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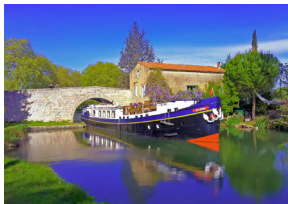
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Below: Two of our European Inland Waterway Vessels:
The Anjodi (left and right) and the La Bella Vita (middle).



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THE WESTWELL EYE

178

December

2017



2nd December

3rd December.

9th December

11th, 18th December

12th December

9 - 11am Christmas Bazaar p13

3.30pm Messy Church

9am + 2pm Christmas Decoration Workshops p12

1.30pm Painting Group

Book Club, p.13

December 2017

SUNDAY	MON	TUES	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT
3 Advent Sunday 8am Holy Communion St. Mary Westwell 3.30pm Messy Church Parish Hall	4 7pm Fitness	5	6 11am Fistsieps	7 Re.F.T 9.15am Pilates 12.30 Dog training Christmas Meal	8	9 9am + 2pm Christmas Decoration Workshops
10 2nd Sunday of Advent 11am Iona Eucharist St. Mary Westwell	11 1.30pm Painting 7pm Fitness	12 11am Book Club p13	13 11am Fistsieps	14 R.F.W.G. 9.15am Pilates 10.30 Dog training 7.30pm WI	15	16
17 3rd Sunday of Advent 11am Family Service 4pm Carol Service St. Mary Westwell	18 1.30pm Painting 7pm Fitness	19	20 11am Fistsieps	21 Re.F.T 9.15am Pilates NO Dog training	22	23
24 Christmas Eve 3pm Christingle 11.30pm Midnight Eucharist St. Mary Westwell	25 Christmas Day 10am Family Eucharist Hothfield	26 7	27	28 R.F.W.G. NO Plates NO Dog training	29	30
31 1st Sunday of Christmas 8am Holy Communion - Charing 10.30am G7 Communion - Egerton	Jan 1	2	3	4 Re.F.T 9.15am Pilates	Dec 1 10am Eucharist 5pm + up Bazaar	2 9am onwards Christmas Bazaar

From the Editor's desk!...

Another sadness to hit the village, I am sure you would all like to join me in sending condolences to Helen, Gordon and Jennifer on the death of Joe last month. You can read Jennifer's edit of the eulogy given at his thanksgiving service, on page 6.

I have tried, without success, to get the Christmas refuse collection dates. The ABC website gives the dates for 2016(!) but nothing for this year. so I suspect the 28th December and 4th January, in the calendar on page 19, are wrong!

I hope you all went to the Players' Pantomime, if not I gather you missed a treat, best ever!
As most of you probably know, The Wheel is open for business, see page 5 for details. What you may not know is that your Parish Council have worked tirelessly to make this happen; special thanks are due to Clive Bainbridge and Lucy Farrington, with initial help from Penny Knatchbull.

The Christmas Bazaar is upon us again, 9 -11am, 2nd December, do support it, you can get breakfast there before you embark on the rest of the day!

9th December Heather Lister is holding two Christmas Decoration workshops, see page 12.

The photographs on this month's front cover were taken at Hothfield Common by Val Butcher and the Fungus together with the Heathland article in November were by Margery Thomas.

Wishing all my readers a Happy Christmas and New Year

Carolyn Thorneloe ✍

The views of any contributor to this publication may not necessarily be those of the editor and team, nor can the Westwell Eye accept any responsibility in connection with any companies or organisations mentioned or any advertiser.

Correspondence to: Carolyn Thorneloe, Gaoler's Retreat, 5, Faversham Road, Lenham, Maidstone Kent ME17 2PN.Tel: 01622 859376, Email: westwelleye@gmail.com

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WESTWELL WI

Attendance was high at our Annual Meeting this month. Our Secretary, Tracy Shaikh, reminded us of the great variety of activities of the past year and our President, Barbara Gardner, thanked those members who had carried out a particular role during the year to enable the group to function smoothly. Barbara also reminded members that it will be our Centenary next year, something to be proud of, and that we will be having a Centenary Dinner in November 2018. Barbara will continue to be our President for this important year, but Sue Fowler will be standing down as Treasurer, this role being taken up by Carol Godden, and Tracy will share the secretarial duties with Katherine Hazelden.

