



Valerie receives her MBE medal from the Queen

RIP Valerie – Parish Clerk for 43 years

Valerie Bennett, who died just before Christmas after a fall at her home, was 'the epitome of a community activist' says Parish Council chair Roger Fisher.

As well as her record-breaking 43-year stint as clerk to the council she had been a governor at the former village school for 35 years and treasurer of the Village Hall Committee for 27 years.

Her service to the community was recognised in 2009 when she

was made an MBE at a ceremony in Buckingham Palace.

■ **Tribute to 'our busy mum':**
pages 4-5

FUNERAL PLANS

The funeral is on Monday 17 February at 11.15am at Hastings Crematorium, then moving onto The Brickwall Hotel at Sedlescombe afterwards. Her sons said: "All who knew mum and would like to join us in celebrating her life are welcome."

Search under way to fill key village posts

The search has begun to find a new Parish Clerk and a landlord for the Royal Oak.

Following the passing of Valerie Bennett advertisements have been placed to find a new council clerk.

A locum stood in at the January meeting but councillors

are keen to find a permanent replacement for the part-time role (see page 3).

Meanwhile Oak owners Shepherd Neame are seeking a new landlord after current holder Hasan Fikret announced he was leaving to support his partner who is battling illness (see page 6).


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Job share could be answer to clerk vacancy

Search gets under way to fill vital parish role

The search for a new clerk to the parish council is under way following the passing of Valerie Bennett who held the post for almost 44 years.

January's council meeting was the first, said chair Roger Fisher, he had led without Valerie by his side in 40 years, adding: "There can be few people in the village whose lives have not been impacted by her service to the community."

The meeting, which saw locum clerk Phil Burgess

stepping in, agreed to begin the process of searching for a new permanent clerk (see *advertisement below*).

The job requires applicants to work four hours a week at a pay rate of £17.79 - £18.72 depending on experience and qualifications. Closing date is 17 February.

Councillor Simon White suggested one possibility could be to share a clerk with another council – several local parishes have this arrangement.

Ideas wanted for Valerie memorial

A permanent memorial recognising Valerie's contribution to the village is being considered by the parish council.

And it is asking villagers for their ideas on how to mark her long service.

Her sons have waived the right to receive the remaining portion of Valerie's salary and this could form the starting point for a village appeal alongside the contribution of the parish council.

Suggestions will be considered at the next meeting of the council on Thursday 20 March.

You can email your ideas to clerk@whatlingtonparishcouncil.com

VACANCY: Whatlington Parish Clerk & RFO

Closing Date: 17 February 2025

Hours: 4 hours per week

Rate of Pay: £17.79 - £18.72 per hour (SCP 24 -26) depending on experience and qualifications.

We are looking for someone who is motivated and organised, with excellent administration, bookkeeping, IT and communication skills to join our team. You will need to be proactive and helpful in supporting councillors and residents and taking an interest in village affairs. You need to be able to work independently from home.

Reporting to the council you will be required to organise meetings, draft minutes, prepare documentation and follow up on actions. As Responsible Financial Officer you will manage the council's accounts and budget. You will

also liaise with other organisations and groups in this key role.

Although an appropriate qualification would be preferred, the council will support an applicant, following appointment, in pursuance of continuing professional development (CPD).

Place of work: Home-based with evening attendance at meetings (typically five meetings per year including attendance at the Parish Assembly). Occasionally, special planning meetings are required.

■ The application form and the job description are available from Emily Simpson at admin@esalc.co.uk

■ For any queries, Emily can be contacted on **07881 714526**.

VALERIE BENNETT 1939-2024

Valerie moved to Whatlington in 1971 with her husband Leslie. Their two sons Clayton and Tyson were raised in the village and here they look back over their mother's life and service to the community.



Clayton, left, and Tyson with Valerie

F Mum was born in 1939 in Woolwich, London, and after marrying Leslie in 1962 they eventually settled in Whatlington where they raised us.

Mum was always a busy person and loved to get involved with the community, such as being one of the founder members of Battle Preschool Playgroup in 1972 and Claverham Swimming Club.

She was also a volunteer hospital driver, taking patients to and from appointments. All this while being a governor at Mountfield and Whatlington Primary school for 35 years.

In 1976, along with three

Playgroup founder to parish clerk: mum was always a busy person

others, they started a business in Battle High Street designing, manufacturing and selling suede and leather garments. It was known as Battle Cottage Industry and had orders from as far away as Canada and South Africa via mail order catalogues.

Her other careers included working for Lloyds bank in Battle, Hollington Post Office and the Citizens Advice Bureau in Hastings.

