



Parish Council Matters

Welcome to the New Year! A main focus of the Parish Council in 2025 will be improvements to the playing field.

The lease from the Sandringham Estate states that the field should be used as a “recreation ground for the inhabitants of the Parish of Bircham and their guests”. Recreation does not just mean cricket — people use it for football, tai chi, model aircraft and cars, as well as dog training and exercising. It also means just sitting and chatting!

Having multiple uses of the playing field inevitably means different users have different priorities. The priorities of those who use the field and those who live near it can also differ.

Our Code of Conduct, available on the bircham-pc.gov.uk website, includes a commitment to champion the needs of the whole community. Data from the 2021 census on the ons.gov.uk website shows lots of detail about the population of Bircham. Whilst our percentage of older people is higher than the national average, 73 of the 430 residents were aged less than 20 years and 141 less than 45. These numbers do not include holiday-makers and visiting relatives with their children.

The PC can only do a good job if it knows your priorities. Only then can we draw up plans that satisfy as many people for as much of the time as possible. Please speak to your councillors or email the clerk at clerk@bircham-pc.gov.uk so your views and ideas can be included in our discussions.

There is no council meeting in February, so the next time we meet up will be Wednesday March 5th 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

We celebrate worthy winners this month, with congratulations winging their way to Barbie Howell (p. 10) and two families (among others) who illuminated Christmas for us all (p. 5). In addition, we look back at the wartime Zeppelin attacks that took place hereabouts 110 years ago this month. We also have articles on skygazing and birdwatching as well as reminiscing about past sporting achievements. And, as ever, there's a book review and gardening tips, and a curious tale about Snatch Valentine.

Oh! and the symbol at the head of this page is St Brigid's cross. Brigid is the most famous Irish female saint, who had the happy knack of being able to turn water into beer. Her feast day is commemorated on February 1, just the right moment to kick "Dry January" into touch!

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

ZEPPELINS IN NORFOLK

On Tuesday January 19, 1915, there was a Zeppelin attack on the Norfolk coastline, with Snettisham, Brancaster and King's Lynn coming under attack from Zeppelin L4.

Nottingham Journal Thursday January 21, 1915

"The bomb dropped at Snettisham fell in a field some 25 yards from the south-east corner of the church, smashing the east window and all the windows of the Le Strange Chapel and damaging every other window in the church. The internal damage was limited to the destruction of a heavy mural tablet, but the buildings in the neighbourhood suffered severely with smashed windows and stripped roofs."

"The bombs launched by the hostile airmen were of conical shape, some being 23 inches in length and weighing about 100lb."

"The zeppelin was watched from when it entered the coast at Holme and covered the dunes there and at Thornham before turning to Docking. The ship returned to Holme about 15 minutes later before dropping a missile at Brancaster and then at Snettisham's church before heading off towards Lynn."

Daily Record Thursday January 21, 1915

"People described it as a large balloon, pointed at each end, and shaped like a sausage."

"The zeppelin also dropped bombs over Snettisham, a favourite resort of Queen Alexandra during her Majesty's summer visits to Sandringham, and another bomb was dropped at Grimston, a village on the road to Lynn. At Grimston the bomb fell near an ammunition store belonging to troops camped in the district, but no damage was done."

"At King's Lynn two houses in Bentinck Street were absolutely demolished, and a third was partially destroyed. In one the youth [14-year-old Percy] Goate was killed in his bed; from the ruins of the other the body of Mrs Gazeley, whose husband had been killed at the front [i.e. the Western Front], was recovered this morning."

East Anglian Daily Times Saturday January 23, 1915

A report of the incident by schoolteacher Miss Grace Tomlinson said that the hole left by the bombing on Snettisham was "big enough to bury a horse and cart". She continues somewhat mysteriously: "To crown it all a German motor was in the village and attempted to guide the thing to Sandringham. The police have been after this car for some time, but it escaped, and, although chased it still remains uncaptured. The zeppelin was round here half-an-hour and could easily have been hit."

She appears to have been corroborated by Mr Winlove Smith, who noted that the car in Lynn was "cooperating with the airmen" and had "two enormous headlights". Mr Holcombe Ingelby, the MP for the town, said that there were actually two cars, one on the right of the road and one on the left. One car was actually stopped and told to turn its lights out since they were "a breach of the regulations", before the driver shot off "at a rapid pace for the open country".

See also <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Pg6XxeiHh8>

Local Dersingham artist Ben Mullarkey has created an evocative painting of the raid on Snettisham church. Seek it out if you can.



