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COUNTY LIFE

HERTFORDSHIRE

WINTER ISSUE 2022

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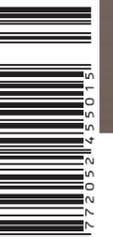
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County Life - Hertfordshire

Winter issue, number 38, 2022

Down Your Way • Aspects of County Life • **History & Heritage** • County Connections • **The County Gardener** • Wildlife • **New Books** • Lifestyle • **Seasonal Features** • Grand Days Out • **Great British Traditions** • A Picture of England • **The Short Story**

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Your Winter Edition

Hello and welcome to your winter edition of *County Life*.

It would be a huge understatement to suggest that 2022 has not been the best of years although, for *County Life*, it has been one of celebration because this year marked our 25th year of publishing - 'a great achievement', as one loyal reader kindly communicated.

Over the past 25 years, we have been blessed with an eclectic array of editorial contributions; some from very notable and famous wordsmiths. It is fair to say that we consider ourselves temporary custodians of a substantial catalogue of articles; many capturing the history and heritage of our beautiful county. We have also preserved some very educational, entertaining, and valuable personal stories which relate to Hertfordshire and beyond and, as is our usual commitment, this issue is no exception!

'Down Your Way' features the Ickleford; notably once home to Winston Churchill's son Randolph and his wife Pamela, who moved, temporarily, into the rectory during World War II.

Aspects of county life are abundant and 'The Big House' recalls a period of house sitting, over a period of a few summers, and the resulting memories and experiences that have endured the passage of time. In the same category, we consider the masquerade connection and the challenge set to discover the golden hare, with the help of clues written deep into the fabric, of Kit Williams' famous book *Masquerade*.

Readers' recollections continue to be very popular, providing a rich observation of personal life running through the veins of this magazine's editorial content. 'Bumps In the Night' is a story of a new life and the experiences of a 12-year-old evacuated to the countryside during the 1940s.

Enjoy our seasonal gardening tips from the County Gardener, then follow in our footsteps as we escape to London - the city that never sleeps. 'British Traditions' unravels the origins of Boxing Day and our 'Short Story' and 'Picture of England' complete the line up!

Enjoy your winter edition of *County Life*!

Alan



The *seasonal* photo - Credit: Annika Thierfeld.
 If you have a seasonal snap you'd like to submit, please email it to editor@countylifemagazines.co.uk (Images submitted for consideration must be your own work and offered free of copyright and license for publication in County Life Magazines)

Pen-ultimate letter 

DEAR COUNTY LIFE ...

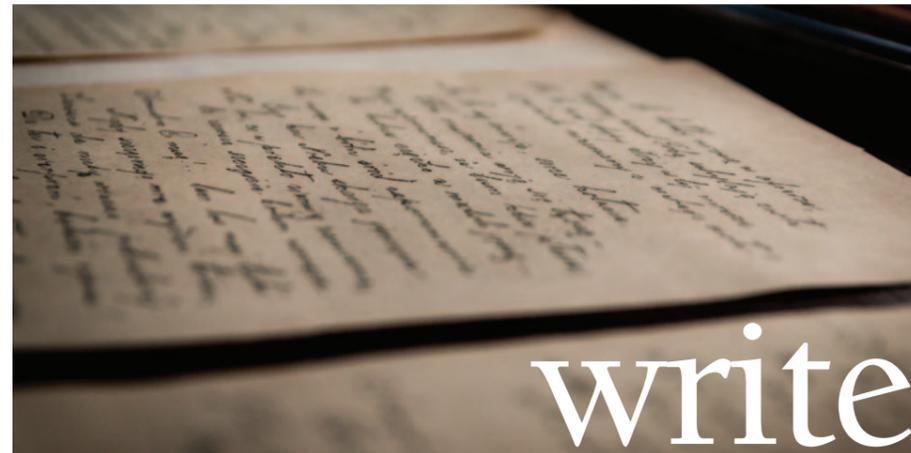
THE ESSENCE OF OUR PROUD HISTORY AND HERITGE...

Dear Editor,

What a revelation to read Sally Smith's article about Hilda Hewlett. I remember my grandfather talking about this great lady but, as a very young child, paid little attention to his reminiscences. It just makes me realise what a rich seam of history and heritage runs through the fabric of our region and the wider world. I understand why the movers and shakers, appointed to high office, concentrate their efforts on our future but am disappointed that it comes at the cost of the neglect of our proud and historic past. All credit to the author of the article for her hard work in researching and writing the story (not to mention her book) and also to *County Life*, who have spent the past 25 years publishing and documenting many more stories that capture the essence of this region's proud history and heritage.

Barclay Smith - Bedfordshire

From the editor... It is the result of comments and observations like yours that make my work very worthwhile.



writeback

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Have your say - make a comment or recommendation. Our 'Pen-ultimate' letter will receive one year's subscription to either our Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire or Hertfordshire edition; redeemable as a gift subscription to a friend if preferred.

Reaction

DEAR COUNTY LIFE ...

Superb photography!

Dear Editor,

I must congratulate Ian Dawson on his superb photography featured in your autumn edition of 'Nature Notes'. Tim Sharrock offers some excellent commentary and I must admit I enjoyed reading his serialisation published by *County Life*, many years ago, entitled 'In Search of The River Ivel'. By the way, will you ever republish his serialisation for those coming up through the ranks?

Kathleen Smith. Hertfordshire

Are you still feeling isolated after the pandemic lockdown?

ARE YOU STILL STRUGGLING TO GET YOUR OLD LIFESTYLE BACK?



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Hertford High Street Awards

2022 WINNERS ANNOUNCED

THE HERTFORD HIGH STREET AWARDS

CEREMONY took place recently at the refurbished Corn Exchange. The Hertford High Street Awards are organised by Hertford Town Council to celebrate,



Image: team at Tom Ashley collecting their award from the Mayor

support and recognise the array of businesses within the town and encourage residents to shop local. Over a thousand public votes were cast for people's favourite Hertford retailers and businesses across ten categories.

The evening was compered by Mary Sykes of the Hertfordshire Chamber of Commerce and a warm welcome was given by the Mayor of Hertford, Cllr Sue Barber. The finalists in each of the ten categories were announced with runners up being asked to collect their certificate from the stage. Comments from the public relating to the winners were then read out before the winning businesses were invited onto the stage to receive their award from The Mayor.

A total of 63 businesses entered the awards competition, the finalists and winners were selected by a combination of public voting, and a judging panel made up of representatives the local community.

The Mayor of Hertford, Cllr Sue Barber, said: "The Hertford High Street Awards have once again highlighted the wealth and breadth of outstanding shops and services we have on our doorstep in Hertford".

Oakmoor Lodge

CARE HOME DEVELOPMENT, BUSHEY

DEVELOPMENT WORK ON OAKMOOR LODGE, Quantum Care's new care home for older people in Bushey, is nearing completion. The new home represents the latest in care home design resulting in beautiful and welcoming interior spaces with facilities designed for a more active and engaged style of living. Oakmoor Lodge will include 72 en-suite bedrooms, all fully furnished with items from Quantum Care's carefully selected range, and will be situated a short distance away from the popular Bushey Gallery which hosts exhibitions from local artists, as well as from those further afield. The interior design of the home will reflect Bushey's artistic heritage, with the home's "Arthouse Café" being a focal point in the home.

The home will also include a cinema, hair and beauty salon and a number of well-appointed social lounges and dining rooms.

Oakmoor Lodge will offer residential and specialist dementia care as well as



convalescence care for individuals who just need to get back on their feet again after, say, a stay in hospital or an illness. Short breaks are also on offer, enabling those caring for an individual to take time off from caring, allowing the home to take up the care while they themselves rest and recover.

The home is due to open early 2023

Quantum Care is a not for profit Community Benefit Society that provides a range of care services for more than 2,000 older people in Hertfordshire.

For more information about Oakmoor Lodge, please contact Quantum Care on 01707 393293 or visit www.quantumcare.co.uk



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Ickleford

A Jewel in Hertfordshire's Crown

Ickleford is an interesting village to visit and explore; its history and architecture being part of the identity and allure of this charmingly complete little village.

by
Peter Etteridge

Ickleford has been awarded the accolade of best kept village for a number of years. The village has a variety of interesting buildings, including thatched cottages, inns and curiosities, which include a village pump, found on Upper Green.

Winston Churchill's son lived at the Rectory during World War II, and the village is the resting place of Henry Boswell, king of the Gypsies, who died in 1780 at the age of ninety.

Ickleford has commemorated a number of royal celebrations and, in 1897, a lamp was erected on the green to commemorate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. Horse chestnut trees were planted on Upper Green to commemorate the coronation of King Edward and Queen Alexandra, and celebrations were held for the coronation of King George V and Queen Mary in 1911 and the coronation of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth

in 1937. In 1953, when Queen Elizabeth II was crowned, children in the village were each presented with a commemorative mug to mark the special occasion.

During Edwardian times, Squire Fellows provided each newly delivered baby and nursing mother with a daily cooked meal and a pint of milk for a fortnight. He also provided a joint of beef and one hundredweight of coal to each elderly resident at Christmas, and the children of estate workers were also given a present.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Walter and Arthur Witter came to live in the village. Walter's wife, Marie, taught embroidery and needlework to the local school children, and Walter taught boys the skills required to fashion copper and brass. Walter and Marie eventually started a business employing more than twenty-five men and women, who worked from a small



Image: Ickleford is a well manicured village with a variety of interesting buildings.

Photo: copyright 2015 Peter Etteridge.

workroom behind the Witters' cottage. The business grew to become the Ickleford Industries of Applied Arts and an annual exhibition was held to exhibit their work.

Winston Churchill's son, Randolph, and his wife, Pamela, moved to the Rectory in Ickleford during World War II. Randolph was a Major General in the Intelligence Branch of the General Staff, and the

couple arrived just before the birth of their son, Winston Jnr, who would often be seen in the village accompanied by his nanny.

The rectory, which fronted Upper Green, was a large, rambling, cold place with eleven bedrooms. Notable visitors to the Rectory during this time included Clementine, Sir Winston Churchill's wife, and the author Evelyn Waugh, who wrote of

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celebrating VJ Day at the Rectory. The building was demolished during the 1960s, and the last resident rector was the Rev. Thomas Walton in 1888.

Henry Boswell, the King of the Gypsies, was born on the Six Hills of Stevenage in 1690. He travelled nearly every road in England until his death ninety years later in 1780. He was carried along the Icknield Way to be laid to rest in the churchyard here.

