



## Parish Council Matters

The next Parish Council meeting will be on January 28, 2026, at 7.30pm in the Social Club.

In the meantime, if there is anything that you would like to be discussed at that meeting, please get in contact with the clerk (see below).

Council sends all parishioners of the Birchams the very best for 2026.

Email: [clerk@bircham-pc.gov.uk](mailto:clerk@bircham-pc.gov.uk)

Post: Hall Farm, Sedgeford Road, Docking, King's Lynn, Norfolk, PE31 8LJ

Website: [bircham-pc.gov.uk](http://bircham-pc.gov.uk)



## Newsletter Thoughts

Happy New Year... we go again. But first some facts and figures. It's somewhat alarming for those of us who are still getting to grips with the "21st century" as a notion – especially when we habitually think of "the turn of the century" being around 1901 and not 2001 – that we are now a quarter of the way through the said 21st century. Was it really 26 years ago when Tony Blair crossed arms to shake and carouse in the New Year to Auld Lang Syne with HM the Queen at the Millennium Dome... Lizzie with uncrossed arms and a slightly puzzled demeanour?

At the time the terrifying prospect of a millennium bug (Y2K) taking down Western civilisation came to very little; meanwhile, some years later, the "bug" we came to know as SARS-CoV-2 or COVID-19 came close to succeeding in a way few anticipated. In Russia, the New Year of 2000 ushered in a resignation speech from Boris Yeltsin and paved the way for the emergence of you-know-who. Some things change, some things stay the same...

And so to 2026 and what we might anticipate for the 12 months to come. Well despite the global future of the planet not looking entirely rosy, the one thing we probably can say with certainty based on the past is that we really don't have a clue as to what the future will bring and no snake-oil salesman should convince us of anything different. We make the best of things, be good neighbours and keep up sunny dispositions as far as possible. "Seize the day" as the ancients would tell us, since we don't know what tomorrow will bring. But to each and every one of you, we wish you a healthy, happy and importantly a lucky new year.

Do remember that the *Bircham Times* can be delivered to parishioners by email. You can email us at [news@thebirchams.uk](mailto: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](http://www.thebirchams.uk)



## Norfolk Carynx Hoard

Planning permission, even for the smallest building project, often calls for an archaeological investigation before work can begin. It was one such routine dig last year, a few miles from Thetford, that threw up some quite remarkable artefacts.

These date from the Iron Age, around 2,000 years ago, and include a battle trumpet known as a carynx, which was almost intact, along with fragments of some others. Also found was a stunning boar's head crafted from bronze sheet.

The carynx would be long (maybe as long as 6ft [1.8m]) and used vertically, so that the sound emitted carried over the heads of the warriors and far beyond.

The boar's head would have been mounted on a long shaft to lead the Celtic warriors into battle while sounding the trumpet (or several) to hopefully instil fear into the enemy.

The trumpet is one of only three ever found in Britain and the most complete in Europe. And the boar's head battle standard is the only one to be found in Britain.

Did these perhaps belong to members of the Iceni tribe made famous to all school kids by Boudica's brave, yet ultimately failed, revolt against Roman subjugation?

The find features in the BBC's *Digging for Britain* series (the episode in question – Series 13, ep 2 – aired on January 14 and is available on iPlayer).

LR



## Big Garden Birdwatch

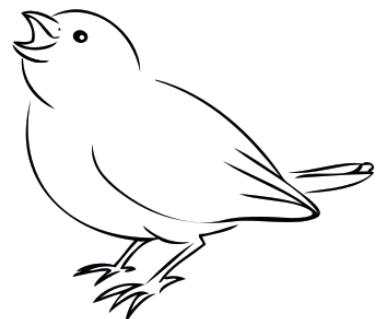
Since 1979 the RSPB has been encouraging us all to meditate awhile on our gardens and count the number of birds we find there. The Big Garden Birdwatch, dubbed the world's largest wildlife survey, returns this January, on the weekend of 23-25th.