The business of the evening was followed by a talk from local resident Nada Kydd about Growing up in the Middle East. She showed family photos as she told us of her father's diplomatic career in Iraq, then a monarchy, which meant a lot of travel. We learnt of the Revolution when the Monarchy was overthrown and following which her father was imprisoned for nine months. Following his release, the family moved to Lebanon, where Nada studied and attained a degree in agriculture. There was further conflict with civil war and invasion by Israel, after which the family finally left the Middle East.

Our competition for something brown brought a variety of entries, including a money box, earrings and a jar of homemade chutney!

Marilyn Warner

Next Meeting: Thursday 14th Desember at 7.30pm.

Christmas Party: Members only) Supper £4

Please bring a present (minimum value £3) plus cutlery, glass and drink

Hostesses: : The committee

Vote of thanks: Valerie Hooper

Competition - Multi

Plans

The following applications were supported by the Parish Council, and a decision is awaited from Ashford Borough Council.

17/01379/AS Swinford Cottage, The Street, Westwell, Replacement of an existing rotten window to the front of the house, like for like.

17/01443/AS The Wheel Inn, The Street, Westwell Erection of 2 pairs of 3 bedroom semi-detached houses, car parking, replanting of trees, hard and soft landscaping works, and other associated works.

17/01560/AS & 17/01561/AS The Mill House, Eastwell Lane, Westwell 1) Enlargement of Entry Hall to form connection between Mill House and Granary. 2) Removal of wall and window from north elevation to form enlargement of Entry Hall to form connection between Mill House and Granary.

The following application will be discussed at the next meeting of the Parish Council:
 17/01686/AS (Listed Building Consent) The Dairy, Westwell Court, Eastwell Lane, Westwell Installation of a stove and twin wall chimney in the sitting room/lounge of the property.

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A Family Christmas - Poem by Ernestine Northove

Sitting in front of the fire, Auntie Flo's reciting a story,
it's one about her first Christmas as a newly wed,
the same one she broadcasts every year,
but no one is listening.

Uncle Fred, 'out to the world' snores rhythmically
on the sofa.

Mother exhausted, having cooked the lunch,
without help, as usual,
stifles a yawn.

Dad, brow furrowed, is trying to piece together
Eddy's lego set,
whilst Eddy glowers,
after all, it was 'his' present.

Joe, playing with a set of 'disco lights'
is sending flashes of colour across the room,
straight into Grandpa's eyes,
making him feel even more bilious
after having consumed too many chocolates.

Grandma's knitting.
Grandma always knits on Christmas Day,
and every other day, come to that,
probably yet another scarf for what she believes is
still the war effort.

The cat, curled up on her lap, purrs contently,
oblivious of the knitting needles, waving precariously
in front of his sleepy eyes.

Susan is gazing at the TV screen, .
glued, for the umpteenth time to, 'The Sound of Music' movie,
singing every song, word for word,
at the top of her voice.

'Turkey was nice', said Auntie,
'I was given too much', moaned Grandpa, belching loudly.
'Your problem is, you never can refuse a second helping', said Grandma, 'so it's your own
fault'.

Mother grins and asks,
'Would anybody like another mince pie'?

The Wheel

Thank you everyone who came to our opening night on November 10th .
Matt and I are thrilled to be here in Westwell reinventing The Wheel;
Being here for the Westwell Book Club; the Westwell Shoot; your party and more

Here is how to use the Wheel a lot in December .

Contact: Drop in anytime during opening hours
or Phone **01233 712223**

email: **info@thewheelinnwestwell.uk**
leave a message with your phone number: we'll call back .

Opening hours:

Pub: Monday – Thursday , Sunday 11am to 11pm

Friday, Saturday 11am – 12pm

Kitchen: Monday – Friday 12noon – 3pm and 6pm – 9.30pm

Saturday: 12noon – 9.30 pm

Sunday: 12noon – 4.30 pm

Menu

Available during Kitchen hours – drop by or call
Pub menu and a la carte: anytime during kitchen hours
Sunday: Roast 12 noon – 4.30pm

Specials

2nd December: Live Music Evening

Christmas Day: 2 sittings 12- 2.30pm; 3pm – 5.30pm

Boxing Day: Sunday opening hours

New Years Eve – Open, Finger Buffet in the evening
And there may be music – look out on Westwell Events and Facebook

Bookings

Taking bookings now for office parties and other celebrations through December.
Pre - orders for parties over 10 please.

