

Whatlington News

AUGUST 2025

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Village field up for sale at £600k

A 16.5 acre field in the heart of the village is for sale with a guide price of £600,000.

Woodman's Field is bordered by Riccards Lane, the A21 and Whatlington Road, and is described by the agents as 'exceptional roadside land'.

In its catalogue Barney Estates & Auctioneers lists the land as "a highly versatile plot with potential for equestrian use, biodiversity enhancement, or subject to planning, small-scale development".

It was due to go under the hammer on 13 August.

The steeply sloping land, part of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, originally belonged to the Moore family but was bought by a property investment company. Local landowners believe the value of the field for agricultural use would be about a quarter of the asking price.





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Anger at three week leak as hose ban bites

A leak in Whatlington Road that took three weeks to repair saw thousands of gallons of water gushing down the road while hosepipe bans were introduced.

Once on site, a crew from South East Water fixed the leak quickly but the delay had been caused while waiting for traffic management measures to be put in place by East Sussex County Council.

The incident was reported to the company by several residents who had water cascading past their properties as well as, in some cases, having to cope with reduced water pressure.

One said: "I phoned South East Water several times and was astounded to be told a repair crew was waiting for a traffic management permit before it could fix the leak, which I think came from a faulty stopcock outside one of the properties.

"At one stage they did turn up but just painted a big blue arrow on the road pointing to the leak, which was totally obvious anyway."

Because the volume of water overwhelmed the nearest, partially blocked drain the water ran through the pipes that criss-cross the road to the other side, causing the fast-running stream to run down both sides of the highway.

Matthew Dean, South East Water's Head of Water Supply (Sussex), said: "We apologise to our customers in the Whatlington area.



"This repair had to be carried out using traffic management to ensure the safety of the public and our staff. We liaise with the highway authority to schedule these works at the most suitable time, but this can result in slight delays.

"We know that leaks are frustrating to see but in the last year alone, we have repaired more than 18,000 leaks and we have 70 teams repairing leaks when they are reported, with a further 86 technicians searching for and finding leaks proactively."

Chair of Whatlington Parish Council Roger Fisher said: "It is doubly galling that, at a time of restrictions on our water use, this should have taken so long to do.

"But also the site of the repair is one that has regularly seen leakages. These issues must be answered by SE Water. They speak of a shortage of crews and traffic management as contributing to repair delays, but recurring leaks in the same area?"

Whatlington is to host one of the key events in next month's High Weald Walking Festival.

Details for the village cross-country walk, on Sunday 14 September at 10am, are being finalised. The start and end point for the 2.5 mile trek could be at

Join Whatlington's festival walk

the Village Hall car park or in Footland Woods. Bev Marks, the Ramblers Local Footpath Warden for Whatlington is planning the route to avoid crossing the A21.

All are welcome but the

organisers regret dogs are not permitted.

You can find more details nearer the time, along with some self-guided walks, at www.highwealdwalks.org

What next for the Oak?

While there have been several viewings from potential buyers it is understood there are no firm offers for the village pub at present. Owners Shepherd Neame remain tight-lipped about future prospects. A request by the Whatlington Community Connectors for permission to use the building for pop-up events was rejected. Change of use to a domestic dwelling is a long and complex process described as 'not for the faint-hearted'. Being run as, for instance, a restaurant is a possibility. But could the village run its own pub? Whatlington News editor STEVE TURNER explores the possibilities.

THE OPPORTUNITIES

According to UK real ale campaigners CAMRA there are around 220 pubs bought, owned and run by communities. A further 78 campaigns for locals to take over their local are under way.

CAMRA says such takeovers have a 100 per cent success rate! The theory is that people in a community with a direct stake in the business will support it, and encourage others to do so.

An example is The Harrow pub in Stockbury near Maidstone, put up for sale by Shepherd Neame to the surprise of villagers. Sound familiar?

A committee was formed, residents were asked what they wanted from their village pub, a publicity

campaign was launched, a Community Benefit Society set up, events organised, funds raised, grants applied for and in March 2017 the village bought the business.

As well as being a freehouse with food sourced

from local farms it has become a daytime café where villagers can socialise, in addition to a book swap, internet café and Seniors' Lunch Club. In past years

the Oak has hosted well-attended film and book clubs, quizzes, music nights and special events.

