



B I R C H A M T I M E S



In and around the Birchams

news@thebirchams.uk

October 2024 Issue 12

Parish Council Matters

Our October meeting took place on 9th October. We welcomed our new Clerk, Michelle, to her first meeting.

Various issues were raised in reports to Council which will be of interest and relevance:

- In June we provided an update about the proposal for 12 new houses at the South of Great Bircham. The latest changes suggest that our concerns have been met. Based on this, Council have withdrawn the call in for this application. We will have further conversations with Highways regarding the Village Gateways as these will need to be repositioned.
- A team from the Borough Council Benefits Unit has been setup to help those who are unable to check which benefits they are eligible for. You can contact them on 0800 731 2253
- Borough Councillor Chris Morley still has £900 of his Councillor Community Grant Fund; any good cause that is in need of a little help can contact Councillor Morley on cldr.chris.morley@west-norfolk.gov.uk for further details (a bank account is required)
- Work will start at the Playing Field to install a soakaway system to provide a solution to the water run-off onto Church Lane. This is being coordinated by Sandringham.

We also agreed to add poppies to the railings around the War Memorial for Remembrance, along with the Council's wreath as we did last year.

Our next meeting is on Wednesday 27th November 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

It's that time of year when festivals and celebrations come at us thick and fast — as our Foodie correspondent notes: "the end of the harvest and.... the start of the dark half of the year or the first day of winter." Halloween is the best-known representation of this. We've harvested (and carved) pumpkins, laid down winter food stores and readied ourselves for the dark winter to follow. In this issue we discuss the various Christian and pagan festivals and how they merge under the ever-important blanket of food. We are fortunate to have an article from Dr Paul Lee who has mapped ghostly goings-on in the vicinity; we remember (maybe not lovingly) the terror created by the 17th-century Witchfinder General; and we dig down into the legend of Black Shuck, the ferocious helldog of hereabouts. From the Annals tells of smuggling, once much prevalent all along the Norfolk Coast. We also touch upon the local link to the Gunpowder Plot (November 5) and remember the death of England's (and Norfolk's!) preeminent naval hero, who died on October 21, 1805.

To lighten the mood a little we have the return of the majestic pink-footed geese, a book review on an Australian author, your many clubs, meetings and societies, news from another Bircham bowls club (is there a third? Do let us know), and the announcement of a Christmas lights competition as we wend our way towards the wintery festive season.

Do remember that the *Bircham Times* can be delivered to parishioners by email. You can email us at news@thebirchams to request that (or for any other matter).

In addition, we publish on the 15th of every month on our website: www.thebirchams.uk



Foodie Fare

We have the Celts, mainly, to thank for the celebrations that start at the end of October. Samhain is a Celtic festival occurring around Oct 31/Nov 2 which celebrates the end of the harvest and marks the start of the dark half of the year or the first day of winter. (Samhain is the word for the month of November in modern Irish.) During Samhain the barriers between the physical and spiritual worlds would supposedly become porous, allowing interaction between the living and the dead.

The tradition of carving turnips/swedes into lanterns can also be traced back to that festival — later adapted to pumpkins in the US (a lot easier to cut — if you ever tried carving root vegetables as a child, like I did, when pumpkins were unknown to us UK kids, you would definitely agree).

In the same way that Christianity adapted Christmas to fit in with pagan midwinter festivals, around the 9th century, the Christian Allhallowtide festivals that include All Saints' Day on November 1 and All Souls' Day on November 2 appear to have eventually been merged with Samhain. Hence we have ended up with a veritable cornucopia of celebrations around that time of the year, both pagan and Christian, with sometimes similar sensibilities. These include:

Samhain

Halloween

Allantide (Cornwall)

Hop-tu-Naa (Isle of Man)

Day of the Dead [Día de los Muertos] (Mexico)

Allhallowtide (Christian), comprising All Saints' Day, All Hallows' Eve, All Souls' Day

All those pagan and Christian festivals naturally involve special culinary delights. We are all familiar with the seasonally appropriate toffee apple in the UK, designed to keep dentists in employment by removing any loose dental fillings. But how about the Spanish speciality, saints' bones (*huesos de santos*) — a sweet item that is fashioned from marzipan and made to look like a white finger bone, with a filling usually made of confectioner's custard to represent the marrow. In Mexico for the Day of the Dead you will find sugar skulls as well as *pan de muertos* — a sweet, fluffy bread topped with small bone-shaped decorations to represent the dead.

