



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



In and around the Birchams

news@thebirchams.uk

September 2025 Issue 23

Parish Council Matters

We hope you had a good summer break and were able to enjoy the warm sunny weather. There was no meeting of the Parish Council in August and this report was written before the September meeting.

During the summer we were very pleased that the footpath on the north side of Stanhoe Road, all the way from opposite the church to the pond, was cleared by the County Highways Department. In places it is now twice the width it was!

This shows how effective it is to report problems with footpaths and roads to the Highways Department. Please do not report them to the PC; go directly to the Highways website: www.norfolk.gov.uk/39652.

After the Council meeting on 17th September, the next meeting is on Wednesday 22nd October, starting at 7.30 pm in the Social Club. If you wish to discuss a Parish matter, please attend the meeting and raise it during the Public Participation session or write to the Clerk.

Thank you.

Email: clerk@bircham-pc.gov.uk

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

Website: bircham-pc.gov.uk



Newsletter Thoughts

It's meteorological autumn and thoughts turn to leaf-fall, school returns, maybe unpacking those fleeces, the honking of overhead geese, the thermostat, and the excuse to indulge in a few puddings with custard. We've a simple and versatile recipe this month that will use up any glut of apples you have... or any other fruit. Additionally, we've news on a bridge club, a timely piece on the end of the cricket season, Words on Birds discusses the coal tit, the book column features an excellent tome on Colditz and we focus on Castle Rising, Norfolk's very own rotten borough.

And here at Bircham Towers as we catch the first house mouse (uninvited) of the season, an appropriate saying comes to mind.

"It's the early bird that catches the worm but the second mouse that gets the cheese."
Though in our experience they are more partial to peanut butter.

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



Rotten Borough Politicians

What do a famous diarist, a duel fought on horseback and an inveterate gambler who shot himself have in common? Why, they were all MPs for the rotten borough of Castle Rising.

A little background to start: Parliament from the 13th century was made up of burgesses, men from the boroughs who represented the people (in theory) and sat in Parliament in London to do so – but it was not a "one man one vote" system as we understand it today. Pocket boroughs were ones where the electors were in the "pocket" of a local grandee or landowner – in Norfolk's case the owners of Holkham, Houghton, as well as the Dukes of Norfolk, Suffolk and so on. Rotten boroughs were those where the populace had dwindled to such a low number that their votes could be bought. Castle Rising fell into both those categories. The most notable rotten borough was Old Sarum, the site of an Iron Age hill fort and where the original settlement of Salisbury had been established. By 1220 the place was deserted but was still somehow managing to send TWO members to Parliament. By contrast, Manchester had not a single MP in the early 19th century, despite its burgeoning population. All this underhandedness was swept away with the Great Reform Act of 1832... and we have the PM Charles, Earl Grey (he of the perfumed tea name) to largely thank for that. At a stroke 625,000 men became enfranchised (though they had to have a certain amount of wealth) and 143 parliamentary seats were abolished for good, including Castle Rising.

Back in May 1669 the diarist Samuel Pepys abandoned his tome, which came to an abrupt end. He had continued with eyesight problems for a while but finally gave up writing. That impediment didn't stop him because by 1673 he was one of the two MPs for Castle Rising thanks largely to the intervention of the soon-to-be Duke of Norfolk. A second jobber, Pepys was also the Secretary to the Board of Admiralty so its doubtful whether he spent much time in his constituency and by 1679 he had become MP for Harwich.

Robert Walpole, owner of Houghton and now considered the nation's first prime minister, was an MP at Castle Rising (as was his father and several other Walpoles). The family name L'estranger or Le Strange pops up too over the centuries, as does Hoste.