01233 712223

See you here very soon

James Kelland and Matt Bare

Joe Stuart - Smith

Joseph Merriam Stuart-Smith was born in Mill Hill, northwest London, on January 2nd, 1935. He was the first of three boys born to William (known as Stuart) and Caroline -- an American who had come to London to study the piano.

When war broke out, Caroline plus Joe, David and Larry, went to America to escape the bombing. As David recounts: "We had a wonderful four years in America during the war, in our grandfather's comfortable home in Framingham, Massachusetts -- with summers on Cape Cod, in a wooden cottage on the sea front."

Their mother, missing her husband, returned with them to London in March 1944, risking a journey by boat and air in a Sunderland Seaplane and a Dakota, via Portugal and Ireland to get them home to Mill Hill where they spent a year -- mostly in air raid shelters. They perfected their London accents which, combined with an American twang, made them stick out like sore thumbs when they moved to Kent and went to Yardley Court, the smart Tonbridge School Prep. Teachers and pupils remarked on their 'cockney' accents.

Soon after Joe started at Tonbridge School, the family moved to a smallholding in Underriver. This was a period that would influence the careers of both Joe and his younger brother Larry, who became a vet. All of the family, apart from Caroline, were keen riders and members of the Pony Club. Along with rugby and music, horses would be a life-long interest of Joe's. It seems to be a family trait to dabble in different hobbies and sports... and Joe certainly did well in any sports he attempted. On taking up running in his late 40s, he completed the New York and London Marathons in around 3hrs 30 -- times that would put many younger runners to shame. Joe skipped his final year at Tonbridge by winning an English Speaking Union scholarship to Taft School in Connecticut. There he played ice-hockey and baseball, played his oboe and boxed. After Taft, Joe then went on a tour of the US with school friends, taking in 35 states, travelling by Greyhound bus, a convertible MG as well as riding 'Western style' in Montana. Joe returned to England and did his National Service, with the Royal Artillery. After National Service, Joe trained as a land agent, and spent 4 years working for the Duchy of Cornwall. After which he returned to Kent in 1965 to help his parents run the farm. He was well-qualified, but lacked the support of a woman who would be willing to look after him and the livestock too. On a shooting trip with his brother Larry, a few years later, he would meet the lovely veterinary nurse and fruit-farmer's daughter, Helen Smith.

From that point began a partnership that would continue for nearly 48 years. Dunn Street was run as a mixed farm of cattle, pigs, sheep and arable for many years, facing the same challenges as other small farms in these decades. The cattle went first, then the pigs, while 'Helen's sheep' remained and helped to establish the farm as a more typical downland landscape of grass and native woodland.

Joe took an environmentally friendly approach to farming, before conservation became a buzzword. He planted native hedgerows, coppiced woodland and took great care managing the fields and paddocks. Later he embraced running the campsite, and liked nothing more than chatting to campers. Post running and rugby, he joined the Ramblers Association becoming, as he often noted, that rare combination of rambler and farmer.

His last few weeks were spent at home, cared for as ever, by his wife Helen in the home he had built. In his last few days he looked up at the beams of the barn and said to Helen: "What a lovely building -- and what a lucky man I am."

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Salmon Wellington - serves 12

By Nigel Slater. From Nigel Slater's 12 Tastes of Christmas

Ingredients

2 medium cucumbers, peeled
2 tbsp clear honey 1 tbsp white wine vinegar
salt and freshly ground black pepper
1 x 2.8kg/6lb salmon, skin removed and filleted into 2 pieces
1 free-range egg, beaten, combined with a little milk

Method

Preheat the oven to 180C/350F/Gas 4. Line a large baking tray with baking parchment. Slice the cucumbers lengthways, scrape out the seeds and chop into 1cm/1/2in thick pieces. Place the cucumbers in a mixing bowl with the mustard, honey, vinegar and finely chopped dill. Season well with salt and freshly ground black pepper and set aside. Roll the pastry out to 40cm x 30cm on a lightly floured surface. Lay on the lined baking tray. Lay one fillet in the centre of the pastry, pile half of the filling on top and then cover with the second fillet. Brush the edges of the pastry with the mixture of milk and beaten egg. Fold the pastry over the fish, sealing the edges by pressing them together, leaving a gap in the centre, so that you can see inside. Brush the pastry with more beaten egg and milk and bake for 45 minutes. Serve with the remaining cucumber mixture.

