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Village Voice

Chris Smith - We Remember!

ISSUE 232 | JANUARY 2026



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Community magazine for Kingswinford, Wall Heath & Wordsley



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Village Voice

Community magazine for
Kingswinford, Wall Heath & Wordsley

Cover story

For Village Voice, 2025 was a great year and we are determined to make 2026 even better! There are exciting plans ahead for the magazines. Over the last six months we have begun venturing into new areas in which to deliver the magazines and this has generated a lot of interest. Don't worry, we are still going to all the places that we have in the past, but it never hurts to raise the bar a little.

We have also joined forces with a PR man! Sounds grand but it will be his job to ensure that the magazine is going in the right direction. Those that were acquainted with Chris will know that he was a PR man through and through and it is one of his ex-colleagues who will now be working alongside us. All that is left to say is 'watch this space!'

Gail



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74-77 The Parish Pump: Read about what is going on in your area.



Please note that the closing date for our competition this month is **FRIDAY, 23rd JANUARY 2026**. Entries received after this date will not be entered into the draw. Please ensure your name, address, telephone number and email address are included on your entry.

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COPY DEADLINE

Please note that the copy deadline for the **FEBRUARY 2026** edition of **VILLAGE VOICE** is **THURSDAY, 22nd JANUARY 2026**. Please book your space early to avoid disappointment.

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Courtesy of THE ROBIN in Bilston, we have two tickets up for grabs for one lucky winner. All you have to do to be entered is to send your **NAME, ADDRESS, TELEPHONE NUMBER** and **EMAIL ADDRESS** to villagevoice@hotmail.co.uk or write to us at The Robin Tickets, Forge House, 50 Redhall Road, Dudley DY3 2NL. The lucky winner will be drawn on **Thursday, 22nd January 2026 – GOOD LUCK!**

Congratulations to **KEVIN PHILLIPS** of **LOWER GORNAL** who was the lucky winner of the two tickets on offer in the **DECEMBER 2025** edition.

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★ On 23rd October 1851 the court at Kingswinford found John Beddard guilty of riding his cart without reins. He was fined 5 shillings and costs with the alternative of 14 days imprisonment with hard labour if the fine was not paid.



★ In September 1931 it was announced that the Olympia Cinema in Wordsley (seen left) had just installed the latest projection system—a Morrison Model F4. This new projector was available at a purchase price of £260 (or £2 weekly) and was said to provide a standard of reproduction that was equivalent to systems costing twice as much.

★ In the 1920s and early 1930s the Bridge Inn at Dawley Brook, Kingswinford was owned by brothers Henry and Benjamin Woodhouse who ran the very successful Alma Brewery in Dudley. In total they owned some 15 pubs and brewed for a number of other outlets as well.

★ Greensforge was originally named Mr Green's Forge one of four experimental forges built in the 1620s by Dud Dudley, the illegitimate son of the Earl of Dudley. It later became a mill.

★ Wordsley FC played for two unsuccessful seasons in the Worcestershire Combination league in 1948/49 and 1949/50. They won only seven of their 84 league games and scored just 88 goals against 274 conceded.

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BRAINTEASERS

We are starting off 2026 with a mixture of puzzles, all of which are on the easy side (so no excuses!). If, however, they do get the better of you, then the answers can be found on page 68.

1. Which of the four statements below are correct and which are false. No catches...but be careful!

- A. The number of false statements in this box is one.
- B. The number of false statements in this box is two.
- C. The number of false statements in this box is three.
- D. The number of false statements in this box is four.

2. A man walked into a bar, put £1 on the counter and asked for half of lager. The barmaid asked him if he wanted Kronenberg or Fosters. He

asked for Kronenberg. A little later another man (who was a stranger) came in, put £1 on the counter and asked for a half pint of lager. She immediately pulled him half a pint of Kronenberg. Why didn't she offer him a choice?

3. What is the next letter in the sequence?

O T T F F S ?

4. Dave ran halfway into the forest in half an hour. Steve claimed that he could have gone three-quarters of the way into the forest in the same time. Dave, however, said that this was impossible. Why?

A slightly more difficult one now:

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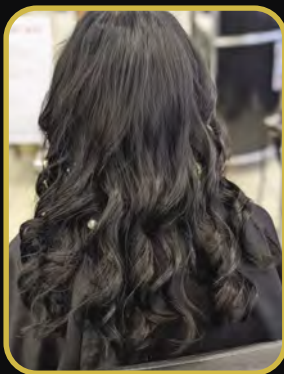


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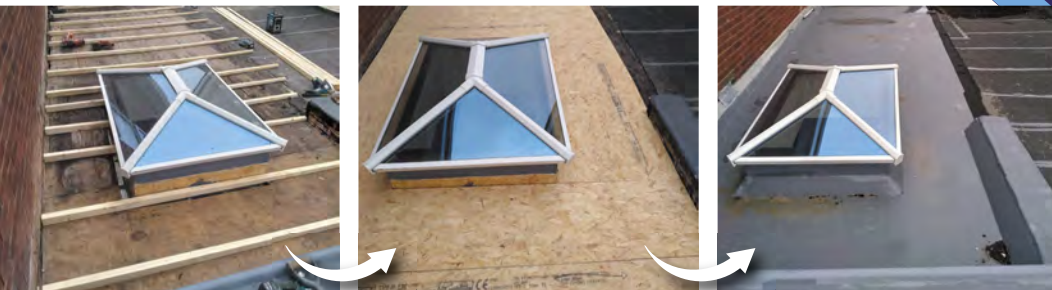


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A NEW YEAR..OR IS IT?

Historically, New Year combines both pagan and religious beliefs and is the oldest celebration regularly undertaken by most of the world's population. However, that celebration does not always take place on 1st January with over half of the world celebrating on various other dates.

The first New Year celebrations came from the Babylonians about 4000 years ago when they celebrated the re-birth of the land at the beginning of Spring. The significance of 1st January was set by the Romans in 153 BC although it would seem that the date chosen was purely arbitrary. Despite the fact that this was a pagan festival the Christian church accepted this date as being a time to celebrate the start of a New Year and throughout the Western world this became the norm. However, other religions celebrate it on a very different dates.

Much of the Eastern Orthodox Church, for example, celebrates the New Year on 14th January when it also celebrates the circumcision of the infant Jesus. For members of the Coptic Orthodox Church the significant date is much later on in the year—11th September to be precise—when they celebrate Neyrouz. The Hebrew new Year (Rosh Hashanah) occurs any time between 6th September and 5th October with it falling on Saturday, 12th September this year.

The Chinese will celebrate the start of the Year of the Horse on 17th February whilst the Bengali New Year (Pohela Baisakh) is celebrated on Wednesday, 15th April.