Earlier, in 1593, the MP was John Townshend, a landowner and military man. But seems he couldn't set his fighting ways aside. In 1600 he attempted a duel with another parliamentarian, Sir Christopher Heydon. Both were summoned by the Privy Council when they got wind of the proposed duel, and an end was put to the foolishness before it ever got started. But later that same year Townshend did get his opportunity to have a duel, this time with Sir Theophilus Finch, a lawyer. Both men survived! Latterly, Townshend fell out with Sir Matthew Browne and they engaged in a duel, on horseback no less, on Hounslow Heath. An unnecessary affair, Browne was killed but Townshend, the winner, succumbed to his own injuries the following day: a case of third time unlucky perhaps, or maybe he was a thoroughly objectionable man continually spoiling for a fight! "Live by the sword and die by the sword" was perhaps never more apposite.



Jenison Shafto [great name!] was a racehorse owner and prodigious gambler who somehow ended up being an MP for Castle Rising from 1768 to 1771. Shafto's demise followed a period of ill health when he complained of head pain, giddiness and confusion. He sent a valet to fetch a doctor at his home in Pall Mall, London, and upon return they found that Shafto had shot himself in the head. An inquest held that the cause of his death was lunacy. The story was even sadder in that it was reported that Shafto's brother-in-law cut his own throat days afterwards. Many suggested that Shafto's course of action was due to gambling debts but he was reported to have left more than £90,000 – a very large sum of money.

A wondrous pastiche of rotten boroughs is played out in the Dish & Dishonesty episode of the third series of *Blackadder*, with the rotten borough in question being Dunny-on-the-Wold. Seek it out if you have never watched it before.



Words on Birds

A BANDITRY IN THE BIRCHAMS – MEET THE COAL TIT

If you've ever noticed a small, bustling blur zipping from your bird feeder to a nearby hedge – usually with a sunflower seed clamped firmly in its beak – chances are you've seen a coal tit. Their official collective noun is a "banditry" of tits.

Not as colourful as some of its relatives, the coal tit has a distinctive grey back, black cap, and a neat white patch on the back of the neck. Its bill is smaller than that of the blue or great tit, perfectly designed for prising seeds out of fir and larch cones.

At just 10–11cm from tip to tail and weighing about the same as a 50p coin, it's one of the smaller, noisier visitors to Bircham gardens. They're partial to sunflower seeds, but they never sit still to eat – they grab and dash off to a more secret place to eat. Male and female coal tits look much alike, though the males have slightly bigger black caps. Both, however, when agitated, raise a tiny hidden crest into a small spike.

During the breeding season they favour holes in rotting tree stumps, often low to the ground. Come May, the female will lay an impressive clutch of 7–11 red-spotted eggs. Most coal tits live just 2–3 years, but one exceptional bird ringed in 1983 reached the age of 8 years, 9 months and 26 days.

The coal tit however holds a less-than-glamorous record: the most fleas ever found in a single nest – a truly itchy 5,754.

So next time you see a tiny black-capped blur in your garden, it's almost certainly a coal tit – Bircham's pocket-sized pickpocket with a taste for sunflower seeds.

Richard Campey

Owner of The One Stop Nature Shop, Burnham Deepdale

Lynn Museum Finds Day

If you've been digging in the garden recently, or maybe had building works done. Perhaps you have been walking in the countryside or on a local beach and have discovered something unidentifiable in the ground. And sometimes the Internet is of no use whatsoever in telling you what you might have found or whether or not it could be valuable. Well Lynn Museum could be the answer to your prayers. It is holding a "Finds Day" at the Museum on October 4 from either 11-1pm or 2-4pm (choose your booking slot) and the experts there will be happy to examine your pottery, coin or flint finds.