The parish church of St Katherine is centrally located in the village, near to the junction of Turnpike Lane and Arlesey Road, and has a number of tall cedar trees in the churchyard. The nave of the church dates from the twelfth century, and the chancel and square tower date from the thirteenth century. A south porch was added during the fifteenth century, and a south aisle and chapel were built in

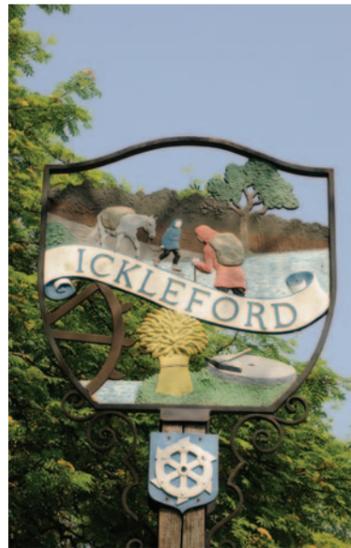


Image top left: The Old George public house is a pretty timber-framed building.

Image top right: Lamp on the Plume of Feathers, Ickleford, Hertfordshire.

Image above: The traditional village sign depicts Ickleford's heritage.

Photo: copyright 2015 Peter Etteridge.

1859 during the extensive alterations made by Sir Gilbert Scott.

St Katherine's has two lychgates providing access to the churchyard. A double lychgate stands near the Old George Inn, and a small lychgate stands at the opposite corner of the churchyard near Upper Green. Originally, a hostel was located on the site now occupied by the Old George inn, and housed Gilbertine monks. During the building of the church, it is said that a tunnel once ran between the church and the inn. The earliest parts of the present timber-framed building date from the sixteenth century, and the earliest known reference as an inn is 1665. Dick Turpin is reputed to have visited the inn to escape capture, and hid in the chimney of a large inglenook fireplace. The Green Man in Turnpike Lane, a short distance from the Old George, has been an inn

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since 1777, and a blacksmiths' shop was attached until the late 1960s.

Further along Turnpike Lane, the Clockhouse and Waltham Cottage are both Grade II listed buildings. The Clockhouse was once a stable block and formed part of Ickleford Manor. The timber-framed gatehouse has a clock dated 1819. Waltham Cottage probably became a separate residence after Ickleford Manor House burnt down in 1911.

Several interesting cottages that can also be seen if you walk along Arlesey Road to Upper Green include Orchard Cottage and Ivy Cottage. The village pump, made by the makers of the first iron engine, stands behind iron railings on Upper Green, as does the village sign and a commemorative shelter presented to the village by Wilfrid Vere Doughty, Lord of the Manor. The Plume of Feathers inn was once a private house with a forge attached, and was



Image top: Ickleford's iconic Village hall.

Image above: One of St Katherine's two lychgates.

Image opposite page: The commemorative shelter presented to the village by Wilfrid Vere Doughty, Lord of the Manor.

Photo: copyright 2015 Peter Etteridge.

an inn by 1778. The gateway and wall to Ickleford School stand beside Upper Green. The gateway has the inscription 'FDR 1848'. Further along Arlesey Road, the attractive village hall was built in memory of the men who fell during World War I and those who lost their lives during World War II. Pamela Churchill helped to run a British restaurant in the village hall to help the war effort. The Cricketers inn, which opened in the mid nineteenth century, can also be found in Arlesey Road. The building was a beer house in 1850 when it was known as the Live and Let Live, later being renamed the Cricketers.

Ickleford remains an interesting village to visit and explore; its history and architecture being part of the identity and allure of this charmingly complete little village.

Article first published in County Life-Hertfordshire, issue 8, Spring 2015





Images: For illustrative purposes only.

The Big House

When I was very young, mostly at the same time every year, my mother, father, two older brothers and I would stay in a large house belonging to a local doctor. Every year, during the 1940s, for two weeks, we would 'house-sit' while the family was away on holiday - most years in Scotland, where they would stay with relatives. My two aunts (my mother's sisters) lived in at the doctor's house. One was the cook/housekeeper, the other acted as a nurse to the doctor's brother, who suffered from polio.

by
John F. Pickering

I remember some lovely times at the doctor's large house situated along a tree-lined avenue. Our own family house would be locked up for those two weeks, although one of us would either return by bus, or cycle, to collect the mail and to ensure that everything at home was safe and secure.

When the school holidays ended, the autumn school term began and I can recall one occasion when the teacher gave my class a composition to write

entitled 'What I Did In My Summer Holidays'. I contemplated the subject for a few minutes, stood up and approached the teacher telling him that I never went on holiday with my mother and father. His reply was stern: "Go and sit down, John! You must have done something. Just write about it!" So I did - and the following is something of what I wrote.

Year after year we would go to the 'big house' as we called it, and in the last five or six years, following my father's death, it would just be my mother and me who stayed because, by then, both my

brothers had married. The whole experience of our two-week 'house-sit' was an education for me as I began to grow up!

In what the doctor referred to as 'the nursery' there were rows of the small Beatrix Potter and Ladybird books. I looked at every one of them. There were also Meccano and Lego sets. There was a large kaleidoscope that I enjoyed looking through observing the various patterns made when it was rotated. I had never seen any of these things before; they were all magical to me. There was also a large stand-up gramophone housed in a beautiful mahogany veneered cabinet with a handle that had to be wound before it would play a record. The cabinet had two doors, and opening or shutting them acted like volume controls for the loud speaker. Underneath these doors was the record storage area, all of which were played at 78 rpm. There was quite a selection including classical and 1930s' dance band music. I had heard some of the dance band music before because we had an H.M.V. wind-up gramophone at home, with a small collection of records. But I had never listened to classical music before playing the doctor's collection, which included Gili, Joan Hammond, and other well-known artistes. I really enjoyed listening to the records and, as a result, became interested in all types of music.

As the years went by I took more interest in the workings of the 'big house'. There was a tea trolley to transport food from the kitchen to the dining room. On it would be placed the main dish and the vegetables, but the main condiments were left in the dining room. I used to push this tea trolley up and down the long hallway from the front of the house to the back and found it great fun, until it was needed at meal times. There was also a large electrical heated tray with a lid to keep food, tea or coffee warm. I had never seen these things before. They really opened my eyes!

There was also a beautiful silver teapot, a silver coffee pot and a lovely China tea and coffee set with matching cups and saucers decorated in pink and white roses. At home we had a brown clay teapot and plain cups and saucers, but we did have a willow patterned set that came out for special occasions.

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Stephen Hearn

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The Big House

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At tea time, cakes of various kinds were placed on a three-tier cake stand and placed in the middle of the table. Tea, as I remember, consisted of ham, chicken or other cold meats, with a salad in a large bowl. They certainly lived well at the big house!

After they had moved to a larger house, the doctor's new family home had even more to discover. Two staircases (one had a lovely curved handrail, which followed the curve of the stairs, with a thick stair carpet on it - this was the main staircase used by the doctor's family); the other was just straight up and down, with lino on it, used only by the servants. There was also a big summer house. I even tried to play croquet on the large lawn, but couldn't get the hang of it.

The house had a gated, covered tradesmen's entrance, which went the full length of the house with access to the back door.

As I grew older, what I liked most about the new house was its proximity to the shops and the local cinemas. During the 1940s, a commissionaire, dressed in a blue uniform, would stand at the entrance of the cinema, and he looked very grand. The local bus station was within easy walking distance and all along the high street were several shops I also enjoyed visiting. In fact, it was a small community and with the bus station nearby, some of the shops did quite well, especially for those last-minute shopping items.

I remember the local garage and car sales showroom, the cycle shop, the cafe, the green grocery, also a ladies underwear shop, and a music shop which sold pianos, sheet music and records and next door was a fish and chip shop. On the opposite side of the street was Clarke's shoe shop, and a bread and cake shop with a cafe upstairs, a chemist and an electrical appliance shop, not to mention numerous other establishments which I just can't recall but they included several public houses.

In those days television was in its infancy. The drawing room in the big house (which we call the lounge today) had a large console television with a small screen, but we never looked at it. We just listened to the wireless or went for a walk to entertain ourselves.

In the final chapter of our 'house sitting years' the doctor's wife passed away and he then stopped going on holiday. My mother then started to cook his meals, when my two aunts went away on their holidays. As I got older I used to visit him and talk with him and he also allowed me to go into the nursery, which, although I enjoyed it, was like a shrine to his children.

In the late 1950s the final chapter closed on this period of my life when the doctor died and the house was eventually sold.

During my final years at school, the headmaster introduced the radio to the class so that we could listen to the educational programme *For Schools*. There was one particular time when we listened to some classical music and the headmaster enquired if anyone knew what the piece of music was called. My hand shot up. The headmaster gave a big sigh. "All right, Pickering, let's see if you know." "*Ritual Fire Dance*, sir", I replied. "How on earth do you know that?" he enquired. "Because I heard it before, sir," - not letting on that I had heard it at the big house. I know that my knowledge of classical music surprised him and I was the only one in the class who put their hand up to answer his question. For the rest of my life, I have always had an interest in all types of music and this was as a result of listening to the doctor's records during my time at the 'big house'. I often think of those days - so very different to today's world.

Article first published - Bedfordshire County Life, issue 57, Summer 2012



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BUMPS IN THE NIGHT

By the autumn and early winter of 1940 I was settling into my new life in a rural community. I was an evacuee, and my new life not only encompassed the rich variety of experiences a village life could provide, it also introduced me to a complete revolution in lifestyle - not to mention a steep learning curve. I was a 12-year-old East End Cockney lad now living on a large farm, and I was an absolute beginner at living this totally different existence, but I took to it like the proverbial duck to water.

by
Michael Dundrow

My adopted family was mercifully spared the horrors of the Blitz but we were frequently reminded of what was being suffered by our fellow citizens less than forty miles to the south. For, during those early years of heavy night-time bombing raids on London, the sirens would sometimes go off when we were asleep in our beds. In total darkness, we would jump out, groaning and complaining as we staggered outside en route to the air raid shelter. Now this was a very unusual thing to do because most houses in the villages didn't actually have their own shelter and their only protection was to crowd under the stairs or huddle beneath stout kitchen tables.

