

Local Fire Stations at Risk



Calls for Prater to Stand Down After Backing Fire Station Closure Plans

Calls are mounting for Sandgate county councillor Tim Prater to step down from his role on the Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue Authority after voting in favour of proposals that could see several fire stations close across Kent.

The controversial decision was taken at an extraordinary meeting of the Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue Authority on Thursday, August 6, when members voted to approve a public consultation on a major review of how the county's fire service is organised.

The review has been brought forward by Kent Fire and Rescue Service following a detailed assessment of where and when emergency incidents occur. The Authority says demand has changed significantly over recent years, with fewer fires, more prevention work, advances in technology and increasing financial pressures all contributing to the need

to review how resources are deployed.

Among the proposals are the closure of a number of fire stations and the relocation of fire engines and firefighters to areas where the service says they are needed most during peak demand. Kent Fire and Rescue Service argues that the changes are designed to improve response times while making the service more financially sustainable in the years ahead.

However, the proposals have proved deeply controversial, with many residents fearing that losing local fire stations will ultimately reduce resilience and leave communities more vulnerable when major incidents occur.

The vote has also exposed clear political divisions.

Every Reform UK member sitting on

Continued on page 2

Locals welcome signs of improvement on Kent's roads after years of underinvestment



Residents across Folkestone, Hythe and Romney Marsh are beginning to notice improvements to Kent's roads as the county council steps up investment in resurfacing and major highway projects.

After years in which repairs often amounted to little more than filling potholes, some of the area's most badly affected roads are now being fully resurfaced.

Among the largest schemes is an investment of more than £5 million in Folkestone's Road of Remembrance. The project was intended to be jointly funded by Kent County Council and Folkestone and Hythe District Council.

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Fresh blow for Railway as fire risk forces steam suspension



The Romney, Hythe and Dymchurch Railway has been forced to suspend its steam services, adding to the pressure already created by the cost of coal and low passenger numbers.

The popular Kent tourist attraction announced last week that it would switch to a revised diesel-only timetable after Natural England raised the Fire Severity State to "exceptional" across parts of the county.

The warning covers the railway's route between Dymchurch and Dungeness, leaving operators with little choice but to withdraw steam locomotives to protect passengers, neighbouring properties and the surrounding countryside.

It is the latest setback for the heritage line, which is already contending with the expense of coal and subdued passenger traffic. Passengers will instead be carried by diesel locomotives under an altered timetable. One of the railway's steam engines will remain on display at New Romney station for visitors to inspect.

The Fire Severity State measures how serious a wildfire could become if one started under current conditions. Its assessment takes account of factors including drought, wind speed and humidity. Natural England has classified several parts of Kent as facing an "exceptional" risk, including areas around Tunbridge Wells, Tenterden and Tonbridge.

An RHDR spokesperson said: "Natural England is forecasting this situation until at least August 5. We know this will be a disappointment to many of you, but we have to ensure the safety and wellbeing of both our passengers and our neighbours in this very unique part of Kent. Thank you for your understanding on this difficult situation."



Visitors planning to use the railway are being advised to check its diesel-only timetable before travelling.

The restrictions highlight the growing operational difficulties facing heritage railways, which rely heavily on steam services to attract visitors but must also absorb the cost of fuel and respond to increasingly dry conditions.

The Kent & East Sussex Railway, which operates between Tenterden and Bodiam, has not run steam trains since June 23 because of the danger of lineside fires, according to attraction bosses. The suspensions follow concerns about the potential for steam-powered vehicles to ignite dry vegetation during prolonged spells of warm weather.

Organisers of the Weald of Kent Steam and Country Show went ahead with their event at Little Engeham Farm in Woodchurch at the weekend after insisting robust fire-safety measures were in place. Concerns had been raised that traction engines could trigger wildfires.

Kent Fire and Rescue Service has also urged people to help reduce the risk of grass fires. By July 27, its crews had attended more than 300 accidental grass fires since the beginning of May, including more than 130 during July.

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Editor's Word

David Wimble



I am writing this on a Sunday morning, with the good weather continuing although thankfully the temperature is no longer in the mid-30s.

Sitting here in my shorts, I am reminded that it will not be too long before we are all complaining that it is too wet or too cold. For now, though, we should make the most of the sunshine.

The good weather has been particularly welcome for the many people who have taken the considerable step of organising local events. For them, the weather can make the difference between success and failure after months of planning and hard work.

Over the past few weeks, we have enjoyed some excellent events locally, including the Weald of Kent Steam Rally, the Woodchurch Battle of Britain Airshow and Folkestone's Trawler Race. One of the last major events in our district this summer is, of course, the Hythe Venetian Fete, which is always a highlight of the local calendar.

I recently received a letter asking why we had not included Lydd Club Day, an event the paper has always covered. The simple answer is timing. Now that the paper is printed in Suffolk, each edition must be sent to the printers on Thursday for delivery the following Monday. That meant this year's Club Day took place after our deadline, and any report in the next edition would have appeared almost a month out of date.

We also did not receive any press material from the committee this year. Nevertheless, I apologise to everyone involved and to those readers who were disappointed not to see the event featured.

In September, we will be holding a Looker networking event for anyone interested in advertising with, contributing to or becoming involved with The Looker. It will be an opportunity to meet the team, chat with some of our current advertisers and discover how advertising in the paper works for them. Look out for full details in the next edition.

Finally, the next edition coincides with me taking a week off for a holiday. If you have news, photographs, articles or details of forthcoming events that you would like us to consider, please send them in as soon as possible. The earlier we receive your contributions, the better the chance we have of including them.

David

Railway's final salute to David Clark OBE

The Romney, Hythe and Dymchurch Railway has paid a moving tribute to David Clark OBE, a devoted railway enthusiast and familiar face at Dungeness station, who died in July.

David's funeral was held on 5 August, bringing together those who knew him as a friend, colleague and passionate supporter of the railway.

Following his retirement, David generously gave his time to help at the railway and continued volunteering until the Covid pandemic. He became a regular presence at Dungeness, where his enthusiasm, knowledge and warm personality made him popular with staff, volunteers and visitors alike.

Few subjects delighted David more than railways. He was particularly keen to pass that enthusiasm on, often encouraging younger people to take an interest in steam and to become involved in railway preservation. He understood that the future of heritage railways depended upon inspiring a new generation to learn the traditional skills needed to keep them running.

Although he did not make a great show of it, those who knew David well understood that steam locomotives held a special place in his heart.

To commemorate his life, the railway had planned to run No. 10 Doctor Syn draped with black ribbons on the day of

his funeral. The locomotive, built in 1931 and named after the fictional Romney Marsh smuggler, is one of the railway's distinctive Canadian Pacific-style steam engines.

Restrictions on operating live steam locomotives meant that the planned tribute could not go ahead as intended. Instead, a diesel locomotive carried the railway's farewell. As the train passed the home David shared with his wife, Jane, its driver sounded an extra-long blast on the horn a simple but deeply affecting final salute to a man whose love of the railway had brought pleasure and encouragement to so many.



One of David's favourite locomotives Dr Syn which was meant to play a whistle solute

The sound carried across the Marsh as a reminder of the railway which had meant so much to him and of the friendships he had made there.

David will be remembered with great affection at Dungeness and across the Romney, Hythe and Dymchurch Railway. His enthusiasm, generosity and determination to encourage younger generations form a fitting legacy.

The railway extends its deepest sympathies to Jane, David's family and all who knew him.

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Rising costs put Kent tourism jobs and attractions under pressure



Jobs are at risk at Howletts and Port Lympne as wage bills, National Insurance, maintenance costs and disruption on the M20 place growing pressure on the county’s visitor economy

Kent’s tourism industry is facing an increasingly difficult battle to balance its books as attractions contend with rising wage bills, higher employer National Insurance contributions and the everyday cost of keeping their doors open.

Jobs are now at risk at Howletts Wild Animal Park, near Canterbury, and Port Lympne Reserve, near Hythe, where bosses have begun a formal consultation with staff.

The two parks, operated by The Howletts Wild Animal Trust, employ more than 550 people, as well as about 100 seasonal workers. It is not yet known how many posts could be lost or which departments might be affected.

A spokesperson for Howletts and Port Lympne said: “Like many businesses across the tourism and hospitality sectors, we must respond to the current economic climate and rising operating costs.

“To protect the long-term future of the organisation and its vital work, we have unfortunately begun a workforce consultation, but we are committed to keeping any necessary redundancies to the absolute minimum.”

The trust has not attributed the consultation to any single expense. However, the announcement reflects the pressures facing attractions which must pay staff, heat and maintain buildings, insure their sites and meet the cost of fuel, food, specialist equipment and regulatory compliance before a single visitor walks through the gates.

For animal parks, the bills also include feed, veterinary care, specialist keepers and the year-round maintenance of enclosures. Those costs continue regardless of the weather or the number of tickets sold.

The pressure on labour-intensive businesses has increased significantly since April 2025, when the employer National Insurance rate rose from 13.8% to 15% and the annual earnings threshold at which employers begin paying it was cut from £9,100 to £5,000.

That £5,000 threshold and 15% rate remain in place during the 2026-27 tax year.

At the same time, the statutory National Living Wage for workers aged 21 and over increased from £11.44 an hour in April 2024 to £12.21 in April 2025. It rose again to £12.71 in April this year, while the rate for workers aged 18 to 20 climbed to £10.85.

The increases provide important additional income for lower-paid workers facing their own cost-of-living pressures. But they also fall particularly heavily on tourism and hospitality businesses, which employ large numbers of seasonal, part-time and entry-level staff.

Before pension contributions or other employment expenses are included, a business employing an adult for 37.5 hours a week at the present minimum rate faces a basic wage and employer National Insurance bill of about £27,750 a year. That is roughly £3,600 more than the comparable cost before the April 2025 wage and National Insurance changes.

Across a workforce of dozens or hundreds, the increase can run into six or seven figures.

The difficulties are not confined to Kent. The National Trust announced last year that it was seeking savings of £26 million and proposed cutting the equivalent of at least 550 full-time jobs after its annual labour costs rose by more than £10 million. It said increasing costs were outstripping growth in visitor income.

Kent’s heritage railways are confronting a different but equally serious operational problem during the prolonged dry weather.

The Romney, Hythe and Dymchurch Railway is running an amended timetable because of the high fire risk around its 13½-mile route. The railway’s current visitor information warns passengers that scheduled services have been adjusted as a result.

The volunteer-supported Kent and East Sussex Railway has gone further, announcing that services between Tenterden and Bodiam will be operated by heritage diesel locomotives until August 14 because of the very high risk of lineside fires.

Steam locomotives can throw sparks and burning material from their chimneys, while red-hot cinders may also escape from the firebox. In dry conditions, either can ignite grass, crops or lineside vegetation.

Using diesel traction allows trains to continue running, but steam is a central part of the experience for many visitors. Restrictions can therefore affect bookings, special events and secondary spending in station shops and cafés, even when the railway itself remains open.

The Kent and East Sussex Railway has acknowledged that hotter, drier summers are changing the way heritage lines must operate. In an appeal supporting the restoration of a diesel railcar, it said it could no longer rely solely on steam



during its busiest period because of the danger of trackside fires.

For attractions in east Kent, the calculation over opening days, staffing and future investment is further complicated by Operation Brock.

The traffic-management system is intended to keep freight moving towards the Port of Dover and the Channel Tunnel during periods of disruption. Its contraflow between junctions eight and nine of the M20, however, can create slower journeys and reinforce the perception that the Kent coast is difficult to reach.

That perception matters to venues dependent on families deciding whether to make a day trip from London, Essex or elsewhere in the South East.

A Kent and Medway Economic Partnership survey published in 2022 found that, when Operation Brock was operating beyond capacity, 80% of responding businesses said their revenue or income had been affected. Some 72% reported an impact on customer or visitor numbers, while

53% said recruitment and retention had been affected.

The survey concluded that the effect on visitor numbers was felt particularly sharply by tourism and hospitality businesses. Although the research is now several years old, its findings remain an important warning as decisions are made about the future management of cross-Channel traffic.

The underlying visitor market remains valuable. Figures released by Kent County Council show that domestic and international visitors made a combined 66 million trips to Kent in 2024, generating about £4.1 billion for the county’s economy.

But high visitor numbers do not automatically produce a healthy operating surplus. Attractions must keep admission prices affordable while paying bills which have risen regardless of whether visitors spend more once they arrive.

At Howletts, the consultation follows the separate announcement that plans to return its 12 African elephants to the wild would not proceed after a viable overseas project could not be found. The trust said £250,000 raised for the proposal had been spent on feasibility work, assessments and the evaluation of potential international partners.

