

GOT A STORY? Steve Turner ▶ 07941 669678 ▶ steveturner807@gmail.com

BINGO
Fun for all the family
20 February 7pm Village Hall

See
pages
13-14
for full
details

**ANTIQUES
MARKET**
22 March 10am-1pm
Village Hall

Step up or pay up

Lack of road safety volunteers could prove expensive for villagers

Villagers could face a bill of up to £15,000 for measures to slow traffic on the A21 following the end of the Whatlington Speedwatch Group.

Appeals for villagers to join the group failed to encourage a single extra person. It meant the remaining three members could not get roadside often enough to make a difference to vehicle speeds on one of the region's most dangerous roads.

Alternative measures, such as electronic speed measuring signs or entrance 'gates' to the village, are being considered by the Parish Council.

But there would be a cost, warned Chair Roger Fisher. "If people are concerned about the danger posed by speeding traffic but not willing to volunteer to do

Continues page 3

Pub sale remains a mystery

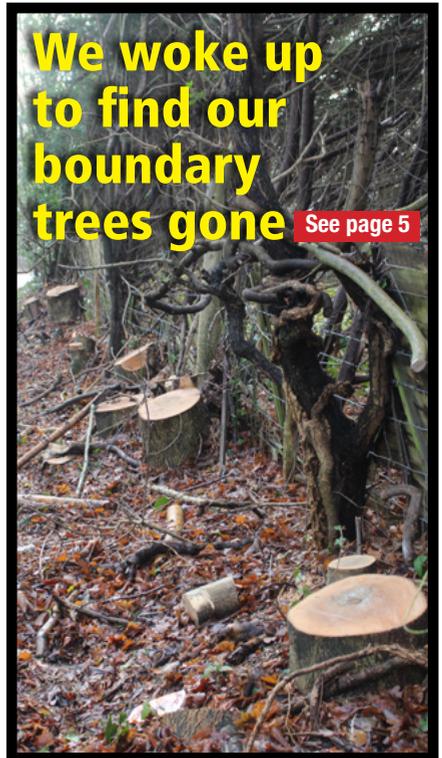
Uncertainty surrounds the sale of the Royal Oak, with strong local rumours that a buyer has been found not confirmed by owners Shepherd Neame.

It is thought the pub, closed for nearly a year, may have been bought by a restaurateur who lives locally.

But a spokesperson for the brewers would only say that "discussions with an interested party are ongoing".

The property is still listed as Under Offer on selling agent Christies website.

**We woke up
to find our
boundary
trees gone** **See page 5**





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Parish tax up 20 per cent

But village council hike amounts to just an extra £1 a month

Villagers will see a TWENTY PER CENT rise in the Whatlington portion of their council tax bills from April.

However, that only amounts to an extra £1 a month per household, bringing the average parish council precept to £62.88.

The lion's share of council tax bills is made up mainly of demands from district and county councils and emergency services.

The authority decided that it needed more than last year's tax take and the rise, which follows a ten per cent hike last year, would bring income to £10,100.

A new computer, the cost of having a stand-in clerk following the death of Valerie Bennett and the need to have the overgrown area around the bus stop cut back had all put pressure on the council's finances.

On top of other expenses it meant "our reserves are being hammered" said Chair Roger Fisher, leaving little room for other projects that occur during the year.

Prior to the five and ten per cent rises in 2024 and 2025 the precept had not risen for five years.

Out of 33 councils in Rother district Whatlington parish has the 27th lowest precept.

Step up or pay up

From page 1

something about it then we may need to look at other options.

"The cost of these would be paid for by residents through their council tax bills."

Research by Speedwatch Group Co-ordinator Anne Smith showed that entrance gates, such as those seen at Battle and Staplecross, provide a strong visual cue that the motorist is entering a residential area.



They are proven to reduce speed, on average between three and 12mph, and accidents by more than half.

In addition they are an attractive introduction to the village with the possibility of adding planters and village

name and speed limit signs. They can be made from wood, which would require regular maintenance, brick, metal or recycled plastic.

However, Parish Clerk Tracy Dixon warned that Brede Parish Council was also considering entrance gates and had been given a price of £15,000.

That compares to a total parish council annual income of around £10,000, so the cost would need to be spread over 3-4 years.

Tracy will investigate the cost of gates for Whatlington as well as electronic vehicle-activated speed display signs.

Lack of volunteers 'hard to understand'

Whatlington Speedwatch Group has been operating roadside radar checks mainly on the A21 for three years.

Although the group could only report to police those vehicles travelling at 47mph or above, it found almost three quarters of motorists were travelling above 40mph.