The Islamic New Year commences on 17th June. Because the Muslim calendar is based on a 354 day lunar year the dates move forward about 11 days each year.

However, one of the most fascinating celebrations is in Sri Lanka where the Sinhala and Tamil New Year fall on Tuesday, 14th April. The actual end of the old year is determined by the state astrologer who also says when the New Year (Aluth Avurudhu) should commence. The two are not necessarily immediately after each other and the period between the two is known as Nona Gathe (the neutral period) when normal work is abandoned in favour of religious devotion.

Finally, of course, New Year would not be the same without resolutions being made. Even the Babylonians 4000 years ago are reported to have made promises to be better at various things—the most common resolution being to return borrowed farm equipment!

A recent survey showed that in the UK the five most popular resolutions are to lose weight, to quit smoking, to get out of debt, to get fit and to spend more time with the family. Unfortunately the same survey also showed that most people were only repeating the same resolution from the previous year as they had broken it within ten days of the New Year starting. Perhaps the most appropriate resolution is to stop making New Year's resolutions!

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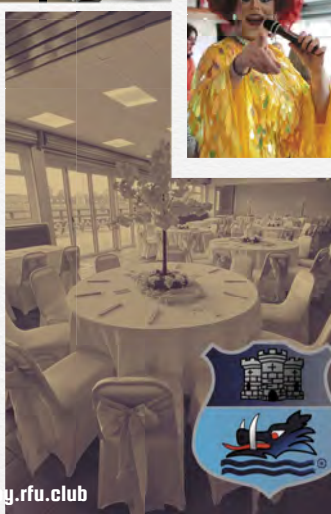
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Firstly, can I wish all readers of Village Voice a happy and peaceful 2026. I have been asked by Gail to write a brief article about our work as a coach operator. The new year provides an opportunity for all people, families and businesses to plan new adventures for the forthcoming 12 months. However, for our business we start making firm plans for 2028!

"Why so early?" readers may ask. Having only one coach, supported by one minibus, we are amongst the smallest coach firms in the UK and in order to compete, and earn our family's living, we strive to keep our programme fresh each year. We need to reserve hotel allocations before larger tour companies do, and in most cases, hotels are booked and contracted two years in advance. By extension, some tours also require ferries and attractions to be booked well in advance.

We will not say what is planned for 2028 as that is currently top secret! All will be revealed in 2027, just as our tours for next year will be published later this year. As the saying goes, the early bird catches the worm.

Julian Phillips, Director, Phillips International Travel

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FLYING HIGH AT BOBBINGTON

Wolverhampton business Airport at Bobbington near Wombourne was originally an RAF station opened in March 1941. It was primarily used for training and air observation duties and at its height some 66 Avro Anson aircraft were based there and over 1000 personnel were assigned to the base.

For some years there was confusion between this base and RAF Bovingdon near Watford, resulting in supplies (and servicemen) often being sent to the wrong base. Legend has it that several American planes landed at Bobbington rather than in Hertfordshire and the crews were less than enchanted with having to spend the evening in Wolverhampton rather than London! To resolve the problem Bobbington was renamed RAF Halfpenny Green.

After the War the station continued to see service as a training establishment before being 'downgraded' to a maintenance depot. It again saw some activity during the Korean War in the 1950s but in 1961 it was briefly leased to Ted Gibson, a distinguished local wartime bomber pilot who had won the Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC). The site, however, quickly passed to Bobbington Estates Ltd.

Since then military aircraft have still visited the airfield on a regular basis—the annual airshow held until the 1980s often had RAF display teams and the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight have made a number of "flypasts".

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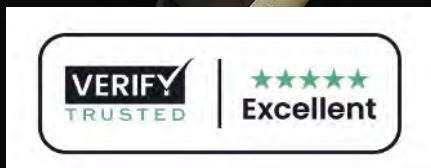


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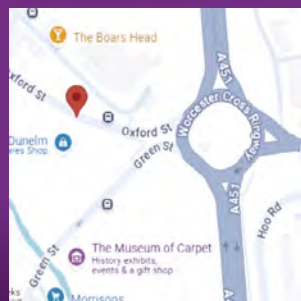
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DID YOU KNOW?

Prior to Victorian times most houses were built with chimneys but without pots on top. This was because the fires were mainly wood rather than coal burning. In Victorian times the more wealthy started to burn coal in their fires and chimney pots had to be added to vent the excess sulphur fumes. Another clue to the standing of householders in the social scale was whether or not they had a front garden. Houses with even a very small space between the front door and the pavement were thought considerably more prestigious than those with no garden at all.

Working for the Post Office in 1829 involved long hours—Mary Martin, the postmistress at Stourbridge had to be up at 5.30am to receive the post from Bristol and wait until 4.15pm for the post to be sent to London.

The Round Oak Steelworks opened in 1857 and closed in 1982. At its peak in the 1950s it was producing up to 500,000 tons of steel a year.

In 1952 clubs and societies in the Brierley Hill area included the “Brierley Hill & Brockmoor Brighter Old Age Committee”, the “Brierley Hill Junior Ballet Circle”, “Marsh & Baxter’s Male Voice Choir” and the intriguingly entitled “Mrs D. Price’s Party”.

A bride who made her own wedding dress was said to be running the risk of her future husband committing adultery within five years of the marriage.

The Vicar of Wollaston, Rev Reg Bamber, served in the Second World War as a chaplain in the Gloucestershire Regiment. He was posted to France where, in 1940, he was taken prisoner by the Germans. He spent almost five years in a POW camp, returning in April 1945. A special day of celebration was held on his return to Wollaston.

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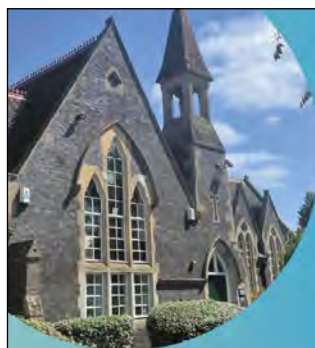
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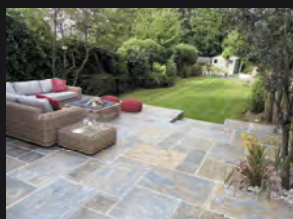
- ★ In June 1901 Zacahariah Cartwright, a farmer from Wall Heath, was awakened in the middle of the night after hearing cries of pain from his cattle. He rushed outside without even pausing to get dressed and chased a man that he saw by his cowshed. He failed to catch the intruder but discovered that two animals had been horribly maimed. Two days later a Wall Heath resident—Charles Holmes – was arrested and charged with inflicting the injuries on the cattle.
- ★ There was an astounding review of the work of the Richardson Glassworks at Wordsley in the October 1849 issue of the prestigious magazine Art Journal: "The glass of Messrs Richardson of Stourbridge (*the 'Wordsley Works'*) is confessedly surpassed for brilliancy and purity by that of any manufacturers in the kingdom; it is not too much to say that it may compete with the best produce of the continent; certainly we saw nothing at the Exposition in Paris superior to the crystal produced at these works."
- ★ A local vicar proved to be a matchwinner for Wordsley Sports Club in a cricket match in July 1924. The team was playing Stourbridge Brotherhood and they scored 154 for 5 declared. Of these Rev. R.H. Fowler (who had only recently joined the club) scored 95 of these runs. He then went on to take seven Stourbridge wickets for 25 runs as they were skittled out for just 68, a total of 27 runs less than the number that Rev. Fowler had scored by himself.
- ★ The Rev. Charles Girdlestone became Rector of Wordsley in 1847. He was related to Admiral Lord Nelson and allegedly Charlemagne, King of the Franks.