A planning application has instead been submitted to Canterbury City Council for a new elephant house and enclosure.

For the parks’ employees, however, the immediate concern is the workforce consultation. Its outcome will be watched closely across a tourism industry in which venues are being forced to reconsider staffing, opening arrangements and investment simply to meet the cost of another season.





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Trust refuses to explain IT failure that disrupted hospital care for Folkestone, Hythe and Romney Marsh patients



Health bosses have promised a full review after a major IT failure disrupted hospital services used by patients from Folkestone, Hythe and Romney Marsh.

East Kent Hospitals University NHS Foundation Trust declared a critical incident after the problem affected its emergency departments at the William Harvey Hospital in Ashford and Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother Hospital in Margate.

Patients, including those from the Folkestone and Hythe district who use the William Harvey's A&E department, were warned they could face "extremely long waits". Scheduled appointments and procedures were also reviewed.

The critical incident was stood down on Monday after being in place for several days.

The trust said the failure originated in a system provided by an external supplier, rather than one of its own systems. However, it has declined to identify the supplier or explain exactly what went wrong.

An investigation and recovery programme remain under way. The trust previously said it did not believe the incident was caused by a cyberattack.

A trust spokesman said: "Essentially, the issue originated from a system we use provided by an external supplier, as opposed to an issue with an EKHUFT system."

Asked what had failed, which company supplied the system and whether malicious activity had been ruled out, the trust

said it could not provide further information.

It added: "At this stage, we are unable to provide any further information beyond the statement already issued.

"The incident occurred last week and the investigation and recovery programme are still underway.

"We do not have any additional details to share at this time."

The spokesman said the trust had worked with its partners and suppliers to identify the problem and restore its systems safely.

They added: "We are undertaking a review of the incident to identify any lessons to strengthen our resilience and to prevent re-occurrence, or to reduce the scale and impact of any future disruptions."

The failure happened at the same time as separate IT problems affected GP practices across Kent and Medway.

Doctors reported being unable to access patient records and other clinical systems, although that disruption has since been resolved.

NHS Kent and Medway said the problems affecting GP surgeries were not caused by a cyberattack and were not connected to the East Kent Hospitals incident.

The outages have renewed concerns about the health service's dependence on computer systems and secure internet connections for accessing patient records, prescribing medication and making urgent referrals.



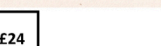
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Brockhill Country Park retains prestigious Green Flag



The 22-hectare park near Hythe has held the national award every year since 2007.

Brockhill Country Park has retained its Green Flag status, cementing its place among the best-managed green spaces in the country.

The park at Saltwood, near Hythe, is one of eight Kent County Council country parks to receive the international quality mark this year.

Green flags will also fly at Lullingstone, Grove Ferry, Shorne Woods, Teston Bridge, Trosley, Manor Park and Pegwell Bay country parks.

Brockhill has now secured the award every year since 2007. It has also previously received a gold medal in the country parks category of the South and South East in Bloom competition.

The 22-hectare park lies within the Kent Downs National Landscape and is designated as a Local Wildlife Site. Its mixture of woodland, meadows, pasture, marshland and water provides habitats for species including marbled white butterflies and green woodpeckers.

Three distinct areas make up the park: the deer paddock, a tree-fringed lake and a broad valley through which the Brockhill Stream flows towards the Royal Military Canal.

Visitors can follow waymarked paths through the grounds, enjoy views towards the English Channel or use the park's picnic area, children's playground and café.

The land was formerly part of the Brockhill Park Estate and has historic links to Saltwood Castle. It is thought to have served as a game estate during Norman times, providing the castle with meat, fish and timber.

Its lake, created in its present form during the Victorian period, may have developed from earlier medieval

fishponds. Kent County Council bought the site in 1946, and it has been open to the public as a country park since 1986.

Jamie Henderson, the councillor responsible for environment, coastal regeneration and public health, said the parks were "proud" to have retained the accolade.

He added: "It is a fantastic achievement, and it reflects the commitment of the teams who look after these special places every day."

Mr Henderson said country parks were vital because they "make a real difference to people's lives".

The Green Flag scheme, now in its 30th year, recognises parks and green spaces that are welcoming, well maintained and managed to a high standard. It is regarded as a benchmark for public green spaces in the UK and internationally.

Paul Todd MBE, Green Flag Award manager at Keep Britain Tidy, which runs the scheme, said: "Parks are essential public spaces that support our wellbeing, our communities and our economy. With public services under pressure, investing in parks is a practical way to improve quality of life."

The Green Flag Award was established in 1996 in response to declining standards of park and green-space maintenance.

The first awards were presented in 1997, and more than 2,500 parks and green spaces have since gained accreditation.

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Bridge Too Far? Folkestone's £22m play plan is no child's play

By Colin Turner

A colourful new playground promises a greener town centre. But after years of plans, consultations and disruption, residents are entitled to ask why Folkestone's "Brighter Future" has taken so long to arrive.

A salamander is supposed to symbolise rejuvenation and regeneration. In Folkestone, it may need to symbolise patience too.

Plans for a new play zone in Bouverie Square will go before Folkestone & Hythe District Council's planning and licensing committee on Tuesday, August 11. The proposal includes a large Robinia-hardwood climbing structure, tube slides, an accessible roundabout, an in-ground trampoline, a nest swing, a tunnel and seating.

On paper, it sounds imaginative, inclusive and fun. In reality, it arrives beneath the long shadow cast by the £22 million Folkestone – A Brighter Future regeneration scheme: a project whose name has become increasingly difficult to say without somebody asking when that future will finally turn up.

The chronology matters. The Folkestone Place Plan was developed through engagement beginning in 2020 and approved in 2021. The Levelling Up bid was submitted in 2022, and the Government announced a £19.8 million award in January 2023, supported by about £2.2 million in match funding. So it is not accurate to say the £22 million award itself was agreed nearly five years ago. But the ideas behind it are approaching six years old — more than long enough for public excitement to curdle into frustration.



When the funding was announced, the council said it was "ready to go". The money originally had to be spent by the end of March 2025. Yet the main construction works did not start until April 2025, and the council said last year that the scheme was due to finish in summer 2026.

For people walking past barriers, temporary surfaces and unfinished sections, progress can still feel painfully difficult to see. That does not mean nothing has happened: roads have been altered, utilities diverted, paving laid and work undertaken at Bouverie Square. But after years of glossy plans, residents can reasonably judge the scheme by what is open, usable and complete — not by percentages in a progress report.

The Guildhall Street footbridge is the most obvious symbol of the delay. Contrary to claims that it has not been started at all, foundation work has begun. But the bridge itself is not expected to be installed until September 2026, according to reporting based on council project papers. That would put it around two years beyond the September 2024 milestone contained in the original programme.

The playground announcement therefore lands awkwardly. Councillors are being asked to consider brightly coloured salamanders while one of the scheme's most substantial pieces of infrastructure is still waiting to span the road.

Then there is the bus station. The old station has been removed so that Bouverie Square can become a park, with a linear bus hub created along Middelburg Square. The council says the new arrangement will be safer, more accessible and better suited to modern buses. Yet its own consultation record shows that some residents wanted a different priority.

One respondent said: "Maybe a bus/tram would be a better long term spend. DO NOT change bus station." Another wrote: "I'd like to see the bus station remodelled like Canterbury for safety."

Those are not complaints about a slide or a swing. They are concerns about whether a town-centre transport hub will be fit for purpose for commuters, elderly passengers, disabled users and anybody left waiting in bad weather.

The council points to extensive engagement between 2023 and 2025, including surveys, public events, virtual-reality



experiences, computer-generated fly-throughs and consultation boards. It says feedback led to several proposals being amended or dropped, including a planned roundabout, while a separate play-area survey attracted 496 responses and found strong demand for climbing, swinging, sliding and adventure play.

That is evidence that some feedback was heard. But it does not answer the sharper democratic question: how much influence did residents have over the scheme's fundamental choices, particularly the decision to replace the traditional bus station with roadside stops?

Critics have also questioned the amount spent on consultation exercises and digital visualisations. Claims that these alone cost "hundreds of thousands of pounds" should not be printed as fact without invoices or a council breakdown. The original project cost plan did, however, allocate about £1.817 million to professional fees and surveys across the wider scheme. The council should now publish an itemised account of what was spent specifically on consultation, virtual reality, animations and engagement events. Transparency would either validate the criticism or lay it to rest.

Without that detail, the danger is that consultation looks less like shared decision-making and more like an

expensive guided tour of decisions already largely taken. Dropping one roundabout does not, by itself, prove that the public held the pen.

There is a positive case. A green Bouverie Square could be a genuine improvement on the tired former bus station. Consultation responses showed support for more greenery, and younger participants welcomed both the green space and the bridge. An accessible play area in the centre could give families a reason to stop, help local businesses and turn an unwelcoming transport space into somewhere pleasant.

When it is complete, the park may be lovely. Children will not care about funding streams, procurement timetables or council acronyms when they are racing towards the slides.

Adults, however, have every right to care. A £22 million regeneration programme should be judged not only by the colour of its salamanders but by whether it delivers reliable transport, safe crossings, completed infrastructure, value for money and a town centre that works.

Folkestone was promised a brighter future. What it needs now is a firm finishing date — and a clear account of why getting there has taken so long.

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The Looker asks: what can we do to save our high streets?

By David Wimble

The decline of the high street is no longer a distant threat or a debate about what might happen in the future. It is happening now, in our towns and villages, behind shuttered windows and “To Let” signs.

Across Folkestone, Hythe and Romney Marsh, more than 100 businesses have closed during the past 12 months, leaving shops vacant and communities asking what comes next. Each closure has its own story: rising costs, changing shopping habits, high rents, business rates, staff shortages, retirement or simply too few customers coming through the door. Taken together, however, they represent a serious challenge to the economic and social life of our district.

So what is the answer?

Would greater support from Folkestone and Hythe District Council make a meaningful difference? If so, what form should that help take? Would business rates relief save otherwise viable shops, or would it merely delay closures caused by much bigger changes in the retail economy?

Under the previous administration, £3 million was put into supporting high street businesses through a grant scheme intended to help them compete with online sales. That was a significant commitment of public money and an acknowledgement that independent traders cannot always adapt without help.

The important question is what that investment achieved. Which businesses were helped? How many jobs were

protected or created? How many recipients are still trading? Did the money generate lasting improvements, or provide only temporary assistance? Before any new scheme is launched, residents and traders deserve a clear assessment of the previous programme.

That does not mean the idea was wrong. Small businesses often need help to modernise. A grant might pay for a new website, an online ordering system, better signage, energy-saving equipment, improved accessibility or a shop refurbishment. These investments can allow a traditional business to serve customers both in person and online.

But grants alone cannot reverse every trend.

The high street is competing against businesses with enormous warehouses, sophisticated technology and national or international distribution networks. Online retailers can operate without paying for prominent town-centre premises, while local shops must meet rent, rates, energy, insurance and staffing costs before selling a single item.

This raises the question of whether Britain needs a tax on online sales—a form of “Amazon tax”, although other brands are, of course, available.

The argument is straightforward. If the tax system places a heavier burden on businesses occupying physical premises than on companies selling through the internet, the playing field is tilted. A modest online sales levy could help fund business rates relief, improvements to town centres or support for independent retailers.

Such a tax would have to be introduced nationally, not by the district council. It would also have to be designed carefully. Many high street businesses now sell online, and they should not be punished for adapting. Nor should a new tax simply be passed on to customers. The aim should be to rebalance the system, not to penalise innovation.

Business rates relief could provide more immediate help. The council should examine whether it can offer targeted, discretionary relief to independent shops, start-ups and businesses taking on long-empty units. A tapered scheme might give a new trader substantial relief in the first year, followed by smaller reductions as the business becomes



What is the price of personal service or is convenience the most important thing in 2026

established.

Relief should be targeted rather than handed out indiscriminately. Public money should support businesses with a credible plan, not subsidise unsustainable rents or leave landlords free to keep units empty while waiting for unrealistic returns.

The council could also consider incentives for property owners who accept sensible rents, divide large empty shops into affordable units or allow temporary uses. At the same time, long-term vacant properties should be brought back into use wherever possible.

Pop-up shops can give new businesses an opportunity to test an idea without taking on a lengthy lease. Indoor markets and shared retail spaces can reduce overheads. Artists, craftspeople, charities and community groups can animate empty premises while permanent tenants are sought. Flexible planning and short-term licences could make these arrangements easier.

Better parking offers are frequently suggested, and there is a case for reviewing charges, particularly for short visits. But free parking is not a complete retail policy. A town centre must give people a reason to visit. It must be attractive, safe, clean and accessible, with places to eat, meet and spend time.