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 (send in your results by February 22), even if our feathered friends don't make an appearance. Everyone who participates is adding to the sum 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 590,000 people took part, surveying 9.1 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. In Norfolk, our most-present species was the blue tit, followed by the woodpigeon and the house sparrow. So do your bit, settle down with a cuppa, pen and paper for an hour and record what you see.

[www.rspb.org.uk/birdwatch](http://www.rspb.org.uk/birdwatch)





## Bagthorpe Snowdrop Festival

On February 22, 11am-4pm, you can take part in the annual walk around the grounds of BAGTHORPE HALL. Surrounded by farmland, this is a delightful circular walk which meanders through a stunning display of snowdrops naturally carpeting a woodland floor. The hall can be found off the Syderstone Road to the east of Bircham Tofts. Entry costs £6 and children go free. Refreshments are available.

And if you are missing the great outdoors, there are other gardens open around this time including:

LEXHAM HALL, Sundays February 8 and 15. 11am-4pm. PE32 2QJ, near Litcham. Entry £6. Chd free. Pre-booking online, card or cash on the day. Parkland with lake and river walks surround C17 Hall.

Woodlands and borders carpeted with snowdrops. [www.lexhamestate.co.uk](http://www.lexhamestate.co.uk)

HORSTEAD HOUSE Saturday February 14. 11am-4pm. Mill Road, Horstead, NR12 7AU. Entry £6. Chd free. Pre-booking online, card or cash on the day. Stunning display of beautiful snowdrops with winter flowering shrubs. Another beautiful feature is the dogwoods growing on a small island in the River Bure, which flows through the garden.

BRINTON HALL Sunday February 15. 10.30am-3pm. Stody Road, Brinton, NR24 2QH (near Melton Constable). Entry £15. Chd free. No dogs. Pre-book online essential. A guided walk with the owners in the historic garden developed over 40 years. With large drifts of snowdrops and numerous cultivars, the walk crosses over a meadow to the lake, where there are specimen trees and shrubs planted for winter interest and scent.

### NATIONAL GARDEN SCHEME

The National Garden Scheme gives visitors unique access to more than 3,500 exceptional private gardens in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Channel Islands, and raises impressive amounts of money for some of the UK's best-loved nursing and health charities through admissions, teas and cake.

Thanks to the generosity of garden owners, volunteers and visitors we have donated more than £77.8 million to our beneficiary charities and in 2025 made donations of close to £3.9 million.

To find your perfect garden, visit [nhs.org.uk](http://nhs.org.uk), download the National Garden Scheme app or purchase the National Garden Scheme's Garden Visitor's Handbook, [nhs.org.uk/shop](http://nhs.org.uk/shop)

For more see [www.ngs.org.uk](http://www.ngs.org.uk)

For more information please contact Amanda McCallum  
[amanda.mccallum@ngs.org.uk](mailto:amanda.mccallum@ngs.org.uk) 07769 883537