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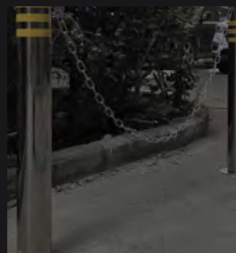
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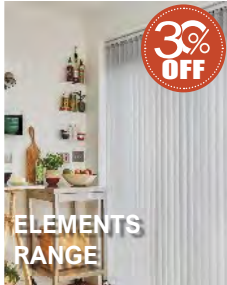
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One of the least successful companies to have operated in Wordsley was SGB Developments who operated in the early 20th century from premises in the High Street.

SGB stood for 'square golf balls' and the company had developed a range of three balls that they said "*have all the characteristics of a traditional ball but without the inconvenience of rolling*". The balls were supposed to be for use in gardens and parks where there was a need to restrict the distance they were hit. Perhaps not surprisingly, though, the idea did not take off and in 1913, just 18 months after it had opened its doors, the company collapsed.

Before it finally disappeared, however, it did try to interest potential investors in another sporting invention described intriguingly as "*a new concept in the delightful game of tennis*". It is not known exactly what this invention was and it is likely that no prospective investors came forward following the somewhat limited success of the Square Golf Ball.

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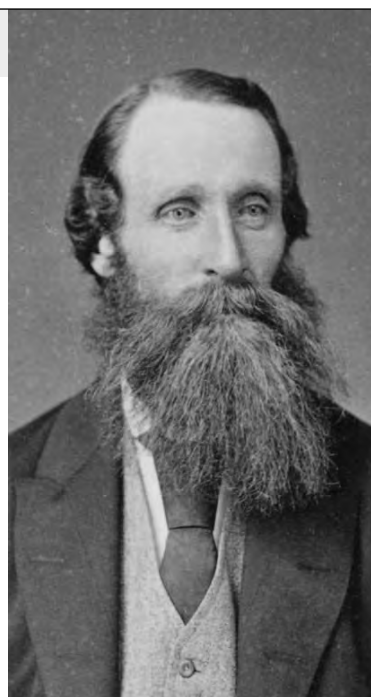
READ ALL ABOUT IT!

Born in Birmingham during 1830, the story of John Howard Clark is quite remarkable and has local connections.

The son of Francis Clark, an accountant, and his wife Caroline (who happened to be Rowland Hill's sister), John became one of the leading citizens of South Australia—and all because he went to work in Kingswinford. After finishing school and college in Birmingham, John Clark got a job at Corbyn's Hall colliery and ironworks between Pensnett and Kingswinford.

Whilst working at the colliery his health deteriorated and in 1850 he emigrated to South Australia with his parents, looking for a better climate. Initially he worked as a chemist and then joined with his father to form an accountancy practice. Later he was to purchase the South Australia Register newspaper and became a major business figure in Adelaide.

Although active in local politics he turned down the chance to become an MP and concentrated on developing the artistic opportunities in the city. This included founding the State Library. In 1878, however, the ill health that had dogged him finally claimed his life.



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JEAN GENIE
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SUNDAY 25TH JANUARY
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We all know that after the expense of Christmas budgets are always at full stretch. We have been “gifted” by one of our lovely advertisers, 2 x £50.00 ‘Dining Out’ gift cards which we are now offering to two lucky winners. The card can be redeemed at a selection of restaurants. But remember...you need to get your entry in before the closing date.

All you have to do is search out the square below for the 16 words associated with **VILLAGE VOICE** on our list. Fifteen of them are hidden in the square (spelt forwards, backwards, up or down or diagonally) whilst one is not there at all – or it may be misspelt! Once you have identified which one is missing just fill in the form below and send it to us.

Alternatively send us an email at villagevoice@hotmail.co.uk

(remember to include your name, address, postcode, telephone number and email address).

The winners will be the first two correct entries drawn at random after the closing date of **Friday, 23rd January 2026**. Good luck!

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it's a fact!

- ★ In 1838 the Gibbons Blast Furnace at Ketley in Kingswinford had a weekly yield of 236 tons of pig iron, the greatest yield of any single furnace in the country. This was achieved following the introduction of a new method of using the waste heat of the furnace to raise the temperature even higher than normal.
- ★ The popular 'Katie Fitzgerald's' pub on the Wollaston/Stourbridge border was originally called Washing Pool House and stood next to the Washing Pool which was used by local residents not only to wash their clothes but also to water their livestock. However, as it was on the boundary of the two districts there were frequently disputes about who had the right to use it.
- ★ Colour Sergeant Anthony Booth from Brierley Hill was awarded the Victoria Cross, the highest honour on the field of battle for his part in the Battle of Intombi Drift during the Zulu War. He led a small party of soldiers who gave covering fire for 50 comrades who were retreating after being ambushed. The announcement of his decoration was, however, delayed as the only surviving officer from the action was court marshalled for cowardice. Booth was a member of the 80th Staffordshire Volunteer Regiment and when he died in 1899 he was buried with full military honours in the churchyard of St Michael's Church in Brierley Hill. His medal is on display at the Staffordshire Regiment's museum in Lichfield.



MYSTERY OF PUB NAME

One of the biggest mysteries of the area is how the Stewponey got its name.

For some years it was suggested that it came from the licensee of the pub (which was originally called the Green Man) who had served in the Peninsular War in Spain and had met and married a Spanish girl whilst there. When the couple returned to England it was said that he changed the name of the pub to Estepona, the Spanish town where they had met. Over time, however, that became corrupted into Stewponey. The only problem with this theory is that there are records of the name Stewponey being used some 34 years before the Peninsular War!

Several other suggestions about the possible derivation of the name have also been put forward. These include that it is a corruption of the Latin 'Stour ponte' which means the bridge of the River Stour or even possibly that it was named after Epona, the Roman goddess of horses and donkeys. Whilst certainly there is evidence that the Romans did occupy land close by (and that, therefore, a Latin connection may be possible) the most likely explanation is that it comes from 'stew ponies', the name given to fish ponds in the Middle Ages. These would have been close to the River Stour and would have belonged to the nearby Stourton Castle.



