



Parish Council Matters

Our next meeting is on Wednesday January 15 at 7.30pm in the Social Club; as usual, members of the public are very welcome. As ever, if you wish to raise any issues with Council, please contact the Clerk on clerk@bircham-pc.gov.uk or by post at Hall Farm, Sedgeford Road, Docking, King's Lynn, Norfolk, PE31 8LJ. Our website is <https://bircham-pc.gov.uk/>

Newsletter Thoughts

Unfortunately, there are as yet no minutes from November's Parish Council Meeting. However, we bring you instead a festive poem written in 1981 by a contributor, Mr W. Strang of Ingoldisthorpe, to the Poetry Corner feature of that Christmas's *Lynn Advertiser*, found among the snowy stories from that winter that we regale you with on page 2.

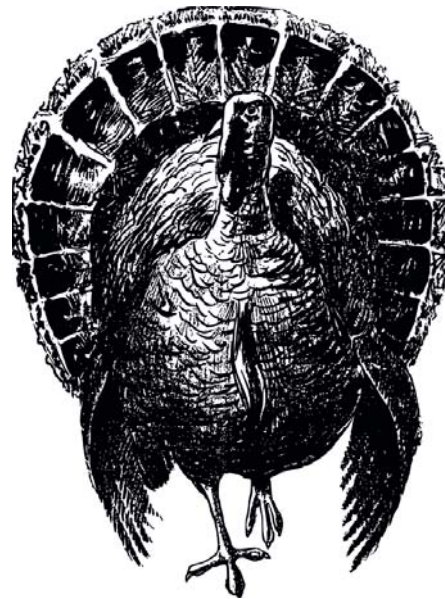
TALKING TURKEY

Don't worry gobbler if you're thin
A skinny frame could save your skin
It's Christmas time so watch your weight
Or you'll finish up on someone's plate

Man's greedy eyes survey your girth
They size you up for what you're worth
A scraggy bird if they espy
With ne'er a glance will pass you by

But if you're plump with double chin
Best notify your next of kin
You'll top the menu as main course
And get gummed up with caper sauce

Then when the church bells ring in New Year
Alas, my friend, you won't be here.



Merry Christmas from the *Bircham Times* to all! And a Happy and Prosperous 2025!

Do remember that the *Bircham Times* can be delivered to parishioners by email. You can email us at news@thebirchams.uk to request that (or for any other matter). In addition, we publish, in advance of the paper copy, on the 15th of every month on our website: www.thebirchams.uk



From the Annals

LET IT SNOW!

Depending on the way you measure it, the Christmas period of 1981/2 was the snowiest on recent record, especially in the west of the country. East Anglia didn't escape the epic snowfalls though, as attested to in the following extracts.

Lynn Advertiser December 15, 1981

"Hundreds of travellers found themselves stranded. A party of pensioners on their way back to Hunstanton from Fakenham had to stay in a private house near Docking, and various police stations, including those at Fakenham and Hunstanton, gave overnight shelter to motorists who had been forced to abandon their cars."

December 22

"Snow piled up to nine feet high on either side of the road and it looked like a railway cutting said the police, who also said that the trouble came from the snow being blown back on to the road. The high winds had also caused problems with the Sedgeford to Ringstead road and the Docking to Bircham road at Honey Hills."

With Christmas looming, people's thoughts turned to food and the ability to get their hands on it in such trying conditions.

The big freeze sent vegetable prices soaring. Weather conditions meant that vegetables remained in the ground and those that could be harvested bounced up in price. Market stallholder Mr Cyril Stockdale was charging 22p a pound for sprouts when normally he would have sold them for 15p. Mr Tony Lawless commented:

"The vegetables are dying. They are frozen-up and we can't get them out of the ground and this is why they are very, very expensive."

But Santa's on His Way

Santa arrived in Lynn on the 24th and with an eerie prescience he arrived on 10ft-high stilts, it was confirmed, to make his way through the snow drifts. Outside Debenhams the general manager said:

"The children seemed to enjoy it and they were chatting to him. Father Christmas was able to bend down and talk to them and even put sweets in the children's hands."