### Dates for the Diary

**Bircham Windmill** Reopens Mar 28

**RAF Bircham Newton**  
Closed Nov 9

**RAF Sculthorpe** Reopens Apr 5 (Easter Sun)

**Anmer Social Club** Coffee, cake and chat, Mondays 10-12, 07947 580555

**Snettisham Park** Open daily from Feb 1

**Houghton Hall & Gardens**  
Reopens Spring (tba)  
**Sandringham** House and gardens reopen Mar 28

**Jan 18** Taylormania, Corn Exchange, KL, 5pm, £30

**Jan 18** Racing at Fakenham Racecourse

**Jan 21** The Very Best of Frankie Valli with Peter André, Corn Exchange, KL, 8pm, £48

**Jan 22** National Theatre Live, *Hamlet*, Westacre Theatre, 7pm, £14. Also at Majestic Cinema, KL

**Jan 22** The Dreamboys, Corn Exchange, KL, 7.30pm, from £33.50

**Jan 23** Totally Gaga – The Tribute, Princess Theatre, Hunstanton, 7.30pm, £30

**Jan 23-25** Big Garden Birdwatch (see opposite)

**Jan 24** Burns Night Supper, Anmer Social Club, 7pm 07899 872351

**Jan 25** Norfolk Symphony Orchestra, Corn Exchange, KL, 3.30pm, £16 (max)

**Jan 30** An Evening of (Very) Old Radio, Westacre Theatre, 7.30pm, £16/£10

**Jan 30** WW2 RAF Object Handling Coffee Morning, Lynn Museum 10.30-11.30am Afternoon Talk – RAF Aerial Reconnaissance and Photography in World War II, Lynn Museum, 2-3pm, £2



## Foodie Fare

### WORLD PULSES DAY

Yes, the UN celebrates a World Pulses Day on February 10 each year to recognise the global importance of the crop to many world diets. Of course, they form a large part of a vegan and/or vegetarian diet but appear also in carnivore diets. Pulses are also known as legumes of course. Chickpeas, lupins, lentils, dried peas, split peas are all regarded as "ancient superfoods" that have been cultivated since before 7000 BC.

Pulses produce a lower carbon footprint and smaller water footprint in their growth so are also considered better for the environment. Of course, this all sounds very virtuous and you meat-eaters out there are probably asserting the fact that a boring old pulse isn't ever going to pass your lips... but you are probably wrong. If you have ever eaten hummus, either at home or on a Greek or Turkish holiday, then you have eaten pulses (chickpeas).

And I simply refuse to believe that you have never had baked beans on either an English breakfast or a jacket potato. Or mushy peas (marrowfat peas) with your fish and chips. And it is not a new-fangled invention either, beloved of hippies, Gen Z or dieters (think edamame beans). The older generation is probably familiar with pease pudding (a mush of yellow split peas) often eaten with ham... probably to give it some flavour to be honest! It was originally called pease pottage and a recipe from the 14th century exists, as well as the centuries-old nursery rhyme:

"Pease Pudding hot, Pease Pudding cold, Pease Pudding in the pot nine days old.  
Some like it hot, some like it cold, some like it in the pot nine days old."

and consider the tune from *Oliver!* "Food Glorious Food" and the line "pease pudding and saveloys".

Pulses are not just part of olde English fayre but also the basis to many Indian curries. Daal, or lentil curries, are a mainstay of the cuisine, as are chickpea curries (channa daal). Caribbean food is based on the rice and peas dish; the Mexican staple chilli con carne has red kidney beans and refried beans (usually pinto) also feature; soybeans form the basis of Japanese cuisine and even the humble peanut is a legume so you can add a lot of Thai cuisine to the list. The French dish cassoulet, the Portuguese rib-sticker stew fabada and Middle Eastern falafels continue the theme.

There are literally hundreds of pulses to try and nowadays you don't have to soak and boil the living daylights out of them to make a dish since most come canned and ready to go. For those on a budget, try the "ethnic" aisle in the supermarket where the can of pulses is often sold considerably cheaper, or cut out the high street supermarket altogether and head for a health food store or an Indian supermarket.

We've left the delicate bit till last. Pulses are good for your insides, being full of protein, iron and fibre as well as heaps of other nutrients, but they are notorious for their gassy side-effects: think *Blazing Saddles* with the campfire pork-and-beans episode. There's also the catchy rhyme "Beans beans the magical fruit/The more you eat the more you toot".

### SHROVE TUESDAY OR PANCAKE DAY

The Lenten celebration takes place on February 17 this year so be prepared with your milk/water, flour and eggs, plus a little oil for frying. Whether you're going with sugar and lemon, Nutella, or a savoury filling, please do go carefully with your pancake frying and tossing. Nanny state advice of course but we were surprised to learn that last year 250 people visited A&E with Pancake Day misfortunes ranging from burns, falling over on spilled fat, to strained wrists from using the wrong tossing technique! We couldn't find any stats for injuries for crepe suzettes, mindful of the flaming liqueur risk!