A largely forgotten English recipe is the soul cake. During the Middle Ages beggars would go from door to door, asking for food or donations. In return they would offer up prayers for the holy souls. This practice became known as "souling" and the cakes offered to them were referred to as "soul cakes". The recipes appear to resemble what we today would recognise as shortbread.

175g caster sugar
175g butter
3 egg yolks
450g self-raising flour
2 tsp mixed spice and some ground nutmeg
100ml milk
100g currants
Demerara sugar



1. Preheat oven to 190°C (gas mark 5). Line several baking sheets with baking paper.
2. Cream the butter and sugar together until light and fluffy. Beat in the egg yolks. Sift together the flour, mixed spice and nutmeg. Add to the creamed mixture along with the milk.
3. Roll out the dough on a lightly floured surface with a lightly floured rolling pin to 1/3 inch (8mm) thickness. Cut into rounds with a 3-inch (75mm) biscuit cutter. Using the dull side of a knife mark a light cross indentation into the top of each biscuit. Press currants into the crosses. Sprinkle with demerara sugar and bake for 10 to 15 minutes until risen and golden brown. Cool on a wire rack.



From the Annals

SMUGGLING

We've had poaching and now a spot of smuggling, including a right free-for-all in Snettisham. The Norfolk coastline with its nooks and crannies was a popular place to bring in high-taxed goods such as gin, tea and silks, thereby neatly avoiding the Custom House in Lynn. And seems the local populaces were all too happy to help themselves to the loot. A case in point was at Hunstanton where tax officials were shot dead and the perpetrators were freed after a jury trial full of complicit villagers.

THE NORWICH COURIER — February 1822

"On Thursday night a boat, supposed from a cutter which was seen in the offing, landed from 70 to 80 tubs of gin and brandy on Snettisham Beach, when part of the crew of the Preventive boat, upon that station, seized the same, and also the boat; but the smugglers, being assisted from the shore, succeeded in regaining part of the goods, and also the boat — in the scuffle, two of the smugglers were wounded (it is supposed dangerously) when they made off, leaving the boat's crew in the possession of 22 tubs of gin, nine tubs of brandy, and two tubs of tobacco, which were securely lodged in his Majesty's warehouse here on the following day, though strongly opposed by the party on shore, consisting of nearly 100 persons, some armed with bludgeons, and others with fowling-pieces (one of which was taken by the officers), attended by from 20 to 30 carts and horses, to take away the goods, had they not been interrupted "

On September 26, 1784, two men were killed by the notorious King's Lynn smuggler William Kemball. The victims were William Green, a customs officer, and a dragoon soldier, William Webb. Kemball and his accomplice Andrew Gunton were tried at Thetford Assizes the following April.

NORFOLK CHRONICLE — April 16, 1785

"It is to be remarked, that the Petit Jury who convicted James Clissen of murder, on strong circumstantial evidence, at our last Assizes at Thetford were the same who acquitted William Kemball and Andrew Gunton for the same crime (under every aggravation and proof of guilt) the very next trial! On their second trial four of the Jurors were for convicting the prisoners, but the other eight prevailed in acquitting them.

By the penal law of England, in cases of murder, if the nearest of kin appeal, and the prisoner be convicted, the crown has no power of mitigating sentence."

What we might consider today a case of jury nobbling, even the father-in-law of William Green gave evidence in support of Kemball, saying they had been drinking in a nearby pub together when shots went off.

Dates for the Diary

Houghton Hall and Gardens (Suns, Weds, Thurs). Antony Gormley *Time Horizon* exhibition runs Apr 21-Oct 31
RAF Bircham Newton Heritage Centre Sundays fortnightly from September 15, 10-4. Ends November 10

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

Oct 17 *The Murder Mystery Play*, West Acre Theatre Studio, 7pm, £40 includes dinner

Oct 18 Racing at Fakenham Racecourse
<https://www.fakenhamracecourse.co.uk/book-tickets/>

Oct 19-20, 24-31 Pumpkin House and Sale, Brookhill Farm, Thursford

Oct 21 Whirling Wader Walk & Breakfast, RSPB Snettisham 8-11am from £28

Oct 23 *Anatomy of a Fall*, Westacre Theatre, 2pm £10
OCTOBER 25-NOVEMBER 1
SCHOOLS HALF-TERM