Christmas Panna Cotta - serves 6

by Hairy Bikers. From The Hairy Bikers' Twelve Days of Christmas

Ingredients

4 tbsp raisins
6 gelatine sheets
120g/4 1/2oz caster sugar
1 tsp ground allspice
1 tsp ground cinnamon

5 tbsp Dijon mustard
50g/1 3/4oz fresh dill, finely chopped
1 x 380g/13oz ready-made puff pastry sheet

Method

Place the raisins into a small bowl and cover with the rum. Set aside to soak for at least 30 minutes. Meanwhile, soak the gelatine sheets in a bowl of cold water until softened. Drain and squeeze out any excess liquid using your hands. In a heavy-based pan, heat the double cream, sugar and ground spices. Bring to the boil, then reduce the heat until the mixture is simmering and simmer for 2-3 minutes, whisking until the sugar has dissolved. Remove the cream mixture from the heat and whisk in the drained gelatine until dissolved. Drain the raisins and stir into the cream mixture (discard the soaking liquid). Pour the mixture into ten 200ml/7fl oz moulds or ramekins, filling them to three-quarters full. Set aside to cool completely, then cover with cling film and chill in the fridge for at least two hours, or until set. To serve, dip the ramekins briefly into hot water to loosen each panna cotta and turn out onto serving plates. Scatter over some redcurrants to garnish.

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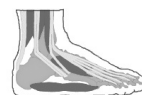


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Letter to the Parishes

Wait for it!

So, what is the build up to Christmas? On holiday in August there was a documentary on the television about the Christmas Trade Fairs. This was a gathering, in balmy sunny weather, for distributors to meet with the big shopping chains to promote the Christmas ranges. On the way home I noticed Christmas being advertised in one supermarket – it was early September.

Indeed, the decorations in some shops will be up the moment bonfire night is behind us. And let's be honest, we will all be in full swing by the beginning of December with decorations, Christmas parties, carol services and the like.

But this is not a traditional Christmas. In the days before commercialism the celebrations didn't start until Christmas day. When they did start, they continued from Christmas day until the eve of Epiphany – the twelve days of Christmas. So what were Christians doing before the 25th of December? Well, they were waiting.

This waiting involved an advent calendar (though not full of chocolate), but also advent prayers, and perhaps most importantly the Nativity Fast. Just like the period of Lent before Easter, Christians would fast in the weeks before Christmas in anticipation of the big celebration.

So, what was this prayer and fasting about? Well, before they celebrated Christmas, they spent time saying sorry for their wrong doing. The fasting was not about making room for lots of extra food on Christmas Day – there was rarely the need for a diet back then. The fasting and prayer was about focusing the soul on God. It was a time for Christians to remind themselves why God had sent His only son – to redeem His people from their wrong doing and to bring them back to Him.

I was quite taken by this when I read about it a few years ago, so decided to try a traditional advent. It was really hard! At a time when we in this country are gorging ourselves like never before, and it seems like everyone is in the party mood, trying to abstain from things like chocolate, or alcohol, or excessive eating generally, is particularly hard. It was also hard to focus on God with so many other distractions.

Despite the temptations however, it was a time of spiritual growth for me. It certainly wasn't easy – but the journeys of our souls rarely are. I also had some great conversations with non-Christian friends about what Christmas is really all about. It felt like a meaningful start to Christmas.

I should not have been surprised! As Christians we are still called to be different from the world (John 17:14-15). We are called to be 'in the world, but not of the world'. Our souls are designed to magnify the Lord. At this time of advent why not try to set aside some extra time to be with God? Maybe give up something for advent, just as you would for lent, and take up a little extra prayer instead?