## Words on Birds

### STOCK DOVE – OVERLOOKED AND UNDERRATED

Resembling a woodpigeon or even a feral pigeon, the stock dove is perhaps one of our most overlooked birds, especially in The Birches. They do congregate with woodpigeons, so keep a watchful eye in your garden for this most subtle of doves.

Similar in size to the collared dove but looking more like a woodpigeon, they are smaller, have no white neck pattern like a woodpigeon, and are shorter tailed.

Stock doves are largely blue-grey with an attractive iridescent bottle-green band on the neck and have a pink chest. In flight, they show black edges to the wing and two partial black bands near their back. Their dark eye gives them a gentle appearance unlike the pale yellow of a woodpigeon's eye.

Stock doves were farmed in old East Anglian days by warreners. The birds nested in rabbit burrows so the warreners covered up the holes with crossed sticks, allowing the parents to feed the chicks but the chicks could not leave the nest. They were then taken for the pot when ready. Young birds around four weeks old were a tender and sought-after meat.

Nowadays they still nest in holes, usually in trees, but often in old stone barns or similar buildings, quite different to the flimsy twig nest of a woodpigeon. This requirement for nesting holes restricts it, but ensures that it is common in old parkland with mature trees. It will also visit gardens and bird feeding stations. Here in Bircham I am fortunate to have four birds regularly visiting the ground feeders.

British stock doves are sedentary, rarely moving far from where they were hatched. In contrast, the Scandinavian and eastern European populations are migratory, with the birds moving south to the Mediterranean region.

This is one of the few birds that the UK has by far the biggest European population, with at least 2 million breeding pairs. Though many are unaware of these most subtle of doves in our midst.

There are many regional names for this dove, ranging from blue rock to wood dove, cushat, sand pigeon and stoggie.

Richard Campey is the owner of  
The One Stop Nature Shop at Burnham Deepdale

### Dates for the Diary

**Feb 6** Talk: Wildlife of the Pantanal S American Wetlands, Hawk & Owl Trust, Sculthorpe, 2-3.30pm, £6-9

**Feb 7** Warden's Walk @ Sculthorpe, 10-noon. £10-16

**Feb 7** Farmers' Market, North Creak from 9.30am

**Feb 7** Natural Paints and Pigments Workshop For Adults, Lynn Museum, 10.30-12.30pm, £10

**Feb 7/28** Barsham Brewery Tours, West Barsham £20 (also every Friday 3pm)

**Feb 8/15** Snowdrop Days at Stow Hall Gardens, Stow Bardolph, 10am-4pm, £8

**Feb 9** Fruit Tree Pruning Workshop, Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse, Dereham, 10.30-3pm, £45

**Feb 13** The Irish House Party, Princess Theatre, Hunstanton, 7.30pm, £25

**Feb 14-28** 819th King's Lynn Mart, Tuesday Market Place, KL, see <https://lovenorfolk.co.uk/events/kings-lynn-mart/>

**Feb 14** Nature Photography Winter Workshop, Sculthorpe Moor Nature Reserve, 10-4pm, £30/£35

**Feb 16-20** NORFOLK SCHOOLS HALF-TERM

**Feb 22** Bagthorpe Hall Snowdrop Festival, 11-4pm, £6

**Feb 26** National Theatre Live, *The Audience*, with Helen Mirren, Majestic Cinema, KL, 7pm

**Feb 27** Sign-Writing Coffee Morning, Lynn Museum 10.30-11.30am  
Afternoon Talk – Rise and Fall of Steam Power and the Savage Bros Ltd, Lynn Museum, 2-3pm £2



## *Those Long Winter Evenings*

Do remember with the winter evenings drawing in that there is a goodly stock of books, games and jigsaws held in St Mary's that is available for borrowing. If tidying the house or cutting out clutter after Christmas, do consider donations of such items. It's also great practice to take and then give some different items back for others to enjoy. Do seal jigsaw boxes to avoid accidents, though, and it's helpful if you can indicate if there are pieces missing!

