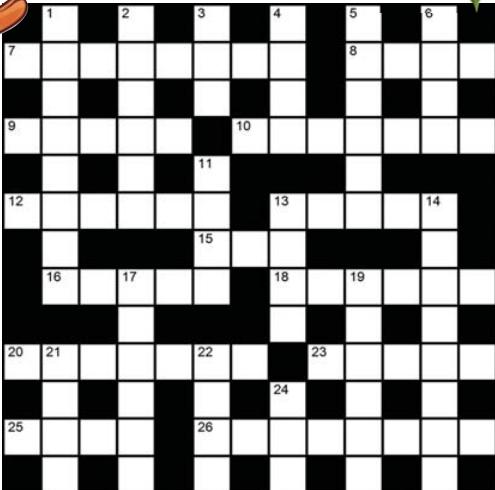
Christmas Crossword

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)

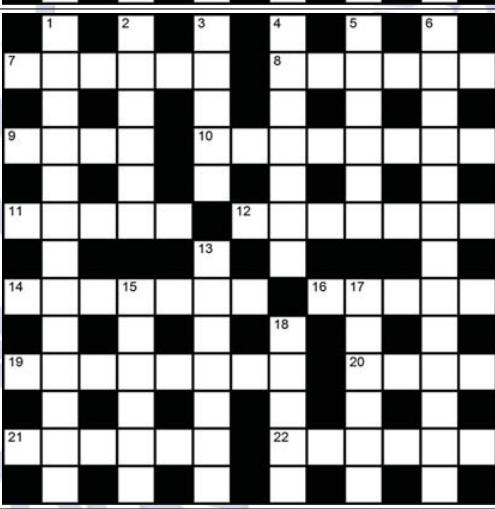


Across

- 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)

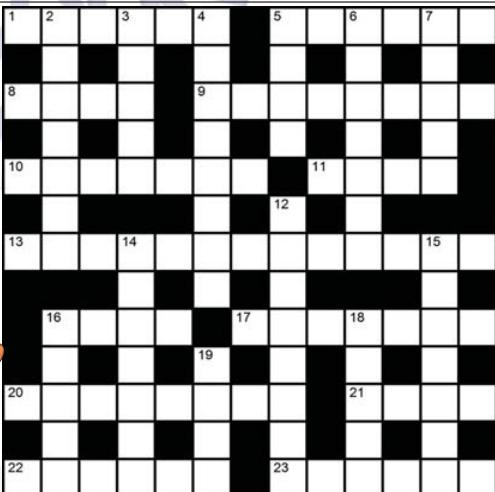


Across

- 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 | | 8 | 4 |

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.