"One thing Santa did have to watch was the slippery, icy pavements. After all, he can't afford to be out of action at this time of year – can he?"

By December 24 the moaning about the weather had set in. This was a typical complaint from a reader's letter:

"We hear that main roads are open, but little or nothing is mentioned regarding villages such as this [Syderstone], which even now are in an appalling state of neglect. Today, after days of thick snow, I saw a County Council snow plough coming down the road – but at no time did the driver lower his shovel. What his purpose was in this village only he and his Maker apparently knew."





Foodie Fayre

SCOTTISH TIPPLE FOR HOGMANAY

It's pretty traditional to take a tippie of whisky (or maybe more than a tippie) at Hogmanay but have you tried other commonplace Scottish drinks?

This first product was invented in 1901 and contains water [*sensible*], foaming agent quillaia extract [*peculiar*], ammonium ferric citrate [*you're scaring us now!*] and sunset yellow and Ponceau 4R [*what the hell!*]...Well those are just some of the ingredients that appear in the fizzy Scottish orange favourite — Irn-Bru.

Originally it was spelled (Iron Brew) and while we all know it is "made in Scotland from girders", it seems it's no idle boast since there is also iron in it. It is brewed on licence around the world and is very popular in Russia, though exports were frozen after the invasion of Ukraine [*that'll teach them*]. And the American version has banned the colour Ponceau 4R in their formulation...and replaced it with their own colourful additive no doubt.

This might all appear far too sweet for some tastes and of course if you fancy a beer, there are plenty brewed in Scotland. There is a curious distinction in the country whereby beers are labelled as "shillings", which denote strength and taste.

There are light ales at 60/- (60 shillings); 70/- and 80/- are stonger, heavier ales with more alcoholic content and, while rarer, the ratings go up to 90/-.

Whatever your tippie at Hogmanay: Slange Var [*Slàinte Mhath!*]

Bridge Builder

The photo alongside comes courtesy of Elly Chalmers who noticed this attractive and purposeful new addition to the muddy pathway on a walk on the village outskirts. She asked us to thank whoever has laid it.



If you head out of the village on Fring Road and keep going beyond Mill Lane, you will come to a track off to your right (The pumping station is a little past the lane, so if you reach the pumping station you have gone too far.) The new bridge and ponds are along there. It's a very pretty walk and you can continue on to do a circular walk of the village, up through Bircham Newton village, then you can follow paths that will take you back to Great Bircham.

Enjoy the walk! And if you have your own local route you'd like us to share, please drop us a line.

Dates for the Diary

From Oct 7 Coffee, cake and chat, Anmer Social Club, Mondays 10-12, 07947 580555

Dec 7-Jan 5 *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, Princess Theatre, Hunstanton, from £21.50/£19.50

Dec 10-Jan 5 *Cinderella*, King's Lynn Corn Exchange, From £19

Dec 22 Horseracing at Fakenham

Dec 25 Christmas Day Fancy Dress Swim at Hunstanton 10.30am

Jan 1 Horseracing at Fakenham

Jan 9 Stanhoe & Barwick WI, Reading Room, Stanhoe, Susan Parry on *The Tragic Case of Florence Maybrick*

Jan 19 Horseracing at Fakenham

Jan 23 *Thelma* at Village Screen Cinema, Amy Robsart Hall, Syderstone, 7pm

Feb 6 Bircham Banter at the Social Club, 2.30-4pm



Digital Digest

For drone coverage of St Andrew's Church

There are a number of communities of drone enthusiasts whose members launch their craft at various locations to film the area and upload the results of their endeavours for others to enjoy. We came across one such example featuring the ruins of St. Andrew's Church at Bircham Tofts, which is quite fascinating:

<https://youtu.be/1TELi9reJyQ>

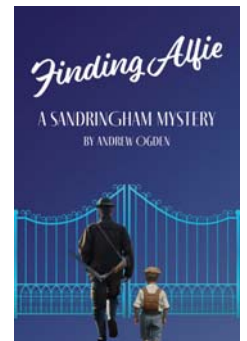
Curl Up With a Good (Local) Book

Finding Alfie (2024) Andrew Ogden.