If an avid reader, do also take advantage of the monthly visit of the mobile library from Norfolk Library Services.

## *St Mary's 100 Club Draw*

**JANUARY RESULTS:** Here are the first results for 2026: 1st prize no. **98**; 2nd prize no. **55** (1st prize wins £25; 2nd prize £10).

Thanks to everyone who has taken part, and good luck to all in the coming year.

Sally

## *Bircham Banter*

Next Banter session is on Thursday February 5 from 2.30 to 4pm in the Social Club. Do come along and join with the regulars for chat, tea/coffee and cake, especially if you are new to the village. You'll be made very welcome!!

Pauline

## *Stanhoe & Barwick WI*

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

February 5 King's Lynn Night Shelter

March 5 History of the Control Tower, Sculthorpe

Visitors are always welcome. Our charge is £5, which includes refreshments. Contact [stanhoeandbarwickwi@gmail.com](mailto:stanhoeandbarwickwi@gmail.com) for more details.

## *Sandringham & District Rotary Club*

A new venture for 2026 is the forthcoming Sandringham & District Rotary Club. A presentation for those interested in joining was held on January 9 at the Dersingham Village Centre. Expect more news soon.

There are currently clubs at Fakenham and Hunstanton that meet on Wednesday lunchtimes. Rotary is one of the world's largest and most successful global membership and humanitarian service organisations, with 1.2 million members in more than 200 countries. In Britain alone there are 35,000 members and 1,500 clubs with maybe one more to add to the total?

## *Health News*

A reminder of the jabs you can receive this winter.

Flu jab: Over 65s or in a high-risk group

Covid jab: Available to over 75s and anyone else who is immunocompromised. Both vaccinations can be given together.

Call Bayfield Surgery on 01485 521135 to arrange an appointment or use the NHS Account App or access via the NHS website <https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-app/account/>



## Curl Up With a Good Book

**Ragtime** (1975) by E(dgar) L(awrence) Doctorow

The mixing of fact and fiction in novels appears pretty commonplace nowadays but not so much back 50 years ago when E.L. Doctorow penned *Ragtime*. The novel is set in pre-World War I New York, and is a snapshot of an era when the US was full of confidence, boasting a can-do attitude concerning industry, invention, adventure, glamour, big money and patriotism (see where we are going here?).

The tale immediately concerns an ordinary but prosperous family whose wealth was built on flags, bunting and fireworks: Mother, Father, Grandfather, the Little Boy and Mother's Younger Brother. The family remains nameless but are counterposed with the scattering of real individuals who cross their paths. Harry Houdini crashes his car outside the house; Father accompanies Robert Peary on his fallacious trip to conquer the Arctic; Mother's Younger Brother is in love from afar with showgirl Evelyn Nesbit (who in real life was part of a sordid murder scandal involving a famed architect and her husband). And so it goes on....



The novel is meticulously researched with the famous names behaving as they did more than a century ago (including Henry Ford, financier J.P. Morgan, writer and anarchist Emma Goldman), and there's a real evocation of the time, whether that be music, fashions, architecture, language.

Then into this tale step another two families: one black and the other Jewish, and nothing is ever really the same again....

Doctorow is an under-appreciated author in this country but one who deserves to be read. You may have come across the movie based on another of his New York yarns: *Billy Bathgate*. The story here is easy to follow, entertaining and rewarding (though possibly X-rated in places); and while the book runs to just 250 pages you'll undoubtedly find yourself disappearing down Wikipedia rabbitholes to find out more about the lives of this cast of real characters. Real life really is stranger than fiction...

## 1953 North Sea Floods Commemoration

January 31 marks the 73rd anniversary of the North Sea floods that swamped the east coast of Britain and led to more than 300 deaths in the country (around 100 in Norfolk alone) and close to 2,000 in the Netherlands. Both locals and US servicemen living in Hunstanton as well as rescuers from RAF Sculthorpe perished on that night. In the past there has been a parade at Hunstanton and an act of remembrance at the town's memorial.

