

Whatlington News

JUNE 2025

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SUMMER OF FUN

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OUR WHAT'S ON GUIDE**

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Concerns grow over future of Royal Oak

After nearly three months since being put up for sale there is still no sign of a buyer for the village pub.

Last week agents Christie & Co knocked £30,000 off the asking price, with the freehold of the 15th century building now on offer for £395,000 +VAT.

Brewers Shepherd Neame, who own the Oak along with 300 other pubs in the South East, told Whatlington News there have been "a number of viewings from interested parties" but, as yet, no takers.

The Whatlington Connectors

has issued a pledge to the brewery that it would increase the number of events held at the Oak in order to show any future landlord that there is local support to keep the pub open.

But Parish Council Chair Roger Fisher confirmed no funds were available to support a community takeover of the Oak and, in any event, such a move would present "insurmountable problems" in managing and staffing a pub in such a small village.

■ **Villagers' hopes and fears for the Oak: page 3**



Bargain hunters flock to market  **Page 8**

Road closes in bid to end floods **Page 5**



Church packed for village wedding **Page 11**

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Calling time ... forever?

Villagers express their hopes – and fears – for the future of the Royal Oak

The pub could thrive again

Tim Underhill

The Royal Oak has a long and distinguished history as a wayside pub and restaurant. The building oozes character and there is a pleasant, safe and secluded garden at the back. The Oak was a thriving 'gastro-pub' in the recent past. The pub is a key part of the village and the brewery and landlords have been closely involved with community events such as the annual barn dance, summer fete and the musical serenade. The function room is a great asset and has hosted a range of events including films, talks, quiz nights and music. The pub is central to village life and to maintaining the community spirit of the parish. The pub could thrive once again with the right owner and we would be keen visit regularly and eat there again if it offered high quality food and a varied menu.

Beating heart of the village

Charlotte Moore

The Royal Oak is one of the oldest and most interesting buildings in Whatlington. It's been there since well before Columbus reached America, and for at least half its life, probably more, it has been the village public house. 'Public house' ought to mean just that – a home from home, welcoming, comfortable, companionable; a place where you can eat well, drink well, and, most importantly, talk well. We all know how difficult it is to run a pub in the present economic climate, but there must be someone out there with the energy – and the backing – to revive this venerable Oak and make it once more the beating heart of the village. If there was a plan to help it along by volunteering a little free labour, I would put my name down for that. To quote Jeremy Clarkson (not something I often do): "What's a village without its pub? Just a collection of houses."



We don't need Clarkson

Martyn Hole

My very first memory of the Royal Oak was in late 1993 where we retired with some local friends after we had viewed Home Place for the second time with the agent. After a few pints and some quick calculations on the front page of my FT, we said: 'Let's go for it!' and the rest is history. After living away for 10 years, on returning there were familiar faces and I was welcomed back. Good conversation including some passionate arguments and generosity: people buying you a drink or one time lending me a hi-vis jacket to walk home after sunset and lifts after (perhaps) one too many pints of Long Man. We don't need Jeremy Clarkson to save our pub! Per ardua ad astra.

Insurmountable problems

Roger Fisher

All communities are created from small groups that come together often for a common purpose or activity. The Parish of Whatlington is a reflection of this. We have a Parish Council, a Village Hall Committee, the Church, Whatlington Connectors, Speedwatch and a Village News distributed by volunteers.

We also had a pub for more than 600 years. Sadly its future is in doubt. That you don't know what you've got until it's gone would be a fitting, if unfortunate, epitaph.

Unhappily the parish council can do little. There is no funding available. Indeed, even if there were, there would be insurmountable problems in managing and staffing such a pub from a small village population.

We can only hope that somewhere there is a budding entrepreneur who can see not only the intrinsic community benefits but also the business possibilities.



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Road closed in bid to end bridge flooding

New clerk tackles to-do list

New Parish Council Clerk Tracy Dixon has wasted little time in getting stuck into the role she took over at the beginning of April.