What do you think? Is a community pub viable? Would you be involved as investor or volunteer (no commitment!). Email your views to info@whatlington.com

THE CHALLENGES

With a population of around 700 Stockbury has twice as many residents than Whatlington from which to draw volunteer staff and customers.

To raise funds, forming a Community Benefit Society is the usual route – a type of co-operative operating on a not-for-profit basis with all money raised going back into the society's enterprise. Members are often, but not necessarily, those who have contributed funds towards the purchase, although all members have the same voting or ownership rights.

Grants can be applied for such as the Big Lottery Fund, the Plunkett Foundation and possibly, if a building is of historic interest, the Architectural Heritage Fund.

In the case of a reasonably well-heeled village such as Whatlington the scenario could be that philanthropists invest part of the £395,000 purchase price, topped up by local fundraising, while residents take on the running of the pub. Many such ventures employ an experienced manager to oversee day-to-day operations.

While this option has been much talked about in Whatlington there have been no officially-backed moves to explore it, the relatively small population cited as a stumbling block.

There is also a realisation that most residents have not supported the Oak in recent years. That could change, of course, if the Stockbury model was replicated here.

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White Chapel could become family home

The White Chapel, the village's more prominent landmark, could be turned into residential accommodation if given the nod by Rother planners.

An application to change the use of the building is due to be decided by the council by 3 September.

The building dates from 1872, built as a Methodist chapel in the Victorian Gothic style. It is believed to have closed as a place of worship around 1936 and has since been an antique shop, estate agency and, from 1987 to 2020, a fireplace showroom run by the Waghorn family.

The application envisages minor changes to the exterior of the listed building – it will be repainted white or off-white – while inside a new mezzanine level will be created and two new windows incorporated at the rear, together with a sliding door.

An old timber shed at the back of the site will be demolished.

Rother Planning and Conservation Officers have expressed in-principle support for 'a sensitive scheme'.

The application, by a Mr Andy Chan of London, states: "Rather than leaving the chapel empty or at risk, this proposal actively restores and maintains it – keeping the structure in beneficial use, preserving visual identity in the landscape, and securing a future for the building as a familiar and cared-for part of Whatlington's built heritage.

"In doing so, the legacy of the White Chapel – as a cherished local landmark and a piece of Methodist heritage – will continue."



Margaret Waghorn, who with her husband Fred ran White Chapel Fireplaces for more than 30 years, passed away last month aged 77.



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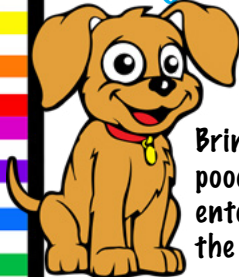
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BACK BY POPULAR DEMAND! WHATLINGTON ANTIQUES MARKET

Sunday 21 September 10am-2pm, Village Hall



Following the success of our first antiques market earlier this year, Whatlington Connectors is organising a second event.

Local dealers will be offering silver items, jewellery, vintage wind-up toys and automata, ceramics and kitchenware among many other items.

There will be refreshments and the 50p entry fee includes a ticket for the raffle.

A donation from the proceeds will go to Macmillan Cancer Support's annual World's Biggest Coffee Morning.

Organised by Whatlington Connectors
Donation to Macmillan Cancer Support



The BIG village Quiz

Friday
7 November
Village Hall

With questions posed
BY villagers FOR villagers!

Keep an eye on whatlington.com for updates



Mother pulled from A Whatlington tragedy in 1845

In May 1845 the Brighton Gazette reported the coroner's inquest on the newborn baby of a girl named Harriet Fuller. The coroner and jury assembled in the Royal Oak to hear the evidence.

George Harris, an agricultural labourer in Westfield, was the first witness. He had been "walking out" with Harriet but ended the relationship when he heard she had "been with other people – she has taken me in a good deal."

A chance encounter in Battle encouraged him to resume the friendship; George invited Harriet to sleep in his bed that night, but he spent half the night in the kitchen and for the second half, "I slept among the cattle".

He did not notice that she was pregnant: "I never had connection with her so as to be the father of the child."

Whatlington in the early part of Queen Victoria's reign was a small agricultural village. Not, you'd have thought, the setting for drama and tragedy. But in a single decade, 1845-1855, five Whatlingtonians drowned in streams and ponds: one accident, two apparent suicides, and two illegitimate babies. Here, author and historian CHARLOTTE MOORE recounts the story behind one of those horrific episodes.