Not many people bothered with either of these alternatives, especially after the first two or three events sirens sounded. They actually became quite blasé about the whole thing - sure that the German bombs would never find them - and tended to stay in bed. In conversation, they would often claim that if your name was on a bomb it would get you anyway, regardless of whether you were under a table, under the stairs or in your bed.

At the farm, my new found home had a purpose-built air raid shelter constructed by the elderly farmer's older brother, who was a builder by trade and lived in Harrow, where, of course, air raid shelters were deemed an absolute necessity. At the outbreak of war, he had insisted on visiting his brother at the farm to build the shelter. It was positioned just outside the sheep yard in the orchard. A concrete slab sunk into the ground, it had a great mound of earth covering its structure - like an ancient tumulus. Thing was, nobody really knew if it would protect its occupants if it ever took a direct hit, so perhaps it was best to stay indoors and take the chance. And it was this uncertainty that drove us outdoors on troubled nights.

The shelter was cramped, cold and uncomfortably damp - as all such places inevitably were. Although a shade less agreeable, it was, nevertheless, larger and capable of inspiring more confidence in survival than the London Anderson shelters. Yet, after we had the experience once or twice of getting out of a warm bed at 2 o'clock in the early hours of the morning, putting on an old coat and our shoes before wandering out into a cold, dark night's air, and once in pouring rain across the sheep yard into the orchard and down into the damp hole in the ground, we decided it was too much, preferring to stay indoors in our warm beds and take our chances.

It was no joke sitting in an apprehensive, bleary-eyed circle in the flickering light of an oil lamp in the small hours, usually shivering in spite of the efforts of a paraffin stove to circulate some warmth. The first time, it was exciting, even to me as a young boy. I imagined us as the sole survivors of a massive attack on our village with all our senses alert, our hearts thumping in preparation for the expected onslaught. The miserable circumstances of the shelter seemed a small price to pay for salvation. But then came the all-clear and with it a feeling of anti-climax, as if we had been cheated of our dues as we trailed disconsolately back indoors while all our neighbours were stirring sleepily in their warm beds, vindicated in their brazen defence of the instinct of self-preservation.

The third time we decamped, more reluctantly, utter peace and calm prevailed again in the starry skies over the village until the all-clear sounded. Once more, we came forth complaining beneath the same impassive stars at the loss of a good night's sleep, and for no sufficient justification; not even a distant bomb, let alone a concentrated attack on our village. "I have had enough of this lark," said Fred, his love of towing the official line now quite exhausted. We vowed then and there, as we grumbled our way back across the

yard once again, that we would never leave our beds in the night for any number of sirens. "I would rather die in my bed, snug and warm," said the old farmer.

We never did get any value out of that shelter. Abandoned, it just became entangled in weeds; a monument to excessive caution, which became the home of spiders and yards of fungus. Its entrance and surrounding slopes ended up being choked with nettles that were very skilled at concealing any stray cricket ball that was launched sky high into the orchard for six out!

So, very late one night, some weeks after the shelter's final rejection and when the sirens wailed out into the night air all over the village, we decided that we would remain tucked up like our neighbours, merely grunting sleepily, rapt smiles on our faces, turning over and appreciating the warmth and comfort of our beds - not to mention our own good sense. Suddenly, and to our utter disbelief, a series of loud explosions and thumping great bangs took our breath away. The farmhouse shook, the windows rattled, all creation seemed to shudder as we sat up in the darkness with exclamations of consternation and incredulity. Were we about to pay for our defiance of Jerry and the wisdom of Harrow? How attractive our shelter now seemed for those few panic struck moments! What fools we had been! We listened intently for a minute or two and thought we detected, beyond the noise of our own thumping hearts, the faint sound of aircraft engines. Then all was complete silence.

Fred, standing at the window in his nightshirt, pulled back the blackout curtain but could see nothing. "I'd better go out to have a look round," he said, grappling for his 'Specials' uniform, which he slipped on hastily. "That lot wasn't far off, or I'm a Dutchman!" he exclaimed.

I jumped up and put my clothes on over my pyjamas and went downstairs, where I was soon joined by the farmer's wife. We were all speculating vigorously about the bangs, which had really startled and alarmed everyone by their loudness, and the likes of which had not been heard in the village before. Fred departed on foot and headed out towards Church End as I stood in the yard gazing up at the constellations as if for enlightenment, becoming no wiser - only colder. The farmer's wife and I then returned indoors to the warmth and security of our beds. There was no question of going into the shelter; the fun and games were over now, we felt sure. Everywhere around was as silent as the grave. No more surging, anxious crowds in the roadside outside, no voices in the darkness, no traffic, no flashing lights, of course. It seemed as if the village had turned in again - if ever it had turned out in the first place.

By the time Fred returned, the all-clear had sounded and I was fast asleep. I didn't hear his exciting news until I awoke the following morning, when, over breakfast, he told me that two bombs had fallen smack bang in the middle of the main road and close to the Memorial Hall. No one had been hurt, he said, and he didn't think there was any damage to the nearby houses. They hadn't even knocked over the telegraph poles or broken the power cables; just made the posts lean a little.

This was our last and heaviest attack of the war, and the general consensus of village opinion was that Jerry probably had a fighter plane on his tail and had jettisoned his bombs to assist his speedy retreat, thinking they would fall on open fields. The school of thought which held that the attack was a deliberate and precisely executed one to cut the village off from the main town and in some mysterious subtle way cripple the villagers' war effort had few adherents, even when it was pointed out that several workers had been prevented from getting to the local tank factory the following day. What effect this had on the subsequent North African tank battles history, alas, does not record.

On the way to school, which was only a hundred yards from the devastation, I passed the scene. Treading gingerly around the two great craters where the bombs had fallen in the road, I paused long enough to search for, and find, a few bomb casing fragments to complement my growing collection.

There were no policemen, fire engines, shovelling workers, sightseers - nothing but a rope cordoning off the damage. The council road gang, taken off their normal sweeping routine, arrived after breakfast and started to clear up. Daylight also revealed another crater in an adjoining field, and I heard that a couple of dead rabbits were found nearby; the only confirmed casualties of direct enemy action in our village throughout the war years.

All the local schoolchildren ended up being sent home that morning because of the traffic disruption, and I enjoyed a day's impromptu holiday. Some of us watched the council workers shovelling earth back into the bomb craters, which, by teatime, had been filled, allowing the traffic to pass gently over wooden boards placed on top of the newly refilled craters. Later on, council workers would return again to tarmac the damage. For many years there was a roughness, an unevenness and a slight change of colour in the road surface, which reminded those who could remember of the night when our village was shaken and stirred to its very foundations.

Article first published in Bedfordshire County Life, issue 70, Autumn 2015

A Mystery to Solve...

a masquerade

When author Kit Williams turned his 1970 book *Masquerade* into a treasure hunt, he captured the public imagination. The challenge of a mystery to solve, as well as the lure of actual treasure, set some two million readers thinking. And the quest was to end in our region at Ampthill Park, in the heart of the Bedfordshire countryside. But what inspired the success of *Masquerade* and how was this literary and pictorial puzzle to unfold?

by
Isabel Murdoch

If anyone caught sight of two men entering Ampthill Park and walking in the direction of the Katherine Cross in the late summer of 1979, they probably saw nothing suspicious. One man held a Tupperware box, the other a ceramic casket. At a quiet time, they began to dig. Soon the casket was buried and the soil returned to the hole: to ensure that no disturbance of the earth could be seen, the man with the Tupperware container opened the box and poured a cowpat over the site of the hole. Then they left. There was no hint that buried treasure now lay beneath the parkland, in Bedfordshire soil.

But the man who buried the casket was Kit Williams, then a little-known illustrator and writer, and the man with the Tupperware container was the well-known TV presenter Bamber Gascoigne. And the casket contained a jewelled ornament of a hare in 18 carat gold, which was to inspire a worldwide treasure hunt.

Born in Kent in April 1946, Kit Williams was in his early thirties when he published *Masquerade*. When he came up with the idea, he set himself the task of sculpting the actual golden hare, over a period of one month. Seen in running pose, the hare has strikingly long ears and decorative patterning on the body. In planning to bury the treasure, Kit placed the hare in a ceramic casket to avoid treasure seekers using metal detectors. All was prepared.

In writing *Masquerade*, Kit wove some clues into verse, others were pictorial, so linking his different skills.

Britain has a strong tradition of book illustration, from Arthur Rackham's fantasy fairy tale worlds to Kate Greenaway's childhood idylls and Beatrix Potter's timeless tales, to Quentin Blake's quirky scenes and Axel Scheffler's illustrations for Julia Donaldson's runaway recent successes *The Gruffalo* and *The Highway Rat*. Illustration features heavily in children's literature in particular, and Kit Williams intended *Masquerade* to be a children's book. But this book took the art of illustration to a whole new level, so drawing in a far wider readership. For as well as enhancing the reader's experience of an imaginary world, Williams' illustrations to *Masquerade* turned the reader into a detective.

Reading *Masquerade* became active, an opportunity to take the initiative and unravel the enigma or decode the author's thoughts. Only with lateral thinking and attention to detail could the reader piece together the solution. But that solution eluded more and more readers. For the book became something of a publishing phenomenon. Williams probably intended his mystery to inspire readers to try to locate the treasure, but only on a small scale. But in no time at all the quest caught on. This was some years before the world wide web, but these days the treasure hunt would have gone viral. Million of copies of the book flew off the shelves.

Illustrating *Masquerade*, planning extremely exact pictorial clues, must have required very painstaking work on the measurements and scale of the animal

continued on page 24

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A M Y S T E R Y T O S O L V E

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paintings. For the only way to solve the clues was to draw lines on each painting, one from each of the featured animal's eyes and others from the longest digits on their claws. Via the border, these would link to a letter which would construct a word and lead finally to an acrostic (which read "close by Ampthill").

By the time Kit Williams settled on a Bedfordshire hiding place, Ampthill Park was owned by the town. And with the castle long ruined, the two striking features of the park were the crosses, as they still are. One, erected during the 1920s, commemorates soldiers who attended the Duke of Bedford's parkland training camp and went on to give their lives in the battlefields of Flanders in World War One. The other, erected two centuries earlier, in 1773, is the famous Katherine Cross, commemorating Katherine of Aragon's confinement in Ampthill Castle at the end of her marriage to King Henry VIII. The park must have seemed so different then, as the desolate queen waited to learn her future fate. It was this Cross which attracted Kit Williams' attention. But even then the precise location of the treasure was to be more complex.