Sandringham 1933. the idyllic Royal Estate is rocked by a chilling discovery: a body in a gamekeeper's cottage. A father and son go on the run but the trail runs dry and the police hunt for them is abandoned. Eighty years later, in a nursing home, an old woman's childhood memories spark her grandson to breathe new life into the quest. *Finding Alfie: a Sandringham Mystery* is available in hardback and paperback from Amazon and, as they say, all good bookshops.

It is Great Bircham resident Andrew Ogden's first published novel. Be warned: the follow-up, *Wrong Body: a Sandringham Mystery*, is already written!

Copies are selling fast at the Bircham Stores. There is also a book signing at the launch at the King's Head on Tuesday December 17 at 6pm and a few words will be given by Andrew. We encourage you to support this local author and grab yourself a signed first edition ... and just in time for Christmas too.



A Christmas Carol (1843) Charles Dickens.

Considered perhaps the original and best when it comes to Christmas stories, Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* delights us with all manner of well-recognised characters from Ebenezer Scrooge to Tiny Tim, and Bob Cratchit to Jacob Marley, in addition to a retinue of ghosts. An uplifting read of man's realisation of his good fortune, it is a straightforward and edifying read for adults and children alike. It's also available on ebooks, audiobooks, and on film. In fact we can confidently state that the best-ever Christmas film is *The Muppet Christmas Carol*, with Michael Caine as Scrooge. You can keep your *Die Hard* and *It's a Wonderful Life*. Muppets are the true meaning of Christmas!

A Christmas Carol is not Dickens's only Christmas tale. If you enjoy his writings, try *The Cricket on the Hearth* (1845) and *The Haunted Man* (1848) as well.

And for something a bit more contemporary, try David Sedaris's *Santaland Diaries*, where our protagonist models as a Christmas elf at Macy's department store.



History Corner

"KAISER GROWS A BEARD"

Well we honestly didn't expect to be reporting on this, but it caught our eye while compiling From the Annals. In the aftermath of the First World War, this was front page news, apparently.

"Drooping Moustache Alters His Appearance

Jan 11, 1919 The Kaiser's personal appearance has undergone a remarkable change. His moustache no longer points upwards, and his chin is decorated with a stubbly growth. It is said that he intends to let his beard grow in order to protect his throat — Reuter"

[He probably contemplated ditching the natty bird headgear too!]



Speed Watch

Our efforts to reduce vehicle speed and hence increase safety in our village have continued through the summer and autumn months. With an enlarged team -- there are now 11 of us -- we are increasing our sessions from 4 per month to 6 per month, although during the winter season we do find that sometimes a session has to be cancelled due to adverse weather. Our objective with such an increase is to provide as much evidence as we can to demonstrate to both Norfolk Police and the Highways Authority that Bircham needs additional traffic calming measures.

There are 63 Speed Watch teams in Norfolk and over the past year or so Bircham has usually been in the top three in terms of "offences" per hour per Speed Watch session. We also monitor the data from the Sam2 camera, which records number, speed and timing of traffic. There are four positions for this around the village and the apparatus is either moved or reversed to face in the opposite direction every month or so. We are currently forwarding highlights from this data to Norfolk Police, at their request.

These highlights show that although average speed recorded is just under 30mph, there is a significant proportion of traffic going at above the 30mph limit -- in October it was 51%. The highest speed recorded in any month is usually above 60mph -- in August there was one vehicle doing 75mph!

One of our team has recently resigned to take on more voluntary work at the local hospice, so we do have space for one, or possibly two new recruits, for anyone interested. Comments and questions are welcome, as always

Hugh Kemsley, Speed Watch Co-ordinator
hughkemsleyuk@gmail.com 07770 742386



The Liverpool Virus

The mention in last month's *Bircham Times* of something called Liverpool Virus in connection with rat poison and the Norfolk Rat Week of 1924 intrigued me. So I did some digging and discovered that there was a brand of rat poison launched around 120 years ago called Liverpool Virus. This claimed in the advertisement reproduced alongside to "exterminate rats without danger to other animals and without smell from dead bodies". Other versions of the ad also claimed it was without danger to humans which turned out to be... well, not quite true.