Co-ordinator Anne Smith said: "To get the message across to people driving through the village that they are likely to encounter a speed check there needs to be regular

roadside sessions, at least once a month.

"With only three members that has not been possible and so, although we would all have continued if extra volunteers had come forward, we have had to disband the group.

"It's a shame because speeding traffic is always cited as residents' biggest concern about life in Whatlington.

"So it's hard to understand why hardly any were willing to give up an hour a month to help make this a safer place to live."



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Couple's anger at overnight tree massacre

When Tony and Sheila Lilly heard noise and saw flashing lights outside their home one night they assumed it was a National Highways crew cutting back tree branches.

They had been informed of the work by letter previously but that didn't prepare them for what they found the next morning.

Around 35 fully-grown trees on the boundary of their Woodmans Green Road property had been cut down.

Suddenly their garden was exposed to passing A21 traffic and resulting noise and pollution.

"It was a total shock," said Sheila.

"When we heard the noise we thought they were cutting back branches on both sides of the road. We never thought it was just the trees outside our house they were cutting down.

"It's disgraceful, complete devastation."

Tony said: "I walked along the road and saw there were very few trees removed from beyond our house. Given that we were the focus of National Highways attention, I believe they should have knocked on our door to tell us of their intention before they started."

In a letter to the highways authority the couple wrote: "Our boundary is now much more exposed to the road. This makes us vulnerable to intruders entering our garden.

Moreover, the noise of the road is heard a lot more in the garden and the house."

The authority responded by saying the A21 work was to clear diseased trees affected by Ash Dieback. It stated that where trees form part of a boundary they are left at around five feet tall to provide a screen.

However, the stumps on the Lillys' boundary have been cut to around 1-2ft high.

The authority said it would consider planting new trees if it agreed the existing ones had been



Tony Lilly in his now exposed garden and, below, the noise of A21 traffic is much louder



'It was a total shock . . . disgraceful and complete devastation'

cut too short.

"How long would that take to restore our privacy?" said Tony. "Ten years? We are calling on the authority to erect a fence now to cover the exposed area.

"We feel we have been treated as if we didn't matter. It appears no thought was given to the effect this devastation may cause us, especially as we are trying to sell this house."

Food waste bins for every household

From the end of next month Rother District, along with every council in England, will be carrying out weekly food waste collections from all households.

It's a new legal requirement by the Government under its Simpler Recycling Regulations.

By collecting food waste, which makes up about 30 per cent of the average household bin, the authority can reduce the amount currently thrown away as household rubbish.

Collected food will be turned into soil conditioner and used on local farms. You will also be able to buy it from waste recycling sites.

Rother says the scheme will reduce the district's impact on the environment and help tackle climate change.

Each household will receive a 5L kitchen caddy in which to put food waste (in biodegradable bags), which can then be emptied into a 23L outside food container for weekly collection.

You can find out more at www.rother.gov.uk and searching for 'food waste'.

■ The site includes FAQs including: ***My neighbour has received their food waste containers, but mine hasn't arrived.***

If your neighbour has received theirs, please contact us 01424 787000 if you haven't received your container(s) after two working days.

Can I opt-out of the service?

The Government requires councils to provide every household with the service. Food waste can be easily recycled, so we encourage you to make use of the new service.

Will my rubbish or recycling collection day change?

No. The launch of this service does not affect your other collection services.

What counts as food waste?

All your raw and cooked food waste, including uneaten food and plate scrapings, dairy products (except liquids), cheese, eggs, bread, cakes, pastries, meat, bones, tea bags, coffee grounds, fruit, vegetables, peelings, fish, bones, rice, pasta and beans.

WhatsApp way to stay in touch

An official WhatsApp channel for East Sussex County Council has been launched to keep residents informed of important dates and key events.

A spokesperson for the council said: "We think the channel could be especially useful to keep people updated during emergencies, to help them find services they need, and sometimes simply to celebrate life in East Sussex."

To get involved scan the QR code on your WhatsApp device.



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Oldest villager John Tunstall passes away shortly before 101st birthday



Whatlington's oldest resident John Tunstall passed away last month just weeks short of his 101st birthday.

He died at his Whatlington Road home where he had lived for around 50 years, moving there with his wife Margaret who passed away in 2015.

He spent much of his working life overseas as a horticulturist, researching crop pest controls, in particular cotton, and that expertise was recognised in 1969 when he was made an OBE.

His passion for plants was a lifelong one. He was a leading member of the

Sedlescombe and District Garden Society for many years and grew – and often shared – a vast array of exotic plants at his home.