The Stewponey was so famous that a series of postcards featuring the pub were produced and sold in the area.

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it's a fact!

- ★ In April 1961 Wordsley resident Joe Heath became a director of Aston Villa FC. A well-known fruit merchant with farms in Bobbington and associated businesses in Bilston, Willenhall and Sedgley, he had been a fervent Villa supporter for over 50 years travelling around the world watching them.
- ★ In April 1849 at Staffordshire Assizes Thomas Lewis pleaded guilty to stealing a wheelbarrow, the property of Joseph Woodcock of Kingswinford, for which he was sentenced to two months imprisonment. Whilst in court, however, an extra charge of stealing a wheelbarrow from James Noakes of Wombourne was put to him. Again he pleaded guilty and was sentenced to a further two months in prison.
- ★ In April 1947 a fire broke out at Himley Hall during conversion work in the south wing. The work was being carried out on behalf of the National Coal Board which had purchased the Hall three months earlier.
- ★ There was a sad story reported in many newspapers in March 1904 about a young girl called Rosannah Hanworth who had been missing from her home in Wordsley for nine days. Her body was found buried in snow in a field near Kinver.
- ★ In August 1887 the 60 employees at glass manufacturers Mills, Walker & Co, of Wordsley had their annual outing to Worcester. After lunch at the Golden Lion the group spent time in the city centre before returning back to Wordsley at 5.00am the following morning.
- ★ The first church in Kingswinford was probably built before the Norman Conquest in 1066.

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ONE COMMUNITY UPDATE BY SHAZ SALEEM

Hey wonderful people of Kingswinford and Wall Heath, I'm very proud to be part of the Village Voice writing a monthly blog to highlight amazing community groups and community champions.

HAPPY NEW YEAR

The old year's gone, its stories told,
A new one dawns, bright, fresh, and bold.
Let worries fade, let kindness bloom,
Chasing away the winter gloom.
With open hearts and hopeful sight,
May your New Year shine ever so bright!

Over 250 toys donated to Russell's Hall Hospital Children's Ward

I was honoured to join community groups led by The Saleem Foundation as we donated over 250 toys to the children and staff at the Children's Ward, Russell's Hall Hospital.

Christmas is one festival that unites everyone, and it is so important that we are there for one another. No-one has seen tomorrow, so it's so important we create priceless memories and enjoy today. My grandad, who was a teacher, was very passionate about supporting youngsters, and it's that legacy I wish to continue.

Busy December!!

It was a busy December with multiple community events. The 3rd annual Santa Trail was a massive success with hundreds of youngsters taking part. £500 was raised to support the local community.

The 10th annual Santa truck run was an epic experience with 1000s of people lining the streets from Bilston to the DK Rugby club. A huge thank you to Andrew and the team for organising this incredible event.

Over 550 chocolate selection boxes were donated by the Saleem Foundation to schools, nursing homes and other community groups. A huge thank you to Prem from The Old Courthouse Kingswinford for sponsoring us and a special thank you to Sarah from Tesco in Stream Road for donating 100 chocolate boxes.

We also held special thank you drinks for the Kingswinford & Wall Heath Litter Pick Group who have collected over 225 bags of litter and thousands of items. Thank you to Gail and the team.

Upcoming community events

9th January - Kuppa Club - 9.15am to 11am at Wall Heath Tavern ● **11th January - Kingswinford & Wall Heath Litter Pick** - 10am ● **23rd January - Kuppa Club** - 9.15am to 11am at Wall Heath Tavern ● **25th January - Kingswinford & Wall Heath Litter Pick** - 10am ● **Kingswinford in Bloom** meet every Saturday and Sunday 10am by the library.



Contact me

📞 07786 196666 ✉ askshaz@hotmail.co.uk 🌐 @shazsaleem001

THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF WEBBS

Without a doubt one of the best known companies to have been based in Wordsley were the Royal seedsmen Webb & Sons. Here are a few facts about the company.



- ★ Much of Webbs initial reputation was based on its range of root vegetables. In 1902 'Smithfield' mangolds were adjudged the heaviest cropping by several tons per acre whilst its 'Imperial Swede' was capable of producing almost 50 tons per acre (according to the advertisement (right)).
- ★ At its height the company had over 15,000 acres of land under cultivation stretching from Wordsley almost to Kinver.
- ★ In 1884 the company introduced the 'Wordsley Wonder' pea which proved to be one of its most successful products over a period of almost 20 years.
- ★ Many of the Webbs products were given names associated with the local area—as well as 'Wordsley Wonder' peas there was 'Kinver Chevalier' barley and 'Stourbridge' marrows.
- ★ They also sold boxes of Floral Gems' containing “seeds of beautiful flowers, easy of cultivation for the Gardens of Ladies and Amateurs”.
- ★ As well as growing vegetables and flowers, the company ran an artificial manure works at Saltney near Chester.

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COURT MATTERS

Almost two hundred years ago courts never bothered with 'community sentences' or 'conditional discharges'. Criminals convicted of theft, for example, were much more likely to—at best—be deported to Australia or often sentenced to death.

For example, in July 1804 **Enoch Bunn** was found



guilty of breaking open the stable belonging to John Addenbrooke at Oldswinford

and stealing two horses. He was sentenced to death and executed within a week. More frequently after the death sentence was pronounced the prisoner was reprieved. This happened in the case of **William Stokes** in 1813 when he was found guilty of breaking into the houses of John Yardley, also of Oldswinford. Similarly two years later **John Foxall** and **Benjamin Troman** who pleaded guilty to killing and stealing a sheep, the property of Thomas Page of Lutley were given the death sentence but were later given a reprieve.

Even more common, though, was transportation to Australia, even for seemingly minor offences. In 1833, for instance, **Richard Yeadon** aged 17 was found guilty of stealing 5 pairs of stays (corsets) from the shop of Samuel Hallam of Stourbridge. He was transported for 14 years. Six years later **John Buffery**, a 42 year old nailor was sentenced to 7 years transportation for stealing a kettle at Stourbridge (although he did have previous convictions).

Between 1787 and 1868 (when transportation finished) well over 162,000 men, women and children had been taken to Australia. Until 1842 most went to New South Wales whilst for the following 10 years they were sent to Van Diemens Land (Tasmania). After this they were taken to Western Australia.



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Your Local Councillor Update

Dear Residents,

As we step into 2026, we wanted to take a moment to wish all residents across Kingswinford and Wall Heath a very Happy New Year and to say a heartfelt thank you for the support, conversations and community spirit we've seen over the past year.