Oct 26 Peta Wainwright Artist Open Studio, Fring Road, Great Bircham, 10-4pm

Oct 26 *Wilding*, Village Screen Cinema, Syderstone, 7.30pm

Oct 27 Halloween Paw-Traits photography for pets and owners @ Creake Abbey Farm £35

Oct 27 Clocks go back

Oct 29-31 Pumpkin Carving at Shadowthorpe Farm Shop, Creake Abbey 10-4pm £8

Nov 1 Fawkes in The Walks, free fireworks in the Walks, King's Lynn from 6pm

Nov 1 Christmas Memories, King's Lynn Corn Exchange 2.30pm £14.50

Nov 2 Cliff-top fireworks, Hunstanton Cliff from 5pm
<https://thelittleboxoffice.com/princess/book/selection/202802>



Digital Digest

For retro views of today's news

All hail Ceefax! Launched by the BBC just over 50 years ago, it was the trailblazing place to turn to for news, sport, travel, weather and so on, long before the universal reach of the Internet. This teletext service may have been switched off in October 2012 but those clunky, colourful text and graphics are still within reach. Get today's news in yesterday's format by visiting this site.

www.nathanmediaservices.co.uk/ceefax

For getting lost down a rabbit-hole of why, how and what

We've spent far longer on this site than we'd care to admit, but it is very thought-provoking and stimulating and covers hundreds of topics from baby names, presidential politics, mind puzzles, and time theory to name but four. It is American in orientation but don't let that put you off. Bet you can't spend just 10 minutes on it...

<https://waitbutwhy.com/>

Curl Up With a Good Book

The Living Sea of Waking Dreams (2021) Richard Flanagan

I have always enjoyed and respected Australian writers: Clive James, Peter Carey, Jane Harper, Rory Arnott, Trent Dalton and Richard Flanagan. To me they all offer a more expansive, alternative form of writing than the average British author.

For this review I have chosen Richard Flanagan; he won the Booker Prize in 2013 for the fabulous *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*. He is a Tasmanian author with an international and intellectual reach.

I have chosen his recent work, *The Living Sea of Waking Dreams*. The simple premise of this novel is the dilemma facing the three children of Francie; she is 86 years old and lying in a Hobart hospital. She almost welcomes her forthcoming and inevitable death, but two of her children, who no longer live in Tasmania and are very successful, are unwilling to let her. Tommy, the child who has stayed with her in Tasmania and has looked after her, wants to fulfil his mother's wishes.

This all takes place in the summer of 2019-20 when raging bushfires were destroying Tasmania's fabulous flora and fauna.

These parallel ecological and human storylines almost ask the question "should the Planet Earth be taken off life support". It is, in effect, a story about disconnection both from each other, even within the same family, and from the ecology of the world around us.

Flanagan is a skilful writer who manages to mould and intertwine these two themes. He is a vehement and active environmentalist. This passion for life comes through in this novel, which had deservedly rave reviews in Australia. I highly recommend any of his books, but this, his most recent, will come to be regarded as a highly important contribution to world literature.

Terry S

The Manningtree Witches (2021) by A K Blakemore

A lyrical prose retelling of the 17th century witch craze, based in Manningtree, Essex, with heroine Rebecca West facing the dangerous Witchfinder General Matthew Hopkins. There's fear and suspicion aplenty in the village as dark forces come out to play.



History Corner

PIRATES (cont. from Sept) AND THE METRIC SYSTEM

The US, as we all know, stubbornly refuses to adopt the metric system... persisting with their "inferior" pints, gallons and tons, as well as the abomination that is a "cup" in cooking! However, it seems we may need to cut them a little slack, since no lesser authority than Founding Father Thomas Jefferson was all geared up to adopt the French metric system in the late 1790s before some English privateers got in the way.

In 1793 Jefferson sought the help of famous French scientist Joseph Dombey and requested that he transport to the New World via ship a copper rod, the length of which was exactly 1 metre. In addition there was a metal cylinder with a standard mass of 1 kg. Both objects would form the basis of a new metric system to harmonise all the differing measurements in use at the time. However, those pesky English privateers got in the way, raided the ship and held Dombey to ransom (a price that was never paid since he died while held prisoner on Monserrat).

Obviously this should have been a "mere" hurdle to overcome on the route to metrication... but the US is still not quite ready to adopt!