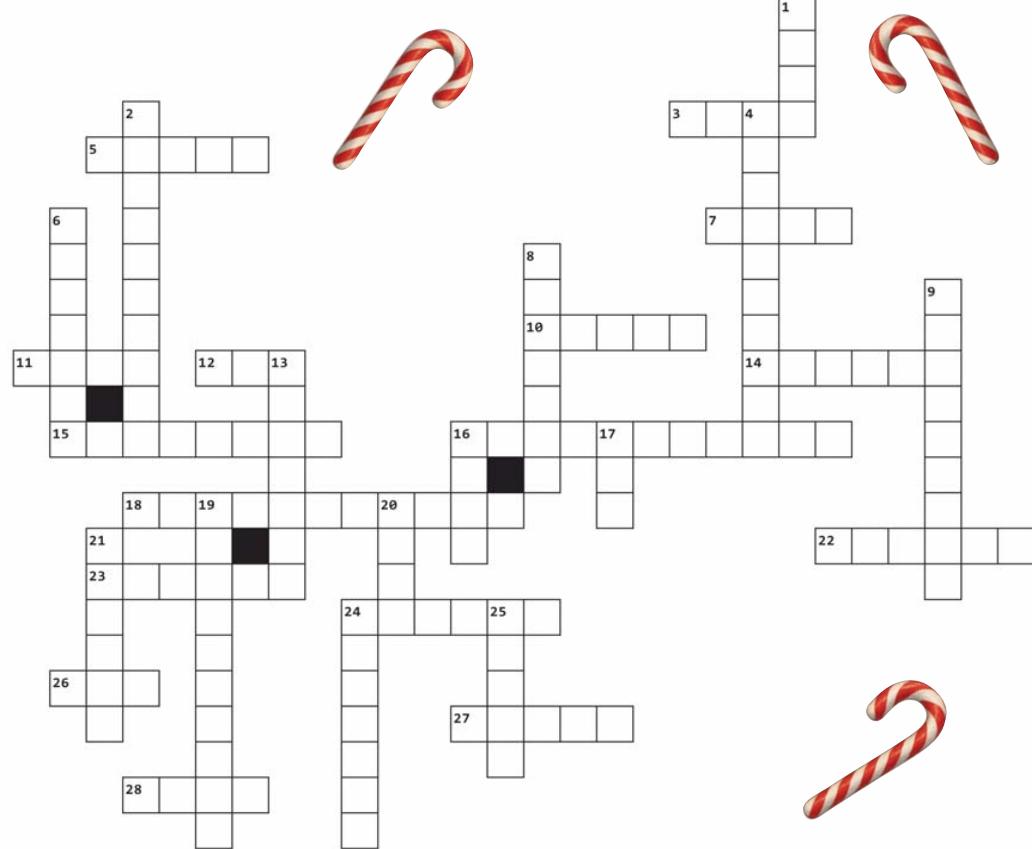
Word of the Month

'Erubescence'

becoming a reddish colour or blushing
Definition:



Christmas Crossword



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

Down

- Traditional Christmas dessert often filled with dried fruits
- Famous Christmas ballet
- Traditional Christmas plant with red leaves
- British Christmas food
- Christmas' country of origin
- "Bah Humbug"
- Reindeer with a glowing nose
- Santa's mode of transportation
- Christmas movie featuring the character "Buddy"
- Festive candle holder with multiple branches
- Christmas tree topper
- Traditional Christmas drink
- Christmas market country of origin
- Christmas carol group

Across

- Christmas gift wrapper
- Popular Christmas cookie
- Seasonal winter precipitation
- Traditional Christmas color
- Another name for Father Christmas
- Christmas tree material
- Popular Christmas tree decoration that sparkles
- Festive wreath often hung on doors
- Christmas gift-giving tradition in some European countries on 6th December

Famous Writers Wordsearch

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

AA MILNE

AESOP

ANN B. ROSS

BUCHAN

BUNYAN

BYRON

CAMUS

DANTE

DIDEROT

GRIMM

HARDY

HOMER

KAFKA

KEATS

LUCIAN

MARLOW

PASTERNAK

PLATO

PROUST

SARTRE

SHELLEY

WAUGH

Christmas

Maths Brainteaser

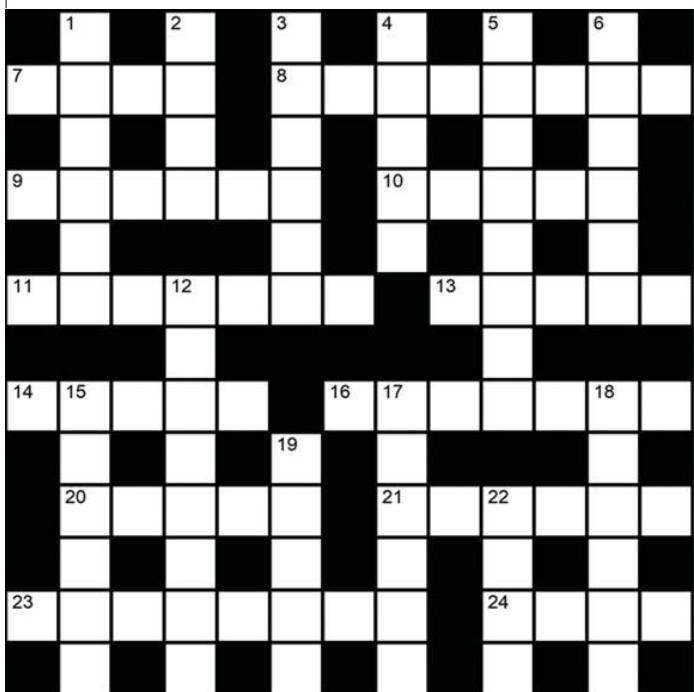
$$\begin{array}{l}
 2 + \text{Cookie} = 8 \quad \text{Cookie} = \square \\
 \text{Cookie} - \text{Mitten} = 4 \quad \text{Mitten} = \square \\
 \text{Mitten} + 5 = \text{Tree} \quad \text{Tree} = \square \\
 \text{Mitten} + \text{Tree} + \text{Cookie} = \square
 \end{array}$$