December was packed with fantastic festive events, and we were proud to attend so many of them. The Christmas light switch-on's in both Kingswinford and Wall Heath brought families and neighbours together for magical evenings filled with music, laughter and cheer. Huge thanks to the volunteers, schools, businesses and community groups who helped make both events such a success.

We were also delighted to attend the beautiful Community Carol Service at the Church of the Ascension—a warm (not the weather) and thoughtful celebration that really captured the true spirit of Christmas. Across the ward, local schools, churches and organisations hosted a range of festive performances, fairs and gatherings. It was uplifting to see so many people come together to celebrate and support one another at the end of a busy year.

Of course, elections are on the horizon this May, and no doubt the months ahead will bring plenty of debate and political discussion. But for now, we simply want to thank you for the continued trust you place in us to represent our area. We'll always strive to be accessible, visible, and dedicated to getting things done.

Whether your New Year's resolution is to get more exercise, see the world, or finally fix that squeaky gate, we hope 2026 brings you health, happiness and a bit of sunshine between the showers. As always, we're here if you need us.

Here's to a peaceful, healthy, and hopeful 2026.

Phil, Ed & Mark

CONTACT YOUR LOCAL TEAM BELOW



Cllr Phil Atkins
Tel: 07929 662888
Email: cllr.phil.atkins@dudley.gov.uk

Cllr Ed Lawrence
Tel: 01384 818007
Email: cllr.ed.lawrence@dudley.gov.uk

Cllr Mark Webb
Tel: 07801 802227
Email: cllr.mark.webb@dudley.gov.uk

Slimming World

MAZ GIBBS

Before I joined Slimming World, I was at rock bottom – I had struggled with my weight for most of my adult life. At my heaviest, I was 23st 10lbs, and at just 5'2, the impact on my health was enormous. I couldn't walk far without losing my breath, relied on a mobility scooter to get around, and was unable to even be considered for an essential knee operation because of my weight. As a consequence of this my confidence was extremely low, and I felt limited in every aspect of life – even simple hobbies felt out of reach.



MAZ GIBBS – Age: 54 – Height: 5'2
Starting Weight: 19st 10lb – Target weight: 10st 10lb

The turning point came when I realised how much I was missing out. I wanted to enjoy life, but my weight was holding me back. At this point I joined Slimming World and made changes, with over 350 foods that can be freely eaten without going hungry, I didn't feel like I was on a diet. As the pounds came off, I noticed a huge difference. I went from feeling trapped in my own body to rediscovering freedom. Walking became easier, my breathing improved, and I started to feel like myself again. The more progress I made, the more determined I became to keep going. When I got to my target of 10st 10lbs, I felt like a completely different person. My confidence has grown in ways I never thought possible. Since becoming a Slimming World consultant, I can now help others find that confidence and the joy that losing weight brings. So, if you are looking to lose weight then come and join me on Mondays at New Life Church in Wall Heath from 5.30pm to 6.40pm or give me a call on 07779127548 if you would like some more information.

Contact Maz on 07779 127 548 – New Life Church, Wall Heath – Mondays 5:30-6:40pm

ABBY KINLEY

My weight had yo-yoed over the pandemic as I ate comfort junk food then I tried quick fix diets, though my weight steadily crept up. When my little girl arrived in November 2021 my weight increased drastically. As a new Mom, I really struggled with my identity – I was tired and overwhelmed and I quickly turned back to comfort food and takeaways, telling myself I just needed to 'survive'. I would hide myself away in my maternity clothes because I was not confident shopping for clothes because my body had changed and I gained yet more weight. I felt embarrassed about my appearance which made the problem even worse. I stopped taking care of myself, even stopped washing my hair – I felt invisible so why would I make any effort for myself? As my weight spiralled, I withdrew from friends that had known me before my weight gain, because I was so ashamed that they wouldn't recognise me.



ABBY KINLEY – Age: 34 – Height: 5'11
Starting Weight: 15st 11lb – Target weight: 12st 11lb

In January 2024, whilst getting ready to celebrate my husband Mike's 40th surprise birthday party, I was dressing in a size 16 skirt and the button ripped off, tearing the material. I had no alternate outfits as I'd stopped buying clothes for myself, stopped looking after myself and lived in dark jeans and oversized jumpers, so I had to just tie the damaged skirt together as best I could. I felt panicked and trapped, as I couldn't cancel plans because it was a surprise party. This was the point where I knew I had to take control – my daughter was just gone two by now and I knew I was making excuses and compromising my health, both physically and mentally.

When I joined Slimming World, I confess I was sceptical. I thought I would be out of place, not knowing anyone in the group and feeling very self-conscious but the members were very warm and friendly, with all sorts of different people there. I was worried that I would be the youngest in the room and wouldn't have anything in common with anyone, but I was really surprised to find a bustling group, with men and women of all ages, all chatting and laughing together.

I lost 6lbs in my first week by following the Food Optimising Plan. The flexible eating plan is rooted in the science and psychology of food and eating habits, putting members in control. Food Optimising is non-restrictive, with members encouraged to eat unlimited amounts of 'free-foods' including meat, fish, pasta, fruit and vegetables. Members are also supported to get active in ways that they love, putting the member in control in a non-prescriptive way.

I have lost 3 stone and I feel so much better. I feel healthier with lots more energy, which in turn is making me a better Mom. Without a doubt, Slimming World saved me from more than declining physical health – my mental health also improved drastically through fabulous new friendships that I'll treasure forever. I still enjoy the 'me-time' at my group, dedicating just 90 minutes in total to my health and wellbeing. It puts me back in the driver's seat when life gets busy! Whilst I can't bottle the feeling to pass on to others, I can pay it back in another way – which is why I became a Consultant and relaunched the Wall Heath Saturday group.

Every Saturday at 8.00am we meet at the Church of the Ascension church hall and we have a great time! We deal with serious topics, though we don't take ourselves too seriously – we always laugh our way through our weight-loss journey and we would love to welcome you to our fabulous group too!

Contact Abby on 07539 865 553 – Church of the Ascension, Wall Heath – Saturdays 8.00am

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INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT JANUARY

The Anglo-Saxons called January “Wulfmonath” meaning “wolf month”.

In Tudor England, January 1st gifts were called “handsel” which refers to a gift given to mark a first occasion or a new beginning.

Many cultures have developed unique traditions and superstitions associated with January, often centred around good luck for the coming year. In Scotland “first-footing” is practiced on New Year’s Day where the first person to enter a home brings gifts for luck. In Japan, people eat *toshikoshi soba* (year-crossing noodles) on New Year’s Eve for good luck. In some parts of the United States, eating *black-eyed peas* on New Year’s Day is thought to bring prosperity. A Spanish tradition is to eat *12 grapes at midnight* on New Year’s Eve which is believed to bring good luck.