He was presented with a plaque to mark his 100th birthday on behalf of the Parish Council.

His daughter Mary lives in Australia, his younger daughter Lizzie died from the lasting effects of Covid and he had five granddaughters and two great grandchildren.

Dad was not planning on leaving us

Mary Tatam, John's daughter

Dad passing so near his 101st birthday was unexpected. He was not anticipating leaving us any time soon and the night before he died was letting me know his views on the current political situation and his planned plant growing activities.

I have fond memories growing up in Zimbabwe and Malawi, my dad going to work at the research station wearing a safari suit with knee high socks (the attire of the day), and many days playing with the local children in the cotton fields.

Unbeknown to many, in his youth dad was quite a sight on the dancefloor, boisterous in his dance moves with the ladies, injuring his knee in the process, which was never really the same again.

As dad's mobility declined my sister and I set him up with all the equipment he needed to continue to grow his plants in the sunroom of our home. It was not unusual to have a wheelbarrow full of potting soil in the dining room.

Dad was lovingly nurtured and supported by my mum until she died 2015, and I know he missed her terribly, as he did my sister when she died in 2022.

Dad was an inspiration, and I have so much love and respect for his determination to keep going through times of personal loss and increasing frailty.

Passionate about sharing

Rod Eldridge and Brenda Page, Sedlescombe and District Garden Society

John was a lifetime member of our society and much respected for his knowledge of all aspects of horticulture. He was much valued as a plants man over many decades and grew and collected outstanding exotic plants and seeds.

He exhibited and usually won the prizes for most things in the Vegetable Section and carried on his interest up to his final days.

John was passionate about sharing his knowledge and encouraging young people to get involved in gardening. He understood its importance in a changing world climate. He will be missed by so many who knew and loved him.

Good neighbour and close friend

Roger Fisher and Linda Javin-Fisher:

John was our neighbour for more than 40 years and our son Robert and daughter Sarah both regarded him and Margaret as 'in loco parentis' grandparents and loved their Alsatian Tara.

He grew a vast range of exotic vegetables and fruits and for many years Sarah nurtured a cotton plant he gave her.

He will, rightly, live long in many people's memories. He was a good neighbour and close family friend.

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Join the Great Poppy Knit

Appeal for help in creating Remembrance spectacle

Get knitting to help carpet Whatlington in poppies for this year's Remembrance commemoration.

The call for villagers to get involved in the first community knitting event comes from Sandie Sullivan and Jane Hendley.

They are hoping that enough bright red poppies can be made to decorate the village for Whatlington's biggest display to honour Forces personnel who have risked their for the sake of the country.

No knitting experience is required as instruction and more information will be given at two drop-in events later this month. Knitters of all ages can then start click-clacking with their needles at home.

Wool will be provided for free and the first eight people to get involved will receive a Poppy Appeal tote bag.

Parish councillor Sandie says: "The poppies are simple to make, you don't need any previous knitting skills and, along with the extra plastic versions the parish council will be displaying, it will create a fantastic way to honour past and present members of the armed forces."

**■ To get involved go along to either of these Village Hall one-hour sessions:
18 Feb 12.30pm or 27 Feb 7pm.**

You can register your interest with Sandie by calling her on 07939 025828 or emailing vsullivan1904@btinternet.com



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CHURCH SERVICE TIMES

15 February

Holy Communion 9.15 am

22 February

Evening Prayer 4pm

1 March

Holy Communion 9.15am

8 March

Family Service 10.30am

15 March

Holy Communion 9.15am

22 March

Evening Prayer 4pm

29 March

Holy Communion 10.30am

3 April

Good Friday Reflections 6pm

5 April

Easter Sunday Holy Communion 10.30am

Could you depict Easter on a tray or in a shoebox?

Village children rose to the challenge when asked to depict Easter in a shoebox last year.

Now the competition is being widened to include grown-ups as part of the church's Easter celebrations.

The aim is to depict a scene from the Easter story in an open shoebox – a diorama – as if it were a stage setting.

In addition this year the challenge has been extended to include the option to create an Easter Garden on a tray.

Entries must be delivered to the church on Good Friday (3 April) ready for displaying on Easter Sunday. Following the service at 10.30am, to which everyone is welcome, regular congregation members will vote for their favourites, with small prizes for those selected.

For more information call John and Fran Crouch on 07788 416903.



The church has a growing number of Facebook followers.

The Whatlington Parish Church page has information about service times and special occasions, and photos of recent events.

You can also keep tabs on what's happening by visiting www.achurchnearyou.com and searching for St Mary Magdalene Whatlington.