Tree - 7
 Mitten - 2
 Ornament - 6
 Answers:

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 | 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
- OBÖE
- ORGAN
- PIPE
- REBEC
- REGAL
- SHAWM
- SHENG
- SITAR
- TABOR
- TUBA
- VEENA
- VIOLA

Christmas

Maths Brainteaser

| | |
|---|----|
|  +  = | 45 |
|  +  = | 23 |
|  +  = | 10 |
|  +  × - = | 22 |

Answers:
Lampposts - 15
Snowmen - 4
Trees - 3

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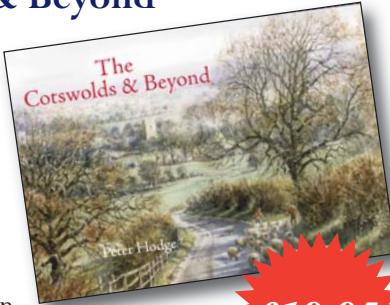


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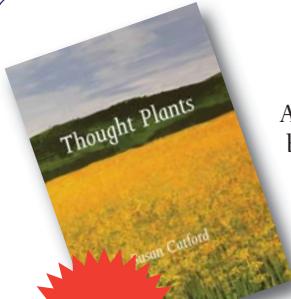


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The Importance of Matrescence

The transition to motherhood and the impact it can have on breastfeeding

Matrescence refers to the profound physical, psychological, and social transformation a woman undergoes as she becomes a mother. Much like adolescence, matrescence involves a period of intense change, adjustment, and self-discovery. Yet despite its significance, the importance of matrescence may have been lost in a westernised society, and as families have become more fragmented. However, recognising this importance is essential for supporting women's wellbeing and fostering healthier families and societies.

The transition to motherhood brings about a redefinition of identity. Women experience shifts in self-perception, priorities, and roles. Understanding matrescence helps normalise complex emotions such as joy, anxiety, grief for a former self, and uncertainty about the future. There are also significant physical and hormonal adjustments as a woman's body adapts to nurture a new life. Along with these changes, her body will work hard through labour or experience major surgery. How a woman experiences birth, and her physical and hormonal changes, can affect mood, energy levels, and overall health.

She will also need to navigate new dynamics with partners, family, and friends, and often encounter cultural pressures to conform to societal ideals of what a mother is or does. By recognising matrescence, we can better address the holistic needs of a new mother as she journeys through this transition. This, in turn, will help a more positive feeding experience no matter how baby is fed. She can feel empowered, and learn to listen to her own mothering instincts as she becomes a new version of herself.

At TwoShires Support, we have developed a journal that mothers can complete to help them with the transition to motherhood. Carefully crafted prompts encourage a woman to set their own feeding goals and think about how to achieve them. Each prompt helps her explore and reflect on various aspects of being a parent, and provides valuable insights, helping her to make informed decisions through her journey into motherhood.

The journal is available as a downloadable PDF or in Hard Copy format.

To order, go to www.ncotsbreastfeeding.co.uk

Anny James

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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:

The Queen Elizabeth Inn

COMPETITION TIME!

Take a look at the anagram

The answer is the name of a business that is advertising in the Broadway Times this month

This month's prizes!