January has inspired many song titles in music including David Bowie’s “January Man” and Elton John’s “January”. Pilot reached No. 1 in the UK Singles Chart with “January” in 1975. The 2006 film “The Holiday” features a house swap that takes place in January. The popular New Year’s song “Auld Lang Syne” was adapted and partially written by Robert Burns from traditional Scottish folk songs in 1788.

January is National Soup Month in the United States.

Despite the cold in many parts of the world, January sees interesting natural phenomena and wildlife activity. Many animals, including bears and bats hibernate during January in colder climates.

The wolf moon, the first full moon of the year, typically occurs in January.

GONE...BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

2025 has seen the death of a number of well known and respected entertainers across television, films, music and more. The list seems endless but here are just a few:

Actor **Robert Redford**; actress **Diane Keaton**; Cosby Show star **Malcolm Jamal Warner**; Black Sabbath frontman **Ozzy Osbourne**; Twin Peaks co-creator **David Lynch**; Oscar winner **Gene Hackman**; Gossip Girl star **Michelle Trachtenberg**; Buck Rogers star **Gil Gerard**; and popular author **Sophie Kinsella** (of '*Confessions of a Shopaholic*' fame).

There was also legendary playwright and screenwriter **Tom Stoppard**; Reggae pioneer **Jimmy Cliff**; and the always amusing and highly talented drummer **Jellybean Johnson**. He originally drummed for Flyte Tyme from which Prince later recruited members for his new funk-pop group the Time—the band released three albums in the 80s for Prince on multiple tours in the early 80s and also appeared in his 1984 film, *Purple Rain*.

Prunella Scales, an actress who became a household name playing the long-suffering Sybil Fawcety (Fawlty Towers) alongside John Cleese; **John Lodge**, singer and bassist for The Moody Blues who he joined in 1966.

RIP one and all.

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DRINKS: In the Spirit—Abingdon Distillery

A review by Trevor Langley



The Abingdon Distillery (Est. 2018) is located at Abingdon-on-Thames and has won numerous awards for their exceptional productions of spirits. The copper stills, which are utilised to a great advantage, were handmade in Portugal. No artificial colours, concentrates or flavourings are included in the production processes of the small batch delectations. The botanicals and casks used are from worldwide origins. The bottles are 100% recyclable and packaging is free of plastic, as the company is committed and dedicated to reducing their carbon footprint and the distillery has now become part of a global sustainability programme.

Abingdon London Dry Gin (40% vol) utilises eight botanicals in its make-up, to bring this hugely popular gin to fruition. Juniper forward, plus citrus and sweet spices are amongst the inclusions for this production. I found this gin to be outstanding, from the enticing bouquet, through the mouth's pleasure, for flavour and taste, to the palate's delight, which appreciates the long, extended finish. Perfect with an Indian tonic water and garnish.



Wild Oxon Rum (40% vol) from the Abingdon Distillery is a premium spiced rum production that has many devotees. White rum is fermented from cane sugar and the process which follows involves maceration with orange peel, plus toasted coconut chips, nutmeg, ginger and other spices, to produce this excellent pleaser. Nasal senses, taste buds, and palate are all 'tuned in' to this grand production. Great for cocktails or for adding a mixer to.



Other spirits include several Gins, Pure White Rum, Chocolate Rum and more. Tastings, tours, private events, occasions and corporate functions can also be booked. The Rum Blending Experiences and Whisky Master Classes have become a welcome 'surprise gift' for loved ones, or someone special – plus connoisseurs too. The Discovery Club and the Founders Club offer exclusive benefits and have also grown in popularity. Corporate gifting, with customised labels, plus bespoke productions, can be developed and launched. Gift boxes and gift vouchers are also available. Their very informative website has all details and information, including stockists.

Online ordering is available and easy.

Abingdon Distillery, Coxeter House, 21 – 27 Ock Street, Abingdon, Oxfordshire OX14 5AJ. E-mail: hello@abingdondistillery.com Web: www.abingdondistillery.com

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Trevor Langley

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★ The General Election of January 1910 resulted in a great deal of excitement across the Black Country, especially it seems in Wordsley. During the final two hours of polling large crowds gathered outside the polling station at the Church School and gangs of youngsters dressed in the colours of the different parties marched up and down beating tin cans. A van with a poster prominently displayed toured the local streets—the message on the poster read: “We want work for our father that we may have food. Think of us, not the foreigner. Vote for tariff reforms and Staveley-Hill”.

★ When he died in 1917 Sir Charles Holcroft (who lived at the Shrubbery, Kingswinford) left a fortune worth £1,599,677 (today worth almost £97 million). He was a retired ironmaster and colliery owner whose enterprises included the Portfield Ironworks in Tipton. Amongst the bequests in his will was a donation of £5,000 to set up the Charles Holcroft Research Fund at the University of Birmingham.

★  There was good news for Joseph Eveson of Wall Heath in May 1871 when he heard that, after spending three months of a five year sentence in Stafford Prison, he was given a free pardon. He had been found guilty of a criminal assault on a concert room singer called Emma Clifford but there was some doubt about whether there had been a certain amount of provocation. The Home Secretary agreed and put his name forward for a Royal Pardon which was granted.

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Creating an Intentional Life for 2026

How Simplifying and Decluttering Your Life Can Make You Happier

In a world that encourages us to upgrade, accumulate and say yes to everything, more people are discovering the powerful emotional and psychological benefits of owning less and creating intentional spaces.

For the past 10 years, **Katherine Blackler**, Certified Professional Organizer (CPO®) and founder of SortMySpace Ltd has helped individuals transform overwhelmed homes and workplaces into more supportive, calming environments.

The Invisible Weight of “Too Much”

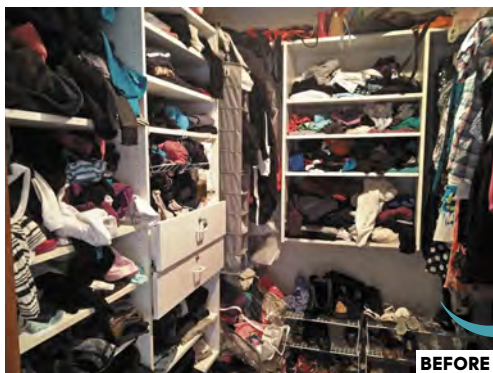
Clutter usually enters our lives quietly, a special-offer purchase here, a sentimental item there, a box we never quite get around to sorting.

“People underestimate the invisible weight that unnecessary belongings carry,” Katherine told us. “Every item you own needs storage, cleaning, maintaining, or replacing. Reducing what surrounds you, also decreases the number of demands placed on your brain, time and energy.”