Contact the museum at <https://www.museums.norfolk.gov.uk/article/71827/Finds-Day-at-Lynn-Museum>

Market Street, King's Lynn, PE30 1NL, by the bus station

Dates for the Diary

Bircham Windmill Closes
Sept 30

RAF Bircham Newton Open
Days 10-4pm (see below)

RAF Sculthorpe Open Days
from 10am (see below)

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

Snettisham Park Open daily
from February 1

Houghton Hall & Gardens
Selected dates between May
4 and Sept 28

Sandringham Until Oct 10

Sep 20-21 Holt &
Sheringham 1940s Weekend
@ N. Norfolk Railway, from
£25.50

Sep 21 Hunstanton Soap Box
Derby, 11-5pm (Town Hall to
Bandstand)

Sep 21 Earth, Wind & Fire
Day

Sep 21 RAF Bircham Newton
Open Day

Sep 21 Autumn Craft Fair,
Westacre Theatre, 10-4pm

Sep 21 Telegraph Pole
Appreciation Day

Sep 24 Westacre Theatre's
Quiz Night, 7pm. £5

Sep 24 National Fitness Day

Sep 26 World's Biggest
Coffee Morning aka
Macmillan Coffee Morning

Sep 26-28 King's Lynn
Literature Festival, Town
Hall, King's Lynn, from
£16.95

Sep 26-28 Duration's
Oktoberfest, Duration
Brewing, West Acre, various
sessions £15/£6

Sep 27-28 Big Machinery
Weekend at Pensthorpe, from
£12.95

Sep 28 Sandringham Half-
Marathon and Community
Mile, 9.30am

Sep 28 Burn Valley Vineyard
Oktoberfest, 1-6pm, £10

Oct 1 Royal Opera: *Tosca* at
Majestic Cinema, KL, 6.45pm



Foodie Fare

WHAT A LOAD OF OLD COBBLERS!

Making a pie can be a bit of a faff. Rolling out pastry and ensuring it doesn't tear, then getting it into a baking tin or dish in one piece, and then having to repeat the process with the pastry lid, and then ironically slashing into the top to create the very tear you have been avoiding thusfar seems a palaver. Fine for that special occasion but not for everyday fare – I am convinced that is why crumble was invented. You can't go wrong with crumble but it's not terribly exciting.

This September we are once again facing a glut of apples – and after juicing, cider-making and pork and apple sauce dishes we're left wondering what is next. And this is where the cobbler comes in. Easier and more forgiving than pastry work and more versatile than crumble, it's a half-way house and can be used to top apple dishes and any other autumn fruit: pears, blackberries, sloes, plums and so on. The versatile bit is that slightly re-tailored it becomes the topping for stews and casseroles and is a little more forgiving on the waistline than dumplings.

For anyone who remains none the wiser about what a cobbler is, well it is a lightly leavened topping, made with flour, liquid/eggs and the essential ingredient baking powder. On the top of your dish it resembles cobbled paving stones, hence the name (no one can explain its true origins). It is basically a scone mix but there are very many twists in the recipe and I have made cobblers where the mixture was cut out with a pastry cutter – you can go free-hand or use a wine glass, say, to shape it – and at other times it resembles the consistency of dropping batter and gets spooned or "dropped" over your base mixture.

Dropping Cobbler Recipe (sweet version)

125 g sifted plain flour
1 tbsp caster sugar
1½ tsp baking powder
pinch salt
50 g butter
60 ml milk
1 beaten egg
2 tbsp caster sugar (to sprinkle on top)

Mix together the flour, sugar, salt and baking powder. Then cut in the butter until the mix resembles coarse crumbs. In a separate bowl mix the milk and beaten egg and then add to the dry ingredients. Stir a little, then drop teaspoonfuls on your fruit mixture. Sprinkle over the remaining sugar, Bake for around 20 mins at 200°C.

Firm Cobbler Recipe (sweet version)

225 g self-raising flour
pinch salt
85 g cold butter
55 g caster sugar
1 beaten egg
4 tbsp milk

As before, mix the dry ingredients with the butter, add the sugar. Then separately mix the milk and egg before adding to the dry ingredients. This should result in a dough that can be rolled out and cut into rounds, or triangles if you are feeling adventurous. The cooking time suggests about 25 mins (you've created a thicker mixture) at 200°C (you can also experiment with 10 mins at the higher temperature before dropping to 190°C, say). You know your own oven best.