Mum was the Whatlington Parish Clerk from 1981 until the present day, treasurer of the Village Hall Committee for 27 years and the Village Voice writer for the Observer for 11 years.

Her role as Parish Clerk saw her involved in many aspects of village life: she enjoyed helping organise village fetes, barn dances and hog roasts.

Everybody knew they could contact her with village concerns and she would always get the job done, no matter how many emails and phone calls she had to make.

We remember her as kids, forever running around delivering parish council post, being the first and last to leave events, and always having to pop up to the notice boards to refresh them.



Valerie with her MBE medal and husband Leslie

Continues opposite

VALERIE BENNETT 1939-2024

Cleaning the flagpole at the age of 85

From previous page

Even just a few months ago she sprayed WD40 on the locks of the notice board to get it open, and I helped in the dropping down of the flag pole for her to clean it, at the grand age of 85.

These commitments were acknowledged when in 2009 she was made an MBE by the Queen at Buckingham Palace – one of her, and our, proudest moments.

Mum was an active person, living life to the full by swimming at Crowhurst Park every week in the winter. Once April came she would go to the beach and swim in the sea at every opportunity.

She had a large garden, which was her pride and joy, pottering in it every day. As the garden got harder for her she employed a gardener (her granddaughter) once a week to help with the bigger jobs and cutting the grass. Anything that was too big for the pair of them was left for us all to muck in at the weekend.

In more recent years Valerie enjoyed holidays with the family, most recently Iceland (it was

on her bucket list to swim in the Blue Lagoon), France and Spain, where she kept up with the rest of the family walking the whole of the Rock of Gibraltar.

“Valerie was the epitome of a community activist, publicly recognised by her MBE. Her contribution to Whatlington and the wider area has made a positive impact on many lives.

“I know her time as our Parish Clerk was not viewed by her as a hobby or a job, but a responsibility to serve.

“I know this, having spent time about 20 years ago convincing her – reluctantly I know – to take a salary.

“She will be missed, leaving a void in the lives of her family and parish, to whom she dedicated a significant period of her life.”

**Roger Fisher
Chair, Whatlington Parish Council**

Perhaps the best way to sum up mum is with something dad, who died in 2018, wrote about her before her 80th birthday: “If you asked me to describe Valerie in one word it would be ‘remarkable’. I remember sitting in the garden on a stiflingly hot day when she disappeared came back with garden secateurs and a bucket to cut down plants.

“Shortly after, I heard the lawn mower start. She cut the lawns then trimmed all the edges. ‘Come and sit down,’ I said. She replied she would when she finished the lawn and got dinner ready. Forty five minutes later she came over to me with two glasses

of sherry and a pot of anchovies. I am not complaining . . . it is very handy being married to a workaholic!”

Valerie leaves two sons and their wives, five grandchildren and a great grandson.



I've had to bite my tongue

When she was made an MBE Valerie told Whatlington News the qualities she thought were needed to be parish clerk

“You must be able to keep confidences, you must be a good listener, you must be able to communicate, you must be determined and you must be patient – there are many times when I have had to bite my tongue!”

A good memory is also an asset, said Valerie, and the fact she was an avid newspaper reader helped: she had scrapbooks containing 20 years' worth of press stories in which Whatlington or the village school is featured.

She said: “You get so much more out of living in a village like this if you know what's going on and take an interest in local matters.”

Hasan's 'use it or lose it' warning as he quits Oak

Landlord calls time to look after his partner



Royal Oak landlord Hasan Fikret is leaving the pub to concentrate on caring for his partner Selda who is battling illness at their home in North London.

Hasan took over the 15th century pub in November 2022 after it had been closed for more than two months following the departure of the previous licensees.

It was one of the toughest times to take on a pub since the Second World War, with the country still recovering from Covid and energy prices spiralling.

Trading conditions haven't improved much since then, says Hasan, with the rising cost of living leaving households with less money to spend and business rate discounts being slashed from 75 per cent to 25 per cent.

Added to that have been frequent closures of the A21 reducing the amount of potential passing trade.

"It has been a lot harder than I anticipated," says Hasan, who previously ran a large nightclub in London. "But despite that I love this place and I've made some good friends here.

"The summer trade has been good, despite poor weather, and we've had some great nights such as the blues band gigs, carols round the bar and, recently, Tuesday quizzes.

"I wish the new tenants every success but they will need the support of villagers to help them. Local people need to realise that nowadays, particularly for country pubs, it's a matter of use it or lose it."