Exterminated by
"LIVERPOOL" VIRUS

RATs

without danger to other animals and without
smell from dead bodies. In tins
ready prepared with bait. Virus
for rats 2/6 & 6/-; for Mice, 1/6.
OF ALL CHEMISTS.

Decades later it was established that the secret ingredient was not actually a virus as we would understand it in the modern sense: it was actually a strain of salmonella bacteria. The preparation did originate in Liverpool, though!!

Write for particulars to

EVANS SONS LESCHER & WEBB, Ltd.,
56 Hanover Street, LIVERPOOL

Now, as you know, salmonella is one of the most common causes of food poisoning, so it will come as little surprise that, as early as 1908, medical journals were reporting cases of enteritis in humans linked to rat poisons like this one (there were a number of brands with similar "active ingredients"). Although most people recover from salmonella without lasting issues, it can cause permanent damage and even death. Indeed, some of the salmonella cases connected to rat poisons did result in death. It also turns out that the rats would become immune to the strain of bacteria used. Although the products were then ineffective, the rats could still act as a carrier, infecting humans. Over the coming decades such preparations were banned in various countries. The UK was a bit late to that party, eventually outlawing them in the 1960s.

LR

Bircham in Bloom

The Bircham in Bloom team met again on November 14. Since the last meeting, a lot of end-of-season tidying has been done around the village, including clearing the leaves that covered the pavement around the Old Rectory corner.

Many bulbs have been planted in a number of sites and the new bank (technically called a bund), created as part of the works to prevent flooding off the playing field, has been sown with a wildflower meadow mix.

We continue to press the County Highways Department to restore the blocked footpath which runs north from the Docking Road just after the fishing lakes.

The fruits of our efforts this year have been put together in a collage of photos, hosted on the Parish Council website: <https://bircham-pc.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads//2024/11/Bircham-in-Bloom-2024.pdf>

We are all looking forward to the annual BiB Christmas lunch and our next meeting will be at 9:30am on Tuesday March 4, 2025 at the Bircham Stores Café.

Chris F



In the Garden

Amaryllis (*Hippeastrum*)

I never cease to be amazed by the spectacular growth rate of these beasts. Obviously the bulbs are primed by the growers to be at their best for Christmas and, as soon as exposed to light and watered, they almost explode out of their seemingly undersized pots and tiny amount of soil. They must be supremely efficient at converting the available nutrients into plant growth. They can grow by inches/centimetres in a single day. I swear that I once transported one on a 30-minute journey and it was bigger on reaching our destination than when I set off! Just a few weeks later, depending on the variety, they can result in a single flower or multiple ones and the breeders have developed an increasing number of colours beyond the traditional white or red. They are very easy to look after and will survive in a warm house as they need temperatures above 16°C. They also like a lot of light and should be turned occasionally to keep them from bending towards it. You may be able to get your Amaryllis to flower again the following season if you wait until the greenery has died back, store it in a cool place until autumn, then re-pot and start to water.

Poinsettia (*Euphorbia pulcherrima*)

These are reared to flower mid-winter and are notoriously difficult to keep going beyond the festive period. Most houses will be too hot and dry for them to survive, as they prefer temperatures around 15°C and relatively high humidity. They also hate draughts and overwatering. If you keep them in a coolish place (15°C) with little temperature variation and out of draughts, water sparingly, keep the leaves moist and feed fortnightly with tomato feed, you may be able to coax them through to spring and beyond.

Christmas Cactus (*Schlumbergera*)

This one is a more enduring gift that can live for many years. Get this one right and you will be rewarded with masses of pretty pink flowers (other colours are available these days, but pink is still the most common) and potentially several blooms per year. The secret to this one is warmth, plenty of light and a careful watering regime. The soil should be only just moist and after flowering they need even less water.



LR



VILLAGE SCREEN CINEMA
at Amy Robsart Village Hall, Syderstone
Saturday 23rd January at 7.30pm



***Thelma* (12A)**

Thelma Post, a feisty 93-year-old grandmother, gets conned by a phone scammer pretending to be her grandson. She sets out on a treacherous quest across Los Angeles, accompanied by an aging friend and his motorized scooter, to reclaim what was taken from her. Starring June Squibb, Fred Hechinger and Richard Roundtree.