Simplifying, she explains, isn't about stark minimalism or living in a characterless 'show home'. It's about finding your unique 'sweet spot' as to the volume of things you want and need around you. An intentional space reflects the life you're actually living now, not the one you used to live, or one that you feel obligated to maintain.



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Stepping Away from Social Media Pressure

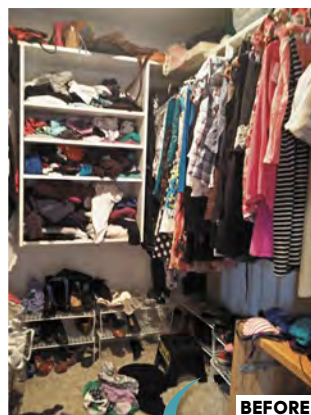
"So many people try to replicate what they see online," she said. "But Instagram-ready perfection isn't real life, it's a heavily curated version of life. Often the content creators don't sustain what you see in their images either".

She encourages clients to unfollow accounts that evoke comparison or pressure. This makes it easier to recognise what genuinely brings us joy (not what we feel we *ought* to want).

Reclaiming Space, And Emotional Freedom

When you let go of what no longer serves you, you gain room, physically and mentally, for what truly matters. Simplifying your life doesn't require sweeping changes or perfectly labelled boxes. Katherine encourages starting small: one drawer, one shelf, one habit. Momentum builds slowly. She also cautions that "New behaviours or processes can take time to adjust to so be gentle with yourself if you fall back into old ways."

In a culture that celebrates consumption and busyness, simplifying is more than a lifestyle choice; it's an act of self-care. Decluttering can offer a path to a happier, more intentional life, one clear surface and one conscious choice at a time.



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Wall Heath in Bloom

What a summer 2025 was and what an amazing team we have at Wall Heath in Bloom! We may be small, but we are mighty! It was "all hands on deck" for non-stop watering from early spring right through till autumn! We had some incredibly dedicated additional watering volunteers who worked tirelessly alongside our regulars to keep the village blooming. We were stretched and a hose pipe ban looked likely at one point but we did it! Almost everything (and everybody) not only survived but thrived!

Despite the heat we got stuck into some new projects too, creating new borders and a rockery at Church of the Ascension. The rockery has proved a hit, especially with a small, secretive creature which has begun excavation there! We can't thank Sandiacre and its staff enough for their donation of time, rocks and plants and Virgin Media for their team of diggers and movers!

Work towards being more sustainable began at The Gables where the team planted more perennials and shrubs, many donated, and created new wildlife friendly beds.

Our sustainable gardening hit new highs too with tens of tonne bags of leaves, green waste and spent compost being constantly worked on to create mulch and planting medium. The number of water butts we have has been increased ready for next summer! One can never have too many water butts!

The team enjoyed some great social events in 2025 - a barbecue, meals out, visits to garden centres and the Malvern Shows and a garden party at Church of the Ascension. It can't be all work and no play!

2026 is going to be another busy and exciting year for Wall Heath in Bloom. We will be working with residents, young and old, in a number of village locations, to embrace and encourage wildlife and wildflowers AND we will, once again, be entering the RHS Britain in Bloom competition! We will be pulling out all the stops and going for gold!

We would like to take this opportunity to say a big thank you to each and everyone of you who has supported us in 2025 and look forward to working with you again in 2026. We extend a warm welcome to all the wonderful, new volunteers who joined us in 2025 too.

If you would like to be part of our lovely team and really make a difference to the village, please get in touch. It's going to be a good year!

Happy New Year from Wall Heath in Bloom!





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BRAINTEASERS ANSWERS

1. The answer to this is very simple. The only statement that can be correct is C.
2. Kronenberg was 90p a half pint and Fosters was £1.00. The first man put down a £1 coin and so he could have wanted either brand. The second man put down a 50p, two 20p pieces and a 10p piece—so he obviously wanted the £1 drink (Fosters).
3. The next letter in the sequence is 'S'. They are all the initial letters of numbers—One, Two, Three etc.
4. This is all a question of word semantics. You can only run half-way into a wood—after that you are running out of it!
5. It's easy if you say what you see! The answer is A STEP BACKWARDS.

COMPETITION WINNERS

The answer to our Wordsearch Competition in the **DECEMBER** edition was **FAMILY** which was misspelt. The two lucky winners who each receive a **FAMILY PASS** to the **ODEON CINEMA, MERRY HILL, DUDLEY** are:

MRS CAROL CURRIEN of **SEDGLEY** and
NORMA HURST of **SEDGLEY**

You can find this month's competition on page 36.

PLEASE NOTE: Only one entry per person per month is allowed – multiple entries will be disqualified.
Winners are chosen at random from all correct entries received by the closing date.



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OR WHATEVER by John Sparry

“Thinks, thanks to Horlicks!”

On the 257, heading for another day at the desk—or even worse, dithering on the Amblecote sports field—what were those adverts along the bus interior? Oh, clever, that! ‘OOZ



Photo by Graham Beckley of a family heirloom.

GOING TO THE ZOO?’ Dudley, of course. But what was ‘208 Metres’? Luxembourg? Wireless! Better try that particularly when Dick Barton had gone from the BBC. Ah, but wait a jiff—Noel Johnson, the first of 3 Bartons, was on Luxembourg as Dan Dare! Sponsored by HORLICKS, remembers friend, Dave.

Courtesy of a gift of a complimentary ticket I went to the Civic Hall, Wolverhampton, to see the excellent Ken Mackintosh and his Orchestra making two recordings for broadcasting on Radio Luxembourg.

The legendary Geoffrey Everitt introduced the shows—no doubt improving the purchase of LYONS RED LABEL TEA no end.

Interestingly, although I was not to know it then, saxophonist Ken’s trombone section probably included Stourbridge’s Bobby Johnson, and also Gordon Langhorne, who as Don Lang and his Frantic Five

later recorded TV’s ‘Six Five Special’ theme.

It is possible that by many a fireside there are folk who can still spell Bristol’s Keynsham, after hearing, night after night, the rather plodding voice of Mr Horace Batchelor advising us to try his Infra-Draw Method of football pool selection. His style became an institution—just like ‘RADIO LUXEMBOURG, 208 METRES, MEDIUM WAVE—The Station of the Stars.



The hugely popular Gene Crowley famous for ‘Music in the Morning’ on pre-War Radio Luxembourg also sponsored by Horlicks.

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(Sorry folks, no texts or voicemails accepted—I just can’t cope with that!)

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THE BRIERLEY HILL GIANT

Through the 1920s and early 1930s George Lovatt was known as “The Brierley Hill Giant” - with very good reason. Not only did he stand over 7 feet tall but he also weighed more than 42 stone, making him at that time the heaviest man in the country.