History Corner

GREAT ZEPPELIN ATTACK OF 1915

The Zeppelin attack as described opposite was the second major attack by Germany on British civilians in the First World War. In December 1914, just a month before the Norfolk attack, the NE coast of the country had been pummelled from the sea by shelling from the German High Seas Fleet. In Scarborough, Whitby and Hartlepool more than 120 civilians were killed; the barely believable action on a defenceless civilian population (including young children) acted as a highly emotive recruiting sergeant and put a civilian population on high alert.

So when Zeppelins were spotted over Norfolk a few weeks later, the populace was notably concerned. Zeppelins L3 and L4 were aiming for industries around Hull and the Humber but as is the way of such things they got lost. L3 did its worst on Great Yarmouth before heading home but L4, captained by the grandly titled Count Magnus von Platen-Hallermund, was undeniably lost and seemingly bombed any large-looking conurbation... including Snettisham and Heacham!! Since they were lost (and obviously not in Hull) it seems that the hysteria about cars directing the Zeppelin to targets was unfounded.

It was odd though that the enemy got quite so close to Sandringham, since the Kaiser was in fact a cousin of the king in residence, and that bombing his home was presumably not in the Count's military orders... but the horror of a perceived attack on the monarch did not go unnoticed in such imperial times.

The raid of January 19 saw the loss of four civilians, with many injuries and damage to buildings.

Mobile Phone Networks

Norfolk County Council recently teamed up with Streetwave to create a map showing the quality of coverage for all four mobile networks. Devices were fitted to bin lorries, allowing the measurement of signal strength and speed in real-world conditions throughout the county.

The results can be seen here:

<https://app.streetwave.co/coverage-checker/55/map>.

Many of you will not be surprised to see how poorly EE fares in the Birchams and Three is practically non-existent — then again, Three and Vodafone have recently been given the go-ahead to merge, so that last point will become academic. O2 looks to be the clear winner for coverage in the Birchams with Vodafone as runner-up. If you want to benefit from O2's superior coverage, as well as O2 itself, there are also "virtual" operators that use O2's infrastructure. These include Tesco Mobile and giffgaff.

Dates for the Diary

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

Jan 19 Horseracing at Fakenham

Jan 24 Two-Course Burns Lunch, Amy Robsart Hall, Syderstone, noon. £8.50, tickets from Julie 07515 648928 or Anita 01485 578524

Jan 24-Mar 3, Snowdrop Walks at Oxburgh Hall, mornings Fri to Mon (inc)

Jan 25 *Thelma* (12A) Village Screen Cinema, Amy Robsart Hall, Syderstone, at 7pm, £4

Jan 27-Mar 2 Walsingham Abbey Snowdrop Season, 10-4pm, £6.50/£2.50

Jan 31 Johnny Cash Roadshow, KL Corn Exchange, 7.30pm, £28.50

Feb 1 Mercury — The Ultimate Queen Tribute, KL Corn Exchange, 7.30pm, £30.50

Feb 2 Hometown Glory — a Tribute to Adele, Princess Theatre, Hunstanton, 7.30pm, £26

Feb 4 *Les Misérables* — The Staged Concert Live! CinemaLive, Princess Theatre, Hunstanton, 7pm £15.50

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

Feb 6 Talk: Julia Paul on Hodmedods Hedgehog Support, Stanhoe & Barwick WI, Stanhoe Reading Room, 2pm, £5

Feb 10 Bingo at Bircham Social Club, 7.30pm

Feb 14 Horse-racing at Fakenham

Feb 15 Snowdrop Charity Day, Walsingham Abbey, 10-4pm, £6.50/£2.50



Digital Digest

For a bit of nostalgia and artistic inspiration

If you enjoy browsing posters, are interested in images and typography from the early years of the 20th century, or just want some design ideas, take a look at this site full of film posters. You can search by year (always fun to try your d.o.b.), favourite actor/actress/director or by individual designer.

<http://www.impawards.com>

For creative types on a rainy Sunday afternoon

To muse away a rainy afternoon or whenever you need a little something to pass the time, try creating a model of a car or a building or an animal perhaps?

This site provides templates for creating all sorts of models from Big Ben and the Sydney Opera House to a Ferrari Testarossa, Tyrannosaurus Rex, or Shakespeare's Globe Theatre. It's all a bit inconsequential, but hey.....

<https://www.papertoys.com/>

For reading out-of-copyright books (without paying for them)

Project Gutenberg started in 1971 with the aim of digitising literary works in order to preserve them and make them more widely available. The work is done by volunteers and they have so far processed more than 72,000 works.

Basically, we're talking out-of-copyright (ooc) books here, and as a crude rule of thumb (cos this is US ooc not UK ooc) that means that the author needs to have been dead for 70 years. So Dickens, Hardy is fine...Le Carré and Deighton, you'll need to wait a while yet. Not just novels but all sorts of texts.