Film taken at the time of the devastating events can be seen at <https://eafa.org.uk/work/?id=1395>



**STANHOE VILLAGE SCREEN**  
Stanhoe Reading Room/Village Hall



### **Downton Abbey: The Grand Finale (PG)**

When Lady Mary finds herself in a public scandal and the family faces financial trouble, the household grapples with the threat of social disgrace. The Crawleys must embrace change with the next generation leading Downton Abbey into the future. This film delivers pure escapism with brilliant photography and stunning set-pieces, leading to a heart-warming conclusion for the Downton saga.

Monday January 26 at 7.30pm (doors open 7pm). £6 per ticket includes a complimentary drink.



## 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 Jan 30/Feb 27

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 (to Heacham); 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 15:43; Sat 09:23 12:23 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 Atlantic dominated our weather through to the 18th of December with a succession of depressions and associated fronts bringing frequent wet and windy spells, interspersed with a few sunnier days. Within this period came Storm Bram, which tracked to the north of Scotland on the 9th and produced gale-force winds along with 12.2 mm of rain, most of which fell overnight. The storm was also responsible for the warmest day of the month when a maximum temperature of 14.1°C was recorded along with an overnight minimum that did not fall below 10.3°C, a number that would breach the average daytime maximum for this time of the year. Despite the unsettled start, the monthly rainfall total was 56 mm, this being close to the long-term average and mainly because conditions changed markedly after the 18th. That day recorded the highest daily rainfall of the month at 14.7 mm, after which the wind gradually backed to an easterly direction, introducing much drier but significantly colder air.

Before the 18th the temperatures had exceeded 10°C on twelve of the previous days but they failed to do so thereafter. Despite this imbalance, the mean maximum temperature for the month was 8.9°C, this still being significantly higher than the norm of 7.5°C. The Christmas period then brought some clear, sunny days, tempered by a fresh easterly breeze before the wind backed round to a north-easterly on the 27th, leading to more overcast conditions with occasional drizzle. The final day of the month was also the coldest with a maximum of just 3.0°C, after the only recorded overnight air frost, although the clear, sunny day that followed provided sufficient compensation.

For the year as a whole, 2025 recorded 561 mm of rainfall—around 85% of the long-term average and significantly below the 830 mm measured in 2024. Temperatures were higher too, with a mean annual maximum of 15.4°C compared with 14.7°C the previous year, the latter being closer to the average. November remained the wettest month of 2025 with 114 mm of rain while March clung on to being the driest with just 11 mm.

Bryan



## The Haunting of East Rudham Vicarage

Towards the end of 1908 a mysterious occurrence, an apparition, took place in East Rudham Vicarage. The apparition in question was of the Reverend Dr H. J. Duckinfield Astley of the parish, so not entirely unexpected that he was seen in his own vicarage, except at the time the reverend was actually abroad in Algeria. This was no case of mistaken identity though, because three persons at the vicarage claimed they had seen Astley outside his study window on December 26.

Living at that point in time in the rectory were "Mrs Hartley, the housekeeper, an elderly woman; Florence Breese, aged 18, of Lynn, a domestic servant; and the Rev R. Brock, the priest in charge". Each of the witnesses in turn peered through the window to see the reverend sitting at a desk outside.

Mr Brock said: "I have never seen anything of the kind before. I have no predisposition towards spiritualism."

Mrs Hartley "expressed the opinion that Mr Astley's head was surrounded by a halo when she saw him on Saturday evening". To modern eyes there is a hint of suspicion about Mrs Hartley's report. *The Eastern Daily Press* described her thus: "Mrs Hartley, who has been all over the world, was told years ago in Australia, by a gentleman who is dead, that she ought to have been a medium. She never has been one, but spirits are very frequent companions of hers".

Florence Breese was a "gentle girl, who will never lose her place from any domineering attitude". The journalist clearly believing that Mrs Hartley was leading the young girl astray.