Jack Bateson

Etc

Dates for your diary

December 2nd Bazaar

Christmas Bazaar 2nd December

Westwell Village Christmas Bazaar

Saturday 2nd December 9am – 11.30am

In the Parish Hall

Lots of cakes, gifts, table decorations, raffle and tombola.

Please come and join us and enjoy a bacon butty or mince pie while you shop.

There maybe a surprise visitor for the children!



Dates for WAGS (Westwell Art Group)

11th, 18th December.

Book Club November 2017

'Toast', by Nigel Slater

The Wheel is open again! And that is where we met. There were all of us minus two. We also celebrated four birthdays with a delicious chocolate cake made by Margery. The pub's chef Matthew had a lot of praise for it..and some of us had two helpings.

Back to the book. This is the Nigel Slater's story about growing up in the sixties and seventies. It is written in small sections, all titled as dishes he would be offered, such as Arctic Roll, Flapjacks, Lemon Meringue Pie, and Toast! He loved to cook and discovered his love for fresh produce very early on. While his mum bought and cooked canned foods, he was dreaming of 'exotic' dishes, such as spaghetti bolognese. He lost his mother when he was still rather young and describes how his dad eventually decided to marry his step mum, with whom he did not get along. Quite a sad childhood and adolescence, but the love for cooking shines through.

The verdict on the book was divided, most of us who like Slater and his cooking style loved it. Found it a true reflection of the man and his passion. Others did not enjoy it as they are not fans of his. It is truly biographical though also very personal. When the film of the story came out one of his step sisters was very sad to see how her mother was depicted and thought it biased...as we said, it is a personal view.

Our next book is 'The Aftermath' by Rhidian Brook.....and we meet at the pub again, 12th December at 11am. And for January, 'My Brilliant Friend', by Elena Ferrante(translated from Italian).

Westwell Church Services for December

www.g7benefice.org

Friday 1st

10am Iona Eucharist

Sunday 3rd Advent Sunday

8am Holy Communion

Sunday 10th: 2nd Sunday of Advent

11am Iona Eucharist

Sunday 17th: 3rd Sunday of Advent

11am Family Service

4pm Carol Service

Sunday 24th: Christmas Eve

3pm Christingle

11.30pm Midnight Eucharist

Sunday 31st 1st Sunday of Christmas

8am Holy Communion - Charing

10.30am G7 Communion

Tuesdays:

9am Charing – The Eucharist

7pm Charing Heath – Prayer and Bible Study

There will be no Communion Service in
Charing on Tuesday 26th December.

Family Church at Christmas

Messy Advent will be star struck, Sunday
3rd December at 3.30 back in the parish hall.

All under 10s welcome with an adult.

Contact Heather Lister hlist@hotmai.com
or 01233712981 for details.

Sunday 10th December Christmas Jumpers
On Parade In aid of Save the Children 11am at
church with Iona Communion.

Sunday 17th December **No Family Service.**

Carols at 4pm in the church. 7 readings, 8
carols, candles galore. Followed by festive
refreshments. Collection for Porchlight

Sunday 24th December at 3pm Christingle
for all children, large and small. A chance to get
into the Christmas spirit with a simple service,
carols, candles and of course Christingles.

Collection for the Childrens Society

Greenery Galore



9th December Westwell Parish Hall 2 sessions
Morning 9am to 12noon, afternoon 2 to 5pm.

Find your inner creative self. Learn the basic
skills for evergreen wreaths, kissing balls and
indoor wreaths. Lots of help at hand.

Extra fun if you come with a friend. And of
course...Yummy refreshments

Numbers limited. Contact Heather Lister to
book. 01233712981 or hlist@hotmai.com



The Family Foodbank's

25 Days of Christmas Campaign

Christmas can be an expensive time for
everyone, but for those already on a tight
budget, the added expenses of increased fuel
bills and the need for Christmas presents can
plunge many people into crisis, leading them
to make difficult choices.

How can you help?

From 1st December, for 25 days put an extra
item of food or toiletries (or even some
Christmas Crackers) into a bag and place
them in the Foodbank boxes in any of the G7
churches. Goods are especially welcome in the
weeks before Christmas.