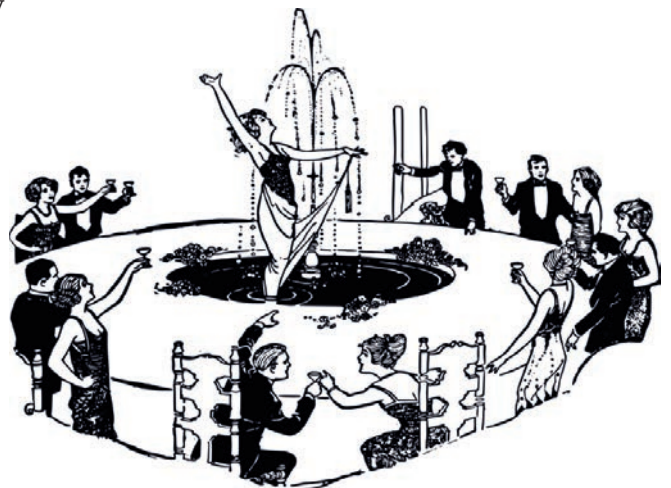
<https://www.gutenberg.org>

Curl Up With a Good Book

The Great Gatsby (1925) by F. Scott Fitzgerald

2025 ushers in the 100th anniversary of what many consider to be “the Great American novel”, the epitome of the Jazz Age and a tale of the American Dream gone sour. The novel is narrated by Nick Carraway, a recent newcomer to Long Island, New York, whose shadowy and enigmatic neighbour is Jay Gatsby, a self-made man who throws wild parties at his West Egg home. Directly opposite the bay (on East Egg) live couple Daisy and Tom Buchanan who represent “old money”. Gatsby’s obsessive love for Daisy, ignited many years previously, is what fuels the novel. Other characters include the Wilsons (George and Myrtle), who live in a squalid “valley of ashes”. All their lives intertwine as they strive to grasp the American Dream, which is always elusively out of reach.

The Great Gatsby is a 100-year-old tragedy with issues that are still debated today: the value of old versus new money, morality, class, decadence and excess, and the superficiality of love and friendship. It’s not necessarily an uplifting read but definitely a riveting one and, at under 200 pages, the story flies by.





Christmas Lights Competition Results

If the Man in (on) the Moon, or the Madam on Mars had looked down on the Birchams in December, they would have beheld a great light!!

The Birchams were glowing with the most wonderful neon displays in and on their houses, in their gardens, on driveways... in trees... it was just fabulous!! Congratulations to all who contributed such cheer to the villages.

For the judges of the lights competition, it was a tricky task to make their choices. Much pondering was done over sausage rolls, mince pies, glasses of sherry or Coca Cola!

The final results were: in the category of "Throwing the kitchen sink at it" the Loose family at Burley House, Docking Road, who had the magnificent display of shining tractors (see page 6)! Well done to them. They received a small prize!

And in the category of "the epitome of elegance", the winners were Marney and Yan at Micklebring in Church Lane! Congratulations to them too. They also received a prize.

We should mention in despatches, however, that there were many other wonderful contenders, and whilst I do not want to single out too many, the cottage opposite Micklebring in Church Lane had made a valiant attempt at "throwing the kitchen sink at it"!! Well done to them. In the more elegant category, both our shop and our hotel/pub had done sterling jobs but, as final arbiter, I decided to rule them out as they are both businesses!

I believe that dwellings on both sides of Lynn Road down from the shop and hotel as far as Church Lane all made a great splash, as did Finches in Snettisham Road!!

May I finally thank my judges, taken from differing age groups, including a teenager as well as octogenarians (assisted by their disabled grandson), and my "artistic" judge!!

The bar has been set for next year!! Happy New Year to you all, and our villages will look rather duller when the lights come down!

Jane Kemsley



The *Bircham Times* would like to send congratulations and thanks to the winners and especially to Jane for dreaming up and organising such a lovely competition that all could enjoy. There was no doubt that the villages looked far more resplendent this Christmas than last!