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Rother council to be scrapped in shake-up

Village leader slams Government plan

Rother District Council will disappear and Whatlington Parish Council could be handed extra powers in the Government's radical shake-up of local authorities.

A new county authority combining East and West Sussex along with Brighton & Hove will be formed, led by an elected mayor.

It would see the current second tier authorities such as Rother and Wealden abolished while towns such as Hastings and Eastbourne will have their own Town Councils.

The proposals, which would see elections

for the first Mayor of Sussex take place next year, may also mean parish councils such as Whatlington having to take on extra powers, the village's current county councillor Kathryn Field warned.

The plan, outlined in a Government White Paper, states it will 'give local communities more power over decisions which affect them, including spending on projects and services'.

However, parish chair Roger Fisher denounced the plan saying: "I totally disagree with this. It means the distance between the parish and the decision-makers would become even greater."

Kathryn said opposition county councillors are pushing to shelve this May's local elections as it would give those elected too short a time to serve their communities.

Parish tax bill to rise by 10 per cent

The parish portion of villagers' council tax bills is to rise by 10 per cent.

However that will only amount, on average, to an extra £5.56 a year.

The parish precept rose by five per cent last year but prior to that had not risen for five years.

In that time the authority had dipped into its reserve funds and councillors felt, with potential increased spending on the horizon, that it needs to bolster the council's financial position.

The precept will see a total of £8,200 raised for the parish coffers.

MP invited to annual assembly

Village MP Dr Kieran Mullan is to be invited to be the guest speaker at the annual parish assembly.

Dr Mullan is the Conservative MP for Bexhill and Battle, having been elected last year despite the national swing towards Labour.

The assembly, at which local organisations review their previous year's activities, takes place at 7pm on Thursday 20 March in the Village Hall.

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Registered charity number 288462

Roll up to join the parish register

Just as the electoral roll for local and national elections is reviewed every ten years, a similar review happens in respect of the Church of England, though it takes place every six years and this year is the next one.

There are restrictions on who can apply for inclusion, but in the main anyone who attends church regularly, lives in the village, is baptised and is over 16, can apply. There are some exceptions, such as a person can live outside the village but regularly attend the church.

Being on the roll gives the right to vote at the Annual Parochial Church Meeting, which this year will be held on 6 April.

The overall numbers on the benefice roll (Sedlescombe with Whatlington) determines the number of seats held on the Deanery Synod, the next level of church governance, currently three plus the Rector for the two villages.

If you feel you meet the requirements and are interested in applying, contact the PCC Electoral Roll officer John Crouch by phone 07788 416903 or email johncrouch56@outlook.com



We're still Good Companions!

Whatlington's Good Companions – the former village WI – is still going strong!

The group, which changed its name to Whatlington Friends before becoming the Companions, meets once a month from spring until November, for either lunch or tea.

It's most recent outing saw a party of 10 enjoy a three-course Christmas lunch at The Sweet Olive in Battle, all taking home a Secret Santa gift to the value of £8.

Hilda Aplin has run the group for 20 years and says: "It was amazing to see what varied lovely gifts could be bought for this amount of money!

"We are a very friendly group and there's no membership required."

Interested? Contact Hilda on 07586 326133.



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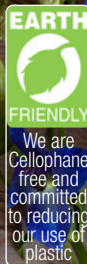
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◀ The ancient festival of Plough Sunday was celebrated at Whatlington Church for the first time in many years. The ceremony traditionally marked the first day of work in farm fields following the Christmas festivities – the start of the farming year. Village farmer James Tassell provided a plough for the service and churchgoers were encouraged to bring along their own gardening implements to be blessed by the Rector, Rev John Hawkins.

SERVICES

February

Sunday 9th, Family Service 10.30am
 Sunday 16th, Holy Communion 9.15am
 Sunday 23rd, Evening Prayer 4pm

March

Sunday 2nd, Holy Communion 9.15am
 Sunday 9th (First Sunday in Lent) Family Service 10.30am
 Sunday 16th, Holy Communion 9.15am
 Sunday 23, Evening Prayer 4pm
 Sunday 30th, Mothering Sunday, special service 10.30am

April

Sunday 6th, Holy Communion 9.15am
 Sunday 13th (Palm Sunday) Family Service 10.30am
 Friday 18th, Good Friday Reflections 6pm
 Sunday 20th (Easter Sunday), Easter Holy Communion 10.30am
 Sunday 27th, United Parish Communion at Whatlington 10.30am

Annual Parochial Church Meeting

Sunday 6 April, 12 noon, Sedlescombe Church

Illustrated talk on church history

The long and fascinating history of Whatlington Church is to be told in an illustrated talk by Churchwarden Jeffrey Bridges.