The tall stone Katherine Cross is surrounded by a low fence, with a slate and stone plaque on the ground. It was commissioned by Lord Ossory of Ampthill Park House, who also altered the town's Market Square, in the 1780s, building the Market House and stone obelisk. He asked his friend, the poet Horace Walpole, to write a verse in memory of the Queen to be inscribed here. Rather than simply burying the casket by the fence, Williams chose the exact spot where the shadow cast by the Cross ends - but only on two occasions in the year, namely the spring and autumn equinoxes.

A walk in Ampthill Park can be an exhilarating experience. I always remember following the footpath from the ruins of Houghton House on a day of bright sunshine and strong wind, watching kites flying high in the breeze. And for over two years the treasure casket lay here, undisturbed.

But as the months elapsed and no treasure was found, the mystery only deepened. Some were misled and came up with wrong solutions, and all the time more copies of the book were sold as new readers flocked to the quest.

And the hunt was to end very differently than intended. In theory, the mystery was solved in February

1982 when a man calling himself Ken Thomas (a pseudonym for security reasons) claimed to have found the treasure when the clues led him to Ampthill Park. But his success was subsequently unmasked as a scam. Williams' ex girlfriend knew Ken through animal activist circles, and she revealed the treasure's location to him. Other readers may have puzzled over the clues, scrutinised the book's pictures, page borders and letters time and again, even set out around the country with spades and shovels, but the treasure went to someone else. Two science teachers were later thought to have truly solved the clues themselves.

So why was *Masquerade* so very successful? Mainly, I think, as something new and different - setting a challenge which could turn into an obsession, and one with a literary and pictorial twist. But also, in using animal characters, Williams was following a long tradition which harked back to Anna Sewell's *Black Beauty* and Henry Williamson's *Tarka The Otter*. Just seven years before *Masquerade* was published, Richard Adams won the Library Association Carnegie Medal for *Watership Down*, an account of life in a rabbit colony.

But fame has its drawbacks, and Kit Williams soon came to regret the scale of the book's success. Requests flooded in for him to feature in TV programmes and interviews, or to endorse books and product lines - none of which he really wanted to do. Indeed, he is known to have referred to the media circus surrounding *Masquerade* as that whole "razzmatazz". As time went by he was thankful to be more free to return to his own work - writing, illustrating and oil painting. He has published other books, and as a marquetry enthusiast he makes his own wooden picture frames. Clock-making has become another of his craft skills, and his large-scale clock designs may be seen on public display in Milton Keynes and Cheltenham.

The golden hare was sold at Sotheby's in 1998 for £31,900 and is now believed to be overseas. But the *Masquerade* mystery still crops up in the media from time to time. In 2004 a BBC4 documentary saw Kit Williams reunited with the hare for the occasion. Almost forty years have elapsed since the buried treasure was unearthed from the shadow of Ampthill's Katherine Cross, but this enigma still has the power to enthrall.

Article first published in Bedfordshire County Life, issue 80, Spring 2018

Improving Hertfordshire homes to weather cost of living



The dramatic hike in mortgage rates is forcing millions of homeowners to consider their next steps, not least when it comes to moving house.

Increased borrowing rates and warnings over a drop in house prices has pushed the issue of 'move or improve' to the top of the agenda, with a huge amount of caution creeping into the house sales market.

At a recent summit meeting for the glazing industry, Barclays' Chief Economist William Hobbs said that sky-high mortgage rates now and in the foreseeable future raised expectations that more people would invest in home improvements rather than move house.

The options for 'improve' over 'move' look promising, not least in terms of creating more space via conservatories or bi-fold doors. And with deep uncertainty over rocketing fuel bills, the idea of saving money by improving energy efficiency in the home - by fitting double-glazed windows, for example - is highly appealing.

There is also evidence that homeowners who have benefitted from a long, steep increase in property values are now considering releasing equity to carry out home improvements that will, in the long run, add value to their homes when prices settle once more.

Steve Rawding, Sales and Marketing Director at leading South East home improvement company SEH BAC, expects to see more people considering home improvement options as the outlook for the economy darkens and the cost of living bites.

"We're living in uncertain times, to say the least, and this is definitely fuelling an interest in home improvements as opposed to moving. The cost of having a conservatory built when you take into account increased mortgage rates and the actual cost of moving, offers particularly good value for money and a sound investment.

"A new conservatory will increase your property's footage, adding value overall. And given the energy efficiency of modern conservatories, you're also saving money at a time when gas and electricity prices are causing understandable worry."

Of course, improving your property should be done using the best advice possible, especially in the current climate, which is why it is wise to call in the experts.

"Careful planning and good advice can bring home improvements you can be proud of," Steve said. "In the rush to save money or add value it's sometimes forgotten that a house is also a home, so think carefully about where and how your property and your family can benefit from improvement."

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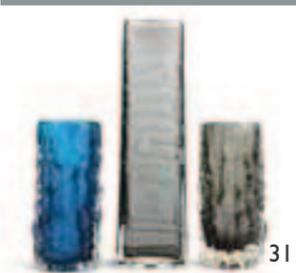
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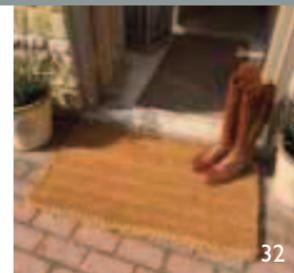
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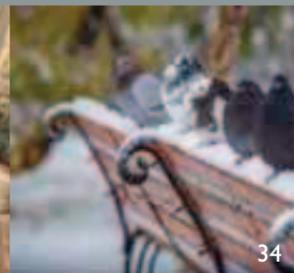
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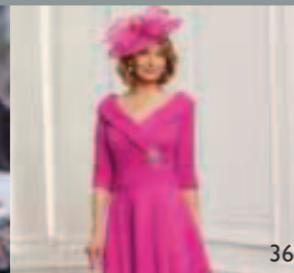
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SERENDIPITY

Serendipity *noun.* the occurrence of an unexpected surprise by chance

Winter time... and the season is on the change

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New Era of Auctioneering in St Neots

The re-opening of W&H Peacock's Auction Centre



Following years of planning and months of building works, Thursday 1st December 2022 marked the dawn of a new era of auctioneering in St Neots with the re-opening of **W&H Peacock's Auction Centre on New Street, St Neots, Cambridgeshire.**

Having two good sized salerooms, a first floor café, dedicated display areas and excellent facilities our newly redeveloped and extended centre means that the historic Cambridgeshire market town of St Neots is now furnished with possibly the most modern and accessible auction venue in the country.

The redesign blends a vibrant refurbishment of the existing Victorian rear barn with a purpose-built contemporary space to meet the demands of today's modern, fast-paced auction world.

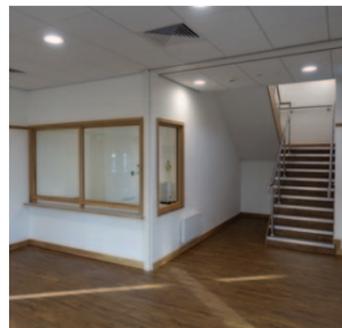
The site will hold two weekly sales every Thursday, together featuring over 1,000 lots of furniture, household goods and electronics, tools, machinery and building supplies, garden and outdoor products and ex-retail stocks, as well as occasional specialist sales, valuation days and events throughout the year.

At W&H Peacock we think nothing compares to the thrill of bidding live in the room. So, whilst all the sales in our new premises will be broadcast live online, we hope that newcomers and seasoned auction pros will enjoy visiting the salerooms and experiencing the drama of a live auction.

Our dedicated first floor café will enhance the auction experience by serving a range of breakfasts, lunches, cake and

snacks using locally sourced ingredients. Open on sale and viewing days, customers can choose to takeaway, appreciate the neighbouring Ouse Valley countryside or overlook the hubbub of the ground floor saleroom.

The project was completed in partnership with architects Woods Hardwick and Milton Keynes based builders Parkway Construction, who together designed and built W&H Peacock's state of the art auction centre and head office in Bedford five years ago.



Key dates:

- Sale entries invited from Monday 21st Nov
- Viewing Wednesday 30th Nov
- First Sale Thursday 1st Dec

www.peacockauction.co.uk

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Collecting Whitefriars Glass

by
W&H Peacock



Whitefriars Glass sits comfortably in any home or setting, whether designed in the ever-popular Mid-Century style or against a more traditional antique backdrop.

For many years the work of Whitefriars Glass has been a popular field of collecting. Founded circa 1680 (only fourteen years after the Great Fire of London) Whitefriars Glassworks was built on the site of an old Monastery of the Carmelite Fathers. These monks were also known as the 'White Friars', hence the name of the popular glass manufacturer.

Whitefriars Glass Works was Britain's longest running glass house, only closing fairly recently in 1980. Throughout its history the company pioneered numerous innovations in glass technology, most notably after being purchased by James Powell & Sons in 1834.

These days, enthusiasts are always looking for pieces designed by Geoffrey Baxter. Having graduated from the Royal College of Art, Baxter joined Whitefriars in 1954. He immediately recognised glass as an art-form and began experimenting with numerous methods of producing unusual textures. Famous results included brick, bark and copper wire. His designs were produced in a series of colours known by specific names including 'Tangerine Orange' and 'Kingfisher Blue'. One of the most popular colours for collectors remains 'Ruby Red'... keep your eyes peeled for one!



If you own anything which you think might be suitable for one of our specialist sales please contact Lindsay Taylor on 01234 266366 or antiques@peacockauctions.co.uk Alternatively, attend one of our Valuation Days where clients are invited to bring along items for complimentary auction advice without obligation. W&H Peacock www.peacockauction.co.uk

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When you've taken time and care with your interior design, certain details make an enormous difference both in terms of pulling a look together and in keeping that look pristine. Doormats are very often overlooked; an afterthought but with a very practical purpose. However, when poorly chosen their utilitarian appearance can easily spoil the effect of your painstakingly put together interior. Do not despair! There is another way.

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The skill of hand-crafted doormat making had all but died out in



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the UK until we revived it. We now offer a comprehensive range of woven back 100% coir mats, without any PVC backing, in a choice of thicknesses, sizes and edging," says Samantha Burlton, Co-Director at *Make An Entrance*.

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“traditional hand-crafted coir mats made lovingly to order by hand, in their UK workshop”

able to produce individual mats to whatever size and thickness their customers require. Adds Samantha, "Indoors, outdoors, for mat wells or freestanding, personalised, machine washable mats and more! For anything doormat related *Make An Entrance* really is the answer."