That means maintaining pavements, public toilets, lighting, seating and planting. It means ensuring that signs are clear and that people with disabilities, parents with pushchairs and older residents can move around comfortably. It also means coordinating markets, festivals, late-night openings and seasonal events so that they produce regular footfall rather than isolated bursts of activity.

A dedicated town-centre manager, working directly with traders and landlords, could help turn separate initiatives into a coherent plan. The needs of Folkestone will not always be the same as those of Hythe, New Romney or the smaller communities across Romney Marsh. Each place needs an approach based on its character, customers and available premises.

Local shopping also depends on local loyalty. Councils and other public bodies could review their procurement policies to see whether more goods and services can be bought from businesses within the district. Traders could collaborate on promotions, delivery services and loyalty schemes. Residents, meanwhile, should remember that every decision to shop locally helps determine what will

still be there next year.

Yet we must also ask a more uncomfortable question: are we trying to preserve high streets that are simply too large for the amount of retail demand that now exists?

In some places, the most realistic answer may be to concentrate shops within a smaller, stronger retail area. A compact high street with fewer empty units may be healthier than a long, fragmented shopping stretch punctuated by vacant premises.

Buildings outside that core could be converted into housing, studios, workshops, offices, health services or community facilities. Bringing more residents into town centres could increase footfall and create customers for the businesses that remain. Empty upper floors should also be considered for housing, provided conversions meet proper standards and do not undermine the operation of nearby shops, restaurants or entertainment venues.

This approach must be carefully planned. Poor-quality conversions, cramped flats and the loss of the best shopfronts would damage the high street rather than save it. The council should identify which sections should remain primarily commercial, where mixed uses would work and where housing could provide a sustainable new future.

The objective should not be to turn every empty shop into a flat. It should be to create active town centres in which retail, homes, hospitality, leisure, services and community uses reinforce one another.

Perhaps we must accept that the high street of the future will not look like the high street of the past. There may be fewer traditional shops and more cafés, clinics, workspaces, experiences and specialist businesses. But that is not the same as accepting that high streets themselves are finished.

If we allow them to decline without intervention, in-person retail may increasingly become something found mainly in out-of-town retail parks and shopping villages. That would have consequences. People without cars would have fewer choices. Town centres would lose jobs, character and social activity. Money would be drawn away from local communities, while some of our most prominent buildings stood empty.

The answer, therefore, is unlikely to be one grand scheme. It will require targeted rates relief, accountable grants, affordable premises, cooperation from landlords, better public spaces, intelligent planning and a fairer national tax system. It will also require an honest acceptance that some high streets may need to become smaller in order to become stronger.

More than 100 closures in a year should be treated as a warning. The council should publish a full audit of vacant commercial premises, consult businesses and residents, assess the results of previous funding and produce a clear high-street recovery plan for every part of the district.

Doing nothing is also a decision. If we make it, we should not be surprised when another shutter comes down, another sign goes up and another local business disappears.

The Looker asks the question. What are we prepared to do to save our high streets?



A computer generated image of what our high streets could look like in ten years



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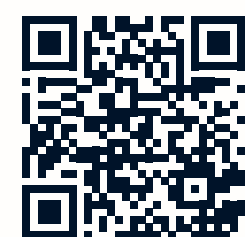
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Folkestone man wants Victorian lift wheel preserved as landmark

A Folkestone history enthusiast wants a colossal piece of Victorian engineering removed during the restoration of the town's historic Leas Lift to be preserved as a permanent public feature.

Resident Bob Mouland hopes the original eight-foot-wide pulley wheel — properly known as a sheave wheel — can be displayed at the foot of the cliff railway rather than disappear from public view.

His proposal is for the wheel to be mounted on a plinth near the lower station or incorporated into the base of the new lower-station building, where visitors would be able to see the machinery that helped carry generations of passengers between Folkestone's seafront and The Leas.

The wheel formed a central part of the lift's original mechanism. A steel rope linking the two passenger cars passed around it at the top of the incline, allowing one car to descend while pulling the other upwards.

Mr Mouland believes displaying the wheel would provide a striking reminder of the ingenuity of Folkestone's Victorian engineers.

Although sometimes described simply as a "cog" or part of the winding gear, the structure is more accurately called a sheave wheel. The Folkestone Leas Lift Company Charity said in 2024 that the original wheel had been sent away for expert assessment but was found to be beyond practical restoration.

A £200,000 grant from Historic England was awarded towards commissioning a replacement, which is essential if the railway is to carry passengers again. The charity said the new wheel would be more visible and accompanied by information explaining how the mechanism works. Leas Lift restoration update

Mr Mouland's ambition would allow the retired wheel to tell a story of its own.

He would like the huge circular structure to become an industrial monument at the lower end of the lift, either standing upright in a purpose-built plinth or incorporated into the new development so that its scale and construction can be appreciated at close quarters.

The officially named Folkestone Leas Lift opened on September 21, 1885, carrying passengers between the clifftop promenade and the beach. Built for the Folkestone Lift Company, its machinery was

supplied by Waygood and Co of Southwark, while the waiting rooms were designed by Folkestone architect Reginald Pope.

The water-balanced funicular works through a simple but ingenious use of gravity. Water is added to a tank beneath the car at the top of the track, making it heavier than the car below. As the heavier car travels downhill, it pulls the lighter one upwards along the parallel track.

The lift proved so popular that a second railway was added alongside it in 1890. A pump house and water-recycling system were installed at the same time, allowing water released from the lower car to be pumped back to the top. The second lift ceased operating after a heavy landing in 1966 and was removed in 1985.

The surviving lift was Grade II* listed in 1989 in recognition of its architectural and engineering importance. Historic England describes it as one of only three water-balance cliff lifts retaining their original operating system and highlights its rare machinery, including its 1890 reciprocating pumps, early cast-steel herringbone gears and balance-wheel and brake assembly. Historic England listing

The railway closed in 2017 after safety inspectors required the installation of a secondary fail-safe braking system.

A £6.7 million restoration led by the Folkestone Leas Lift Company Charity is now well under way, supported by £4.8 million from the National Lottery Heritage Fund and grants from other organisations. The work includes the cars, tracks, tanks, pump rooms, waiting rooms and wheel houses, together with a new café, visitor facilities and exhibition space.

The charity's latest plans envisage the lift reopening in spring 2027. Folkestone Leas Lift Company

For Mr Mouland, preserving the original sheave wheel would ensure that an important part of the lift's working history remains on the site.

Displayed beside the restored railway, the vast wheel could become both a landmark and an open-air exhibit showing visitors not only how Folkestone's famous lift looked, but something of the remarkable Victorian engineering that made it move.



Artist Impression of how the monument could look

Insert Bob Mouland

Dates for your Diary

Email your Dates for your Diary to: john@thelooker.co.uk

Wednesday 19th August

Computer Club, Village Hall, St. Mary's Bay, 9.30 a.m.
Bereavement Support Group, Hub on the Beach, 1 p.m.
Woman's Wednesday Club, St. Peter's Hall, Greatstone, 2 p.m.
Needlecraft Club, Old School, New Romney, 7 p.m.
Short Mat Bowling, St. Mary's Bay Village Hall, 7 p.m.

Thursday 20th August

Lydd Meeting Point, Hardy Hall, 10 a.m.
Dance Moves with Chris, St. Mary's Bay Village Hall, 10.15 a.m.
Craft "N" Laughs, St. Peter's Hall, Greatstone, 2 p.m.
Dymchurch Gardening Group, Village Hall, 2 p.m. (3rd Thurs)
Dymchurch Short Mat Bowls, Village Hall, 6 p.m.

Friday 21st August

Friday Art Group, St Mary's Bay Village Hall, 1 p.m.
Garden BBQ, Romney Marsh Community Hub, 12.30 p.m.
Social Ballroom Sequence Dancing, St. Mary's Bay Village Hall, 7 p.m.

Monday 24th August

Dymchurch Meeting Point, Village Hall, 10 a.m.
Sunflower Memory Café, Old School, New Romney, 10 a.m. (2nd & 4th Mon)
Dance Moves, Burton Hall off Stade Street, Hythe, 11 a.m.
The Games Club, St. Peter's Hall, Greatstone, 2 p.m.
New Romney History Society, Old School, 7.30 p.m. (4th Mon)

Tuesday 25th August

Pilates, St. Mary's Bay Village Hall, 10 a.m.
Dance Moves, Burton Hall off Stade Street, Hythe, 10.30 a.m.

Dymchurch Art Society, Village Hall, 1 p.m.
Hearing Loss Support Group, Hub on the Beach, 1 p.m.
Short Mat Bowling, St. Mary's Bay Village Hall, 2 p.m.
New Romney WI, Scouts Hut, 2.15 p.m. (4th Tue)
Foodbank, New Romney Community Church, 4 p.m.
Dymchurch Short Mat Bowls, Village Hall, 6 p.m.

Wednesday 26th August

Computer Club, Village Hall, St. Mary's Bay, 9.30 a.m.
Bridge Meeting Point, New Romney Scouts Hut, 10 a.m. (2nd & 4th Wed)
Diabetes Support Group, Romney Marsh Community Hub, 1.30 p.m.
Woman's Wednesday Club, St. Peter's Hall, Greatstone, 2 p.m.
Needlecraft Club, Old School, New Romney, 7 p.m.
Short Mat Bowling, St. Mary's Bay Village Hall, 7 p.m.

Thursday 27th August

Lydd Meeting Point, Hardy Hall, 10 a.m.
Dance Moves with Chris, St. Mary's Bay Village Hall, 10.15 a.m.
Pebbles Dementia Café, St. Peter's Hall, Greatstone, 10.30 a.m. (2nd & 4th Thurs)
Craft "N" Laughs, St. Peter's Hall, Greatstone, 2 p.m.
Dymchurch Short Mat Bowls, Village Hall, 6 p.m.

Friday 28th August

Ex-Armed Forces Breakfast Club, Romney Marsh Community Hub, 9 a.m.
Friday Art Group, St Mary's Bay Village Hall, 1 p.m.
Brookland Meeting Point, Village Hall, 1.30 p.m. (4th Fri)
Social Ballroom Sequence Dancing, St. Mary's Bay Village Hall, 7 p.m.

Saturday 29th August

DYMCHURCH DAY-OF-SYN WEEKEND
Indoor Market, Maude Community Centre, New Romney, 10 a.m.

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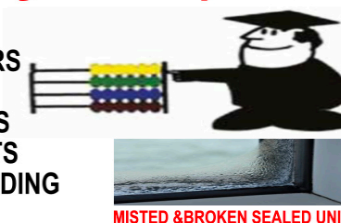


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2026 - The Scouting Adventure Continues

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You get one unforgettable day at the Rare Breeds Centre in Woodchurch! On Saturday 4th July, Squirrels, Beavers and Cubs from 1st Lydd; 1st Dymchurch and 1st New Romney took part to celebrate these incredible Scouting birthday milestones together as Romney Marsh District.



From the moment we arrived, the adventure began. 1st Lydd, along with 1st Dymchurch Explorers proudly adopted two beautiful rabbits, Smokey and Bandit, and even had the chance to meet Smokey in the Children's Barn for a very special photo. 1st New Romney adopted Lionel, a Swiss Valois Blacknose Sheep. We saw Lionel with his best friend Vinnie, a Zwartble sheep – adopted by 1st Dymchurch - it was a hot day and they were both napping in the paddock!! We also couldn't leave without



visiting the Leaders' adopted Highland bull, Huckleberry—who was every bit as magnificent as we'd hoped!

The day was packed with fun: Meeting some incredible animals, Riding the tractor trailer, Burning off energy in the outdoor play areas, Playing games together in the Discovery

Garden, Cheering on the pigs in the pig races. We all finished the day with a delicious ice cream. By home time there were lots of aching legs, sleepy eyes and very happy faces.



As part of our special celebration we welcomed former County Beaver Leader - Kathy Blanc – who started Beavers on Romney Marsh over 40 years ago – what a brilliant idea - the beginning of 44 years of Beaver Scouting on Romney Marsh. . . . Harvey, a Beaver from 1st Dymchurch chose to be officially invested in the Beaver Scouts on our special day – Thank you to Kathy, Jess and the Dymchurch Leaders for facilitating this and making it a memorable day for Harvey.