It's the first of the special events planned to mark the 750th anniversary of the church building. The talk will last an hour and will cover from Saxon times up to the present day.

There will be light refreshments after and an opportunity to ask questions, or just to look around the building.

WHATLINGTON CHURCH

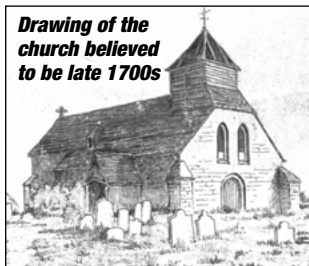
750
ANNIVERSARY

Car parking will be at the Village Hall, with spaces closer for those whose mobility may be a problem.

There is no entry charge, but donations are welcome.

■ **It takes place on Friday 4 April, 7.30pm at Whatlington Church**

Drawing of the church believed to be late 1700s



Other events (dates to be confirmed) include:

Friday 20 June – Village History Talk

Weekend of 19/20 July – Patronal Songs of Praise and Flower Festival

Friday 26 September – Poetry/Music Event

Week commencing 5 October – children's art event

12 October – Art Exhibition

Stay up to date with forthcoming events on the church web page www.achurchnearyou.com/church/5226/
 And on its Facebook page www.facebook.com/people/Whatlington-Parish-Church/100080054184770/

Children's challenge: tell the Easter story in a shoebox!

Children are being challenged to produce a 'shoe-box' diorama depicting a scene from the Easter story.

It can depict any element from the entry into Jerusalem on a donkey on Palm Sunday through to The Resurrection.

Suggestions include: The Last Supper; the arrest in the garden; the trial in front of Pilate; Peter's denial and the cock crowing; the crucifixion; the empty tomb, or Christ appearing to Mary in the garden.

HOW TO TAKE PART

- Take a shoe box with a lid.
- Set the box in the upturned lid to form the frame for your scene.



- Build your dramatic scene, as if it were on a stage.
- Put your name, age and a telephone number on the outside back of the box.
- Deliver the finished entry to church on Saturday 12 April between 2-4pm.

All entries will be displayed in the church during Easter week and then following the Easter Sunday morning service at 10.30, to which everyone is welcome, the regular congregation members will vote for their favourites, with small prizes for those selected.

Any questions, or complications with obtaining a shoe box or delivering on Saturday, call John and Fran Crouch on 07788 416903.

Not a great deal has changed in 750 years

By Rev John Hawkins, Rector, Whatlington Church



In the 13th century, 750 years ago, parishes in the Western Church often had poorly educated priests who could barely get through the communion service, or mass, which would have been in Latin.

So orders of friars were formed to provide wandering preachers to raise the level of faith. Notable among these were the Dominicans (the Hounds of God) and the Franciscans.

At the same time Thomas Aquinas began to teach and provided much that formed the thinking of the church thereafter. In particular, he developed the Catholic understanding of the Eucharist.

It would not be long before John Wycliffe arrived in the 14th century to translate the Latin Bible into English and Chaucer would give us his Canterbury Tales. It was a time of turmoil in the church and for a while there were two Popes, one in Rome and one at Avignon in France.

For most people in Whatlington all this would

have had little relevance to their daily existence. They would have gone to church each Sunday to hear the priest ask God's blessing for their lives throughout the seasons, and then return to hard labour in the fields.

Not a great deal has changed. The universal Church seems to be in even more turmoil, divided into what seems to be warring factions that have little relevance to most people.

Sadly only a few even come to church on Sundays, and I think the community is poorer for that. We lose the significance of the

seasons and how they affect our lives. But it was great to see some of our neighbours come to Plough Sunday (see *opposite*).

Throughout this year there are more opportunities to learn about and celebrate the history of our local church and community and to mark the seasons in Lent, Easter, Whitsun, Harvest and Advent. I look forward to seeing you there!



PARISH COUNCILLOR SIMON'S MERCY TRIP TO LVIV

Parish councillor and former soldier Simon White did his bit to support people in war-torn Ukraine by organising four convoys of vehicles and humanitarian aid.

The vehicles, diesel cars and vans which had been scrapped under Transport for London's ultra-low emissions scheme, were old and some of them "pretty ropey", says Simon.

The convoys travelled on behalf of the charity British-Ukrainian Aid.

On arrival in Ukraine the vehicles were deployed in combat casualty and civilian evacuation, and delivery of medical equipment and aid.

The drivers were old comrades of all ranks from Private to Lieutenant General from Simon's days in the Parachute Regiment. In total, they delivered 23 vehicles with two breaking down on the way.