1st - £50 cash

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The Cotswold Connections of Jane Austen's Family



Jane Austen (1775 - 1817)

On 16th December 1775, Jane Austen was born. In 1783, when Jane was aged eight, she and her sister Cassandra, and her cousin Jane Cooper were sent to a boarding school in Oxford. The school was run by Mrs Crawley, who was the widow of the Principal of Brasenose College, Oxford. It was not a happy experience, and Jane complained of having been “dragged through numerous dismal chapels, dusty libraries and greasy halls. It gave me the vapours for two days afterwards. I never was but once in Oxford in my life, and I am sure I never wish to go there again.” At that time, Jane and her sister Cassandra lived with their parents and her brothers at Steventon in the peaceful Hampshire countryside. Her father, the Revd. George Austen, had been appointed the Rector of Steventon and Deane.

On the maternal side, Jane was related to Revd. Thomas Leigh, who had held the living of Adelstrop near Stow-on-the-Wold for fifty-one years. In 1794, 1799 and 1806, Jane visited her Adelstrop cousins and worshipped at the Church of St Mary Magdalene, which lay close to The Rectory and Adelstrop House. In the Church are memorials, hatchments and a commemorative plaque to Caroline Leigh. When visiting, the Austens would stay at The Rectory, and while they were there, the Revd. Thomas Leigh received the news that the Hon Mary Leigh, who owned Stoneleigh Abbey in Warwickshire had died, and that Thomas had inherited the Stoneleigh Abbey Estate.

Jane wrote an account of their visit to Stoneleigh Abbey to her brother James Austen's second wife, Mary Lloyd.

“The house is larger than I could



Stoneleigh Abbey in Warwickshire

ever have supposed. We can find our way about it ... I expected to find everything about the place very fine and all that, but I had no idea of its being so beautiful. I had figured to myself long Avenues, dark Rookeries and dismal Yew Trees, but here there are no such melancholy things.” Between Stow-on-the-Wold and Adelstrop is the hamlet of Maugersbury, and at the Manor House lived the Chamberlayne family, who were good friends of Jane's mother. At times, the family would visit Bath, and Jane wrote about meeting Mrs Chamberlayne there.

“The Chamerlaynes are still here. I begin to think better of Mrs C -, and upon recollection, believe she has rather a long chin than otherwise, as she remembers us in Gloucestershire when we were very charming young women.”

In 2014, the author of this article published ‘A Spencer Love Affair’ with its foreword by the late Duke of Marlborough. Included in this publication are Jane Austen's family connections to The Cotswolds, including Blenheim Palace, Woodstock, near Oxford.

In 1787, James' brother Henry was an undergraduate at Oxford University. At his parents' home at Steventon Rectory, Henry and the rest of the Austen family would create and perform their own private theatricals. In 1801, the Revd. Austen retired from being the Rector of Steventon and the Austen family then moved to Bath. In Bath, George Austen was treated by a Doctor William Fellowes, who is an ancestor of the screenwriter, Julian Fellowes. Dr Fellowes lived behind the Pump Room in Bath, which today is a hotel. Dr Fellowes was also Physician Extraordinaire to the Prince Regents. In 1799, Dr Fellowes treated Jane's brother, Edward, and recommended that he drink Bath's therapeutic waters,

which helped his gout, as was reported in The Bath Chronicle. As a boy, Edward had been adopted by the wealthy Knight family of Godmersham Park, Kent. On 19th June 1799, Jane wrote in a letter from 18 Queen Square, Bath, where she was staying with her mother.

“I cannot help asking that had Edward not been tied down to Dr Fellowes, for she had become disengaged, we should all have recommended Dr Mapleton.”

Dr Fellowes also treated the Revd. George Austen until



James Leigh Perrot (1735 - 1817)

George's death in Bath in 1805. Jane's father had married Cassandra Leigh at St Swithin's Church, Bath, in 1764, and in 1805, Revd. George Austen was buried at St Swithins.

Whilst in Bath, the Austen family moved many times. In 1797, they lived at No. 1 The Paragon, and in 1801, they moved to 4 Sydney Place. Prior to their move to Sydney Place, Jane stayed for one month with the Leigh-Perrot family at their house in The Paragon. The Leigh-Perrot's family estate was at Northleigh near Witney, Oxfordshire. It was Jane's uncle (her mother's only brother) who inherited the Northleigh Estate from his great uncle, the Revd. Thomas Leigh of Adelstrop, who had married into the Perrot family. After the Revd. George Austen's death in March 1805, the Austen family moved to 25 Gay Street, Bath.