The jewel in their crown is, however, their traditional hand-crafted coir mat made lovingly to order, by hand, in their UK workshop. It's clear to see the quality of these long-lasting mats is second to none. "The excellent scraping action and absorbency of coir makes it a perfect solution for a country home," says Samantha. "Mud stays on the mat instead of travelling onto your beautiful floor coverings. Then, when thoroughly dry, your mat can simply be brushed with a coir mat cleaning brush leaving them as good as new."



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The Cold of Winter.

by
Peter Dean

In winter it is especially important for gardeners to look after birds and other wildlife. When temperatures fall to single Celsius figures wildlife is more vulnerable. They need extra food to survive.

Leaving seed heads on sunflowers, for example, gives birds - finches in particular - a good food source. And so do berries like rose hips and elderberries, which are vitamin rich and provide an energy rich food for garden birds and small mammals.

Insects look for crevices and small holes in walls to hide and hibernate. Bee hotels made from hollow bamboo rods packed together can give these, and other insects, an over-wintering home.

Hedgehogs also hibernate. So do not disturb leaf piles or old wood stocks because they may be in amongst the debris, asleep. It goes without saying that, on Bonfire Night - or any time you plan a winter bonfire - to always check for hedgehogs before lighting it.

The easiest way to help the winter wildlife is to put out shop-bought

seeds and other food for them. And an accessible and clean amount of water.

You can buy sunflower seeds and hearts, specific bird seed mixes, mealworms and nuts that are all good energy sources for all sorts of wild birds. By placing some in aerial feeders, and some on the ground you will encourage a range of species to feed, and will, inevitably, save lives.

Birds, small mammals and insects are all part of the food chain. In the growing seasons each one is important to the gardener to help control pests - including aphids, slugs and snails - and to pollinate our flowers and crops. Their importance cannot be overstated. It is very important to preserve wildlife in every garden.

Other jobs for the winter include maintenance of tools and machines. Give your cutting tools like shears, secateurs and pruners a sharpen with a dry oil stone. Or take them to a specialised tool merchant, where they can sharpen them for you. Get the lawnmower and hedge trimmer serviced. Then you will be ready for spring with sharp cutting blades.

Clean, and lightly oil spades,

forks, rakes and hoes so that they do not rot, although most nowadays are stainless steel.

The greenhouse can be cleaned inside and out, and used pots washed to minimise a build up of diseases.

At Christmas time we try and cut some holly with red berries, and also variegated ivy, to decorate our living room. It is really just a nice tradition to have foliage in the house at this time of year.

After Christmas, in February, snowdrops start to appear in the garden. These dainty nodding flowers are very welcome. They herald the start of a new season.

Why not search out some different varieties? There are some with green markings on the white petals, and even some with yellow markings on them. Some are very rare. Single bulbs can sell for a fortune and are much-prized by galanthophiles (snowdrop collectors). They will go to great lengths to own them. Usually bred by specialist bulb breeders they are, indeed, a delight to see, if you get a chance.

Follow Peter in every edition of *County Life* and plan ahead for each new season!

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Whatever the occasion - a special function, ladies night or that wedding of the year, you'll no doubt want to make a statement ...

Before you say yes to the dress, make sure it's passed the litmus test. The right outfit should feel like it's been created just for you, especially when it comes to hue, fit and hemline.

Most importantly, your outfit should make you feel beautiful. After all, it's a special event - and one in which to shine!

CONDICI

PHOTO STORY - IMAGES: Top - CONDICI - Available from stockists including Cream of Royston.

Cream of Royston

Once you know your son or daughter is getting married a wedding is just the excuse you need for dressing up. Bride aside, all eyes will be on the Mums. *Cream of Royston* has been trading in Royston for 47 years and is predominantly a special occasion store. The extensive stock, on two floors, is colour co-ordinated for ease of selection. Everything is available from outfits (sizes 6-28) to shoes, bags, hats, hatinators, fascinators and lingerie. Brands stocked include Condici, Ispirato, Couture Club and Veni Infantino. Dressed up, Lewis Henry and Ann Balon are perfect for plus sizes. Less formal wear from Frank Lyman, Veromia, and Alison is ideal for a day at the races, weddings abroad or guests and cruising.

Mothers usually purchase their outfits four months before the event and customers are given the option to change it if they see something they prefer later, but they rarely do. Once everything gels and you have the wow factor you have found the outfit. It is usual for the mothers to co-ordinate with the wedding party. It is very important to be comfortable with what you are wearing. A shift dress with a



jacket is always a popular choice because the jacket can be taken off in the evening when things warm up. A dress with a statement hat is also popular. It is important to be happy with the final look.

Whilst the outfit must be perfect for the occasion, having the correct lingerie underneath can alter the whole look of a garment. Cream has a well stocked lingerie

department which can be tried on with the outfit. A free alteration service is available on all full priced outfits bought in store, a fitting being carried out six weeks before the event, thus ensuring a perfect fit. Shoes and bags are made in Spain in different heel heights and beautiful leathers.

The Sale shop, *Occasions For Less*, located opposite *Cream of Royston* in Roysia House, offers mother of the bride and groom outfits, shoes, bags, hats and hatinators from previous seasons at fantastic prices. See the sale page on creamfashions.com. There is also a half price section at *Cream of Royston*. See the bottom of the pages on Condici, John Charles, and Ispirato on creamfashions.com.

Why not visit *Cream of Royston*, there is something for every occasion and budget. To book an appointment call *Cream of Royston* on 01763 244073 - email info@creamfashions.com or *Occasions for Less* at 01763 247166 - email info@occasionsforless.co.uk.

The shops are Covid secure and the diary is filling up fast. Spring/Summer 2023 stock now arriving.

Visit: www.creamfashions.com

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Town & Country Homes

SETTING THE STANDARD FOR BEAUTIFULLY CRAFTED HOMES

SINCE 2015, HAYFIELD HAS SET THE BENCHMARK FOR BEAUTIFULLY CRAFTED, AWARD-WINNING HOMES IN SOME OF THE MOST DESIRABLE LOCATIONS.



Andy said: "We have developed an innovative and responsible approach to minimise our impact on the environment and are committed to consistently bettering Government legislation, to benefit both our customers and the environment.

"Our Zero Carbon Ready homes have been thoughtfully designed to include initiatives that leave a lasting legacy for future generations, while delivering sustainable communities and places that enhance people's wellbeing.

With passion and commitment, Hayfield creates truly exceptional homes of character and endurance, that not only have some of the greenest credentials in the industry, but that come with the highest specifications as standard.

Andy Morris, Managing Director, says: "A Hayfield home is filled with thoughtful design detail and crafted by skill and expertise.

"Homes with a sense of belonging, that sit at the heart of the community and nature, and that create a lasting legacy for generations to come. It's what we have come to call the Hayfield difference. It's what makes us who we are.

A Hayfield home is a home we would love to live in ourselves."

The Government has set a target for the housebuilding industry to start moving towards a zero-carbon future from 2025, something that Hayfield has been doing since 2020.

"The new homes at our latest developments are powered and heated by electricity only that come from renewable sources. We do not use fossil fuels. This, combined with other low carbon technologies we install as standard, and the high thermal efficiency of our homes, means a Hayfield home has the potential to not add any carbon dioxide to the atmosphere during its use by a homeowner."

A trio of developments - at Clophill and Bromham in Bedfordshire and Hanslope in Buckinghamshire - showcase the Hayfield difference. These luxury developments each boast a range of styles and sizes to meet the needs of our discerning customers.

For more details on Hayfield Lakes, Hayfield Park and Hayfield Walk respectively, and to find your forever home, visit our website at www.hayfieldhomes.co.uk



H
HAYFIELD

DEFINITION
OF HOMEMAKING

Hayfield (*noun*)

1. Award winning
2. Quality and craft
3. Zero carbon ready homes
4. A lasting legacy

(see also: hayfieldhomes.co.uk)

<p>HAYFIELD PARK BROMHAM</p> <p>Two to four-bedroom homes</p> <p>0800 161 5548 hayfieldpark@hayfieldhomes.co.uk</p>	<p>HAYFIELD LAKES CLOPHILL</p> <p>Two to five-bedroom homes</p> <p>0800 161 5416 hayfieldlakes@hayfieldhomes.co.uk</p>	<p>HAYFIELD WALK HANSLOPE</p> <p>Two to five-bedroom homes</p> <p>0800 161 5488 hayfieldwalk@hayfieldhomes.co.uk</p>
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Town & Country Homes

STUNNING NEW HOMES IN RURAL SUFFOLK

SUFFOLK IS RENOWNED FOR ITS NATURAL BEAUTY WITH AN ABUNDANCE OF COUNTRYSIDE WALKS AND 50 MILES OF BEAUTIFUL COASTLINE, INCLUDING AWARD-WINNING BEACHES ALDEBURGH AND SOUTHWOLD.



stunning countryside but has fantastic transport links to London, Ipswich and Norwich. I relocated a few years ago from Kent to Stradbroke and fell in love with Suffolk and its quieter pace of life, community feel, open spaces and places to walk our dog. There's a lovely village vibe and community here in Stradbroke. It has a butchers, bakery, spa, leisure centre and community centre, doctors and a lovely pub called The Ivy House.

This site really is in a fantastic location in the village and our stunning homes are perfect for young professionals, growing families or those looking to downsize. We've also got fibre broadband, ideal for people working from home."

Lovell also has homes available now in Norfolk, including at St Edmund's Park in the market town of Acle at the gateway to the Norfolk Broads National Park, as well as St William's Park in the popular bustling market town of Wymondham.

L leading five-star housing developer Lovell has a selection of stunning new build rural countryside developments in the heart of Suffolk, which offer the very best of country living whilst still being located close to town and city amenities and excellent transport links.

All Saints Green has recently launched in the picturesque mid-Suffolk village of Stradbroke with a stunning collection of two, three and four bedroom houses, and two and three bedroom bungalows. It is all about the beautiful location here and community feel, with easy access to public footpaths for rural walks with beautiful views.

Mandy Allen, sales executive at All Saints Green, said: "Stradbroke has so much to offer and is surrounded by



For more details on Lovell visit: www.lovell.co.uk



Outstanding new homes in rural Suffolk

Located in the lovely Suffolk village of Stradbroke, All Saints Green is a stylish new development of 2, 3 and 4 bedroom houses and 2 and 3 bedroom bungalows.