Days like these remind us exactly what Scouting is all about—trying new things, making friends, building confidence and creating memories that our young people

will treasure for years to come. A huge thank you to every leader and parent helper who gave up their time to make the day possible. Your support means we can give our young people opportunities like this, and we couldn't do it without you. Now it's your turn to enjoy the day with us! Have a scroll through the photos and let us know which one is your favourite! Better still come along and join in with the Scouting Adventure in our new term – Groups are currently enjoying a well earned summer break – THE SCOUTING ADVENTURE resumes in September. Find your local group via our website - romneymarshscouts.org.uk - or on Facebook, better still - come long to a meeting – live life on the wild side – it promises to be bucket loads of fun.



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A photograph showing large, rusted metal structures, likely remnants of a collapsed bridge or pier, lying on a rocky beach. In the background, a sandy beach, the ocean, and a coastal town are visible under a cloudy sky.

Folkestone and Hythe District Council has approved the funding to repair the concrete breakwater at Mermaid Beach, a popular section of the town's

The damage was caused by a single storm and will not be covered by the council's insurance because of the nature of the weather event.

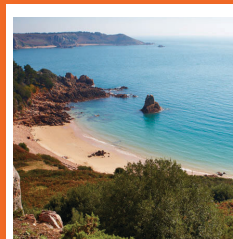
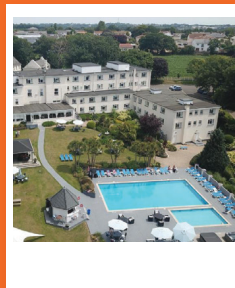
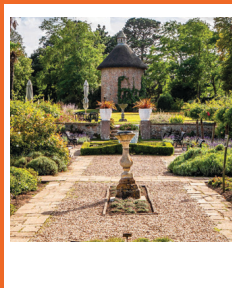
He said: "I could not believe the damage was caused by one single storm and, unfortunately, it was not covered by our insurance due to the nature of the weather event."

The repairs will focus on the damaged concrete structure and walkway. The adjoining rock structure, which provides protection to the coastline, was not damaged by the storm.

The authority has approved spending of up to £200,000, although the final cost of the repairs has not been confirmed.

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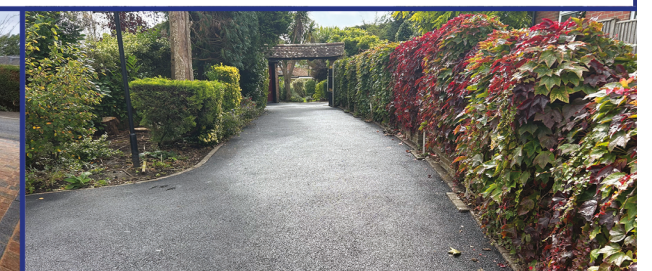
Long time New Romney Resident passes away

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The King Of REGGAE

Singer Ali Campbell on longevity, live music, and why home matters.

More than four decades after the rise of UB40, Ali Campbell remains one of the most recognisable voices in British music. While many artists from the era have been unwilling to keep up with a rapidly changing industry, the 67-year-old continues to tour extensively, performing the songs that helped define a generation.

"There's something incredibly special about hearing thousands of people sing those songs back to you," he begins. "You realise the music has become part of people's lives. It's attached to memories, relationships and moments they never forgot."

Campbell first found fame in the late 1970s and early '80s as UB40 emerged from Birmingham with a distinctive blend of reggae, pop and socially conscious lyrics. Songs such as *Food for Thought*, *Red Red Wine*, *The Earth Dies Screaming* and *Kingston Town* went on to become international hits.

"We were never trying to chase trends," Campbell explains. "We came from working-class backgrounds and wrote about what we

saw around us. Even when the music became more commercial, there was always honesty in it."

That authenticity, he believes, explains why audiences continue to connect with the material decades later.

"People still want songs with warmth and melody," he says. "Music moves very quickly now, but the songs that survive are usually the ones that feel genuine."

Touring remains a huge part of Campbell's life, even if in-band politics has seen him reinvent the UB40 brand.

"I still love being on the road," he says. "Of course it's tiring sometimes, but once the lights go down and the crowd starts singing, you remember exactly why you do it. Live music gives you an energy you can't replace anywhere else."

"It helps as well that reggae has such soul to it. It's a genre of music that makes people feel good, but it can also carry powerful messages underneath."

Despite the success, Campbell speaks modestly about fame.

"I've never been particularly interested in celebrity," he admits. "It doesn't do much for me, and I lot of it I find quite vacuous. The important thing for me was always the music and the connection with the audience. Music is, more than anything else, the thing that can transport someone from one place to another, and that's so valuable."

Away from performing, Campbell increasingly values quieter moments and family life. "When you're younger you think success means constant movement," he reflects. "As you get older, you appreciate balance far more. Spending time at home becomes important, and home will always be Birmingham."



Looking Back

Take a step back in time with us as we look at a series of past events to have occurred in the month of August.

1 year ago

Angela Rayner, the UK's Deputy Prime Minister and Housing Secretary, is involved in a major political controversy regarding her personal tax affairs and property purchases, prompting her removal from the cabinet.

10 years ago

The Rio 2016 Olympic Games sees Team GB win 67 medals, earning a second-place medal table finish. Key standout wins include Adam Peaty's 100m breaststroke world record gold, Max Whitlock's double gymnastics gold, and the women's hockey team's dramatic penalty shootout victory.

20 years ago

Police arrest 24 people (later more) in London, Birmingham, and High Wycombe regarding an imminent plot to blow up aeroplanes travelling to the US.



25 years ago

Tory MP Neil Hamilton and his wife Christine are arrested and questioned for five hours at Barkingside police station in east London regarding allegations of serious sexual assault made by Nadine Milroy-Sloan.

The couple are later revealed to be at a dinner party at Claridge's in London on the night of the alleged incident, and cleared of all charges.

50 years ago

As the dramatic heatwave of 1976 reaches almost unbearable levels, hundreds of thousands standpipes begin to go into the ground as certain areas are told to reduce water consumption by two fifths, or have rationing imposed on them. August concludes what has become the driest 16-month period since records began in 1772.

40 years ago

Madonna's album *True Blue* begins a five-week run at number one in the UK charts from August 16th. In the singles charts, Chris de Burgh (*Lady in Red*) and Boris Gardiner (*I Want to Wake Up with You*) occupy the top spot across the month.

100 years ago

The first Butlin's Holiday



Camp in Ingoldmells, near Skegness, announces it is fully operational, establishing a new, affordable standard for British family holidays.

200 years ago

The first Cowes Regatta is held on the Isle of Wight. Now known as Cowes Week, it will go on to become established as a regular yachting event, one of the oldest and longest-running regattas in the world.





Marsh Memories

Compiled by John Wimble

Memories from 100 years ago

Among the schools on the Marsh were Church of England Mixed Schools at New Romney and Lydd. At New Romney, dinners were available for children who couldn't pop home for lunch and cost 6d. per meal. Every year just before Christmas, crackers and oranges were distributed to the children and a special Christmas Dinner was provided in the School Canteen. Each class had a games period at the end of one afternoon every week and most children stayed at school until they were 14. Their sports ground was the old churchyard, which is now St. Martin's Field. The older children were taught woodwork and cookery, and a popular lesson of the time was gardening. No foreign languages were taught in those days. The head teachers in the 1920s were Mr. A. W. Williamson and Mr. Sidney Fletcher. Some pupils at both schools were awarded free scholarships at Southlands Grammar School.



Experiments with sound mirrors first started during World War One when attempts were made to detect the position of the enemy's artillery guns. Sound Mirrors, also known as Listening Ears, were large concrete structures designed as an early warning system to detect enemy aircraft. There were three designs of mirrors and all three could be seen in Greatstone and they ranged in size from 20 to 200 feet and were built at the end of the 1920s. They were designed to pick up the sound of approaching enemy aircraft by sound waves caught in the centre of the mirror and relayed back through microphones to the operator. The small mirror was the first to be built and was precast as one huge slab of curved concrete.

A slightly larger one was built a couple of years later and was set at a different angle to provide greater accuracy. The large mirror, 200ft in length and 26ft high, was built alongside the other two smaller mirrors and is a near vertical, curved wall, and is one of only two similar acoustic mirrors in the world. The 30ft mirror is a circular dish, similar to a deeply curved satellite dish and is supported on concrete buttresses. And the 20ft mirror is similar with a smaller, shallower dish. Microphones were attached to the curved surfaces and in favourable conditions could pick up the sounds of aircraft up to 24 miles away. The mirrors were used to detect slow moving enemy aircraft before they came into sight, but they quickly became obsolete due to the invention of radar and were abandoned in the 1930s.

The Duke and Duchess of York visited the Camp at the Romney Aerodrome in Jesson (St. Mary's Bay). The duke and his wife came from Ashford by car via Snaive and Ivychurch and inspected the Camp and Buildings and had luncheon at the residence of the resident engineer. They watched some sports and finally after being photographed with the Camp boys and officials, they left by car for Ashford.



At a meeting of Dymchurch Parish Council in 1921, an estimate of £7,000 was given from Littlestone Water Company to supply to the village with mains water. It was agreed to ask the Rural District Council to help to finance the scheme.

In 1926, a Christmas Party was arranged for the children of Dymchurch in the Marshlands Hotel. Over 150 youngsters attended and there was an abundance of food, oranges, nuts and other Christmas fare.

A good selection of second-hand books had been

added to the New Romney Institute and Free Library for the use of annual subscribers. Subscribers were reminded that their subscriptions entitled them to the free use of the Reading Room where a good selection of Daily, Weekly and Monthly Papers could be seen including The Times, Daily Mail, Daily Chronicle, Daily Sketch and London Illustrated News. Inhabitants of the town would soon have some new lights in the streets of the town. The new street lights would light and put themselves out automatically. At the New Romney Sunday School Prize Distribution winners included Norman Rabson, Kitchener Masey, Jack Wire, Harry Simpson, George Barman, Elsie Couchman, Ena Humphery, Maisie Grocott, Vera Masey, Mildred Jones, Ethel Prior and Evelyn Hartop.



The Dymchurch Observer Corps was a voluntary organisation and was formed recently. The founder members were J. Brewer and A. Gearing and other members included H. Clayton, W. Cooper, M. Upton, E. Woodland, A. Wraight, W. Hoper and D. Sharp.

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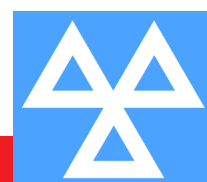


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Postcards From The Past



Above: Brookland High Street, c.1905.

Below: Littlestone Road, c.1940s.



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Gardening

By Michael Gooch

It s hard to find anything positive to say about gardening at present, as the drought continues! Kent was officially labelled as being in drought the other day. I'm surprised it wasn't declared earlier. We are, as before, saving every drop of grey water to keep our vegetables and flowers alive; not thriving, but alive! With a traditional system our water takes a little while to run hot, so we are saving every drop of that as well, and putting a pail under the shower head, until it runs warm. We are putting that clean water on the large tubs with acid loving plants in them, Azeleas, rhododendrons, and camellias. We read you shouldn't put washing up water on them because of the soap content, which is alkaline.

The one plant that is striving in the heat is tomatoes. I think it will be a short burst of season, because the greenhouse ones and the outdoor ones have come at the same time. Usually, the outdoor ones come later. Apart from making soup, you can freeze them after preparation. I skin them by piercing the skins, put them into boiling water and the skin will peel away. Lift them out onto a plate, and with a sharp knife and fork, ease the skin away from the tomato, which happens easily and place skins in a separate dish. Then, cut up your skinned tomatoes, and put into a small saucepan and stew for about 5 minutes. Place into small containers and freeze, and they can be taken out later, and used in recipes that require tinned tomatoes, or as a tasty side to a grill or on toast.

The roses seem to enjoy the heat and continue to flower, so keep dead heading them for continued flowering. Don't just cut the head off, but go down two or three set of leaves to a healthy-looking pair of leaves and cut immediately above it. Dahlias are bravely trying hard, and will need dead heading. In the same way cut above a healthy pair of leaves. If you miss the chance to dead head and they go to a seed head, it can be difficult to identify up coming buds and spent ones. Fresh buds are rounded, and spent ones are more pointed.

Apples are beginning to come and are hit and miss, but the good parts can be salvaged and frozen. I peel the apple, cut it across the middle, and cut away the good bits and immediately place in cold water to prevent them going brown. While doing this have a saucepan of water coming up to the boil. When boiling pop in the apple pieces for about a minute. This is called blanching. Depending on the type, the blanching period will vary. Dessert apples may take slightly longer, and don't even boil bramley and other cooking apples, just put them in the boiling water and switch off the heat. They go down to a mush very quickly. Blanching is just arresting the process of decay, ready for freezing.