Price £4 – pay on the door
Doors open 7.00pm

Bookings can be made by email syderstonecinema_arvh@outlook.com or call 01485 578270.

Caz Appleby,
on behalf of the Syderstone Cinema Team



MOBILE POST OFFICE

Scheduled stop at Bircham Social Club, Church Lane is as follows.

Monday	10:45-11:30
Tuesday	10:45-11:30
Thursday	10:45-11:30
Friday	12:10-12:55

MOBILE LIBRARY SERVICE

Fridays January 3 and 31
Stops at:

Monks Close	15:15-15:35
Village Shop	15:45-16:00
Social Club	16:05-16:15
Windmill Hill	16:20-16:35

BUS 33/33A

To Hunstanton (from King's Head): Mon-Fri
07:36 10:36 13:36 17:16; Sat 8:21 10:36
13:36 15:41
Return from Stand A Bus Station

To Lynn (from Bircham Stores): Mon-Fri
07:17 09:23 12:23 15:38 15:43; Sat 09:23
12:23 15:38 17:08
Return from Stand E Bus Station

GREAT MASSINGHAM AREA COMMUNITY CAR SCHEME

Offering a reliable door-to-door car service,
7 days a week for anyone without personal
transport. Book on 01485 520823
Please give at least 2 days' notice

RECYCLING CENTRE

For pre-booking your visit at **any** Norfolk centre:
<https://www.norfolk.gov.uk/article/62632/Norfolk-Recycling-Centre-bookings>
Or phone 0344 800 8020

Bircham Weather

The old adage that no two days are the same in the world of weather might have been questioned at the beginning of November as low cloud and light winds brought almost persistent "gloom" until the 11th, before the sun finally appeared. The temperatures hardly moved either, nudging between 9°C and 11°C both day and night but at least this kept any really adverse conditions at bay. The lack of rain could also be regarded as a positive at this time of the year, although the month's total still came to 60mm with most of this falling after the 17th. Indeed, the second half of the month saw a complete change and an unusual cold spell from the 18th to the 22nd brought the first snowfall during the evening of the 18th and again in the afternoon of the 20th, although it was of "wet" consistency and was shortlived on the ground. An air frost was recorded on these nights too, with a minimum of -3.4°C during the night of the 21st which is an unfamiliar figure for November. Storm Bert then arrived on the 22nd, bringing rain and gales which lasted through to the 23rd and also sent temperatures soaring to a high of 16.9°C within a 24-hour period. A couple of sunny days provided a welcome relief on the 25th and 26th before Storm Conall then deposited 18.8mm of rain on the 27th before high pressure saw a return to quieter conditions to see the month out. All of this returned an average maximum temperature of 9.8°C which, along with the 60mm of rain, could be regarded as typical November figures in a month that was anything but.

Bryan

St Mary's 100 Club Draw

DECEMBER RESULTS: 1st prize no. **35**; 2nd prize no. **46**
(1st prize wins £50; 2nd prize £20).

Thank you to all who have supported the Club Draw over the past year. If you have not yet entered next year's draw, and would like to, please email me on slilliweb10@gmail.com and I will send you an application form.

Sally



Words on Birds

A WINTER ROBIN

The cheery robin, a beloved symbol of Christmas and the winter months, is often depicted on greetings cards as gentle and charming. It's a portrayal that could hardly be further from the truth.

Robins are fiercely territorial especially during the winter. Males form a territory for themselves, their mate and potential young. This is maintained year-round and they can often be heard singing in winter months. They will become involved in confrontations with neighbouring robins but this is rarely fatal with one of them usually backing down.



The association between robins and Christmas began in Victorian times. Postmen, who delivered Christmas cards in bright red uniforms, were nicknamed "robins" or "robin red-breasts" and so robins soon appeared on the cards they delivered, giving them a festive status.