The first plots on this much anticipated development have just been released, including a selection of 3 and 4 bedroom houses and 3 bedroom bungalows, designed with both energy efficiency and modern living in mind.

Just some of the key features of these new homes are:

- Energy saving air source heat pump heating systems
- Direct fibre broadband connectivity throughout
- High specification insulation
- Off street car parking/garages
- Fully fitted Symphony kitchens
- 10 year NHBC warranty



All Saints Green is being sold from our development at The Acorns in nearby Walsham-le-Willows
 Book an appointment today by calling 01379 398 154
 Our marketing suite at The Acorns is open Thursday – Monday 10am – 5pm

Also building in Suffolk at The Acorns - Walsham-le-Willows and in Norfolk at St Edmund's Park - Acle, William's Park - Wymondham, Bowlers Green - Hopton and Nar Valley Park – King's Lynn.



London

The City That Never Sleeps

Experience the sights, sounds and views of London by day and by night. A grand day out in London doesn't have to cost the earth. Late deal vouchers and internet offers will save you money, time and effort. Just turn up, enjoy and take home some great memories.

by
Alan Humphreys

Like the river Thames, which wends its way through our great capital, London's history, heritage and culture also flows from every conceivable corner.

From the large expanse of the popular tourist attractions, including Oxford Street, Knightsbridge, and Piccadilly, to the narrow, intimate, and winding streets within districts like Chinatown and parts of the Soho area of the City of Westminster, this vibrant nucleus offers something for everyone and is all things to all people.

With a city like London, whose personality is as diverse as the people who live there, the only thing that will limit your capacity to experience this vast metropolis will be your personal levels of stamina, drive, and passion - or simply the limitation of having twenty-four hours in one day!

With a day trip to London, you can satisfy your curiosity for culture in large, or small, doses. It is simply down to personal taste.

Getting to London and back, plus everything else in-between, has never been more tempting, less frustrating,

or easier to arrange. There is no need to pick up the phone, stand in a queue or scan the national press to see what's hot, topical, or flavour of the month. Anyone with a smart phone will at some point have received notifications with the offer of a late deal voucher or any one of several other internet offers. And to prove the point, during a coffee break, and from three websites, I organised an unforgettable day trip to London to include off-peak return train tickets, an outstanding three-course lunch at the Ritz, a day's unlimited hop-on-hop-off Thames cruise and a premier show at the London Palladium to end the day - for an unbelievable price for two people!

Arriving at one of the capital's fine stations, including King's Cross, Euston or St Pancras International station, is an experience in itself. The latter, once described by travel writer Simon Calder as 'the world's most wonderful railway station', is a magnificent Victorian structure and a Grade I listed building, and with Eurostar departures you can't help but feel a sense of anticipation, adventure, and allure, where a journey

continued on page 44





continued from page 42

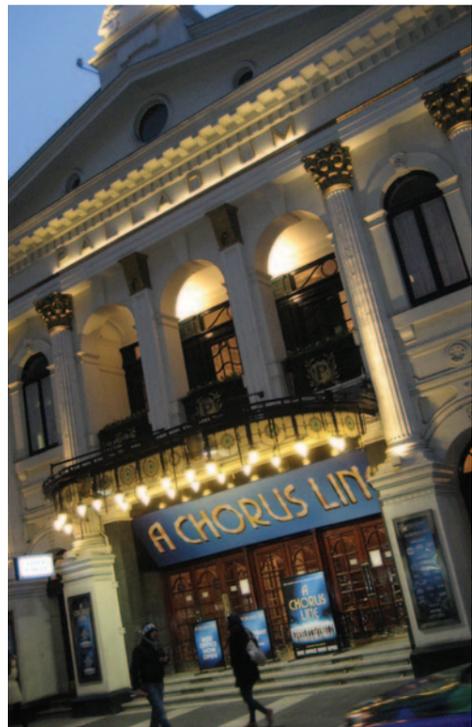
All photos: copyright Alan Humphreys 2022.

of discovery awaits! St Pancras has so much to offer with shopping, eating and even impromptu live entertainment, courtesy of anyone who fancies ‘tickling the ivories’ of one of two conveniently placed, free-to-play, pianos.

Take a short taxi ride or enjoy a brisk walk to Brompton Road, Knightsbridge and absorb the delights of Harrods, whose motto is ‘Omnia Omnibus Ubique’ (‘All Things for All People, Everywhere’). Why not visit The Ritz? Since 1906 it has been entertaining guests and is described as the world’s greatest hotel, and the most beautiful hotel dining room in the world. You could also cruise the Thames which affords the opportunity to view London from a different aspect and with certain operators you’ll be able to hop on and hop off at any one of their piers.

As night falls, the London skyline puts on a show of spectacular lights as the atmosphere changes. Covent Garden, on the eastern fringes of the West End, is vibrant with market stalls, shops, restaurants, and street entertainers, and will put you in the mood for a top London show. The London Palladium for example, or Savoy Theatre, in the Strand, is a short walk from Covent Garden. The theatre, built by Richard D’Oyly Carte on the site of the old Savoy Palace, was opened on 10 October 1881 as a showcase for the popular series of comic operas by Gilbert and Sullivan, which became known as the Savoy Operas.

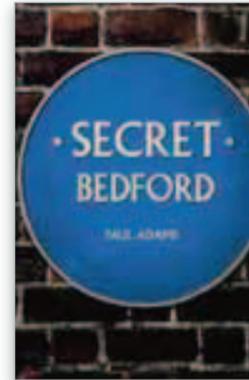
Whatever is on your itinerary, the city that never sleeps will, without doubt, deliver in every respect and provide a memorable grand day out!



THE BOOK REVIEW PAGE

Recommended Reading

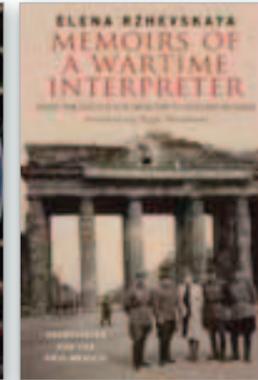
A regular appraisal of interesting books, DVD’s, some by local authors, with a county connection of just a jolly good read.



Secret Bedford

Well known for its lace industry and connections to notable figures such as John Bunyan and John Howard, the county town of Bedford has a long and fascinating history. Here you will discover the grim stories behind the gallows of Bedford Gaol, encounter the drama of the Great Flood of 1823, and find the ghostly link to the famous creator of Sherlock Holmes. In Secret Bedford, local author Paul Adams takes the reader on an entertaining journey into the past, delving beneath the surface and blending dark deeds and strange tales with long-forgotten facts to reveal a hidden history that even most local people don’t know.

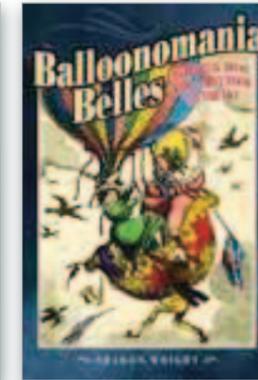
- Secret Bedford
- By Paul Adams
- Paperback
- isbn 978-144567696



Memoirs Of A Wartime Interpreter

By the will of fate I came to play a part in not letting Hitler achieve his final goal of disappearing and turning into a myth... I managed to prevent Stalin’s dark and murky ambition from taking root - his desire to hide from the world that we had found Hitler’s corpse’ - Elena Rzhnevskaya. On May 2, 1945, Red Army soldiers broke into Hitler’s bunker. Almost accidentally the Soviet military found the charred remains of Hitler and Eva Braun. Rzhnevskaya, a young military interpreter, was with them and entrusted with the proof of the Hitler’s death: his teeth wrenched from his corpse by a pathologist hours earlier. Rzhnevskaya writes about the key historical events and everyday life in her own inimitable style. She talks in depth of human suffering, of bitter-sweet victory, of an author’s responsibility, of strange laws of memory and unresolved feeling of guilt.

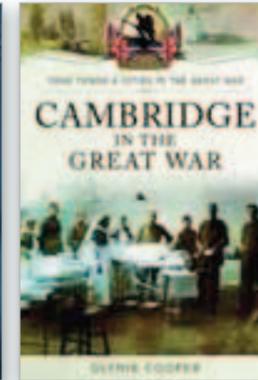
- Memoirs of a Wartime Interpreter
- By Elena Rzhnevskaya
- Hardback
- isbn 978-1784382810



Balloonomania Belles

Lady aeronauts were the liberated stars of saucy cartoons, ludicrous fashions, balloon riots, death-defying experiments and fabulous feuds from the 1780s to 1900s. Yet the very first women to fly have been all but forgotten. Now startling new research by author Sharon Wright reveals the gripping true stories of these feisty females of early flight. In the century before the first aeroplane left the ground. Wright reveals the show-stopping stories of the female pioneers of balloon flight, from the have-a-go-Georgians to the irrepressible Edwardians. More than a hundred years before Amy Johnson and Amelia Earhart, women were heading for the heavens in crazy, inspired contraptions that could bring death or glory and all too often, both.

- Balloonomania Belles
- By Sharon Wright
- Paperback
- isbn 978-1526708342



Cambridge At War

This book tells Cambridge’s fascinating story in the grim years of the Great War. Thousands of university students, graduates and lecturers alike enlisted, along with the patriotic townfolk. The First Eastern General Military Hospital was subsequently established in Trinity College and treated more than 80,000 casualties from the Western Front. Though the university had been the longtime hub of life and employment in the town, many people suffered great losses and were parted from loved ones, decimating traditional breadwinners and livelihoods, from the rationing of food, drink and fuel, to hundreds of restrictions imposed by DORA. As a result, feelings ran high and eventually led to riots beneath the raiding zeppelins and ever-present threat of death.

- Cambridge At War
- By Glynis Cooper.
- Paperback
- isbn 9781-473834026



Hertfordshire A-Z

Pamela Shields’s book, a compendium of fascinating Hertfordshire facts, is an introduction to the county aimed at residents, visitors and tourists. Home to many ‘firsts’, such as the English Pope, the Garden City and the New Town, Hertfordshire was also home to many famous people, from King Offa to Laurence Olivier, George Orwell, Graham Greene and Henry Moore - all of whom are featured here. This is where England’s crown was surrendered to William the Conqueror and where a Frenchwoman and a Welshman started the Tudor dynasty. Among the county’s geniuses are Sir Geoffrey de Havilland, Sir Jon Sulston and Sir Stephen Hawking. Peculiar survivals such as the Hertfordshire Spike and Hertfordshire Puddingstone are included, as are urban myths, local legends and much more.