THE WITCHFINDER GENERAL

Matthew Hopkins, the self-proclaimed Witchfinder General, toured the East of the country during the Civil Wars period, on the lookout for satanic goings-on. While Hopkins commenced his well-paid misogynistic "duties" in Manningtree in Essex, his reach extended throughout East Anglia, including Norfolk. He was born in Great Wenham, Suffolk in 1620, the son of a Puritan clergyman. His first victim was his neighbour, the elderly and crippled Elizabeth Clarke. She was sentenced to death by hanging. Many women, for it was nearly always women, were identified as witches by having strange bodily markings, or they kept small animals around them, mice, cats, etc. the witch's familiar so to speak. They were often given away by fellow females (many of the male householders were away fighting in the wars).

Hopkins' particular skill was to identify a witch, bind her, and submit her to the "swimming test", whereby she was lowered into water and, if she sank, she were innocent and happy in Heaven; if she floated, it were an admission of guilt and she was tried as a witch and when found guilty was hanged. All those magnificent village ponds and village greens in the region have stories to tell.

Reverend John Gaule, vicar of Great Staughton in Huntingdonshire and a critical opponent of Hopkins, wrote:

"Every old woman with a wrinkled face, a furred brow, a hairy lip, a gobber tooth, a squint eye, a squeaking voice or a scolding tongue, having a rugged coat on her back, a skull cap on her head, a spindle in her hand and a dog or cat at her side is not only suspected... but also pronounced a witch."

Dates for the Diary

Nov 3 Dragon Festival, St George's Guildhall, King's Lynn £2

Nov 4-8 and 11-15 Norfolk Restaurant Week
www.norfolkrestaurantweek.co.uk/

Nov 7 Bircham Banter, St Mary's from 2pm

Nov 7 Stanhoe & Barwick WI, Stanhoe Reading Room, 2pm

Nov 8-Dec 23 Thursford Christmas Spectacular, Thursford 2pm/7pm from £43

Nov 9 Concert of Remembrance, with Hunstanton Concert Band at Thornham Church, 6.30pm. Collection for the church and Royal British Legion

Nov 12-16 *The Sound of Music*, King's Lynn Corn Exchange 7.30pm (and 2.30pm on Sat) From £16

Nov 15-17 Sandringham Christmas Craft, Food & Gift Fair
<https://www.livingheritagecount ryshows.com/sandringham-craft-food-and-gift-fair-tickets/>

Nov 16 Bircham Social Club Quiz, 8pm

Nov 16 Burnham Market Christmas Market

Nov 18 *Fairytale of New York* (Irish-themed Christmas concert), King's Lynn Corn Exchange 2.30/7.30pm £30

Nov 19 Horseracing @ Fakenham

Nov 21-Dec 24 Luminare Sandringham 4.30-8pm From £15

Nov 23 *The Holdovers*, Village Screen Cinema, Syderstone, 7.30pm £4

Nov 23 Christmas Wreath Workshop @ Pensthorpe £55

Nov 23 Creake Abbey Christmas Gift Fair, 10-3pm

Nov 24 Christmas Market @ Pensthorpe £3

Nov 27 Parish Council Meeting at Bircham Social Club, 7.30pm



Ghostly Goings-On

A new interactive map showing nearly 400 haunted locations in West Norfolk has been unveiled at www.paullee.com/ghosts/KL

Clicking on the small icons produces a small summary of the alleged stories, some dating back to the late 18th century. Naturally, King's Lynn dominates the spectral scene but there are others elsewhere, including at the Birchams.

The most famous haunted location here is, of course, the Construction Industry Training Board, once the home to RAF Bircham Newton. The main hauntings seem to focus on the old squash court and the adjacent hotel where phantom airmen from World War 2 have allegedly been experienced. However, there are a multitude of other spectres in the vicinity and in the houses on-site and nearby. These ghosts vary from fast-moving figures with glowing white eyes to strange shapes that drift across the road. Away from the CITB, there is a ghostly "White Lady" seen just to the south of Great Bircham who is oblivious to everything around her. Other places in the vicinity, like Syderstone and East Rudham, have their fair share of phantom exploits too.