Thank you for your support.

Church Cleaning Rota.

Cleaning Sarah Stevenson

Flowers: Christmas Team

Brass: Valerie Hooper



Parish Council

The Parish Council met in the parish hall on Monday November 6th. The meeting began with the Open Forum, which gives members of the public the opportunity to raise matters of concern with the Parish Council, but no matters were raised. Larry Krause (borough councillor) reported that the criteria for grants given by borough councillors have changed, and Parish Councils are once again eligible to apply for these grants. The Local Plan to 2030 will go to the Cabinet and full Council for approval in December, and will then be submitted to the Planning Inspectorate for the public examination.

The Minutes of the September and November meetings were agreed, and Matters Arising taken; these included an offer from the organisers of the Sidcup Motorcycle Rally to write to KCC Highways in support of a reduction in the speed limit through the village. The re-opening of the Wheel on 10th November and beacon lighting in celebration would be publicised on social media.

The Financial report was presented and approved. Church green has been successfully registered as a village green. This does not confer ownership of the green to the Parish Council, but it confirms responsibility for maintenance being with the Parish Council (as at present). It is hoped that works to rectify the potholes on the hall access track can be combined with the works by UK Power Networks to underground the power cable beside the playing field (part of its project to underground cables in AONBs). The choice of a suitable variety of Christmas tree to be planted on church green, and repairs to the electricity supply for the lights are in hand. The draft budget for the Parish Council for 2018-19 was presented and discussed. An amended budget will be circulated, and the Precept set at the January meeting of the Parish Council. The change to the parish boundary in 2019 will bring in more properties, there will therefore be more dwellings paying the charge. The Parish Council will then have to decide whether to reduce the charge payable by each property to raise the same amount, or maintain the charge per property and use the additional income for improvement projects in the parish.

The parish had been asked to comment on the planning application for 89 dwellings at Lenacre Hall Farm. It was agreed that the Parish Council would object to the application on the grounds of prematurity, traffic impact, non-compliance with the Local Plan, and environmental impact. The proposal to site a container on the playing field for storage of Westwell Players and fete materials was discussed. The container would be sympathetically painted and screened.

The Parish Council adopted the draft safeguarding policy.

Due process having been followed, the vacancy on the Parish Council will be filled by co-option at the January meeting.

Reports from Parish Council representatives were taken. Highways England have advised that the M20 between junctions 8 and 9 will be resurfaced in 2021, but this is not guaranteed. It was proposed that a letter of thanks be sent to the Borough Council and KCC on implementing the experimental trial banning overnight parking by HGVs between Charing and Drovers roundabout.

The meeting closed after Any Other Business. The next meeting of the Parish Council is on Tuesday January 9th at 7pm in the parish hall. All meetings are open to the public and all are welcome. Parish Council



Westwell Players

ONCE UPON A TIME.....a little village called Westwell had an amateur dramatic group called The Westwell Players which started way back in 1981! In 2017 they decided to put on a pantomime at the end of November and Sarah Whiting was brave enough to say she would Produce with help from Gordon Forster. Now Sarah had never done anything like this before, she had played the lead a number of times, as Cinderella and many other memorable roles but she found a script, everyone liked it and best of all she brought her two children and her husband, Bryn along too! Bryn was cast as Gertie the Dame, Fletcher as the March Hare, a dwarf and a Pirate as well as a mouse and Casey as a dwarf, and a pirate as well as understudying Alice! What a talented family. Then Lucy came to a reading and said her two children would be involved as dwarfs and pirates as well so another family affair. Margaret has brought her grand- daughter along and we have another Mother and daughter duo as Prompt (Mother) and Alice/dwarf/pirate etc!(daughter). Last we have Mary Anne who said she would love a very small part and became The Mad Hatter (type casting is a Westwell specialty!) She brought her daughter Viki as Nack a Court Jester (with Neil as Nick) – you cannot have a Nick without a Nack, not in this pantomime anyway! Viki encouraged her husband Dougal to do a non speaking role as the Wolf, he may not speak but he is going to be exhausted by the end of the Show! However, Mary Anne also persuaded her Grandson Christopher to take part and he has had a good laugh along the way and also brought his daughter Willow along as a dwarf and a pirate – she was the only lady dwarf as she would not become male for anything thank you very much (her own words and she is 5)! So Mary Anne is proud as punch to say that I have four generations in this production and that must be a FIRST! This has been a family show in more ways than one and if you saw it I hope you enjoyed it and if you missed it – be sure to book tickets early next time! Westwell Players will be auditioning for their Spring Show very soon, watch this article for details of when and where and please come along to try your luck at treading the boards