If you have the apples for more than one batch, strain the fruit through a sieve to another saucepan, and bring that back to the boil, and repeat the process. Cool down the fruit rapidly by running under a cold tap. When cooled, put into plastic bags with a few spoonfuls of sugar, and freeze. I put 8ozs(250g) in each bag, enough for a modest crumble or pie. If this sounds a bit fiddling, once you get into a routine, it only takes 10-15 mins. If you smaller

quantities at the end, just put them in a labelled bag to make apple sauce when you have pork.

AND NOW FOR THE VEG

Well, the veg garden is in a very sorry state, and in all our years of gardening we can't remember such prolonged heat and drought, even back in 1976. Runner beans are sporadic and we've been picking them as soon as they get to three or four inches, as they start producing seeds and get tough and stringy. The leeks have stopped growing and are tall and thin, which means they will start to bolt as soon as we get some rain. The chances of them thickening out seem rather slim. Lettuce seeds still refuse to germinate despite frequent watering and at the moment there seems little point in sowing brassicas ready for planting out later in the year, ready for next year's crop. All in all, a very depressing scene.

If you have squashes, melons and cucumbers, these are very thirsty crops so keep the compost moist and feed every week. These crops will probably produce tendrils which help to support the plants, but they do take away energy from the plant which is better channelled to produce fruit. So, remove these tendrils and provide support for the plants to climb such as strong netting, tying the fruits individually to the supports. Although this is a bit fiddly, it will help to prevent the plant from collapsing under the weight of fruits. Remove any side shoots which are not bearing fruit, again this concentrates the plant's energy into fruit production.

If you are growing cucumbers which are not the F1 variety, such as Telegraph, they produce two kinds of flowers, male and female. The female flowers will have tiny cucumbers inside, so remove the male flowers as these will produce bitter cucumbers if allowed to pollinate with the females on the same plant. The more modern varieties produce only female flowers, these are the F1 varieties and require less attention.

We gave up growing the above plants some years ago as they were very time-consuming for what harvest they gave. However, with the likelihood of hotter summers it may be worth considering using the greenhouse for these crops and growing tomatoes outside. These latter are doing better outside than in the greenhouse, which seems rather strange. Tomatoes of course like heat and light, so if they're getting it outside there is little point in growing them in the greenhouse when it could be used for something a bit different. Worth serious thought.

On a practical level, have a look round your property and see if you can devise ways of collecting and saving more rainwater. In the meantime, happy gardening!

Budgeting Tips

By June Gooch



“Mon ami, Hastings, use your leetle grey cells!”

Everyone who has ever read, listened, or watched the stories of Agatha Christie's famous detective will know, that Hercule Poirot has a side kick called Captain Hastings. Hastings always wants him to be rushing about gathering clues, but Poirot is a believer in talking to people and quietly thinking out the problem of who-dun-it. He is always telling Hastings to use his brain, rather than jumping to conclusions, believing what he is told, and rushing after material clues.

There is a terrible book I read when young called “Brave New World” by Aldous Huxley. In it, mankind has been reduced to mindless, enslaved zombies working in intolerable conditions controlled by ‘Brains’. If I remember correctly the brains are literal. They have evolved without arms and legs because everything is being done for them.

A frightening book, partly because we are on the road to this terrible ‘Brave New World’. We are in danger of letting tech and machinery do everything for us. Some years ago, the government of Sweden spent a vast amount of money, putting a laptop or screen into the hand of every school child. They were surprised when children's cognitive ability fell off a cliff. They wouldn't have been, if they had asked the average wise grandmother! They are now spending an equal amount on putting books and pens and pencils back in the classrooms. Much research in recent times has highlighted the fact that the human brain learns better from books, and writing by hand creates all sorts of important connections in the brain.

Some American states have learnt the same lesson, and are putting books and writing back into the classroom. We can't go back and undo the IT revolution, but we need to be very wise in our approach to how much we delegate to electronics and machines. British schools are very heavily into screens and entering work electronically, but at least they are waking up to the damage phones can do among youngsters in school. When we fell out with our pals at school, it was just between a few of us and mostly soon forgotten. Nowadays arguments between school children goes viral and become international incidents. Life has become too intense and people have lost their sense of balance!

In the 1960s there was a peculiar series called “The Prisoner” where the hero tried to retire from MI6, but was taken off to a pretend paradise, and given a number, lost his name and was imprisoned there. Noone really “got it” but the programme and the place where it was filmed became famous. It was filmed at the Italian village at Port Merion in North Wales and we have been there. But the frightening part is that it is coming true. We have all become numbers, our lives couldn't function without us being “numbers” and in some cases numbers have become more important than our names!

We had a holiday on the Algarve in early spring. Being a package holiday, we were picked up in a minibus to take us back to Faro airport. We were the last to be picked up, and I was squashed in beside a young man. I automatically said

hello, but got no response, he was scrolling on his phone. For that journey of over an hour, he didn't once look up from his phone. When we travel abroad, we are interested in everything. The difference in culture, people, language, road conditions, towns, and what is growing in the wild and in people's gardens, I find fascinating. The young man was with a girl the other side of him, obviously together, but she was the same, hardly said anything. I wondered if he could put the Algarve on a map of Portugal, or even Portugal on a map of Europe? They might as well be in Brighton with cheap booze!

By choice we haven't got a satnav. I love maps and atlases. We spent an enjoyable 2 weeks in northern France at the end of June, navigating our way around with the wonderful Michelin Atlas. If you ever go to France, that can be your bible! (We got caught in the first of the dreadful heat domes, but that is another story.) I was reading a story of an older woman in the US who lived at the other side of a city to her daughter and grandchildren, for whom she babysat frequently. One day the daughter was taking her back home, when she set up her satnav. “Surely,” said mum “you don't need that any more, you've done the journey dozens of times.”

“Oh” said the daughter “I never look where I'm going just follow the dot.” Mother was dumbfounded. If a mature married woman is so mindless, what chance is there for her children?

While we are fully computer literate, bank on line, book events and journeys and buy items on line, we try and use our brains and manual methods when we can. I write diaries, journals, logs, shopping lists, thank you letters, charts for medications, and accounts from our baking stall, all done with pen and paper. We are approaching the age when you begin to worry about dementia, so anything that keeps our brains active is good. We read a lot, do all sorts of puzzles, eat well and my dear husband loves to have something to organise! We also have an older car, so we still have to drive it and change gear, although it has got some electronic devices. Our old motorhome is even more of a challenge, with wind down windows and no central locking: we have to remember to lock driver and cab doors manually. We love it!

It is fortunate that we are “with it”; so often people are glued to their phones, or in a world of their own with headphones and they just drift across the road without looking and you have to brake sharply. I know headphones are valuable to special needs people, (from family experience) but I wonder if they are often an excuse for being unsociable and not bothering with the people around you?

So, let's make the effort to use our leetle grey cells. What has this to do with budgeting? Everything. If you are thinking and using your brain, you can make better decisions about what you buy, and generally in life. It will save you from being a mindless zombie, just following the crowd, enslaved by advertising and fashion.

The Lowe deal: should Reform make peace with its bitterest rival?

Rupert Lowe was once one of Reform UK's most compelling speakers. I remember hearing him at a party conference several years ago and liking what I heard: articulate, confident and seemingly equipped with the business experience Westminster so conspicuously lacks.

A great deal has happened since then.

Lowe's relationship with Reform ended amid allegations concerning his conduct towards staff and alleged threats against the party's then-chairman, Zia Yusuf. Lowe denied wrongdoing throughout. For completeness, the Crown Prosecution Service later decided that the alleged threats should not result in charges because there was insufficient evidence to provide a realistic prospect of conviction.

What followed, however, was not a dignified disagreement between former colleagues. Lowe attacked Nigel Farage and the party that had carried him into Parliament, established Restore Britain and began gathering assorted Reform defectors, expelled members and political outcasts.

His movement has since become a registered party. It has attracted attention online and benefited from Elon Musk's praise of Lowe. Yet the mythical multimillion-dollar Musk cheque—excitedly anticipated by some supporters—has never publicly materialised. Social-media applause is not the same as a bank transfer, and an approving post from the world's richest man does not pay election deposits or printing bills.

Now Lowe wants dialogue with Reform.

That request should be considered—but from a position of clear-eyed political reality, not sentimentality.

Read some coverage of Reform's administration in Kent, including reporting filtered through what I regard as Simon Finlay's consistently hostile, left-wing lens in the Kent Messenger, and you might imagine the county had descended into chaos.

The figures tell a rather different story.

At Kent County Council's annual meeting in May, the Reform administration reported that the authority's long-term debt had fallen from £732 million to £590 million in its first year—a reduction of £142 million.

That cut was said to save approximately £1.2 million a year in interest. Opposition councillors argued that some of the reduction reflected maturing liabilities and asset sales, which is a legitimate point for scrutiny. But liabilities still have to be managed, priorities set and borrowing controlled. Reform promised financial discipline, and debt has fallen substantially on its watch.

The council also reported £67 million of highways investment and more than 50,000 pothole repairs, alongside accelerated resurfacing. Whatever national commentators think of Reform, those are tangible things Kent residents can see beneath their wheels.

There have been multimillion-pound savings in home-to-school transport, tighter control of adult social-care expenditure and a balanced budget that avoided raising council tax by the maximum permitted amount. Adult social care consumes an enormous share of the council's resources; bringing overspending under greater control is serious administration, not a slogan.

Then there is energy.

Reform's Kent administration has scrapped the previous climate-emergency approach and begun developing an energy strategy intended to protect agricultural land from industrial-scale solar sprawl. Reform is not arguing that Britain should produce less energy. It is arguing that carpeting productive countryside with solar panels while importing food and energy is economically incoherent.

Its more ambitious answer is nuclear power at Dungeness: pursuing small modular reactors, potentially accompanied by a manufacturing facility capable of producing modular power-station components. The proposal for four reactors is not yet a completed project, and it will require government, regulatory and commercial support. But it represents the sort of industrial ambition Britain has lacked—reliable domestic power, skilled employment and manufacturing investment rather than another field disappearing beneath glass and steel.

Nationally, Reform's position is equally difficult to dismiss. The party says it now has more than 2,400 councillors, eight MPs and control gained of 14 councils in the 2026 local elections. Meanwhile, Conservative leader Kemi Badenoch's party has repeatedly moved towards positions Reform helped make politically unavoidable. Reform is increasingly seen not merely as a protest vehicle, but as a capitalist, right-of-centre party occupying ground the Conservatives abandoned.

Restore Britain has chosen a narrower road.

Its programme is dominated by mass deportations and other uncompromising cultural policies, including a burqa ban and a referendum on capital punishment. Tommy Robinson has endorsed the

project, while former BNP figures and other activists from the further reaches of the Right have publicly gravitated towards it. That does not make every Restore member an extremist, but it creates an image problem Lowe cannot simply wave away.

Lowe risks becoming a one-trick pony: eloquent, energetic and permanently furious about immigration, but without Reform's breadth, organisation or record of running major councils.

The recent Norfolk Police and Crime Commissioner by-election offered a useful reality check. Reform won decisively, while Restore's Mark Buckton received 13,319 votes. That was enough to demonstrate a following—but nowhere near enough to demonstrate a route to national power. Restore may retain Great Yarmouth because of Lowe's personal vote, although even that cannot be assumed. Beyond it, the party's greater immediate capacity may be to prevent Reform victories rather than secure its own.

That is why Farage is right to leave the door ajar.

Under first-past-the-post, 900 votes cast for a rival party of the Right could be enough to hand a marginal constituency to Labour, the Liberal Democrats or the Greens. Voters demanding change would receive more of the politics they rejected, while two supposedly insurgent parties congratulate themselves on their ideological purity.

A limited electoral understanding should therefore be explored. It need not mean a merger, shared manifesto or surrender to Restore's most extreme demands. Reform, as the larger and electorally successful party, must set the terms. Restore could avoid standing in constituencies where Reform has the strongest prospect; Reform could consider exceptional local arrangements where Lowe or another demonstrably credible candidate is clearly better placed.

But any deal must end the poison. Lowe cannot spend every waking hour denouncing Reform, welcome its defectors and then demand generosity when campaign realities bite. Cooperation requires discipline, not another platform from which to attack Farage.

There is an old political saying: it is better to be inside the tent looking out than outside looking in. Lowe must decide whether he wants influence over Britain's future or merely ownership of an increasingly expensive protest.

Reform should talk to him—not because it needs rescuing, but because the country cannot afford to have change defeated by vanity, vendetta and a few hundred wasted votes.



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Wildlife

By Kerry King

Secrets in the Silk

Along the coastline between Dungeness and Folkestone, wildlife often reveals itself in unexpected ways. This interesting discovery was not a bird overhead or a fox crossing a field, but a tiny cluster of newly hatched spiders gathered silently among the leaves of English ivy.