She reported to last month's council meeting that among the tasks she has undertaken are:

- making a start on streamlining "overcrowded and out of date" areas of the council's website
- completing the year-end accounts and had the internal audit carried out
- updating all contacts and passwords
- reviewing all the council's policies and working practices
- making a successful claim to insurers to cover the additional costs of a locum clerk appointed to guide the council in the immediate period following the death of Valerie Bennett
- attending a meeting of the Rother Association of Local Councils where it was revealed that, in the forthcoming reorganisation of local government, parish councils would not be restricted in the amount of extra council tax it can seek from residents to cover additional work undertaken once district authorities are scrapped.

Whatlington Road is to be closed for four days as council contractors bid to put an end to flooding near the Village Hall.

The closure runs from Monday 23 June to Thursday the 26th, between 9.30am-3pm.

The road will be closed between the A21 and Oakhurst Road, with residents able to gain access by speaking to the site team at the barriers.

Blocked gulleys above the Village Hall mean rainwater cascades down the road affecting nearby properties and causing flooding by the bridge over the River Line.

The work, to be carried out by contractors Balfour Beatty, involves CCTV surveys of the underground drainage system and clearing the pipework with high pressured water.

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EVENTS DIARY



Village history talk

Discover more about Whatlington and the people who have lived here at an illustrated talk by author and local historian Charlotte Moore.

It will be held at Whatlington Church as part of its 750th anniversary celebrations. It will take place on Friday 20 June at 7.30pm. Entry is free (donations welcomed) with car parking at the Village Hall and refreshments afterwards.

Say it with flowers at church festival

The Whatlington Church Patronal Flower Festival takes place on the weekend 19/20 July.

It has added significance this year – the 750th anniversary of the building – and villagers are invited to get involved.

The theme for the floral displays is 'Favourite Hymns': "We would love it if any budding flower arrangers would like to take part," says the church's John Crouch.

"Choose a favourite hymn and then depict it in flowers and foliage. It won't matter if we have several of the same hymn, but it would be useful to know in advance what you have chosen.

"If you don't feel you can manage your own display why not offer to sponsor one, and visit the festival visit to see what has been achieved."

The church will be open from 10am-4pm both days, with teas on Saturday afternoon. The event will conclude with Patronal Evening Service at 6pm to which everyone is very welcome.

For more information, or to discuss how you would like to be involved, talk to John or Fran on 07788 416903.

Fran adds: "With everyone's help we can once again make the church look wonderful."

Join the ramble round Whatlington

A guided walk around Whatlington is one of the highlights of the High Weald Walking Festival this September.

The Whatlington walk will be on Sunday 14 September at 10am from the Village Hall car park.

Bev Marks, the Ramblers Local Footpath Warden for Whatlington, will lead the walk, assisted by two Battle Ramblers acting as middle

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7:00pm, Saturday 21st June 2025
St Mary's Church, Battle

Director of Music: Lucinda Sheppard

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and back markers to keep everyone safe.

He is aiming for a 4-4.5 mile walk, taking about 2.5 hours, to give time for occasional stops to talk about the countryside.

There will be some road crossing and country lane walking as well as through fields and woods.

All are welcome but the organisers regret dogs are not permitted on festival guided walks.

EVENTS DIARY

Summer-thing for everyone!

Twilight Serenade
Whatlington Village Hall
Saturday 19th July from 6pm
Free!!!

Raffle to raise funds for the village hall
We provide the music
You bring your own picnic

Music from the
Bodiam Concert Band



There is something for everyone this season at Whatlington Village Hall.

The Bodiam Band will bring a medley of favourite tunes at the **Twilight Serenade** from 6pm on Saturday 19 July in the field behind the hall. Bring your own food and drink, a picnic blanket, chairs or even a gazebo and settle in for an evening of quality entertainment.

There will be fun for all ages at the **Summer Fete** from 2pm on Saturday 6 September. Alongside the BBQ, bar and food and drink stalls, there will be: wheels – with tractor and trailer rides; woofs – with a fun dog show (bring your pooch and enter on the day); the wine or water bottle challenge; welly wanging; tug of war; crashing crockery; splat the rat and hoopla.

Plus there will be good-humoured competition with 'Build the Best Flying Machine Challenge' – the hall will supply the materials and you supply the creativity.

Bring along the pride of your plot for the 'Garden Best in Show', whether a posy, a single bloom or produce from the veg patch. Entries welcomed from experienced growers as well as youngsters. Why not encourage your little ones to pop a sunflower seed in a pot . . . who knows how tall it could be by September?