You can be cooking the base layer of the cobbler dish while preparing the topping. Obviously if using tinned or soft fruit then that requires no extra cooking time. Apples and pears will need a little softening before adding the topping, and a full-blown beef or lamb casserole will require the appropriate timings for the cut of meat involved.



These are very forgiving recipes and once you have achieved the batter/dough consistency you prefer you can experiment. Add oats if you like "bite", play with Greek yogurt instead of milk, use ground almonds instead of flour for gluten-free cobblers (but note that almonds are oily so knock back on the butter to compensate) or add fresh herbs, potato, mustard or cheese (again oily) to a savoury mix.

Just remember that you don't need self-raising flour and baking powder in the same recipe. Baking powder goes with plain flour.

September's Lost Days

Have you ever had a lost weekend? How about a lost 11 days? You'd think you wouldn't survive that but in fact the whole country lost eleven days back in September 1752. Though not through drinking but in the shift from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar. People's last conscious day was Wednesday September 2 and then, hey presto, they awoke in the morning to Thursday September 14. And there were no information campaigns to let everyone know in advance. But of course two-and-three-quarter centuries ago we weren't wandering around with mobile phones and wristwatches and until railway transportation (you need to know the time to catch a timetabled train) and the factory system (be at your lathe, loom or workbench on time) we didn't really need to know the time: we rose at dawn and retired to bed when the light of the day had gone. And nowhere was that more true than in agricultural circles like ours.

The Roman calendar of Julius Caesar (Julian), while somewhat accurate, had been drifting out of synch over the centuries, so the Church, under the auspices of Pope Gregory XIII (Gregorian), set about reformulating the calendar, especially since Easter the pivotal part of the Christian calendar was slipping further away from its intended date.

Gregory first pushed for reform and not surprisingly Catholic countries were the first to adopt the new measures in 1582 (nearly two centuries before it was finally adopted in Britain). And while we may have been slow on the uptake, the likes of Russia (1918) and Turkey (1926) took even longer. Saudi Arabia only abandoned the Islamic calendar in official matters in 2016.

Award-Winning Beer

LOCAL CAMRA WINNER

For those with a taste for a fine beer, we have an award-winning little number practically on our doorstep in North Wootton. Winning the prestigious "Champion Bottle Conditioned Beer of Norfolk 2025" is Lynn Ferry Bitter, a 4.1% session bitter. The judges described it thus: "Peachy, toffee aroma that follows through into the initial taste. Hoppiness and soft yeastiness add depth with a long, lingering sweetish finale."

In the same awards, the runner-up in the strong stout and porter class was Prasto's Porter, a dark 5.2% porter brew made by the Boudicca Brewery. Worth giving them a whirl? You be the judge. See also Oktoberfest details for Duration Brewery in West Acre, Barsham Brewery and Burn Valley in Dates for the Diary.

Dates for the Diary

Oct 2 Bircham Banter, St Mary's, 2.30-4pm
Oct 2 Stanhoe & Barwick WI, Stanhoe Reading Room, 2pm
Oct 3 Buy British Day
Oct 3-4 Oktoberfest at Barsham Brewery, West Barsham, Fakenham, 5pm
Oct 4 Lynn Museum Finds Day (see p3 article)
Oct 5 RAF Sculthorpe Open Day, 10am
Oct 5 Abba Reunion Tribute Show, Princess Theatre, Hunstanton, 7.30pm, £29
Oct 10 Magic of Motown, Princess Theatre, Hunstanton, 7.30pm, £34
Oct 11-12 Titchwell Marsh Big Weekend
Oct 11 The George Harrison Story, Princess Theatre, Hunstanton, 7.30pm, £29
Oct 11 National Album Day
Oct 12 RAF Bircham Newton Open Day
Oct 14 (and Nov 11) Valuation Day at Westacre Theatre, 12-2pm
Oct 17-25 Wells Festival of Literature
Oct 18 Sensational 60s Experience, KL Corn Exchange, 7.30pm, £34
Oct 19 Ready Steady Sew creative fundraiser at Westacre Theatre, £20
Oct 20-26 UK Coffee Week
Oct 21 Metropolitan Opera: *La Sonnambula* at Majestic Cinema, KL, 6.45pm
Oct 23 NT Live *Mrs Warren's Profession* at Westacre Theatre, 7pm, £14
Oct 24-26 Fear in the Fens festival, KL Corn Exchange, £28/£39
From **Oct 25** Alan Partridge Bisonification Garden opens at Pensthorpe
Oct 25-31 Pumpkin Festival at Pensthorpe, from £16.95
Oct 26 RAF Bircham Newton Open Day
Oct 27-31 NORFOLK SCHOOLS HALF-TERM