At first glance, the pale bundle suspended in silk looked almost insignificant, easily mistaken for a scrap of fluff caught in the plant. Yet through the close-up lens of a camera, an extraordinary scene emerged — dozens of spiderlings tightly huddled together in a protective mass of silk, each one only millimetres in size.

These are likely young orb-weaver spiders from the genus *Araneus*, the same family responsible for the intricate circular webs often seen stretched across gardens and hedgerows later in the year. Shortly after emerging from their egg sac, the spiderlings remain clustered together temporarily for protection before dispersing into the surrounding landscape.

Their choice of home is no accident. English ivy (*Hedera helix*), one of Britain's most familiar evergreen climbers, provides valuable shelter for countless small creatures. Its



dense leaves protect insects, birds and spiders from wind, rain and predators, creating an important miniature habitat within our coastal environment.

For these tiny spiders, survival is uncertain. Only a small number will ever reach adulthood. Many will eventually release strands of silk to catch the wind in a remarkable behaviour known as "ballooning", allowing them to drift away and establish territories of their own.

Despite the fear spiders sometimes inspire, orb weavers are harmless to humans and highly beneficial to gardens, helping control flies, mosquitoes and other insects naturally.

Moments like this are a reminder that nature's most fascinating stories are often the easiest to overlook. Hidden within a patch of ivy is an entire world of survival, shelter and new beginnings waiting to be noticed.

Picture 1: Artist's impression: A1 generated image used for illustration, licenced to Kerry King

Picture 2: Newly hatched orb-weaver spiderlings gathered in protective silk among English ivy leaves before dispersing into the surrounding habitat. Credit: Kerry King

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Vinny's Media

Welcome Lookerites to a new batch of cinema reviews for your enjoyment. The World Cup is over and while I am buzzing with anticipation for another football season. Saturday 15th September is firmly etched in my calendar when Millwall take on West Ham at The New Den but until then I've got some great films to get through.

In this issue we start with a recent blockbuster fresh to Amazon Prime starring Ryan Gosling, a creepy horror from Amazon Prime, an Amazon Prime outing for Dwayne 'The Rock' Johnson, Amazon Primes Giant, the story of Prince Naseem Hamed and the latest horror from Eli Roth.



Fresh from the cinema and straight to streaming is science fiction film **Project Hail Mary - Amazon Prime** free streaming. When teacher Ryland Grace (Gosling) wakes up from an induced coma on the space craft Hail Mary he soon learns he is the only survivor of the three-man crew that was travelling to Tau Ceti. The sun is burning out which in turn would lead to global cooling. Grace, a former molecular biologist, joins the Petrova taskforce to find a solution. Told in flashbacks we learn that Grace was pressganged into joining a suicide mission to Tau Ceti, the only star in Earth's solar system not affected, to find out why Tau Ceti wasn't affected.

Grace soon encounters an alien spaceship made up of Xenon. The ship is occupied by a rock like 5-legged alien from Erid who Grace names 'Rocky' Grace creates a machine to communicate with Rocky, who he learns is a mechanical engineer and like himself the only survivor of

the Eridans mission to save their planet. Grace and Rocky combine to work together to save their respective planets and so begins an extra-terrestrial alliance. With neither being able to work in each other's atmosphere Rocky works in a ball of xenonite.

As expected, the pair face a number of difficult situations in space but working together will save their planets.

Project Hail Mary is an excellent heartwarming space adventure that makes you care about the relationship between Grace and Rocky. Gosling is brilliant as the reluctant hero forced into an impossible situation and forced to work with his sometimes-irritating alien friend. Rocky is lovable and the pair find strength in each other as they fight a seemingly impossible battle. The special effects portray the enormity of the task they face and the ending while cheesy will bring a smile to your face.

The artifact horror isn't a new concept to the genre. The latest is **Whistle - Amazon Prime**. When high school basketball star Mason sees repeated visions of a burned man he bursts into flames and dies. Months later new student Chrys is given Mason's locker and finds a skull shaped whistle. When Chrys is provoked by Mason's friend Dean the pair end up in detention with Rel, Grace, Ellie, and the whistle.

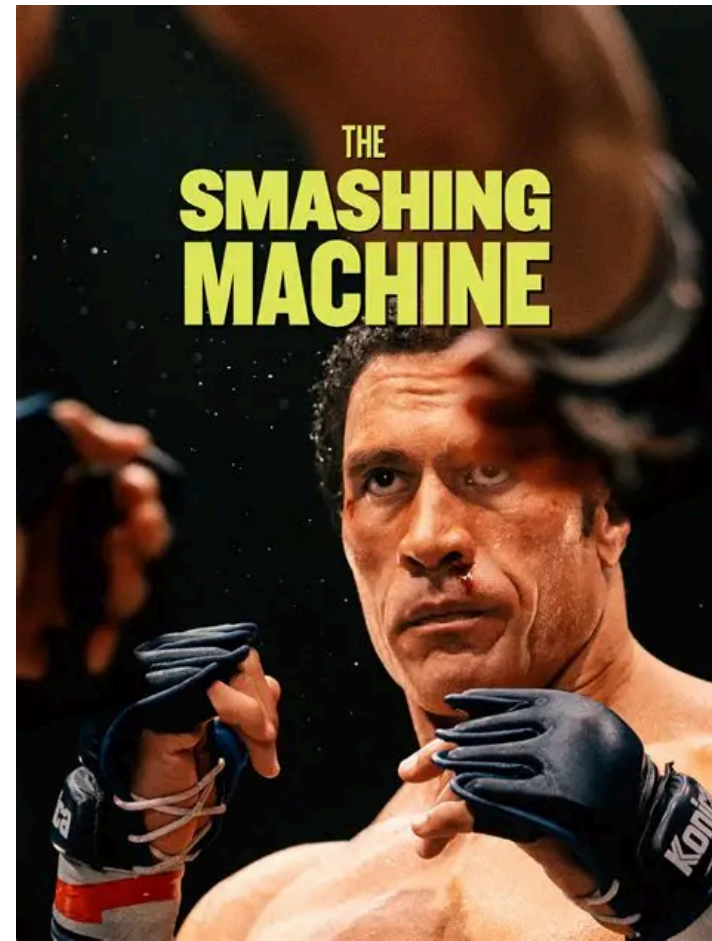


After the detention, the teacher Mr Craven blows the whistle while Rel steals the whistle. Mr Craven dies at the hands of a grotesque apparition of himself. With the whistle in their possession the 'detention detainees all blow the whistle.

Chrys and Ellie discover via Mason's grandmother that the whistle is an Aztec death whistle inscribed with the words "Summon your death" Anyone who blows the whistle is killed by a manifestation of their pending death. Despite their warnings Grace and Dean meet their maker. They learn that the curse can be ended by marking another with their blood.

Whistle is an atmospheric horror that plays out at a decent pace and carries a fair share of jumpy scares and shocks. The ending as with most horror movies leaves a possible return for the whistle.

Dwayne 'The Rock' Johnson has made a successful career in Hollywood after making the transition from wrestling. You can currently see him in Moana and while he has made a name in Hollywood there is no doubt that he is a fine actor.



This is Johnson's standout performance in **The Smashing Machine - Amazon Prime**. Johnson plays MMA fighter Mark Kerr. Kerr made his name as a wrestler and mixed martial artist. The Smashing Machine focuses on Kerr's relationship with his girlfriend Dawn (Emily Blunt) his struggles with substance abuse and his friendship with fellow wrestler and MMA fighter Mark Coleman.

The Smashing Machine highlights Johnson's acting skills, albeit in a role he is highly qualified to play. The scenes with him and Blunt are highly charged and both capture an extremely explosive relationship that is destined to fall. The film draws upon the experience of MMA fighters Ryan Bader who plays Mark Coleman, Bas Rutten who plays himself and boxer Oleksandr Usyk who add authenticity to the proceedings.

The Smashing Machine plays out as part film, part documentary and is an engaging insight into the world of MMA. This is a glamour free no-holds barred look at the lengths fighters go to for success and the pain they endure.

The Smashing Machine is a must-see film.

Moving onto **boxing Giant - Amazon Prime** tells the story of Prince Naseem Ahmed and his meteoric rise under the guidance of his trainer Brendan Ingle at the Wincobank gym.

Growing up in Sheffield to Yemeni parents. Naz encountered racism from an early age. Naz's mother took Naz and two of his brothers to Ingle's gym and it was soon apparent that the talented and flashy Naz was destined for

bigger things.

Giant takes us a journey as Naz signs with Frank Warren and goes onto lift several world titles before he breaks up with Ingle and loses his unbeaten record to Marco Antonio Barrera. At the age of 28 Naz retired leaving behind a successful career.

Amir El-Masry manages to capture the essence, arrogance and showmanship of Naz and Pierce Bronson is perfect in the role of Ingle with a much better accent than the one in Mobland.

Giant is a worthy testament to the legacy of Prince Naseem and boxing fans will love this.

Horror fans will no doubt have seen the trailer for the hotly anticipated Eli Roth horror **Ice Cream Man - On general release**.

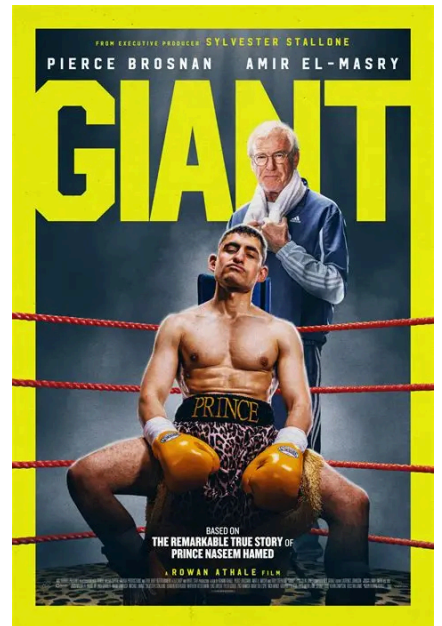
Ice Cream Man tells the story of a sinister Ice Cream Man who gives the local children some very strange Ice Cream flavours which turn the children into homicidal adult killing.

The surviving children the lactose intolerant one, his sister, her would be boyfriend, the one who was sick after consuming the ice cream and the bad ass one are left to fight off the Ice Cream Man and his treats. Meanwhile the adults are dispatched of in a variety of ingenious and thoroughly disgusting ways.

Without giving any of the plot or twists away. Ice Cream Man has a Freddy Kruger type plot, Terrifier deaths, and Children of the Corn villains or should that be 'Children of the Cones'

Ice Cream Man is everything you expect from an Eli Roth horror. Its fast paced has a good plot and inventive deaths. Gore hounds will lap this up in buckets.

That's your lot for this issue. Next issue I promise a review of The Odyessy, the new Spidey movie, Minions and Monsters and I've got a secret screening coming up too. Until then happy viewing.





LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Email: info@thelooker.co.uk

Dear Editor,
I am deeply disappointed by the way some members of the Hythe Community Group on Facebook treat people whose views differ from their own.

At times, the behaviour is vile. Much of the hostility seems to be directed at people who have recently moved to the area. Anyone expressing a different opinion can quickly be made to feel unwelcome—apparently forgetting that many established residents were once newcomers themselves.

My mother used to say: "If you cannot find anything nice to say, say nothing." That advice feels particularly relevant today. It may be called social media, but too often it deserves the name "antisocial media".

A particularly disturbing example came after the editor's shop was broken into and vandalised. Instead of expressing sympathy, much of the ensuing discussion appeared to celebrate the damage. Whatever disagreements people may have, taking pleasure in somebody else's misfortune is utterly disgusting.

Hythe should be a welcoming community in which people can disagree without resorting to cruelty, intimidation or personal attacks. It is time we expected better of one another.

Yours faithfully,

Elizabeth Barnes (West Hythe)

Dear Editor,
I am writing to say what a shame it is that The Looker's coverage does not extend to other parts of Kent. Living in Ashford, I can honestly say that there is nothing quite like it available locally.

Have you ever considered producing a larger edition covering a wider area, or perhaps launching a separate magazine for communities beyond Romney Marsh? I believe there would be considerable interest in a publication offering the same combination of local news, history and community stories.

I have been picking up The Looker from Richardson's Fish Shop in Dungeness for around ten years. After reading each edition, I pass it on to my mother and brother, who used to live in Hamstreet. They both enjoy the local news, particularly the "Marsh Memories" feature, which I understand is written by your brother.