The author of the map, Paul Lee, is keen to hear of your stories and accounts in the region and can be reached at paul@paullee.com

Black Shuck — the Demon Dog

For Halloween we have the tale of a fearsome canine apparition who slyly roams the Norfolk coastline and the inland lanes on stormy nights (of course he does!). He (for 'tis a "he" indeed) is described as a shaggy black hellhound with daemonic eyeballs glowing like hot coals (except in the version of the tale where he is headless!). He howls (both the headed and headless version) a blood-curdling cry and gnashes wildly with phosphorescent teeth. If you were unlucky enough to encounter him you would be sure to die within the year. The rule is, if you see him you shouldn't tell anyone for a year (shades of Fight Club here). Oh and he eats cats for good measure. More egregiously, he is rumoured to have devoured parishioners at prayer during a fearful thunderstorm of 1577.



Seems we owe the emergence of Black Shuck to our Scandinavian forefathers who were afearred of the black hound of the god Odin.

PS From our Dialect correspondent: A Norfolk term for a tramp is a shack or a shuck... an idle dog, a lurcher. The word is derived from an Old English term for the devil. He believes the Scandinavian bit is stuff and nonsense and has long since been debunked. However, he's not so quick to reveal whether Black Shuck is real or not!

Trafalgar Day

It would be remiss of us not to acknowledge the death of the county's most famous son. Horatio Nelson died on October 21, 1805 at the Battle of Trafalgar. The winning of the battle over a French/Spanish fleet put an end to Napoleon's plan to invade England.

The leader of the foreign fleet, Admiral Villeneuve, was an attendee at Nelson's funeral but upon his return to France he died in seemingly suspicious circumstances, found dead in a hotel room with stab wounds — a more ignominious end than that of his opponent: England's finest seafaring hero.





In the Garden

BLACK PLANTS

A lot of people would baulk at growing black-coloured plants. What's the point? Flowers are meant to be bright and giddy, not grim and funereal. But black plants are really, really dramatic and, contrary to expectations, really stand out — especially against natural greenery. And, should you want to grow something a bit more unusual than sweet peas, hydrangeas and carnations, say, then there is plenty of choice within the blacks or *nigra* family.

In spring consider black tulips (queen of night/black parrot/black horse); the black forest calla lily looks dramatic next to its white companions; and if in love with petunias, try the Crazytunia Black Mamba (crazy name — crazy blooms) or clear crystals black pansies with yellow centres. Possibly your introduction to black plants could have been black bamboo, black basil or black grasses but other plants to consider are cosmos (the black magic is less a coal shade and more chocolate), hollyhocks (blacknight), or more intriguingly the black bat flower (great for Halloween), a flighty-looking thing with long black whiskers. Think more cat than bat, to be honest.

Of course, experts will tell you there is no such thing as a truly black plant, but those we mention are very convincing and if you are not yet ready to embrace these blackish hues then you can work up to it slowly with shades of deep purple, red or chocolate.

Changes to Recycling (and Hazardous Bits & Bobs)

In last month's issue we said we would keep you up to date with progress on needing to book a slot at the local recycling centres in the county. Norfolk County Council (NCC) has released the date on which the changes take place. From Monday, November 18 you will need to pre-book your visit, and you can be an early adopter of the system (or just merely organised) by booking from November 11. No specific online booking link was available when we went to press. Presumably the phone number for those not online is their customer service line: 0344 800 8020.

On a slightly different tack, NCC has announced a "Hazardous Waste Event", where you can (as a householder) dump your hazardous undesirables. Our opportunity is at King's Lynn Recycling at Willows Business Park, Saddlebow on November 2 and 3 from 9am to 4pm.

No booking required in this instance but be warned: it's popular and has already led to queues at the first event in North Norwich.

By hazardous, the rules stipulate paint in paint cans, aerosols, bleach, anti-freeze, insecticides and so on.... basically stuff you'd not want to touch with bare hands. The full list and the latest news is at <https://www.norfolk.gov.uk/article/38615/Hazardous-waste-items-we-do-not-accept>

Do let us have feedback on how well the system works for you.



VILLAGE SCREEN CINEMA
at Amy Robsart Village Hall, Syderstone



Wilding (PG) Saturday October 26

Wilding is a documentary based on Isabella Tree's 2018 memoir of how she and her husband Charlie Burrell completely overhauled the 1,400-acre Knepp estate he had inherited in Sussex.

The Holdovers (15) Saturday November 23

College professor Paul Hunham, forced to stay on campus over the 1970 Christmas holidays to care for a handful of "holdover" students, befriends troublemaker Angus and grieving cook Mary in this witty retro comedy that won Best Original Screenplay at the 2023 Oscars.