"The next morning about seven o'clock she returned towards her home. I walked across one field with her, and shook hands with her before parting."

The story was taken up by Charles Kenward, a [gun]powder maker, who saw Harriet the next day, sitting on a bank near the foot bridge near Sedlescombe powder mills.

"She had a small basket in her hand . . . she

Continues next page

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river as infant dies

From previous page

kept applying a pocket handkerchief to her face . . . half an hour later Master Sinnock ran by, he told me they had pulled a woman out of the water and found a child."

Samuel Sinnock, a shoemaker, had heard cries of distress. Going to investigate, he found a labourer named Thomas Swadling who had pulled Harriet out of the stream. Sinnock sent Swadling to fetch a cloak to wrap the shivering girl, while he questioned her: "You didn't throw yourself in for the purpose?"

"She said: 'I did'."

"We got her to her grandmother's. I carried her upstairs."

The grandmother said: "I suppose you are a married man . . . she has been delivered of a baby."

Sinnock then went in search of the baby:

"When I got to the hop-garden I called a person called Hyland to go with me. When we got to the place, we saw a child hanging on a bough; there were no signs of life."

They took it to Harriet's grandmother's house, "wrapped in Hyland's frock [smock]".

James Watts, the doctor told the inquest: "I found Harriet Fuller in a very benumbed and somewhat confused state, circulation very much interfered with, and also respiration."

Her voice was "exceedingly hoarse" from crying. He examined the child. There was a "slight external injury" to the head, "not enough to have caused death".

He concluded "I consider the child to have breathed . . . the child must have been born alive before it was in the water."

Harriet told him: "I felt something come from me in the water. I never saw the child."

The doctor told the jury: "My impression is that she was in a depressed state, and that she was not aware of what she was doing."

"Has she informed you who is the father of the child?" asked the coroner.

"She has."



The Royal Oak – scene of the inquest

Had the man given her any assistance?

He had not.

"I think we should have an examination of the woman before we come to a conclusion," said a member of the jury.

Dr Watts said she was as yet too ill, so the inquest was adjourned for a couple of days, which was "perhaps fortunate . . . as the floor of the room [in the Royal Oak] in which the jury had assembled, gave way nearly three inches."

When they met again, everyone went to the Fullers' house.

The father of the child had been summoned – George Overy, 18, of 'Snaem', Guestling, another agricultural labourer.

"You did say you was the father," said Harriet.

"I know I baint," said Overy.

"Don't tell any lies, George," put in his uncle.

In "a very brutal manner" Overy declared: "I've

told you I'm not the father. I'll never annihilate myself for nobody."

They adjourned to the Oak to decide on their

"We saw a child hanging on a bough; there were no signs of life."

verdict: "That the child was secretly born, and that it was found dead in a stream; but whether it was fully born alive or not, no sufficient evidence appears to the jurors."

This sounds like a merciful decision. If Harriet had been found guilty, she would have been hanged. As it was, her story seems to have a happy ending. Three years later, she married the first boyfriend, George Harris. They had seven children together, two locally, and the rest in New York State where they had gone to start a new life.



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Anthony Edward Cronin 15 February 1935–23 June 2025

Tony Cronin, who has died at the age of 90, was the long-serving owner, landlord and chef at the Royal Oak Whatlington, from the early 1980s and through the 1990s. His funeral took place on Wednesday 30

July and was well supported by his family, friends and a few of his old customers. Mike Tapsfield, an Oak regular and friend of Tony, looks back on the life of one of the pub's most successful landlords.



Butcher Tony led the Oak into an era of fine dining success

Tony learned his trade doing National Service in the Catering Corps, where he acquired the cookery and butchery skills that would serve him well in later life.

He bought his first butcher's shop at the age of 25 in Petts Wood near Orpington and, later, another shop near West Wickham.

He was a successful butcher, buying his beef on the hoof; later he judged at The Smithfield

Show. In the early 1980s Tony sprung it on his wife Brenda: "Let's buy a pub," and so they did, moving from Chelsfield to live in and run The Royal Oak.