Tofts Pond Bench



As mentioned last month, a lovely wooden bench has been installed by the pond in Bircham Tofts. Do take a while to sit and enjoy the last rays of summer and the peace and quiet, all before the gregarious pink-footed geese move in. We've spotted several parishioners already trying it out. Again we give thanks to the family of Jan Hooton for their generosity.

A Bridge Not Too Far

SANDRINGHAM BRIDGE CLUB

Since the days of Covid, the Club has been meeting at Dersingham Village Centre on Tuesday evenings 7-9pm.

We are always looking for new recruits and Bircham residents would be most welcome. We operate a shared transport system and table fees are just £2.50 each to cover the cost of the room hire.

We play Rubber Bridge in a sociable manner using the ACOL Weak no Trump bidding system. Although players are expected to have some experience of Bridge play, some gentle coaching would be available.

Anyone interested is welcome to contact the Social Secretary – Bryan Shaw – on 01485 578325

Household Hazardous Waste Days

After a successful venture in the spring, the county council is repeating its Household Hazardous Waste Day this autumn. The two closest sites are at:

King's Lynn (PE34 3RD or [///ports.sober.spill](http://ports.sober.spill)) and Hempton (NR21 7DY or [///fencing.polices.vines](http://fencing.polices.vines))

King's Lynn is open Friday and Saturday October 10-11 and Hempton on Friday and Saturday November 21-22. Bookings are as per normal recycling (see p8) but slots are only open eight days before each event.

"Hazardous" does have its limitations though: so paint cans, pesticides, anti-freeze, drain cleaners and flammable liquids are good; asbestos, fireworks, fuels, clinical waste or gas bottles are not. See full list at <https://www.norfolk.gov.uk/article/38615/Hazardous-waste-items>

Stanhoe & Barwick WI

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

October 2 Carol Marsden. Carol's Capers – Adventuring for charity

November 6 Mike Simons, Chocolatier. Maldon Handmade Chocolate

Visitors are always welcome. Our charge is £5, which includes refreshments. Contact stanhoeandbarwickwi@gmail.com for more details.



Curry Night Thanks

The PCC – and all who took part in the Curry & Quiz night – wants to warmly thank not only John, Sally and Sue for all their hard work in making it a success, but also those who provided the desserts or set up the furniture before and after the quiz – as was fulsomely expressed by Chrissie on the night. Thanks too to all who supported the event!

St Mary's 100 Club Draw

SEPTEMBER RESULTS: 1st prize no. **59**; 2nd prize no. **55** (1st prize wins £25; 2nd prize £10).

Thank you to all who support the Club Draw. For further details on entering the draw, please email me on slilliweb10@gmail.com and I will send you an application form.

Sally

Bircham Banter

Next Banter session is on Thursday October 2 from 2.30 to 4pm in St Mary's Church. 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!!

And Thursday November 6 for those who are planning ahead.

Pauline



VILLAGE SCREEN CINEMA
at Amy Robsart Village Hall, Syderstone
Saturday September 27/October 25 at 7.30pm



Mr Burton (12A).