Dates for the Diary

Feb 15 Songs of The Beatles by local band Dog House, Westacre Theatre, 7.30pm, £14

Feb 16 Totally Tina – Tina Turner Revue, Princess Theatre, Hunstanton, 7.30pm, £28.50

Feb17-21 NORFOLK SCHOOLS HALF-TERM

Feb 20 *The Importance of Being Earnest*, NT Live, Westacre Theatre, 7pm, £14

Feb 22 *Vindication Swim* at Village Screen Cinema, Amy Robsart Hall, Syderstone, 7pm, £4

Feb 23 Bagthorpe Hall snowdrops walk, 11-4pm, £6

Feb 23 Rude Science: Naughtiest, funniest, most revolting science show in the world. KL Corn Exchange, For children. 11.30 and 3pm, £17-19

Feb 25 *Madama Butterfly*, KL Corn Exchange, 7.30pm, £43-49

Feb 27 An Evening With Jeff Stelling, KL Corn Exchange, 7.30pm, from £34.50

Feb 28 Talk: The Carnivores of the Serengeti, Sculthorpe Moor Nature Reserve, 1.30-3.30pm, £12



Snatch Valentine

St Valentine's Day approaches and we are all familiar with the custom of receiving romantic cards (and potentially gifts) from admirers — often secret ones. But, have you heard of the peculiarly Norfolk legendary character Jack Valentine and his evil alter-ego Snatch Valentine?

In Norfolk, it was common on the eve of St Valentine rather than St Valentine's Day itself — after sunrise it doesn't work — to receive a knock at the door. On opening the door, there would be no one there, but a gift would be left on the doorstep. The gifts were not just for lovers and often intended for children.

Unlike Jack, his counterpart Snatch Valentine was not so benevolent. This baddie would play tricks. You might find a gift left on the doorstep but, when opened, it would contain nothing more than a rude note. Or, when attempting to pick up the gift from the doorstep, it would suddenly move away from you (by means of a hidden person pulling an attached string).

It was also common for children to call on houses, singing rhymes to St Valentine, hopefully in exchange for a penny. Seems like urchins would make use of any opportunity to cadge a penny. Penny for the guy, anyone?

Christmas Lights Competition — A Winner!



If you didn't manage to spot the winning "Tractor House" illuminations over the Christmas period, here's a small snapshot. We're hoping to load more pictures to the website and, as Jane says in her piece, we all hope to go again next year...

Stanhoe & Barwick WI

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

Thursday February 6: Julia Paul on Hodmedods Hedgehog Support.

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

<https://stanhoe.org/WI>

Bircham Banter

Next Banter session is on Thursday February 6 from 2.30 to 4pm. Thanks to the Social Club for continuing to host our get-togethers over winter. See you in February!

Sue

Bircham in Bloom

A reminder that the fruits of BiB's 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>

Our next meeting will be at 9:30am on Tuesday March 4, 2025 at the Bircham Stores Café, and new members are welcome to attend.

Chris F



In the Garden

COMPANION PLANTS

It's that time of year when gardeners thumb through seed and plant catalogues as they optimistically avert their gaze from the outside world with its wind, snow and rain and dream of a lush garden come springtime. When planning what to plant where, canny gardeners not only take care of colour and scent clashes but also pay attention to companion properties, that is, which plants enjoy the companionship of others to deter unhelpful pests or, conversely, to encourage pollinators.

Some plants are said to have allelopathic properties. This means that the plants release chemicals that inhibit growth of other plants. Peas and beans should not be grown near onions and garlic; and potatoes near tomatoes. Marigolds can be considered garden wonders, keeping aphids away from all types of beans as well as attracting pollinators. Geraniums and petunias attract pests away from roses and grape vines. Herbs in general are such strong-smelling decoys that they can deter pests: think, rosemary, mint and thyme for example.



Then there are the flavour improvers. Many gardeners swear by planting basil near tomatoes to improve their flavour. Of course you also have to be careful that your plants do not out-compete each other for light, soil nutrients and space. And there's no point in introducing a companion plant if it then takes over totally... again, think mint!



VILLAGE SCREEN CINEMA

at Amy Robsart Village Hall, Syderstone
Saturday 25th January and 22nd February 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.

Vindication Swim (PG)

Vindication Swim depicts the story of Mercedes Gleitze, who in 1927 became the first British woman to swim the English Channel [see *Bircham Times* February 2024 for an account of Gleitze's Wash swim]. The film portrays Gleitze's upstream struggle in overcoming both the cold waters of the English Channel and the oppressive society of 1920s Britain. However, after a rival comes forward claiming to have accomplished the same feat, Mercedes is forced into battle to retain her record and her legacy. Starring Kirsten Callaghan, John Locke and Victoria Summer.

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 31 and February 28
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

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

December registered 93mm of rain, making it the wettest month since May and bringing the total for the year to 830mm, which is around 25% above average. This is still below the 940mm received in 2023 whilst being significantly more than the 559mm of 2022. February claimed the top spot for last year with a total of 140mm whilst, at the other end of the scale, August was the driest with just 24mm, this being a complete reversal of the usual figures. The temperature profile was similar to 2023 with an average maximum/minimum of 14.7/8.5°C with the warmest day occurring on August 12 when a high of 33.1°C was recorded.