He continued to run the Petts Wood shop and would drive up every Monday to collect the prime fillets, sirloins and rump that would be cooked on his steak grill. The pub soon had a reputation for the best steaks around.

The pub was vibrant with darts and shove halfpenny in the barn and a fruit machine that Parish Council chair Roger Fisher would milk every Friday night, until Tony realised he wasn't making any profit from it and had it removed.

My late wife Bernadette and I became good friends with Tony and Brenda, perhaps the Irish connection and the fact that Tony and I both supported Charlton Athletic. We would meet them in February for lunch at the Savoy Grill to celebrate Bernie's and Tony's birthdays.

New Year's Eve fancy dress parties at the Oak were legendary. Tony and Brenda would dress as Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn and the rest of us as loyal subjects. The drinks would flow and Bernie would lead the conga around the pub and garden and down the A21.

Tony suffered from diabetes and in the late 1990s his leg was amputated at the knee. Undeterred by this minor irritancy, he wheeled himself around on an office chair and carried on.

Eventually, however, he was persuaded by the family that it really was too much and he was forced to sell up and move to Bexhill then, later, to Tonbridge.

Tony is survived by Brenda and children Tracey, Richard, Claire and Nicholas, and grandchildren.

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Serenaders find shelter



With this British summer combining thunder and rain with beautiful sunshine, the Twilight Serenade headed indoors to save the audience from a potential soaking.

Linda Walker, Chair of the Village Hall Committee, says: "The Bodiam Concert Band raised the rafters of the Village Hall with a superb evening's entertainment.

"With all ages in the audience, including a babe in arms, there was music for everyone, ranging from classical to pop, from the theme to The Dambusters to songs from the movie Grease.

"The band had the audience clapping, stamping their feet and singing along, while band leader and conductor John Cornford amused with anecdotes and fascinating facts about each of the tunes.

"Formed 35 years ago, the Bodiam Concert Band has been delighting us at Whatlington for many summers and the Village Hall Committee would like to thank all those who attended, those who set up the event and of course the amazing band.

"A thoroughly enjoyable evening was had by all."

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Flower festival 'the best for years'



Despite the occasional shower, a healthy number of villagers and visitors came to the church over the Pastoral Weekend to view the flowers.

A team of devoted regulars, supported by a few non-church goers, worked throughout the Friday afternoon to leave the church adorned.

As one remarked:
"Possibly the best Patronal Festival showing we've done for a considerable while!"

This year the challenge was set to display flowers to the theme of 'hymns', with a fun but tricky quiz for visitors to match the display to the hymn.

The event closed on Sunday evening with a Patronal Songs of Praise, with a selection of appropriate hymns, concluding with a rousing How Great Thou Art.



Continues next page



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

What an amazing display of flowers we saw at our Patronal Festival. I particularly enjoyed the link to some well-known hymns. It was good also to see quite a few people at the songs of praise celebrating our patron saint, St Mary Magdalene.

With the Oak closed at the moment, maintaining our community is a challenge and, together with the Village Hall, the church gives some opportunities for us to support one another.

I hear rumours of proposed new housing which, whatever we think of it, might bring new life to the pub.

Meanwhile I look forward to the Whatlington Fete on 6 September as a great opportunity for us all to come together and support the village. I am told that providing refreshments is hard work, but since it is usually close to the beer tent and the BBQ, I have foolishly agreed to take it on. I do hope I shall see you all at that event, if not also in the church!

God bless you, John

From previous page

John Crouch, one of the festival organisers, says: "Start thinking about next year's challenge 'Saints' – not the football or rugby teams . . . although that has given me an idea!"

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Green scheme boost for eco credentials

(With apologies to local farmers and rabbits)

The village church has begun a project to boost its eco credentials.

St Mary Magdalene is now registered with A Rocha UK's Eco Church programme, which equips churches in England and Wales to care for creation.

There are currently 16 local churches registered with the scheme, of which six have already achieved a bronze award and one a silver.

We are just starting out on this journey and an Environmental Policy is under preparation.

As part of our efforts to secure additional recognition a management plan for grass cutting has been implemented in the churchyard . . . hopefully this will explain why cutting of the grass appears to have been ignored.

One of the first benefits we have seen during the early months of summer has been the Cinnabar moths hatching from their chrysalis on the Ox-eye daisies. The caterpillars have been making short work of the ragwort.