Mary Anne Pitt 

1st Charing Scout Group

This has been a busy month for scouting. The beavers have been away for an activity weekend and visited the ambulance headquarters. Cubscouts have worked with conservationists to build a bug hotel and also took part in the Internet Jamboree, linking up with young people all over the world. The older ones completed a night hike over the North Downs. Scouts have camped at Gilwell Park, the headquarters of scouting. The whole group marched up the High Street to Church for the Remembrance Service. It was wonderful to see the Church so full and to meet so many people.

Work on our new building is progressing slowly. We are so grateful for the help we have had recently. Anyone with a few spare hours will be most welcome
gsl_charingscoutgroup@hotmail.co.uk **Terry Lister**



December on Hothfield Heathlands

Nature may slow down over winter but on the heathland gorse came into bloom in early autumn and will continue through the winter. The group of amazing volunteers will continue working every fortnight mending paths, clearing invasive scrub and birch trees, enjoying the resulting bonfires of brash, and logs to take home. Their work replicates the centuries of grazing and harvesting that preserved the heathland and the rare and fragile habitats that give Hothfield Heathlands its SSSI designation. Ian hopes that by December winter migrants will be arriving including snipe, meadow pipit and big flocks of linnets and tits. Small rodents will scurry about hoping to avoid the hunting owls and other predators. Winter fungi may appear, mosses and liverworts glow greener than the grass as they continue to photosynthesize.

Many insects and invertebrates are now hibernating as adults, larva or pupae, underground, in autumn debris and grass tussocks, in tree bark, in the heather, even in hollow thistle stems. The varied habitats of the heathland suit a wide range of over-wintering wildlife which will emerge to mate and increase next year. You may not know who or what you are walking past, but the birds will know where to look for their winter food. Sadly, long-term data for over 100 European nature reserves published by the Krefeld Entomological Society this year shows that many insect species have disappeared from large areas where they were once common, creating shortages for the animals and birds higher up the food. No simple cause has yet emerged. Winter conditions for wildlife in gardens can be improved by leaving leaves in untidy corners, not cutting down seedheads that will feed birds, or the dried stems that will house insects, making log piles, bug houses, putting up more bird boxes, keeping

some grass long and tussocky and making even a tiny pond.

We enjoyed magnificent autumn colour through November, deciduous trees holding their leaves late into the month. The carotenoid pigments that produce the golden and russet hues have been present in the leaves throughout summer, masked by the green chlorophyll which degrades in autumn. The reds and purples are caused by anthocyanins which are not manufactured in the leaves until late summer and again become apparent as supplies of chlorophyll diminish. These are all very complex chemical processes triggered by a variety of factors including temperature and day length.

The shortest day approaches. Cuddly versions of two Hothfield Heathlands icons, the highland cow and barn owl, are available as part of a KWT Adopt a Species package, an ideal Christmas gift for a young enthusiast. The other species for adoption is the grey seal, which does sometimes come inland but not as far as Hothfield! The deadline for Christmas orders is Tuesday 12 December <https://www.kentwildlifetrust.org.uk/adopt-a-species>. For enthusiasts of all ages book something from the 2018 programme of Kent-wide walks, talks and courses, on the website under Discover and Learn, and What's On. The fascinating walks include the beaver enclave at Ham Fen which can only be visited with a guide.

Hothfield Heathland is open to all including on Christmas Day. Please keep dogs in check and clean up. Various trails are signposted and indicated on the maps at entrances, which also give the location of the livestock. The noticeboard down the main slope from the Cade Road car park gives recent wildlife sightings. For email alerts on the location of the livestock, or to join the volunteers to help maintain the reserve or check the cattle contact the Warden on 01622 662012 or at ian.rickards@kentwildlife.org.uk.

Margery Thomas