The site includes historic images of the church and recently has had photos of the building before and during the fire of 2010, and the subsequent restoration.

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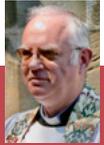
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We must plough ahead with hope as uncertainty engulfs us all



**By Rev John Hawkins
 Rector, Whatlington Church**

Dear friends
 The church year got off to a wonderful start with our Plough Sunday service. The church was packed, and there was quite a moment of suspense when it looked as though the plough might not arrive at all!

Relief all round when James Tassell came rumbling up with a plough on the back of his trusty Fordson Dexta.

A problem with the linkage on the 70-year-old tractor had delayed him, but all ended well. The plough was blessed, along with some of the tools many of us use in our gardens and allotments, and we now look forward to a good harvest in the months to come.

As a new year begins, it's natural to wonder what lies ahead for each of us. With so much uncertainty around, we all hope for the simple but important things: good health, a happy home life, success at work or school, perhaps a decent holiday, or good exam results.

All of that matters.

But my hope is that we grow into the people we were meant to be – whole, content and fulfilled in our lives.

This is where the church has a part to play. At heart, it is a community of people drawn together by Jesus. This means caring about the world around us, about what gives life meaning, about fairness, dignity and justice, and about the deep hope that life does not end with death.

At a time when many people are searching for something more in life, we try to take spiritual things seriously. That's why we worship and pray together, and why our services reflect the beauty, love and goodness that enrich everyday life.

You would be very welcome to come along on any Sunday and see for yourself. We hope to offer more special services like Plough Sunday as the year goes on.

The church is also here at life's important moments – to baptise your children, to support you through illness, death and grief, and to celebrate weddings and other joyful occasions. Please know the door is always open.

Warm wishes to you all, John



Blessing the plough: after the service seeds for the 'seed-swap' were blessed by the Rector



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Uncovering tree secrets with a tape measure



Martyn Hole has been out and about measuring the girth of village trees. Why? Read on ...

I've been measuring trees in the fields and woods around the village. Not hugging them but taking a tape measure and recording their girth. Why on earth would you do that? you might ask. Have I nothing better to do?

I'm practising a sort of dendrochronology, the study of tree rings. This provides an accurate estimate of how old a tree was when felled but lots of other information too.

Tree ring widths are affected by weather. In good years (lots of sunshine and rain) the rings are wide; poor weather years give narrow rings. Together they create a perfect record of the climate in that region during the life of the tree.

Clearly, to get a cross-section like this requires felling the tree, which seems to be a bit of a nuclear option. A less destructive approach is the 'boring option', which is to drill through the tree and obtain a core (and plug the hole afterwards).

But the gear is pricey. A borer could cost up to £1,000 for a 1m core.

I looked for a less invasive method to estimate the age of a living tree: step forward Alan Mitchell, probably the greatest expert on European and North American trees.

During his lifetime, he measured more than 100,000 trees and coined the term 'champion trees' for particularly fine examples.

He noticed that there was a relationship between tree girth and age. The rule isn't perfect and several things will affect it, but a good starting point is to assume a Mitchell Factor of one, that each inch of girth equals one year of age (this is for a champion tree standing in open parkland).

What factors can affect this? The location of the tree, not the species, is most important, by which I mean the proximity of other trees. Those in

woods grow about half as fast, and in an avenue of about two thirds as fast as in open parkland.

The species does have an effect: for faster growing types such as Wellingtonia, Cedar of Lebanon, Douglas Fir, London Plane and Eucalyptus, a factor of two inches per year should be used. Slower growing species such as Scots Pine, Norway Spruce, Horse Chestnut and Common Lime should be about two thirds of an inch per year (again in open parkland).

Take a tape measure and wrap around the trunk at about five feet above the ground and measure its circumference.

My first example was an oak in the open, circumference 66 inches and therefore about 60-65 years old.

This almost certainly grew from an acorn from my second example, a nearby but fairly isolated

tree with a circumference of 143 inches, so about 140-145 years old. This fits with other evidence: in the Village Hall is a photo taken in the 1880s from near the Mill House looking towards the bridge. At that point Home Place close to where I am measuring no trees are visible.

Finally, a fir tree, on the edge of the wood, circumference 84 inches. The Mitchell Factor is two inches but reduced to 1.33 due to its position, so between 60 and 65 years.

Dendrochronology can provide other data. In 1815 the Tambora volcanic eruption was one of the largest in recorded history. A close examination shows that the ring from 1816 is half the thickness of those either side owing to the ash and gases that were released into the atmosphere causing a nuclear winter.





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