I know that, about a year ago, you considered charging for

the publication. I would like to assure you that we would have no objection at all to paying for such a unique and valuable local magazine. Even at around £1.50 an issue, it would still represent better value than the Kent Messenger and, in our view, contain more worthwhile local news.

Please keep up the excellent work. The Looker is a publication that clearly means a great deal to its readers, including those of us living beyond the Marsh.

Yours sincerely,

John Sargent (Kingsnorth)

*Dear John,
Thank you for your kind words. Unfortunately, due to work commitments, I think the paper's circulation will have to remain as it is for now. Sorry!*

"Marsh Memories" is actually written by my father, John. However, if you saw me as deadline day approaches, you would probably think I looked older than he does and he is a sprightly 89 years young!

Best wishes, David Wimble Editor

Dear Editor,
Do we know what is happening at Lydd Airport and what its future plans are?

We were under the impression that the runway was being extended to accommodate larger aircraft, with the possibility of longer-haul passenger flights serving the holiday trade. At the time, this appeared to be a significant development that could bring new investment, employment and tourism to Romney Marsh and the wider area.

However, nothing seems to have progressed any further. Are there still plans to introduce regular passenger services from Lydd, or have the airport's priorities changed? An update from the airport's owners or the relevant authorities would be of considerable interest to local residents.

It would also be wonderful to know whether there is any possibility of bringing back the Lydd Airshow. The last event was superb and attracted a great many visitors. It was not only an impressive aviation display but a proper day out, with classic cars, craft stalls and other attractions for the whole family.

A revived airshow could be a major draw for Romney Marsh, bringing visitors into the area and providing a valuable boost for local shops, pubs, cafés, accommodation providers and other businesses.

With Folkestone and Hythe District Council scrapping the Folkestone Air Display, there would surely be an opportunity for Lydd to fill the gap. With the right backing and organisation, the return of the Lydd Airshow could become one of the highlights of the local calendar and give residents and visitors something genuinely exciting to look forward to.

Is this an idea that the airport, the council and local businesses might be willing to explore?

Yours faithfully,

Philip Larkin (Appledore)

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Charming Cars

Why the golden oldies on our roads still give new cars a run for their money.

Modern cars are faster, safer and more technologically advanced than ever before. Yet despite touchscreen dashboards, digital assistants and increasingly automated driving systems, many motorists still feel drawn to older vehicles.

Why? Well, for many it's pure nostalgia. Yet for a number of others, the drive for simplicity is just as alluring.

One of the biggest differences is the driving experience itself. Older cars tend to feel more mechanical and connected. Steering is often heavier, gear changes more physical and engines more audible. Drivers are required to engage actively with the car, rather than simply operating it.

Modern vehicles, by contrast, increasingly prioritise refinement and convenience. Adaptive cruise control, lane assistance systems, touchscreens and automated safety features undoubtedly improve comfort and safety; yet some motorists

argue they also remove part of the experience that once made driving enjoyable.

Interiors are another major point of contrast. Today's dashboards are the thing of fantasy at times, and many motorists complain that the simplicity of pressing a button or turning a knob was better in every way compared to managing things through large digital screens.

Older cars also tend to age differently aesthetically. Chrome trim, wooden dashboards, thin steering wheels and simpler body shapes create a sense of individuality that many people feel modern designs lack. Even imperfections – slightly worn leather seats, faded switches or the familiar smell of an older cabin – can become part of a car's charm.

There is also a persistent belief that older cars were somehow more reliable. The reality is more complicated - modern vehicles generally suffer fewer major mechanical failures and last far longer overall. However, when problems do occur, repairs can be significantly more expensive due to complex electronics and software systems.

Older cars, while requiring more regular maintenance, are often mechanically simpler. Enthusiasts frequently enjoy working on them, replacing parts

or carrying out repairs without specialist computer diagnostics.

Perhaps the only area where new cars win every time is in the safety features that promise to minimise risk in any eventuality. The same simply cannot be said for older vehicles that were built in a different era, long before the phrase 'health and safety' was even dreamt up!

Ultimately, it all comes down to personal choice where cars are concerned. The enduring affection we have for older cars seems to be part-physical, part-sentimental.

Whatever vehicle you favour, enjoy the fact that any drive is not simply about getting somewhere efficiently; it's the journey itself.



General Knowledge Crossword

#068

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Across Clues:

2. Three feet of garden space (4)

8. Sound of hesitation (3)

9. Mexican currency units (5)

10. Tiny amounts of liquid (5)

12. Frozen princess with a sister named Elsa (4)

14. Completely and without any doubt (10)

16. What we breathe all around us (3)

17. Put in as an extra (5)

20. Large green vegetable or bone's inner tissue (6)

22. Alternative spelling of a large flightless bird (4)

23. Criminal act of taking what isn't yours (5)

25. Animal waste used to fertilise soil (6)

27. Small measure, a twelfth of a foot (4)

28. Mistake or blunder (5)

29. Has a meal (4)

30. Twenty-four hour periods (4)

31. Hangman's loop of rope (5)

Down Clues:

1. At any time, always (4)

3. Rear bodily opening (4)

4. Drained of resources (8)

5. Cartoon Great Dane with a mystery-solving gang (4)

6. Tropical flowering shrub genus (7)

7. Mischievous little devil (3)

10. Pulls along the ground (5)

11. More pleased with oneself (7)

13. Circus performer doing flips and tumbles (7)

15. Tough tissues connecting bones at joints (9)

18. Relating to the direction of the equator (8)

19. Formal lyric poem of praise (3)

20. Warm-blooded creature that nurses its young (6)

21. Washed clean with water (6)

24. Moves smoothly, like a river (5)

26. Windows to the soul (4)

Answers: Across: 2: Yard; 8: Umm; 9: Pesos; 10: Drops; 12: Anna; 14: Absolutely; 16: Air; 17: Added; 20: Marrow; 22: Emeu; 23: Theft; 25: Manure; 27: Inch; 28: Error; 29: Cats; 30: Days; 31: Noose

Down: 1: Ever; 3: Anus; 4: Depleted; 5: Scooby; 6: Eugenia; 7: Imp; 10: Drags; 11: Proudler; 13: Acrobat; 15: Ligaments; 18: Southern; 19: Ode; 20: Mammal; 21: Rinsed; 24: Flows; 26: Eyes

Hidden Message Wordsearch

T	H	E	M	O	N	N	S	O	G	R	E	K	S	S
P	T	E	R	S	O	R	F	P	T	H	R	E	R	U
M	H	E	I	B	M	O	Z	I	O	A	N	U	D	S
X	A	O	R	E	F	C	N	N	K	L	A	A	C	A
R	N	W	E	O	R	I	T	E	O	T	C	H	S	G
K	E	I	E	N	F	N	R	O	G	I	Y	T	E	
S	W	T	H	F	I	U	A	N	O	M	A	H	C	P
I	A	E	I	P	N	X	I	T	E	L	H	R	O	F
L	S	R	R	R	S	M	G	R	E	T	L	H	D	A
I	G	A	C	E	P	V	A	M	P	I	R	E	T	I
S	A	C	O	T	W	S	C	E	N	T	A	U	R	R
A	Y	P	R	A	H	O	E	L	F	U	A	L	L	Y
B	G	O	B	L	I	N	L	Y	P	I	X	I	E	E
D	I	A	M	R	E	M	X	F	E	I	P	L	E	K
I	S	T	A	R	D	Y	H	E	E	H	S	N	A	B

Mythical Creatures

Once you find all the words, copy the unused letters starting in the top left corner into the blanks to reveal the hidden message.

Banshee	Griffin	Pixie
Basilisk	Harpy	Roc
Centaur	Hydra	Sphinx
Chimera	Kelpie	Sprite
Cyclops	Kraken	Troll
Dragon	Mermaid	Unicorn
Elf	Minotaur	Vampire
Fairy	Ogre	Werewolf
Giant	Pegasus	Zombie
Goblin	Phoenix	

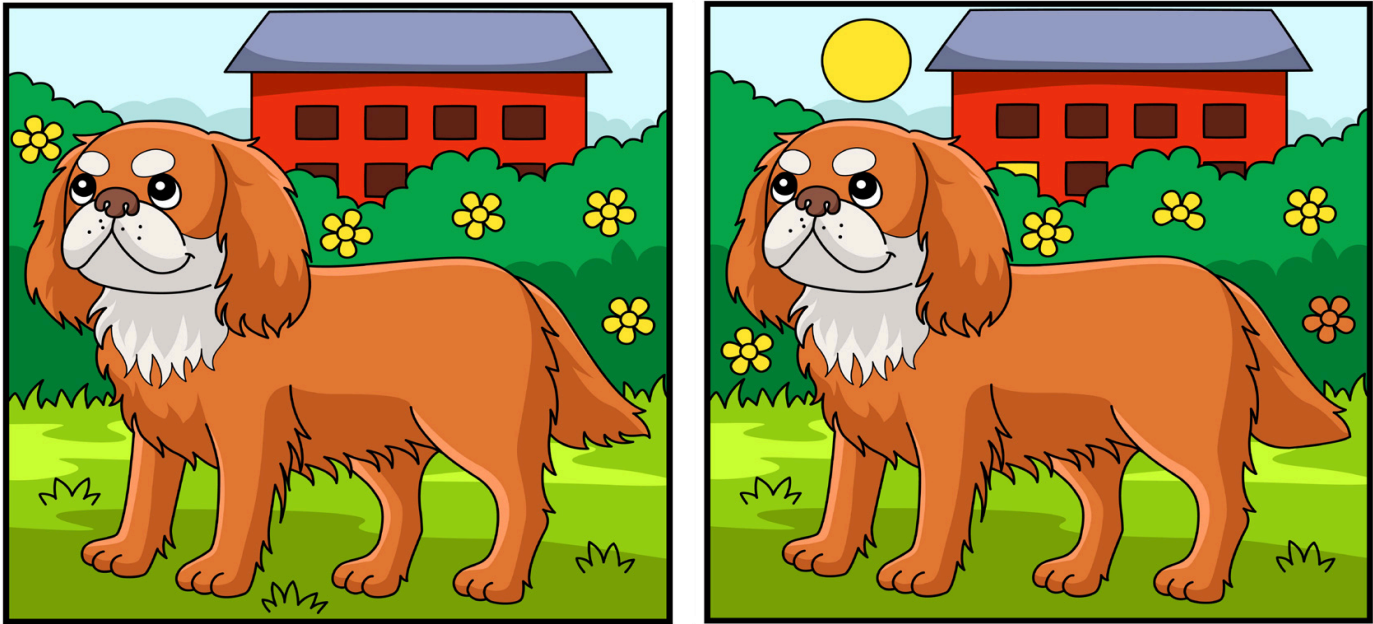
Write the hidden message here:

	1	8	4		6		5	
						7		
		9	2	3	8			6
8	9	3				2	4	
		4	3					
	2			1	4			5
7	4				3		6	
			1			5		4
9					5	8	3	

Sudoku Challenge

Spot the Difference!

There are 8 differences between the two images below.
How many can you spot?



THE RANT!!!



I have been holding back on writing this one, but I could not hold back any longer....

The Yoof of Today: All Pout and No Clout

Before the outrage machine starts coughing into life, let me make one thing clear: this does not apply to all young people. Some are articulate, industrious and perfectly capable of crossing a road without filming a “content journey” about it. Unfortunately, these magnificent creatures are increasingly difficult to spot in the wild.

The rest are the Yoof.

The Yoof appear unable to string together two audible words and turn them into a sentence that makes any sense. Ask one a simple question such as, “Would you like tea?” and you receive: “Yeah, no, literally, sort of, basically... you know what I mean?”

No. I do not know what you mean. Nobody knows what you mean. You have said eight words, contradicted yourself twice and somehow left us both less informed than when we started.

When we were young, we explored. We built camps in woods, climbed trees, dammed streams and got into the sort of mischief that ended with someone’s father shouting, “Who put that shopping trolley on the shed?”

We made bows and arrows from branches and garden twine. They were useless, but they gave us practical lessons in engineering, disappointment and avoiding Trevor’s left eye. We rode bicycles without helmets, knee pads, satellite navigation or a support vehicle. If we fell off, somebody poured tap water on the wound and told us not to drip blood on the carpet.

We built dens from corrugated iron, stolen pallets and one mysteriously acquired pub sign. We learned teamwork, negotiation and which member of the group would betray everyone the moment an adult appeared. It was character-building. Admittedly, the character was sometimes a minor criminal, but it was well-rounded.

The Yoof, by contrast, explore the world through influencers.

What the hell is an influencer?

When I was young, an influencer was Darren from the estate, and your mother would say: “You’re not going out with that wrong ’un. He’s a bad influence.”