In March 1817, James Leigh-Perrot died, and it is said that Jane was upset by her uncle's will, as he had left all his property to his widow for her life. Apparently, the Austen family had hoped to receive legacies from the Stoneleigh Abbey Estate, and it is feasible that due to this, Jane suffered a relapse of the illness that led to her death (aged forty-one) on the 24th July 1817. It now appears that Jane may have died of Addison's disease and that James Leigh-Perrot's death may have exacerbated the Austen family misfortunes, which also impacted the physical and emotional well-being of Jane Austen, prior to her death at Winchester, Hampshire.

The year 2025 is a good year not only to celebrate the 250th anniversary of Jane Austen's birth, but also the Austen family's Cotswold connections.

Allan Ledger
Stow-on-the-Wold

A remarkable return to the Design Museum



While we can't rely on Santa to deliver historical artefacts, the story of our latest acquisition – a rare brass alms dish from the 1920s – feels, in its own way, like a seasonal miracle.

Occasionally, we're fortunate to receive donations from those with personal ties to Gordon Russell Limited – former employees, family members or locals whose relatives once worked at the company. But sometimes, important objects appear at auction and require swift action.

An Auction Discovery

In early October, a particularly significant piece of early metalwork by Gordon Russell was listed for sale at Toovey's Auction House in Sussex. With its Arts and Crafts influence and close link to the firm's beginnings – and to the Lygon Arms – it was a clear candidate for the museum's permanent collection. As a small museum

without a standing acquisitions fund, we launched a public appeal. It was a calculated risk – publicising the auction could have driven up the price – but we were met with generosity from Friends of the museum and enthusiasts from the wider design community. Thanks to this support, we raised the funds in time and were able to secure the dish and bring it home to Broadway.

Family Connections

The polishing and restoration have been carried out by William Hart of Harts Silversmiths in Chipping Campden – great-grandson of George Hart, who likely made the piece. That continuity of craftsmanship, combined with the winning bid placed by the designer's own grandson, Jonathan Russell, gave the whole process a sense of full circle. The dish will take centre stage in our forthcoming exhibition,



Jonathan Russell and William Hart with the Alms Dish

Forged by Design, opening January 2026. The exhibition will bring together a selection of Gordon Russell's metalwork, much of it never before publicly shown. This acquisition was only possible through the generosity of supporters. We're grateful to everyone who helped bring this rare piece home.

Come and see it.

*Forged by Design opens January 2026
Free entry for Friends of the Museum
Standard admission applies
www.gordonrusselldesignmuseum.org*

Volunteers Wanted

The Gordon Russell Design Museum is looking for volunteers to help welcome visitors, support events and keep the museum running smoothly. Just a few hours a month can make a huge difference.

No special knowledge is required.

All the training is provided. To find out more, please stop by and speak to a member of the museum team. Or ring 01386 854695



Evesham Festival of Words has gained a reputation for professionalism, friendliness, quality, and variety of the many events we put on throughout the year. We don't shy away from sometimes difficult topics. This was very clear from one of our November events – a talk by Committee member, Galen Bartholomew, entitled 'Lest We Forget – Timeless Lessons of Auschwitz', thanks to Primo Levi, included in our 2025 programme to mark the 80th Anniversary of the Liberation of Auschwitz. The way Galen wove together the horrific historical facts with the

observations and comments of Primo Levi, himself an Auschwitz survivor, was very powerful and deeply moving. Not an easy talk to deliver or to listen to, but it is so important that we don't forget. Galen would be happy to give this talk to other organisations.

If anyone is interested, please contact: info@eveshamfestivalofwords.org

December sees the annual Evesham Christmas Tree Festival in All Saints Church. We will be having a tree and our usual Secret Santa book gifts. The Festival runs from Sunday 7th – Friday 26th



December. Do pop in! 2026 Festival events will be added to our website in the near future.