It's 1942 and Richard Jenkins is at school in Port Talbot, caught between the pressures of an alcoholic father, a devastating war and his own ambitions. A new opportunity beckons when Richard's natural talent for drama catches the attention of his teacher, Philip Burton. The young man thrives under Philip's strict tutelage and the guidance of a kindly landlady, Ma Smith. But as the acting world comes within Richard's reach, the burden of his past risks holding him back forever.

Starring Harry Lawtey, Toby Jones and Lesley Manville.

Black Bag (15).

National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) agent George Woodhouse faces a challenging assignment. There's a mole in the agency with plans to activate a destructive cyber worm called Severus. George is tasked with identifying the mole. His list of five suspects includes four of his agency friends and colleagues at the NCSC, with the fifth being his beloved wife Kathryn St. Jean. Should he be loyal to his marriage or to his country?

Starring Michael Fassbender and Cate Blanchett.

Doors open 7pm; Price £4 – pay on the door; hearing loop and ice creams available
Bookings can be made by email syderstonecinema_arvh@outlook.com or call 01485 578244.

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 October 10/November 7
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

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

August began in an unsettled mood with a north-westerly wind holding daytime temperatures to a maximum of just 18.8°C on the first day and, along with 14.6mm of rainfall, also made it the wettest day of the month. These conditions continued for a few days and were marked by the passage of an unusually deep low-pressure system for the time of year, named Floris, which tracked to the north of Scotland on the 4th. Fortunately, our region managed to avoid the worst of the weather associated with this depression but we did sustain some strong gusts of wind during the 4th and 5th. Calm was restored after this though and between the 8th and 25th no measurable rainfall was recorded. This dry spell encompassed our region's third heatwave of the summer, defined locally as three consecutive days with temperatures exceeding 27°C, which occurred from the 11th to the 14th when a high of 31.5°C was noted on the 13th. The previous two heatwaves this summer had been recorded from June 17th to the 21st and July 9th to 11th.

It wasn't blue skies and sunshine all the way, though, as a moderate north-easterly wind was responsible for extensive cloud cover from the 16th which limited the maximum temperature to 17.5°C on the 21st, though it did recover in time to provide a sunny bank holiday Monday and another high of 26.9°C. For the month as a whole the mean maximum was 23.2°C, which is about 1.0°C above the seasonal norm, while the mean minimum was 14.1°C, some 2.0°C above average.

After the 25th the Atlantic weather systems re-established dominance, producing some rainfall on each day to the month's end but, even so, the monthly total reached only 32mm, approximately half the expected value. On the last day, the small amount of rain that did fall came during the night, giving a fine day with good sunny periods and hinting that summer still lingered.

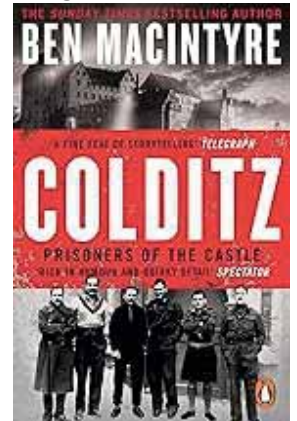
Bryan



Curl Up With a Good Book

Colditz: Prisoners of the Castle (2022) by Ben Macintyre

You may well have heard of Macintyre: he is the author of several readworthy tomes concerning the Second World War and beyond, including *Operation Mincemeat*, *Agent Zigzag*, *The Spy and the Traitor*, *Agent Sonya* and *A Spy Among Friends*. His bestselling book *SAS: Rogue Heroes* was recently given an explosive TV treatment. What Macintyre brings to his books is a heavily researched narrative set alongside a quirky, enjoyable and very readable style. **Colditz: Prisoners of the Castle** is no different. We all think we know a little about the impregnable fortress in which British prisoners-of-war were incarcerated during the period 1940-5 (especially if we can remember back to the excellent BBC drama series of the 1970s), but in fact there is so much more to tell.