Darren’s sphere of influence consisted of three streets, a stolen moped and a suspicious quantity of fireworks. Today, an influencer can reach two million people merely by holding a bottle of shampoo and looking surprised.

“This has literally changed my life.”

It’s conditioner, Tiffany. It hasn’t cured malaria.

I witnessed the full horror recently in Westminster. Nearly every female between the ages of about 13 and 45 appeared to be posing beside a landmark, lips inflated into a trout pout and fingers raised in a Churchillian V-for-Victory salute.

Churchill used that gesture after leading the country through its darkest hour. Tiffany from Hythe uses it because she has located a gin bar in Soho with artificial flowers on the ceiling.

“Hey, guys! You absolutely HAVE to visit this hidden gem!”

It is not hidden. There is a queue around the block, three neon signs and a doorman wearing trousers short enough to reveal his personal trainer.

And who, precisely, is desperate to know what Tiffany thinks of a gin bar?

Her review will be: “The vibe is literally everything.”

What does that mean? Was there seating? Was the gin any good? Did the lavatories have doors? We shall never know. The vibe was everything, leaving no room for useful information.

Apparently these influencers receive gifts. Free meals, free



cosmetics, free holidays and boxes of products they dramatically “unbox” for our entertainment.

Human civilisation spent thousands of years developing literature, theatre and orchestral music, only to reach its cultural summit with a woman called Chardonnay opening a cardboard box and screaming because it contains a candle.

“OH. MY. GOD. GUYS.”

Steady on. It smells of vanilla.

Even more astonishingly, companies pay them. Someone in a glass office has studied a spreadsheet and concluded that the best way to sell moisturiser is to give £8,000 to a man who films himself pointing at captions while pulling the face of a startled haddock.

But influencing is not freedom. It is hostage negotiation with an algorithm.

Tiffany once had 230,000 followers. To survive, she must achieve a sacred 15 per cent engagement rate by posing on Folkestone Harbour Arm with a Pornstar Martini, six layers of make-up and the expression of someone who has just remembered leaving the iron on.

If the likes fall, the metrics dip. If the metrics dip, the algorithm turns against her. Soon she is tumbling down the TikTok charts faster than a piano from a third-floor window.

In desperation, she posts more.

“Morning skincare routine.”

“Mid-morning skincare routine.”

“Skincare routine for recovering from filming my skincare routine.”

Nothing works. She will never recapture the fame she enjoyed on that glorious afternoon when she stalked Andy Murray across the Wimbledon car park and ambushed him with the same V-for-Victory pose.

Murray looked less like a tennis champion and more like a man wondering whether he could serve a restraining order at 140 miles per hour.

What is wrong with these people? Imagine investing the same amount of time in actual work. Real work. Work for which you are paid because you have repaired something, built something, taught someone or prevented an office printer from claiming another human soul.

Influencing is not a career. It is a decade-long fad wearing rented sunglasses. Very soon it will be replaced by artificial intelligence, which can produce an entirely synthetic Tiffany who never needs lunch, never misses a posting schedule and can recommend gin bars in 46 languages.

The virtual influencer will have flawless skin, perfect engagement and absolutely no opinions of her own—so nobody will notice the difference.

Our grandchildren will probably follow computer-generated lifestyle gurus called BlipBlop23, who will advertise imaginary moisturiser while holidaying in a digitally rendered Dubai.

Meanwhile, the real Yoof will sit at home wondering why the algorithm no longer loves them.

Perhaps then they will venture outside. Perhaps they will climb a tree, build a camp and discover there is a whole world beyond the screen.

And perhaps, if civilisation is very lucky, one of them will finally manage to say a complete sentence.

Literally.



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Church Update

By June Gooch

Food Bank. The main food bank for the area, continues in Romney Marsh Community Church on Tuesdays from 4-5.30pm. If you are struggling to feed yourself or your family, ring for a voucher to the Citizens Advice Bureau on 08082 082138. This will enable you to have 3 days' worth of dried and tinned food adapted for the size of your family. Fresh food is also now being made available.

The food bank relies on donations, which can be left in the foyer of the church on North Street during the morning. Most supermarkets have food bank bins.

The demand, unfortunately is not slowing down, and the following items are in short supply. Long life juice, long life milk, cooking oil, washing capsules for clothes, coffee, squash, salad cream, mayonnaise, veggie meals in a tin, and sugar. Fresh food is now being distributed, but depends on availability.

At present they have plenty of tinned goods, (including vegs, beans, tomatoes, potatoes and soup), liquid hand soap, toothpaste and pasta.

The mobile pantry van calls at All Saints Church in Lydd, on Mondays from 10-11am. You can register as a member by calling 07913 573403 (the Rainbow centre) or CAB, number above. After that you can buy a bag of basics for between £5 and £7 depending on the size of your family. Check the venue when you register for your voucher.

The Mobile pantry van is also calling at the Sunflower Community Hub on Rolfe Lane, New Romney, on Fridays between 10.30-11.30am. The conditions are the same, as for the Lydd van.

Village Halls. Many villages and towns on the Marsh have new village halls, which are always available for one off occasions or regular hire. The high costs we are all facing have affected them as well, so they will be very happy to host your event/s. The contact will be on the notice board outside the hall.

Ride and Stride take place on Saturday September 12th. In this event walkers, cyclists and mobility scooters can travel from church to church raising money by sponsorship. If you wish to take part forms will soon be available. The money raised is divided between your own church, and the RM Trust for historic churches. The Historic churches trust has been very generous to many Marsh churches. Volunteers will also be required to staff the churches for the day, to sign form and offer refreshments.

Brenzett, St Eanswith. The big Brenzett club day on August 8th seemed to go very well. The correspondent attended some of the events and those were well support. Perhaps someone on the committee will do a thorough write up.

Brookland, St Augustine.

Don't forget the pantry table in the church porch, both for donations and those in need.

The next sung evensong will be on September 12th at 6.30pm.

The fortnightly midweek HC services continue on alternative Thursdays at 6.30pm. The next one will be on August 27th.

Dymchurch, St Peter and Paul. The church is still in need of help with prayers and intercessions, and an organist to play for the Sunday services. A bible Study group meets at the church on Tuesdays at 10.30am for refreshments and the study starts at 11am and finishes about noon.

Sacristan training (helping with communion) is being offered, so anyone who is interested can let Chris Clark know and your name can be added to the list. Recently some good quality long life floral displays have been purchased, which are very realistic, and will be useful for when the "flower rota" is rather thin!

Day of Syn Weekend. The church will be running a tombola stall on the Recreation Field on Saturday, August 29th. Volunteers and contributions will be very welcome. If you could offer for just an hour it would relieve the main volunteers. If you can help, ring Janet on 07746 590510.

Dymchurch Catholic church, St Monica's on Chapel Road, is open for worship. There will be a regular Sunday mass at 9am.

Dymchurch Methodist church. This is now part of 'Marsh Methodist Church' with a central administration, and services will be on a rotating pattern. See notices for dates.

Greatstone, St Peter. The church hall, attached to the church, is very well used for midweek events. There are clubs and societies of all sorts. Recently the Wednesday morning drop-in has had to be withdrawn, because the numbers were so low, that it wasn't worth continuing.

Craft Fair. The next Craft Fair will take place on Saturday, September 19th, from 10am-2pm, and everyone is invited to this large and diverse craft fair. Several stalls sell edibles of various kinds, and cater for those with restricted diets.

Ivychurch, St George. The March production of "Jane Eyre" was very well received, and enjoyed by the full house audience. It was performed by the "My Theatre" company, and they will be returning on August 30th to perform the "Great Gatsby." Tickets can be obtained from the website, thisismytheatre.com and cost £18. There will be a licenced bar serving drinks and refreshments.

On September 7th, the Amenities Association, is arranging another Barn Dance in the Church, which should be great fun. Cost is £12 for adults, children free. Tickets can be obtained from mlwaite@hotmail.co.uk or on 01797 344144.

Lydd, All Saints. The church hall for all Saints is the Hardy Hall on the Rype. It is, happily, very much used, with events happening nearly day. See the notice board for details. To hire, for one off events, or regular events, ring Maggie Clifton on 07905 433302.

Known as the Cathedral of the Marsh, the church is a very large building, which needs a lot of looking after. The maintenance team always welcome new helpers, even if it only an hour a month. Even if you don't go to church, but feel for the history of the building, contact warden Pat Carter on 01797 320108.

A group of people in Lydd, collect items to help in Ukraine. They accept practically everything, in good condition, that would be useful to people in need. Big items like bikes and sewing machines, medical supplies, toiletries, household equipment etc. They don't want general clothing, (provided by other charities) but hoodies, jog bottoms, T shirts, thick socks, hats and scarves. They buy and convert 4 * 4s as ambulances. If interested in helping or donating, ring Gina on 07874 399422.

Lydd Methodist Church. This is now part of Marsh Methodist Church flannels under one administration, with rotating services. See notices for dates.

New Romney, St Nicholas. Like Lydd church, St Nicholas' is very large and needs a lot of cleaning and care. If anyone has an hour to spare, the church would be very grateful for any help. Maybe you don't attend regularly, but feel for the history of this ancient church, your help would be much appreciated. Call Ann Rolfe on 01797 362719.

Samaritan's purse, the organisation that oversees the shoebox project is also helping with the Ebola crisis in DRC. If interested go to the Samaritan's Purse website, and find out more, and how you can help. As well as delivering shoeboxes to the needy, they have crisis response teams ready at any time.

There will not be a coffee morning and book sale in August, but will be offering cream teas on Sundays, 23rd and 30th August from 2-4pm. All welcome. What nicer way to spend a Sunday afternoon. The church will possibly be a bit cooler than outside!

New Romney Methodist Church. The Saturday morning coffee mornings take place from 10am-noon, and the Meeting Point is on Thursday mornings from 10-12md. Although well attended Meeting Point is having leadership problems and may have to close. If anyone feels they could help to keep this Christian group going, call in on any Thursday morning.

The church is now part of 'Marsh Methodist Church' and services are on a rotating basis. See notices for details.

Newchurch, St Peter and Paul. The next coffee morning will be on Saturday, September 5th from 10.30am - 12.30pm. All welcome to come along and support the village and meet fellow villagers. Big apologies from yours truly, the correspondent, for getting the time wrong, and people were showing up before the stallholders were ready!

Romney Marsh Community Church. There is a Sunday service every week at 10.30am, followed by refreshments and fellowship. Youth and Children's teaching available during the service. Come and visit this time of vibrant worship and say hello, you will be very welcome. For any help or advice ring the church office on 01797 366855 during the morning. The church is also the local food bank, so see head of column for details

The toddler group and Youth Space groups that met on Thursdays have now closed until September.

The church is in the process of appointing a Christian couple as joint pastors, from September. The couple, with teenagers, have much arranging to do, and the teenagers have been given places to start school locally in September.

Snargate, St Dunstans. The Holy Communion services on the 2nd and 4th Sundays continue, so the next one will be on Sunday, August 23rd, followed by refreshments and fellowship. On the evening of Saturday August 29th, there will be musical evening at the church. Just come along, no need to book.

St Mary's Bay, All Saints. The Café church, on Mondays and Wednesday morning get togethers continue to flourish, with increasing number, and a tremendous time of fellowship is enjoyed by all. The regular Tea and Bingo session will take place on Monday, July 27th at 2.30pm.

A new venture is starting in SMB village hall, called "Renew Wellbeing Café" This is a nationwide effort aimed at those who may just need some friendship, activity, and someone to talk to! There will be space for craft, you can take part, or bring your own, and most importantly, a space where it is "ok to be not ok." It takes place on Wednesdays, from 2-4pm. All activities are free, and there are gentle sessions on wellbeing and health, both physically and mentally. All very welcome. For more information, ring Revd Penny Lowe on 07810 717408.

St Mary in theMarsh The Haywardians choir, based at the church is a vibrant choir that raises large amounts of money for Charity. The last concert was a fabulous collection of songs from the musical shows, old and new, and took place in Brenzett church as part of the Brenzett Club Day on August 8th. On August 22nd, there will be a soloists concert at Lyminge Methodist Church at 3pm.

The choir meets on Friday evenings in the church at 7.30pm. If you would like to join, just come along and join in with this friendly bunch.

Church chuckle

From a few years ago.

A Vicar had married a young couple and was wishing them well as they left the church, "I hope you will be happy." The young man replied, "we should be ok, I came through the war alright."

Wit and Wisdom.

From an unknown comedian. "I'm very worried about a friend of mine. He is addicted to brake fluid. But he won't take it seriously. He just says he can stop any time he likes!"

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