Starring Paul Giamatti and Oscar-winning Da'Vine Joy Randolph.

Doors open 7pm; tickets £4 pay on the door

Contact 01485 578171 or syderstonecinema_ARVH@outlook.com for further details.



MOBILE POST OFFICE

The 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

Friday November 8/December 6
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

Bircham Weather

The cool, misty mornings followed by balmy afternoons that would typically describe September days were unfortunately in short supply this year as more mobile weather conditions prevailed, although it did begin promisingly on the first day when the sun broke through by early afternoon to lift the temperature to 25.2°C. This was to be the warmest day though as a thunderstorm during the following night heralded the change to a showery regime, only punctured by a sunny day on the 6th which saw another good maximum of 24.7°C. The weather did settle down in a spell from the 12th to the 22nd when the "typical" September days finally arrived, even though some were interspersed with overcast conditions, before bowing out with a sunny day and a high of 25.1°C on the 21st. Up to this point the rainfall, being mostly of a showery nature, had totalled just 19mm but the wet conditions that were to follow brought the month's total to 68mm, this representing around one and a half times the September average after the 30th returned the wettest day figure of 15mm. Even so, we were spared the worst of the rain as some stations around Oxfordshire recorded around three times the normal volume for the month. Temperatures were also depressed during this spell such that they remained below 20°C with a high of only 12.6°C on the 28th, bringing the average maximum temperature to 18.6°C which was about the norm despite the occasional warm and sunny days that were also unable to prevent the release of the first leaves from the trees.

Bryan

St Mary's 100 Club Draw

Please contact John or Sally on 01485 779669 or email lsallyjohn@gmail.com for details of how to enter each month's draw. **OCTOBER RESULTS:** 1st prize no. **53**; 2nd prize no. **92**

Christmas Lights Competition

Are we really that close to Christmas? Bah! Humbug. Anyway, one parishioner last Christmas noted how many lovely lighting displays there were on individual householders' properties and gardens in the villages, so we came up with the idea to make it a (gentle please!) competition amongst villagers. We decided on two categories:

a) "**We're the epitome of good taste**" and b) "**We've thrown the kitchen sink at it**".

There's only one rule: Don't be offended if the judges think your effort is more b) than a)!! And note that the judging team (not us) cannot be bought at all — not even with sherry & mince pies. Judging likely to take place, anonymously, in the week of December 9-13. Suitable prizes for the winners.

* Usual Christmas elf and safety advice: stay safe and avoid naked flames; don't overload electrical equipment; don't dazzle or impede the highway; and do try to avoid unsafe climbing on to roofs, etc, whatever your age — leave the gymnastics to Santa.



Words on Birds

PINK-FOOTED GEESE

The sights and sounds of pink-footed geese as they arrive in North Norfolk is an autumnal highlight as they arrive from their breeding grounds in Iceland and eastern Greenland. The first birds were seen over Bircham in mid-September and now they are here in full force. Last year some 60,000 arrived in Norfolk and the fields around us held many thousands of birds feeding during the daytime before heading off to roost on coastal sites like Snettisham and Holkham.

They are smaller and more compact than the farmyard greylag geese, with short necks, rounded head and of course their short pink bills and pink feet. Their calls, a distinctive “wink-wink” are gentler and in contrast to the loud honking call of a greylag. This call of the “Pinkfeet” or “Pinkies” while flying over in near-perfect V formation of hundreds and sometimes thousands of birds also sets them apart and is a sight that we all associate with Norfolk and Bircham.



During the day they can be seen nearby on stubble fields, feeding on emerging shoots, discarded grain and sugar beet tops. However, in recent years, the availability of beet tops has diminished due to modern farming practices, which include ploughing the tops back into the ground straight after harvest.

The typical lifespan of a pinkfoot is around 8 years and the record from ringing studies is in excess of 38 years. These birds are monogamous, forming lifelong pair bonds when they start to breed in their third year.

Richard Campey, Owner of The One Stop Nature Shop, Burnham Deepdale

Remember Remember

In Norfolk we have no direct links to the Gunpowder Plot insurrectionists, but Norfolk (Mileham) was the birthplace of Sir Edward Coke, the attorney general who prosecuted the plotters. He also did for Sir Walter Raleigh in the same manner. One of Coke's descendants is Thomas Coke, the first earl of Leicester, and the landowner who commissioned the building of Holkham Hall.