The drive to the Polish/Ukrainian border took 20 hours from Calais with Lviv, the final destination, an hour further on. But being old boys, they were not in a hurry and each time spent a week eating, drinking and sightseeing, mainly with a military theme, along the way.

Continues opposite



Welcome to Ukraine: the convoy with Simon (right) nears its destination

Aid convoy vehicles left behind to transport Ukraine war casualties



Ready to roll: members of the convoy at the start of their journey

PARISH COUNCILLOR SIMON'S MERCY TRIP TO LVIV

'What happens on tour stays on tour'

From previous page

The first convoy in May stopped at the Möhnesee Dam in Germany – target of the Dambusters' bouncing bombs – and the Checkpoint Alpha museum at the start of the former Berlin road corridor.

Old haunts were visited in Berlin itself, where Simon and several others were posted in the 1970s. This trip ended with a sobering tour of the Auschwitz concentration camps.

The next convoy took in a full day's battlefield tour in Arnhem and a visit to the restored Colditz Castle before exploring Dresden and Wrocław (formerly Breslau).

The two final convoys stopped off in Bastogne to see the sites of the Battle of the Bulge, following in the tracks of Easy Company (Band of Brothers), and in Nuremberg with visits to the war crimes museum and Zeppelin Field Nazi rally grounds.

Simon says: "The highlight for me was



**Making friends
with a local in
Lviv**

the city of Lviv in Ukraine, which appears, physically at least, almost untouched by war damage.

"Each convoy was greatly enjoyed by all participants, with old friendships re-kindled, one of over 60 years standing.

"Of course, a few adventures were had, but what happened 'on tour' must remain 'on tour'.

"Above all, we had the honour and satisfaction of making a small contribution to help the Ukrainian people and their efforts to defend their country."

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Flickin' shame this pub challenge is stuck in the past



By Martyn Hole

F Have you noticed how you don't see certain things in a pub anymore? Where are the darts, the skittle alleys, shove ha'penny boards and dominoes? But there is another pub tradition that you see less and less: beer mats.

Tables now have glass coverings or are varnished to within an inch of their lives to make cleaning easier but I still like to have a proper beer mat.

Why?

First, it deadens the sound when you place your pint back on the table. It also provides a great opportunity for beer mat collectors known as tegestologists (from the Latin *teges* meaning mat or cover, hence protect).

Tegestology is a serious business and the largest collection of different types is awarded a Guinness World Record. Step forward Leo Pisker (yes, really) from Austria with 152,860 from 192 countries.

But is there no end to the versatility of beer mats? Have you ever played beer mat flipping? I call the people who do this *tegesdecerpists*.

This is a serious sport and there are annual regional and world championships. The current record holder is Mat Hand (yes, really) from the UK who successfully flipped 112 beer mats. The average beer mat is 1.4mm thick so that is a pile over 6ins high.

Try measuring the distance from your outstretched thumb to your forefinger. I can do

about 6ins so that is quite impressive. However, unlike the pole vault, the long and high jumps, you are allowed as many attempts as you like. Mat took 129 attempts. It sounds like Brian Blessed trying to climb Everest. For me that doesn't count: three strikes and you're out.

A few last thoughts.

Traditional beer mats are made of wood pulp so they are absorbent on both sides. A coaster

is normally cork on one side and some plasticised surface on the other.

Two objections: they don't coast – try 'shove beer mats' with a traditional mat and one of these new-fangled

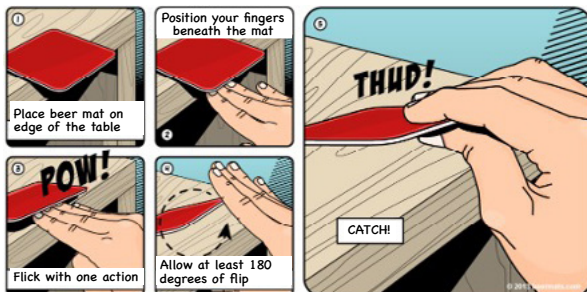
'coasters'. Second, when you put your drink on them, water vapour condenses on the outside of the glass, trickles down to the bottom and next time you lift your drink, there's a coaster stuck on the end!

The world's largest producer of beer mats is the Katz Group, a German company which is a subsidiary of Koehler, a family-owned speciality paper group.

So why have they disappeared? Covid, of course.

But there is one reason above all that makes me like beer mats and it goes back to my first point. If I am having a sneaky late-night libation in bed, the beer mat eliminates the clink of my glass on my bedside table.

I should have worked for MI6.



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media

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