- Hertfordshire A-Z
- By Pamela Shields
- Paperback
- isbn 978-0750942508

Self-mutilation, the sacrifice strategy

The summer of 2022 produced the hottest days in Britain ever and a drought over much of England, including our area. In combination, this put enormous stress on many animals (including Human-beings) and plants (wild and cultivated, in the countryside, in gardens and on farms). Some plants employed a cunning plan: self-mutilation, the sacrifice strategy.

By
Tim Sharrock



Image: Royal Fern *Osmunda regalis* in drought conditions, early August 2022. (In background: Red Bistort *Polygonum amplexicaule* and Purple-loosestrife *Lythrum salicaria*) Copyright 2022, Tim Sharrock

relatively cool summers and relatively mild winters and relatively steady rainfall. Drought and temperatures approaching or exceeding 40°C (or 100°F) and it is crisis time.

Some plants, perhaps those with deep roots, seemed to weather the weather. Did you notice the green Dandelions *Taraxacum officinale* in your straw-coloured lawn? Other plants were clearly suffering, with limp, sagging leaves, and some succumbed completely. A few, however, employed the sacrifice strategy.

Plants lose water through transpiration. The leaves are covered in pores, known as stomata, through which they lose water. More leaves, more water loss; fewer leaves, less water loss. The simple answer is to discard a proportion of leaves, so that sufficient water is retained to support the remaining plant. In my garden, the lawn was littered with the leaves of Cherry Laurel *Sorbus laurocerasus*, Holly *Ilex aquifolium* and Pedunculate Oak *Quercus robur*, as if it was autumn. This was the selective shedding of leaves, for those still on the trees were green and appeared to be healthy. On the other hand, the leaves on a Rowan *Sorbus aucuparia* (also known as Mountain Ash) were all brown, and the tree was clearly moribund.

The absence or presence of this sacrifice strategy was particularly evident with ferns. Most, including Hard Fern *Blechnum spicant*, did not employ the strategy and, although growing in shady spots, suffered, but managed to survive. Other species, such as the non-native Ostrich Fern *Matteuccia struthiopteris*, succumbed, with all their fronds brown, brittle and crumbling. The magnificent Royal Fern *Osmunda regalis*, however, sacrificed about half of its fronds, so that the other fifty percent were green and healthy. This extreme example of the sacrifice strategy is demonstrated clearly in the photograph.

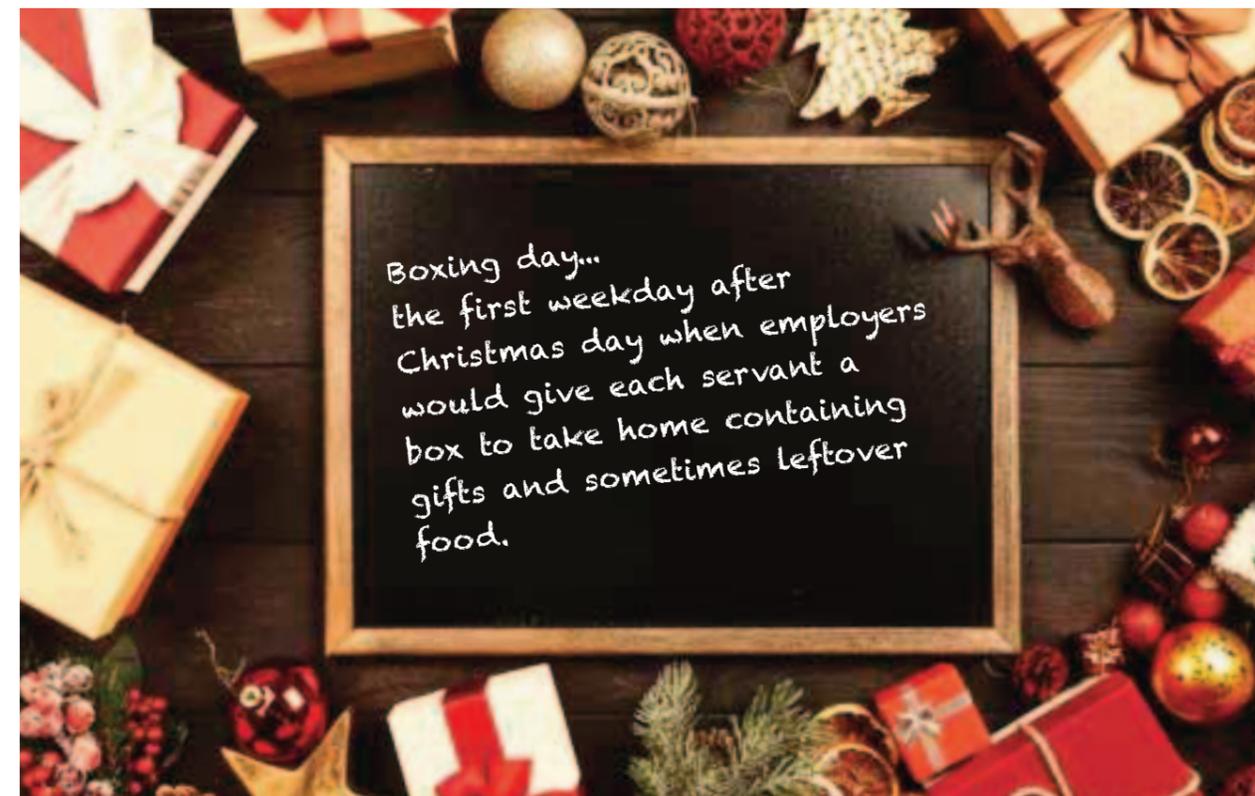
Water retention is the key to survival. Lakes, ponds, rivers and streams, if they had not dried up, were lush oases of green midst a cornfield-yellow land, with desiccated lawns where their owners had, with commendable restraint, eschewed the use of hose-pipes and sprinklers.

Succulent plants, such as my favourite Welcome-home-husband-however-drunk-you-be (otherwise known as House-leek *Sempervivum tectorum*), have their own built-in solution, with water-storage cells. Other plants and trees are mostly adapted to survive our

WINTER - WILDLIFE PUZZLE: **Question:** How can you change a tree with woody fruits into one which bears black berries?

Answers. Change A to E (Alder to Elder).

Boxing Day



Boxing Day got its name during the 1800s and when Queen Victoria was on the throne. The name originates from the when the rich in society would 'box' gifts to distribute to the poor and less fortunate members of their community.

Boxing Day traditionally follows Christmas Day and falls on 26 December. It is defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as "the first weekday after Christmas Day, observed as a holiday on which postmen, errand boys, and servants of various kinds expect to receive a Christmas box" and gives the earliest attestations from Britain during the 1830s.

In Britain, on the first week day after Christmas, it was a customary for tradesmen - as a thank you for good service throughout the year - to collect Christmas boxes of either money or gifts.

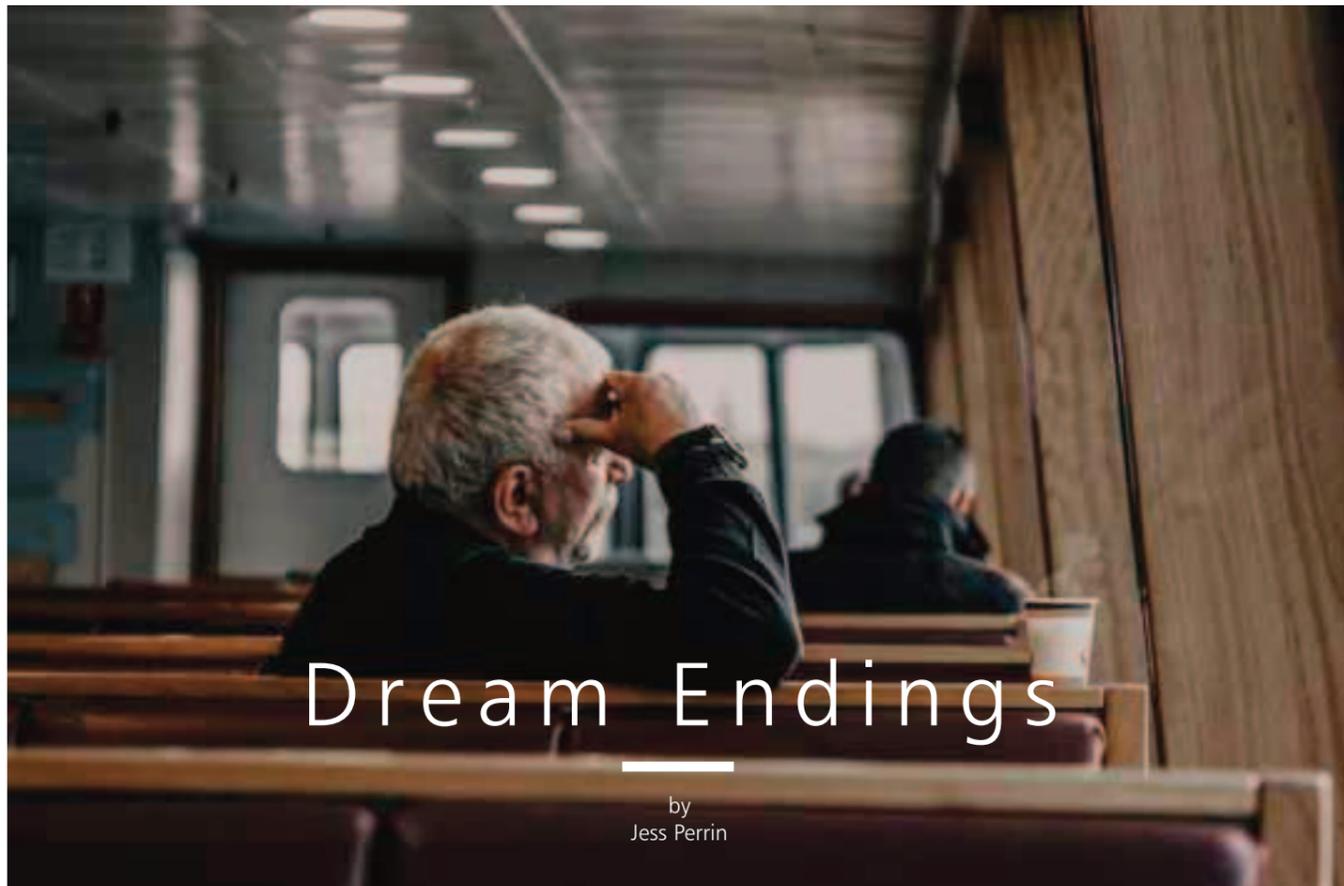
This custom is also connected to a British tradition where the wealthy allowed servants a day's

leave of duty during which time they could visit family, having performed their domestic duties for their employers and masters on Christmas Day. They would each receive a box to take home containing gifts and food left over from the big day. Hence, some believe tht this charitable action of goodwill is associated with the Christian festival of Saint Stephen's Day, which is celebrated on December 26.