If you would like your own stall at the fete, contact Linda on 07730 821743. These will be cash events and money raised will go towards the upkeep of the Village Hall.

■ *The increase in running costs and ongoing maintenance mean charges for hiring the hall will increase by £2 per hour from September this year.*

Take a crafty break and make new friends

This higgledy-piggledy 'village' was made by Whatlington crafters under the guidance of local ceramicist Amanda Westbury. It's the latest creation to come from the classes led by local experts. Fun, friendly and relaxed, the sessions, held in the Village Hall and organised by the Whatlington Community Connectors, offer the chance to learn new skills and make new friends along the way.



COMING SOON: learn the art of mosaics – starting in July – see whatlington.com



Bargain hunters flock to first antiques market

From antique jewellery to vintage kitchenware, the village's first antiques and collectables fair attracted more than a hundred bargain hunters.

Dealers from across the area were among those who flocked to the event and the 11 local stallholders reported brisk business.

Organised by the Whatlington Community Connectors (WCC) the event, in the Village Hall, proved to be a big commercial success for those selling silverware, ceramics, watches, ornaments, figurines, mirrors and other small and large items.

All reported footfall was well in excess of similar events held locally and the main question on their lips at the end of the day was: "When is the next one? Book me in!"

The refreshments table featuring cakes, scones and biscuits made by the Connectors did a roaring trade as did a stall of antique and vintage items donated by local people to help boost takings and support St Michael's Hospice.

WCC chair Steve Turner said afterwards: "Our aim as a group is to provide a variety of different events to help bring the community together in addition to those that have been running successfully for many years.

"This was a bit of a gamble for us and we didn't

Continues opposite





From previous page

know if it would attract many people, so we were delighted and a little bit surprised that it should go so well.

"Thanks must go to committee members who baked such an array of goodies that pretty much sold out, and to Pam Butcher and Hugh Apthorp for the use of their adjoining land as much-needed overspill parking space."

The 50p entry fee for visitors included a raffle ticket for a voucher kindly supplied by Cook in Mount Street and won by Mr Sawyer from Battle.

Valerie tribute plan springs into action

The Whatlington spring, which rises by the Village Hall and was once an important source of water for nearby properties, is to be revamped in tribute to former parish clerk Valerie Bennett.

Valerie was clerk to the Parish Council for 43 years until her death earlier this year, as well as treasurer to the hall committee for nearly three decades.

The council had sought ideas for a permanent memorial with the final decision left to the hall committee, which opted for improving the spring as a cause close to Valerie's heart.

Rather than a plaque inside the hall, it was felt railings and brickwork around the spring would provide a more visible tribute.

A final decision will be taken at the next council meeting once designs and prices had been obtained for the project.

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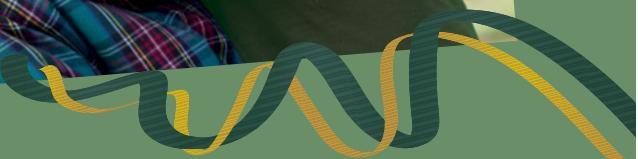
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Church packed as couple with local links wed

One of the biggest weddings held at the village church in recent years saw Raj Kular marry Henry Walter.

While both come from Hounslow, Henry's grandparents lived at Ringlets in Whatlington Road for a while and both his parents are buried in the churchyard.

Guests came from across the UK and abroad in such numbers that not all could be accommodated in the church. Rector John Hawkins said afterwards: "It was so wonderful to have everyone in full voice competing with the organ."

The reception was held in The Abbot's Hall at Battle Abbey.



Another village asset lost but spirit must live on

I have just conducted a wedding service with the church absolutely packed. It is wonderful what a difference that makes as families come together to celebrate.

The groom's family were locals, all 'hatched, matched and despatched' at St Mary's Church. Their names are in the registers and on memorials in the churchyard. The bride's family represented a different culture where family life and support are stronger than we often see today.

Sadly our village is struggling to retain a sense of community as the pub is closed and only the church and village hall are left to provide a place for people to meet and share in the village life. The Whatlington Connectors try to keep us working together for the good of all and there are still opportunities for us to gather and encourage one another.