Stanhoe & Barwick WI

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

Thursday November 7: Wells Community Supermarket, aiming to give access to healthy but low-cost food.

Thursday December 5: Gary Bocking, demonstrating Christmas floral decorations. Sorry, this is for members only, but why not consider joining?

Visitors are always welcome. Our charge is £5, which includes refreshments. Please contact Valerie (01485 576261) for further details.

Bircham Banter

Next Banter session is at St Mary's, Great Bircham on Thursday November 7 from 2.30 to 4pm.

Sue



Heating Oil Thefts

There's a reason why most of us are more vulnerable to oil thefts in autumn/winter and that's because we are generally in the process of filling our oil tanks with fuel for the anticipated cold season. More reward for the thieves! As well as being cautious when ordering (don't tell all and sundry that's what you are up to), there are a number of extra precautions you can take such as locking the tank, making sure the area is well lit/cameras to deter a would-be thief, and otherwise making life difficult for them. Don't go overboard though, since you do actually want an oil delivery to reach you and mercifully theft is very rare here in the Birchams. If the worst does happen, do phone 101 to report an incident afterwards.

For further tips, try <https://oilfast.co.uk/6-ways-you-can-prevent-heating-oil-theft/>
<https://certasenergy.co.uk/helpful-guides/heating-oil-anti-theft-guide/>

Bircham Railway Bowls Club 2024

Following fast on the heels of September's report for the bowls season up at Houghton, we have a further report: this time for Bircham Railway Bowls Club.

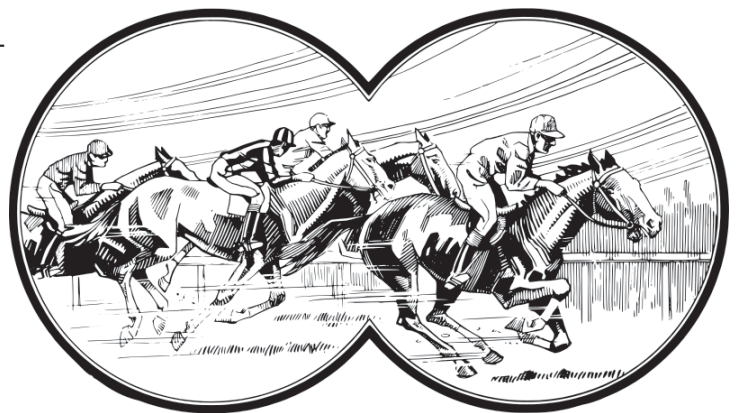
"We play away from home, at Ingoldisthorpe Sports and Social Club PE31, who have warmly welcomed us and gone out of their way to accommodate the Bircham Railway Bowls team. The club did very well this year, coming third in the North West Norfolk League and runners-up in the subsidiary cup played during the week. Our bowlers also came first in the Bridges League and won the Knockout Cup, played on Saturdays.

Everyone is welcome for a try-out at the club, so do contact me if you are interested. Oh! and if you're mystified as to the "Railway" bit in our name [Ed: do tell, we're miles from a any railway], then it's been taken from the Railway Inn at Docking, who some time ago turned their bowling green into a beer garden. Bircham Social Club Bowls team was short of players as was Docking Railway but Bircham had the green, so we merged... hence Bircham Railway."

Bob Hutchinson, Club Secretary, 07887 911895

Follow the GeeGees at Fakenham

The National Hunt season starts again at Fakenham races this autumn with the first fixture, on behalf of Tapping House Hospice, scheduled for October 18, with meetings roughly on a monthly basis thereafter. Rug up warmly and take the plunge, especially if you have never gone racing before. Betting isn't compulsory but you can place wagers at the Tote or with an on-course bookmaker of your choice. If you'd like to splurge then think about dining in the restaurant but, if watching the pennies a bit more, there are numerous catering outlets from Indian to burgers to chips, and bars galore. You are close to the action and can watch the horses in the parade ring before every race. Most views are good as the course (at Pudding Norton) is on higher ground looking down towards Fakenham or you can follow the action on on-course screens or within the bars. Under 17s go free with a paying adult and you can take a well-behaved dog too!



Fixtures for the coming season are as follows: October 18, 30; November 19 (Residents Raceday); December 22; January 1, 19; February 14; March 14; April 1, 21; May 6; June 1 (Ladies Day).