Recalling the Christmas carol *Good King Wenceslas*, the words to the song proclaim that the king tramps through deep snow in a bid to give alms to a poor peasant. According to legend, Saint Wenceslas was a 10th-century Bohemian duke, who performed kind deeds during the feast of Stephen" on the 26 December.

Since 1871, Boxing Day has officially been a bank holiday in the UK and, if it falls on a weekend, it is moved to following Monday, which, to the delight of the nation, extends the leisurely holiday period.

With so many explanations, exactly how Boxing Day began is clearly not too evident. However, the common themes are those of charity and giving.



Dream Endings

by
Jess Perrin

“**C**urse this writer’s block,” old widower Hugh Brown muttered as he sat gazing out of the burger-bar window, searching his mind for the next part of a short story he was writing. He stabbed a key on the sleeping laptop in front of him, waking up the last lines he had entered:

“No Fiona!” Garth pleaded. “It is you alone that I love. My intention was only to give your sister Mandy a kiss on the cheek, but she turned sharply and our lips met.” “Liar!” Fiona cried. “We are finished, Garth Wallace! Finished!”

Hugh still could not think of what to write next. Whenever he reached the climax in a story the plot would fizzle out faster than a sparkler. He took another look out of the window. The large retail park was busy, with vehicles slotting into parking bays like bees cramming a honeycomb. On the patio just outside his window, a family of four sat devouring quarter-pound burgers and large Cokes. Shirtless, the man displayed an upper body of colourful tattoos. His wife was similarly bared and decorated, except for the partial cover of a pink-bikini top. The two children, a boy and a girl, were chunky chips off the old block. “I may have to use that family in my story,” muttered Hugh, desperate for ideas.

As he gathered his thoughts, a shapely middle-aged waitress holding a damp cloth approached his table. She wore

the company brown blouse, and matching trousers that had the shininess of too much sitting. Coaster-like, she would call at each table for a chat, while wiping food from table tops on to seats.

“Writing a story, sir?” she asked, noticing the cover of *Girl of My Dreams*, a short story that lay on a small pile of other stories alongside the aspiring author’s laptop.

“Just a short one,” Hugh replied. The woman’s question caused Hugh to experience a flush of pride; of someone whose words flow unstopping on to the page, all without correction, creating ingenious blockbuster plots with gripping pace and masterful endings.

“Another love story?” the woman asked, pointing her cloth at *Girl of my Dreams*.

“Sort of.” Hugh said. “It’s about a girl who tries to steal her sister’s husband.”

“That’s not a very nice story,” the woman said.

“No, the subject isn’t, but hopefully it should work out all right,” Hugh said.

“Who’s the thief?” the woman asked.

“A girl named Mandy,” Hugh replied.

“Well I never!” the woman said. “My name’s Mandy, and I wouldn’t dream of stealing my sister’s husband.”

“I suppose I could change the name,” Hugh said, in apologetic tone.

“What about calling her Fiona?” Mandy said.

Hugh frowned at yet another coincidence. I’m having one of those dreams again, he thought. I never know which world I’m in.

“Why Fiona?” he asked.

“That’s her out there on the patio, wearing the pink bikini top,” Mandy replied.

Taking a sly glance out of the window, Hugh said, “Oh, her. All right then.” Mandy smiled and walked away to resume half-hearted table wiping.

As Hugh sat thinking of how this new Fiona and her family could fit into his story, the woman herself entered the restaurant, followed by her husband.

“Hey you!” Fiona bawled at the girl behind the till. “I saw you swopping glad-eye’s through the window with my vain fool of a husband here.”

“I never did,” the till girl replied. The tattooed man, aware of his guilt, grinned sheepishly.

From where he sat, Hugh was able to inspect the gory tattoos which spanning the man’s back; five scarlet letters weaving in and out of the teeth of a green serpent, starting with G and ending with H. “I don’t believe it!” Hugh muttered. “Not GARTH. It’s definitely a dream!”

As Fiona attempted to decorate the till girl with tomato ketchup, Garth grabbed her hand. “No, Fiona,” he said. “You know it’s only you I ‘ave the ‘ots for. I only smiled in embarrassment at this nice lady when she saw me choking on my burger.”

“Liar!” Fiona shouted. “You expect me to believe that?” Struggling free, she noticed that one of the several spectators had his fingers poised over a laptop.

“Hey! Old man! What’s that you’re writing?” Fiona bawled.

“Oh, nothing, dear,” Hugh replied.

“Here! Let me see!” she yelled.

“Sorry, the battery’s gone flat,” Hugh replied.

From behind the counter, the manager appeared. He called out loudly, “Would customer with receipt number 095 please come to the till? You are our one millionth customer and are entitled to a year’s free meals.”

Everyone searched for their receipt, grubbing under tables and reaching into trash bins. Fiona grabbed Garth and said, “Oi you. Where’s our receipt?”

“Dunno,” Garth said. “Must ‘ave lost it.”

“Blockhead,” Fiona retorted.

Mandy cut in, “Her at the till knows who had what.”

“I’ll check it out,” Garth said.

“Oh no you won’t!” Fiona bawled. “There’ll be no more slaving over that woman. The kids can do it.”

The couple’s two children were still outside, raiding a row of trash bins where they hoped to find some gimmicky toys that had been discarded after customers’ brief moments of interest in them.

During the distractions, Hugh withdrew a jotter and pencil from his jacket pocket, then started to write down whatever came next...

“095 was a tea and small fries?” the till girl called out.

“My husband had that,” Fiona stated. “He can’t eat much, what with his ulcer playing up.”

Other customers, unable to find their receipt, could not contest the blatant lie that had been heard across the restaurant.

The manager frowned in disbelief, worried that the present claimant would not make a pretty picture for inclusion in the *Burger Bar News*. “Please double check,” he said.

Hugh stopped writing and went to the counter. “I have receipt number 095,” he said.

“Why didn’t you say so before,” the till girl replied.

“I was busy writing,” said Hugh.

Relieved, the manager said, “Congratulations sir, you are the winner. Please come to my office.”

Fiona dug an elbow into Garth’s side. “We’re leaving. Now!”

After receiving his voucher, Hugh returned to his seat. The restaurant was almost deserted. Hugh thought of the prospect of having to eat all those quarter pounders and large fries while trying to write. He was bound to nod off!

Shuffling up to him Mandy said, “Will you finish your story now?”

“Well,” Hugh replied. “I feel as though it has already been written.”

“Does it have a happy ending?” Mandy asked.

“It was going to, but...” said Hugh, faltering.

Mandy pleaded, “Please make it a happy ending.”

“I’ll try,” Hugh replied. He looked out of the window and saw Garth and his family merging like chameleons into a psychedelically-painted pick-up truck. The children, sitting in the open back, looked like turnips rejected from a sorting machine.

“Here. Have a read, Mandy,” Hugh said, handing her *Girl of my Dreams*. “I’ll be back in a jiffy.” As Hugh left the restaurant, Mandy sat down and started to read.

As the pick-up truck began to move off, Hugh tapped on the dark green glass of the driver’s window. Garth, lowering it impatiently, called out, “What’s your problem, grandad? Clear off!”

“You’d best have this,” Hugh said, handing Garth the voucher.

“Uh, what’s this?” Garth responded.

“The truth is,” Hugh said, “I couldn’t think of a story until I saw you and your family sitting at the picnic table. Then it all started to flow. I thought I’d like to show my appreciation.”

“Seems you’re not a bad ol’ boy after all,” Fiona cut in, snatching the voucher from him. “I hope you’ve been writing something nice about us.”

“Oh, yes,” Hugh said, unaware of his narrator’s less than favourable descriptions.

The pick-up truck disappeared in a cloud of smoke and, with it, Hugh’s thoughts. He returned to his table and sat down opposite Mandy, who was just returning *Girl Of My Dreams* to the pile.

“What a passionate read,” she sighed, reaching across the table to stroke Hugh’s arm with her damp cloth hand. “You know just what effect we women have on men. I could just picture myself as the innocent girl. By the way, do all your stories have a Mandy and Fiona?”

Unsure of the warm feeling that had suddenly come over him, Hugh replied, “Only the ones with dream endings.”

This story is purely fictitious. Any connection with similar events or any person or persons alive or dead is purely coincidental. Any imagery used is for illustration purposes only. If you have a short story (1400 words maximum) you would like to submit for the editor’s consideration, and to share with our readers, please email it to: editor@countylifemagazines.co.uk

A PICTURE OF England



The Iconic Red Telephone Box

The iconic red telephone box has been a familiar sight on the streets of England, Malta, Bermuda and Gibraltar for decades. A welcoming sight, it provided a connection with home, friends, work, and much more besides, not to mention its impromptu use as a temporary shelter from the elements.

The much loved British red telephone kiosk, designed by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott, continues to be a permanent fixture in many places throughout the UK. Although not all are still employed as originally intended, many have become a rendezvous for bookworms and the hub of book exchanges where local residents can deposit books for people to read, exchange and eventually return.

The red telephone box was the result of a competition, launched in 1924, to design a kiosk that

would be acceptable to the London Metropolitan Boroughs. Scott's design was chosen and the Post Office who commissioned it be constructed of cast iron - far from Scott's originally suggestion of mild steel painted silver, with the interior painted a greenish-blue. The red colour of the telephone kiosk was chosen because it made them easy to spot and from 1926 the fascia of the kiosks displayed a crown.

Of the original wooden prototypes, from the competition entries, Scott's prototype design is the only one known to survive and can still be found where it was originally placed at the left entrance arch of the Royal Academy.

In 2006, the K2 telephone box was voted one of Britain's top ten design icons.

Ed

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