The average lifespan of a robin is only about two years. The first year is their most challenging as they easily succumb to prolonged severe winter weather. Another significant threat comes from domestic cats, which frequently prey on small birds. One robin however has been recorded as being 19 years old. Male and female birds look alike while the young are brown with no red breast showing early on.

So, while a white Christmas may look lovely for us, it's a disaster for a robin trying to find food on frozen ground. Putting out mealworms during cold spells will help them through the winter.

Richard Campey

Owner of The One Stop Nature Shop, at Burnham Deepdale

Bircham Banter

Next Banter session is on Thursday February 6 from 2.30 to 4pm (no January meet-up). Thanks to the Social Club for continuing to host our get-togethers over the winter months. See you in February!

Sue

Bus Fare Increases

Starting December 1, there's been some minimal fare increases to journeys both to King's Lynn and Hunstanton and stops in between. An adult return to King's Lynn is now £6.60 (single £3.90); to Hunstanton £5.80 (single £3.40). In addition, 10-trip tickets are no longer available. Calculate current fares here: <https://www.lynxbus.co.uk/tickets-fares/>

Stanhoe & Barwick WI

Forthcoming events to be held at the Stanhoe Reading Room, Cross Lane PE31 8PS at 2pm.

Thursday January 9: Susan Parry on The Tragic Case of Florence Maybrick.

Thursday February 6: Julia Paul on Hodmedods Hedgehog Support.

Visitors are always welcome. Our charge is £5, which includes refreshments.

Please be aware that Valerie is no longer our contact point with Stanhoe & Barwick WI. As soon as we know of her successor and their contact details we'll let you know. <https://stanhoe.org/WI>



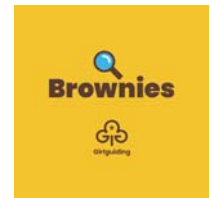
Tapping Tulips at the Movies

One of the big cinema hits of the past few months has been *Wicked*, the movie version of the West End hit of the same name, based loosely on the *Wizard of Oz* film of 1939, which was based on the L. Frank Baum children's book *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900) — a lot squeezed out of a single idea!

Munchkinland, the home of *Wicked*'s characters, was actually partially filmed in the tulip bulb fields laid out every year as part of the efforts at fundraising for Tapping House. If you've wandered the rows of 9 million brightly coloured blooms each year you'll recognise you've moved in the same circles as film stars Cynthia Erivo and Ariana Grande.

Girl Guides

1st Docking Brownies meets at Ripper Hall on Wednesdays in term time (5.15-6.45pm) and 5 spaces are available in January 2025 for girls aged 7-10 years. We have recently had a "Girls Can Do Anything" careers evening, and we went on a Wizard sleepover to Hautbois Activity Centre in Coltishall. We have been generously supported by grants from the Jack's Lane Wind Farm community fund and Subs for Clubs #NorfolkCF and from Docking Parish Council.



In 2025 we have a district outing to Skaters on January 18 and a sleepover for Thinking Day at South Creake during February half-term! If your daughter would be interested, please send an enquiry via the website www.girlguiding.co.uk or email drjrayner@gmail.com, who lives in Great Bircham!

Rosemary

Pupping Grey Seals

It's that time of year once more when grey seals give birth to their pups. One of the best places to see them is at Blakeney Point. You can get out there by taking a boat trip with Beans Boats <https://www.beansboattrips.co.uk/> or Temple's Seal Trips <https://www.sealtrips.co.uk>

If you don't want to go out in a boat it's possibly best to head to the east of the county to places like Horsey, Winterton and Waxham beaches where the pregnant mums drag themselves onshore to give birth.

And if all that is too much hard work, try the Hunstanton Sea Life Centre with its seal hospital. East Winch RSPCA also takes care of orphaned and injured pups so let them know if you come across an abandoned or injured seal on your travels.



Gritting and Grit Bin

With winter now with us and the (admittedly diminishing) likelihood of snow, a reminder to stay safe when driving if flurries of the white stuff do land, or we end up with icy roads. Norfolk County Council has the major roads into the villages covered by their gritters and we also have a public grit bin in Church Lane near the Social Club. You can also buy gritting salt from our recycling centres for your own private use.