Joint events with Holland House, Croftorne, taking place in March, April and May, are open for booking via the Holland House website: www.hollandhouse.org

Merry Christmas to everyone, and we look forward to welcoming you to our programme of events next year.

Sue Ablett, Chair Evesham Festival of Words



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Charity Craft Fair at Leedons Park

On November 15th, the annual craft fair took place at Leedons Park, raising funds for Bethan Edwards, who has lived with a rare heart condition since birth. Bethan, born in 2004, was diagnosed with Hypoplastic Left Heart Syndrome, a serious condition in which only one side of her heart functions.

Incurable and historically life-threatening, Bethan's condition has required high-risk, staged open-heart surgeries, beginning with her first procedure at just three days old at Birmingham Children's Hospital, where she spent the first four months of her life. Thanks to advances in surgery and ongoing care, Bethan has continued to thrive. *More of her story can be found at www.bethan.org.uk*

Since 2004, Bethan's mum, along with close family and friends, has worked with the local community to raise over £30,000 in support of her care.

This year's craft fair alone raised £1,984, continuing a tradition that started fourteen years ago with tremendous effort and generosity from residents in and around Broadway and Leedons Park. Local businesses have consistently donated raffle prizes, helping make each year's fair a success.

Funds raised are donated between Birmingham Children's Hospital and the Cotswold RDA, supporting disabled-accessible horse riding, ensuring contributions make a meaningful impact in both medical care and therapeutic opportunities.

This year's craft fair also marked the final year Mandy Edwards hosted the event. Her dedication over the years has been instrumental in making the fair a cornerstone of community fundraising, and we wish her all the best in her future endeavours and the continuation of this incredible fundraising work.



The annual craft fair is more than a fundraising event; it's a celebration of community spirit, resilience, and the power of coming together to make a difference in the lives of others. *If you would like to support Bethan and the causes she benefits, donations can be made via www.bethan.org.uk*

Amie Hurley



Apotheque, Broadway

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moles or skin tags are also carried out with precision and care. Beyond aesthetics, Apotheque embraces a holistic approach to wellbeing. Clients can benefit from vitamin injections, weight-loss management, hair rejuvenation therapies and restorative facials and massages - all delivered within a calm, welcoming space designed to put comfort first. What truly sets Apotheque apart is its commitment to transparency, integrity and ongoing support. Every recommendation is medically grounded, and clients receive personalised guidance

to help maintain results and nurture healthier skin over time. Whether you are exploring aesthetic care for the first time or seeking a trusted, doctor-led clinic for natural enhancement, Apotheque invites you to experience a new standard of personalised care.

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SPOT & SHOP!
See Page 31

Golf Club professional competes in Marathon



Broadway Golf Club's PGA Professional, Josh Davies, continues to push his physical limits in support of a worthy cause.

On Sunday 16th November 2025, he competed in the Broadway Marathon, joining a field of 108 determined runners. Despite the golf course being left soft and heavy after a week of significant rainfall, race-day conditions proved favourable for the challenging 26.2-mile (42.19 km) route. Josh ran superbly for much of the event,

keeping a strong and steady pace. The final 10 kilometres, however, brought a daunting test as severe cramp set in. Showing grit and resilience, he battled through to finish in an impressive 15th place, with a time of 4 hours and 9 minutes. Although Josh is still collecting sponsorship pledges, all funds raised from the Broadway Marathon will go towards Club Captain Nigel Robinson's 2025 charity, Campden Home Nursing, a local organisation providing essential end-of-life

care, bereavement support, and wider compassionate services to families in the community. This weekend, Josh travelled to Cornwall for an additional long-distance run - not as a fundraising event, but as part of his training regime. He is currently preparing for an extraordinary personal challenge at the end of January, when he will attempt to run the 100-mile Cornish Coast, a distance equivalent to approximately 160.93 kilometres.

Josh's dedication, both to his sport and to supporting the Club Captain's Charity Fund, continues to reflect the strong community spirit at the heart of Broadway Golf Club.

Debbie Donoghue
Marketing Director



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