But the sequence of events was intriguing, since the reverend and Mrs Astley were not just abroad in Algeria but were the victims of a serious accident. On December 16 the couplings of a train in which they were travelling broke, the restaurant car in which they had been sitting careered down a hill at 60 miles per hour, left the rails and fell over an embankment. Luckily they were not seriously hurt but suffered contusions to their heads and Mrs Astley ended up with a broken leg. On December 20 the chaplain at Algiers wrote to East Rudham to tell them of the incident, and the letter was received on the morning of the 26th. Later that evening the apparition was seen, with the halo being significant perhaps? The accident was reported and published on December 29.

On December 31 the newspaper reported "More appearances on Tuesday night" and "Seen by Mrs Hartley and Mr Brock". But they cannily added a PS "But Not by Newspaper Reporters". Mrs Hartley saw the reverend again in the garden in his robes with a stole around his shoulders.

By this stage the journalists probably smelled a rat, or decided that Hartley and Brock had been on the cooking sherry over Christmas and the New Year because at this point the narrative petered out ... but not before *The Times* had got hold of it (well thanks to Mr Brock who sent along his version of the story). *The Times* sent a representative along and Mr Brock mistook the *Times* journalist for the reverend! *The Eastern Daily Press* journalist finally exploded their ruse when Brock admitted he had only seen Astley on a single occasion and for only 30 minutes. And at this point the story died a death... but at least it had kept tongues wagging for a week or so.

## Vic Dade, Hunstanton RNLI

In October 2025's *Bircham Times* we talked about a visit we were delighted to have made to visit the volunteers and staff at RNLI Hunstanton. A particular volunteer who was not name-checked at the time but who graciously gave up his time to talk us through the ins and outs of the vessels there (as well as the tractor) was Vic Dade. Well in the New Year's Honours Vic was awarded an MBE for his long-term volunteering: he joined the RNLI as a 17-year-old in 1979 working as a tractor driver before crewing both lifeboat and hovercraft. Many congratulations to Vic on his award.



## Westacre Theatre Reading Group

If books are your thing then you might be attracted by the Riverside Readers, who meet up at Westacre Theatre on a monthly basis. If you are interested in joining the throng then do contact the organiser Lynette Brinsdon at [lynettesa@aol.com](mailto:lynettesa@aol.com) or on 07900 570765 for more details.

## Bircham in Bloom

Bircham in Bloom would like to give a heartfelt thanks to everyone who has supported them over the past year. We have now grown to 21 volunteers who have been working on various planting projects during the year, together with general tidying-up, weeding, watering and cutting back.

Thank you also to the Parish Council and the Borough Council for their continuing support, as well as those of you who have supported Bircham in Bloom at fundraising events or with private donations.

## Red Squirrel Appreciation Day

On January 21 2026 we celebrate Red Squirrel Appreciation Day. This one-day event helps raise awareness of red squirrels and their conservation, and is an opportunity to celebrate their beauty. You can post, like and share images, news and stories using the hashtag [#RedSquirrelAppreciationDay](#).

Emblematic of nature (and of road safety to anyone of a certain age\*), there are now only a few hundred thousand of the little critters left in the UK thanks to the pox brought by the grey interlopers. Indeed, it is thought the reds will become extinct in England within the next decade.

If you would like to support their survival, contact the Red Squirrel Survival Trust <https://www.rsst.org.uk/> or UK Squirrel Accord <https://squirrelaccord.uk/get-involved/>

\* We never knew until now that Tufty's surname was Fluffytail!



## Winter Olympic Games



Just a reminder that the Winter Olympic Games from Milano-Cortina, Italy takes place from February 4-22, closely followed by the Winter Paralympic Games from March 6-15. It's that four-yearly cycle when we all become experts in the nuances of curling, or muse that in our youth we might have tackled a bit of snowboarding, or even start supporting nations like Jamaica and Australia (with no snow) in their gold-medal attempts. It beats going out and braving the cold here!