We had a Common Spotted Orchid in two locations in the churchyard and, for the first time, a Pyramid Orchid.

The process of leaving large areas of the churchyard uncut until the late summer/early

By John Crouch

autumn is creating a balanced eco-system for us to perpetuate in God's creation.

We are aware that a local vixen has made use of the proliferation of resident rabbits in support of her newly born pups, much to the concern of our local farmer with his lambs no doubt.

We also have a semi-resident buzzard who sits atop one of the memorial crosses watching for rodents in the long grass.

'Caring for God's Acre' posters are displayed to explain our approach, together with information in the church porch.

Other areas to be looked at and undertaken over time include:

- buildings and energy
- lifestyle
- community and global engagement.



Church art class and expo

The Scalands Art Group will be exhibiting some of its work in Whatlington Church from 17-19 October.

The group will show individual pieces as well as work that shows the processes and the themes the artists have worked on.

On the morning of Saturday the 18th group tutor Chris Clarke will run a workshop for children. Parents will also be welcome.

More details will be announced nearer the time.

FORTHCOMING SERVICES

- 17 August** 9.15am Holy Communion
- 24 August** 6pm Evening Prayer
- 7 September** 9.15am Holy Communion
- 14 September** 10.30 Family Service – Education Sunday
- 21 September** 9.15am Holy Communion
- 28 September** 6pm Harvest Service followed by Harvest Supper
- 5 October** 9.15am Holy Communion
- 12 October** 10.30am Family Service
- 19 October** 9.15am Holy Communion
- 26 October** 4pm Service of Memories

The worm that turned ... into two worms

F This summer for me was exciting as I experienced several 'once in a lifetime' (OIALT) events. I had a steak pie (with guacamole and Peter Mandelson naturally) at a football match, something that in 60 years I had never done before.

I got bitten by a dog. Fortunately, it went for my bionic hip so no permanent damage though you should've seen my bruise. (I have photos . . .)

And finally, I walked out of a pub because it was too noisy at 110 decibels (sadly, not the Royal Oak).

But the highlights were my Animal, Vegetable and Mineral events.

Animal: one of the cats caught a slow worm (*Anguis fragilis*) and while they have caught them before, I had never seen what happened next.

I tried to rescue it with a dustpan and brush and was horrified when I thought I had chopped its tail off. I put both bits in the garden and while the front end glided through the undergrowth and escaped, the tail continued to wriggle vigorously for about 10 minutes.

My friend Simon explained that this is an escape mechanism: it sheds its tail (autotomy) to distract the predator (which is why it continues wriggling.) The tail will grow back but shorter and this strategy is very much a last chance saloon tactic: the tail is a major store of energy and also influences social status and sexual attractiveness (yes really).

The name comes from the Old English *slāwyr*m

Forget record temperatures, hosepipe bans and the Oasis reunion . . . an unusual fungus and discarded cans are among the high points of Martyn Hole's summer.



meaning earthworm serpent, which is spot on as it is a legless lizard (great name for a rock band).

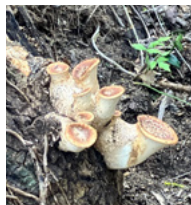
Vegetable: this involves a type of fungus I had never seen before (I was delivering the Whatlington News at the time). Called Dryad's Saddle (*Cerioporus squamosus*) it causes white rot in living and dead hardwoods. When young, it is edible but gets tougher as it ages but can be used to make stiff paper (and would make a great prog rock band name).

Mineral: aluminium, although first isolated just 200 years ago, is the third most common element in the Earth's crust.

I was putting out the wheelie bin and noticed loads of rubbish tossed onto our verge and I was moved

to pick it up, something I had never done before (shame on me after 31 years here). It was mainly flattened beer, coke and Red Bull cans (another great rock band name: The Flattened Cans).

I also discovered something new: recyclers prefer UNCRUSHED cans as it makes it easier for their sorting machines, which use shape recognition to identify them. So don't crush your cans!



Since I wrote this I've seen more slow worms autotomising and picked up more cans, so perhaps instead of Once in a Lifetime (a Talking Heads song) it should be Summer the First Time (a Bobby Goldsboro song). Spookily, the lyrics match our recent weather: "Was a hot afternoon, the last day in June, and the sun was a demon."



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