As we continue to celebrate the history of the church and its place in our community throughout this 750th anniversary year, we can hear more about the village on Friday 20 June as Charlotte Moore gives a talk in the church. Then

**By Rev John Hawkins
 Rector
 Whatlington Church**



on the weekend of 19/20 July we have our Patronal Festival with a flower festival and Songs of Praise.

See page 6

If we truly know, love, and follow Jesus we will find that in our faith we are drawn together. The Bible is full of passages about community. Jesus emphasised the importance of community through love and unity. He taught that love for one another, as he loved his disciples, would be a defining characteristic of his followers.

He also modelled this by serving others and living in community. Furthermore, Jesus prayed for his disciples to be one, reflecting the unity between himself and the Father.

My prayer is that we will all become part of this loving and caring community and be renewed in faith in the weeks to come.



Ivy's bad rep but it's no tree killer

 One plant that I used to see a lot walking up to the Royal Oak was ivy (*Hedera helix*). Many people have a strong aversion to ivy thinking that it kills the tree it is climbing. Not so, as ivy is not a parasite.

Other than using the tree for support it derives no water or nutrients from the host tree and has its own root system. One small negative is that it increases the wind profile of the host tree and also adds to its weight so, in a storm, it may increase the risk of the tree being blown over.

This is very different from true parasites which are divided into two categories: Hemiparasitic, where they generally only take water/nutrients from the host but retain their photosynthetic ability, and Holoparasitic, where they derive everything from the host tree and do not photosynthesise. An example of each:

Hemiparasitic: *viscum album* (the only native) mistletoe – the name is derived from the old English/German 'mist' meaning dung, and tan, meaning twig (tan is the plural of toe). It was believed that the seeds were spread in birds' guano (true) hence the name.

Holoparasitic: *cuscuta europaea*, the Greater Dodder or European Dodder (no, I hadn't heard of it either). I'm not sure about the origin of this name. 'Dodder' means slow and shaky. Perhaps it is slow growing or shakes in a breeze. Watch out for this one: it is poisonous to horses and infests sugar beet and other crops.

Do these plants have any practical uses? Ivy as a Christmas decoration I suppose and it is said to have a fine grain and is good for carving and can be used as firewood, unlike Poison Ivy.

Mistletoe is good for persuading reluctant people to kiss you but it also features in Norse mythology. The blind Hoor killed his brother Baldur with a mistletoe dart but he came back from the dead and his Mum, Frigg (hence Friday) cried tears of mistletoe berries that became a symbol of love.

One last use: it can be used to trap birds. Squeeze the berries and you get a sticky juice called birdlime. Spread it on branches and small birds get stuck in the goo.

But going back to ivy, I do, however, have a place for it in my heart and it stems from Frankie Howerd (Lurcio) in *Up Pompeii*. In series one a rebellion in Britain leads to all able-bodied men being called up. The soldiers are lined up (Lurcio is 4th) and they have to call out their numbers (or actually Roman numerals): I, II, III, IV . . . well, I thought it was funny.

**MARTYN HOLE
examines
the evidence
against one of
our most prolific
plants and finds
it not guilty**



Tragic stories behind war graves

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission cares for 23,000 memorials and cemeteries around the world commemorating 1.7 million World War casualties.

And although it is 80 years since the end of WW2, up to 100 men are buried with full military honours each year, as more bodies are unearthed across Europe by projects such as major road schemes.

But it was the personal stories behind the figures that brought to life Martin Barry's presentation about the work of the Commission held at Whatlington Church.

His research of war graves at Hastings Cemetery revealed the story of Private William Curtis who, having survived Ypres and the Somme, was brought to the town for treatment of an inner ear infection and was killed after being hit by a seafront tram.

Then there was Corporal Luther Algeo whose throat was cut by a fellow soldier at Warrior Square station, just up the road from where Private Joseph Blackstock met a bizarre end – hit by a man falling on him from the steps above his basement billet.

The continuing work of the Commission includes plans to install a new headstone on the Whatlington Church war grave of Frederic Potter, who lived at Woodman's Corner with his wife Jane. Having served in the Boer War he rejoined the army at the outbreak of WW1, was injured in 1915 and died from complications arising from his wound in 1918.



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