December proved to be a turbulent month at times with Storm Darragh providing gale force winds on the 7th that continued into the following day and also dumped 35mm of rain over the two days. We had to wait until the 10th for a completely dry day along with a more settled spell and even so it remained mainly overcast with gales returning on the 18th with another 18mm of rain, although this also turned out to be the warmest day of the month with a high of 14.0°C. The Christmas period was much quieter, when the 24th was cloudy but mild followed by dry, similar conditions on Christmas Day before the fog descended on Boxing Day, a feature that was to stay with us until the 29th before the sun finally made an appearance on the 30th! Even stranger was the absence of an air frost or snow following some particularly cold nights in November.

Bryan

St Mary's 100 Club Draw

JANUARY RESULTS: 1st prize no. **51**; 2nd prize no. **49**
(1st prize wins £50; 2nd prize £20).

Thank you to all who supported the Club Draw last year. If you have not yet entered this year's draw, and would like to, please email me on sliliweb10@gmail.com and I will send you an application form.

Sally



Big Garden Birdwatch

Dubbed the world's largest wildlife survey, the Big Garden Birdwatch returns this January between the 24th and 26th. All you are required to do to participate is to spend just one hour assessing the comings and goings to your garden. Note the birds have to actually land on lawn, tree, path or feeder to count. You're not expected to count the skeins of geese overhead. That way madness lies.

Next, leave a record of your hour's "work" with the RSPB (the survey organisers), even if our feathered friends don't make an appearance. Everyone who participates is adding to the sum total of knowledge about the state and distribution of birds in the UK. You can submit your results by post or online. Full instructions are given at <https://www.rspb.org.uk/whats-happening/big-garden-birdwatch>

Last year more than 600,000 people took part, surveying 9.7 million birds. And while that is an extraordinary number it's a sad fact that the RSPB has determined that as a nation we've lost 38 million birds over the past 60 years. So do your bit, settle down with a cuppa, pen and paper for an hour and record what you see. And no, you don't need a Big Garden to take part!!

Skygazing 2025

By the time you read this, the first full moon of 2025 will have likely been and gone — the "Wolf Moon" which rose at 15:17 on January 13. It will have looked full for a few days either side of that day though.

If you want to see a supermoon in 2025, it's a bit like waiting for the proverbial bus — nothing for ages, then three turn up one after the other:

Wolf Moon — January 13
Snow Moon — February 12
Worm Moon — March 14
Pink Moon — April 13
Flower Moon — May 12
Strawberry Moon — June 11
Buck Moon — July 10
Sturgeon Moon — August 9
Corn Moon — September 7
Harvest Moon — October 7 (supermoon)
Beaver Moon — November 5 (supermoon)
Cold Moon — December 4 (supermoon)

January and February 2025 is a particularly good time to observe the planets. Four planets should be easy to spot without a telescope or binoculars.

Venus: Venus appears in the southwest just after sunset and is the brightest planet visible to the naked eye.

Saturn: Near to Venus, but less bright, is where you will find Saturn.

Jupiter: Found high in the sky towards the south, one of the largest and brightest lights in the sky.

Mars: Mars appears towards the east and, as you would expect, has a red hue. It's not as bright as Venus or Jupiter, but its redness makes it easy to identify. January 16 is when Mars is at its brightest and best for observing.



New Year's Honours

Huge congratulations to Barbara Howell, who was appointed a Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) in the King's New Year's Honours.

A true community stalwart, Barbie is the friendly face welcoming parents on kids' cricket nights, acts as the club's Safeguarding Officer, and has been the force behind the pavilion's tea urn for many years. More to the point, she — alongside husband David (Ben) — has opened up her home and provided a loving and safe family environment for almost 170 children across four decades of foster caring in Norfolk. It's an immense achievement, and an honour that is so well-deserved.

“Congratulations Barbie from the entire village”

April 17, 1983...

... was the day when two current long-term Bircham residents, Chris Weldon and Stan Eyre joined 18,998 others and ran in the third-ever London Marathon. Neither of them were aware of the other's participation until many years later when the subject of running came up over a pint in the King's Head. Back in the day both completed the event in under 4 hours.

Also, in the King's Head that day was fellow Bircham resident Terry Salmon, who chipped in with the fact that 10 years later in 1993 he too had participated in the Marathon, also with a sub-4-hour time.

The running days of all three are well over now. Nice to know though that they had something in common all those years ago. Nowadays, it is just bowls and the King's Head that they have in common!

Chris Weldon



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.