First, Macintyre uses the diaries of a German officer, who lived for a while in Britain (the Cotswolds to be exact) before the war, to describe the cat-and-mouse antics of jailers and their prisoners. Servicemen would attempt an ingenious escape only to be captured and the Germans would block the move from ever happening again. Of course, not all the prisoners were British: at the outset there were Poles, French, Dutch and so on, all separated by nationality. Macintyre tells of tunnelling escapes thwarted as each nationality accidentally brought down each other's tunnels. He describes the deeply unsettling and ironic situation of French prisoners refusing to be billeted with their Jewish-French comrades in arms. And a constant theme is the class struggle every bit as raw as in the outside world. Officers were appointed orderlies or batmen (the regular soldiers) to service their every need. And in the case of Douglas Bader, the wartime legless "hero", his orderly (Alex Ross) had to carry him on his back around the castle for several years with no thanks whatsoever. And when Ross was given the opportunity by the Germans to be repatriated, then Bader selfishly forbade the move.

The story has a multitude of beautifully drawn characters, many tragic in nature from a hunger-striking Indian doctor, to a French aristocrat jumping the barbed wire fences, a dumpy Frenchman passing himself off as a woman and the communist nephew of Winston Churchill. Even Audrey Hepburn, a promising Belgian-born dancer, gets a mention. We also learn about many of the tricks employed to escape, plus the ingenuity involved in hiding maps, say, in a walnut and a radio named Arthur (and Arthur II) that remained hidden for the duration of the war.

Hush! no need to give more of the book's secrets away, but safe to say that this is a very engaging and eye-opening read.

Health News

It's that time of the year again when – if of a certain age – we get to proffer up our upper arm in anticipation (or not) of a friendly free jab from a GP or other medical clinician.

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

Covid jab: Available to over 75s and anyone else who is immuno-compromised

For those eligible, flu and covid 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/>



Back Page Sports

Bircham Cricket Club Season Ends

Time to pack away our bats for the year (for those of us not playing indoors over the winter or, in Tom King's case, heading off to the Australian leagues for the next few months). In the main, our teams enjoyed a notably successful 2025 season on the field.

The Under 9s and Under 11s qualified for the County finals, ending the season with awards for third and second place respectively out of all the clubs in Norfolk. Big congratulations to the enthusiastic youngsters, some of whom were totally new to cricket this year.

Having lost only one match this season, our Under 15s jointly topped the regional league, with four of the top ten overall run-scorers coming from Bircham CC. At the Under 13 age group, the team finished second overall.

The ladies took second place in the West Norfolk league and continued to participate in the regional festival circuit, which aims to encourage newer players. We also arranged a couple of friendly fixtures against ladies from Sandringham, who are hoping to establish a permanent team next year.

In the senior leagues, our youth-plus-experience, mixed-gender Sunday XI had a great first year in the Kevin Grimmer League, playing extremely friendly, low-pressure matches against other clubs looking to develop their young players.

Our First XI consolidated their spot in the competitive NCA Division 2, whilst our Second XI have sportingly dropped down a division (in order to give other clubs a chance) and hope to win more than just the one game as we look ahead to the 2026 season.



Speedway Season Report Card

King's Lynn Stars had a reasonable season that saw them hold the eventual winners – Leicester Lions – to a 45 point apiece first leg before succumbing to a 60-30 defeat in the final of the Premiership KO Cup. The Stars narrowly missed out on getting to the playoffs of the seven-team Premiership league. Racing at the Adrian Flux arena returns in the spring.

The Stars have had a proud history since they were established in 1965; 1980 World Champion Michael Lee was a product of the team.

National Hunt Racing Returns

A bit of forewarning that the National Hunt racing season begins for Fakenham Racecourse on Friday October 17. Under 17s go free and there will be a parade of ex-racehorses around midday to encourage you to get through the doors nice and early.

The last two events for 2025 take place on Wednesday October 29 – Greene King Raceday – and the Sky Bet Christmas Raceday held on Sunday December 21.