Born in 1869 near Chester, George Lovatt came from a family that, in polite company, may have been called “big boned”. Both his parents weighed over 20 stone each and his uncle—John Carter—was almost 30 stone. Initially George worked in the Cheshire chainmaking trade before moving to Tipton to work for his uncle in part of the Earl of Dudley’s Round Oak Works. He lived at ‘Milestone House’, just around the corner from his workplace. By now, however, his weight had ballooned to over 30 stone and he was forced to give up his work as a chain-maker. Instead he went into business with his younger brother, Thomas, a haulage contractor (even though he had to have a specially reinforced wagon to take his weight).

In 1910 George decided to take part in a national competition to find England’s heaviest man. By then George was tipping the scales at over 34 stone and he won the contest easily. Afterwards George’s weight continued to increase and soon he had to give up work completely. He had a number of hobbies to keep him occupied—pigeon flying, boxing and horse racing were his favourites—and occasionally his friends would transport him to his ‘local’ (the Miner’s Arms) for a drink. George Lovatt died in March 1933 at the age of 64 and his funeral—held on 16th March—was described as “an unprecedented spectacle” by the Rector of Brierley Hill with thousands of

people lining the route along the High Street from Round Oak to the parish Church.

At the time of his death it was estimated that his weight was in excess of 42

stone. The coffin had to be specially made and was 7’4” long, 3’6” wide and 2’2” deep. Workmen had to remove the railing in front of George Lovatt’s house in order to take the coffin through the front window onto one of the Lovatt brothers’ own haulage wagons. Once the coffin had reached the church it took 20 men almost half an hour to manoeuvre the coffin into the church. After a short service it was then taken to the grave which had been dug alongside those of George Lovatt’s parents. A derrick had to be erected over the grave and a block and tackle were employed to lower the coffin into the grave. George Lovatt was not only remembered as a giant of a man but also for his charm and good humour. One of his friends was recorded as saying “*An evening sitting with George chatting about this and that was never an evening wasted. He was a larger than life character—in more than just his physical presence*”.



*St Michael's, Brierley Hill
where George Lovatt was
buried in 1933.*

AND THERE'S MORE...



George Lovatt was by no means the heaviest man either in the world, or even in the UK. One of the most famous was Daniel Lambert from Leicester who, in the early 1800s, set himself up in the Kings Head Hotel in Norwich and charged visitors a shilling a time to sit on his knee. It is reputed that he weighed over 52 stone.

Martin Ruane (better known as “Giant Haystacks”) (left) was generally accepted as the heaviest man in England. He achieved substantial fame as a wrestler in the 1970s and 1980s when he was reputed to weigh 48 stone. He died of cancer in 1998. **Paul Mason** once tipped the scales at over 70 stone but lost it after gastric bypass surgery. **Jon Brower Minnoch** from the United States, at one time

weighed over 100 stone (the equivalent of four baby elephants). At the age of 37 in 1978 he suffered a major heart attack and—under strict medical supervision—started a crash diet that saw him lose over half his body weight in 19 months. However, once he had been discharged from hospital he started putting on weight again and died as a result in 1983. As of 2025 **Khalid bin Mohsen Shaari** is recognised as the heaviest man alive, weighing just over 102 stone.

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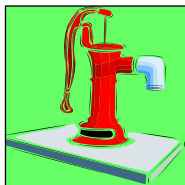


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The Kingswinford, Wall Heath & Wordsley **PARISH PUMP**



Wordsley Bridge Club

Come and play, or learn to play, bridge at Wordsley Bridge Club. We meet in the upstairs room at Wordsley Community Centre on Wednesday Evenings from 7.30pm to 9.30pm, and on Friday afternoons from 1.30pm to 4.00pm.

We are a small friendly group and welcome all, whether experienced or wanting to learn the game. There is a small charge which includes a cup of tea or coffee and you will be guaranteed a game.

Contact Trevor Mansell on **01384 395110** or the Community Centre on **01384 273186**.



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The Friendship Group:

Thursday, 8th January @ 2.15pm in the Church Parlour

AMAZING ANSWERS TO PRAYER

Thursday, 22nd January
LUNCH OUT at the Swan

The Men's Group:

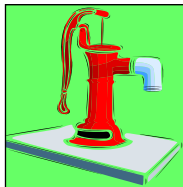
Wednesday, 4th February—Fish and Chip Supper and Games evening will be held at the church.

Coffee and Craft:

The group will meet on 3rd January and 7th February—bring along your craft project and enjoy a natter whilst you knit or sew, stick or stitch!

Coffee, Cake, Conversation and Friendship:

6th and 20th January—10.00am-12.00 noon.



The Kingswinford, Wall Heath & Wordsley

PARISH PUMP



Huge congratulations must go to John and his excellent team at the Royal British Legion for making Santa Clause feel very much at home. The extremely successful Grotto was held at the Legion on the Lights Switch on night and was given the seal of approval by every single child that visited (and, we hear, some adults too!).



DUDLEY SENIOR RAMBLERS



Dudley Senior Ramblers are an active rambling group for the over 50s which meets every second Wednesday of the month from different start points within a 10-15 mile radius of Dudley. The walks are approximately 5-7 miles long.

The group usually conclude the walks towards the end of November and will resume again in February 2026. As such they are actively recruiting new members for 2026.

If this is of interest to you, please contact Jayne Keay (Members' Secretary) at mjkeay@btinternet.com

HAPPY NEW YEAR

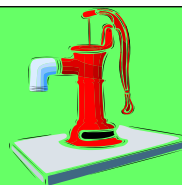
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*Have a very happy, healthy
and prosperous 2026.*



The Kingswinford, Wall Heath & Wordsley

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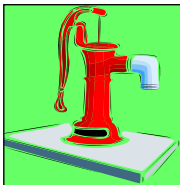
Telephone: 01384 273744 : Email: wallheathcommunityassoc@gmail.com

15th January –Thursday at2 Club—2.00pm: Pamela Manning will be giving a talk “Meet the Wise Women”. A historically funny and factual very adult themed talk. Pamela presents her talk dressed in medieval costume. (*Risque content. Not for those easily offended*).

28th January—Wednesday Club—2.00pm—Chris O’Grady, “ Travelling around Japan on a couch” - Chris’s small contribution to world peace. A personal story of couch surfing, hitchhiking and unexpected kindness from around the world.

5th February—Thursday at2 Club—2.00pm: David Bartley, comedian will be making us laugh the winter away with his wonderful entertaining jokes and humour.

11th February—Wednesday Club—2.00pm: Alan Peace, “Never Work with Children or Animals (by the man who has done both and survived). An anecdotal and light-hearted look at some of the comical situations Alan has found himself in during the 40 years of working with children and animals.



The Kingswinford, Wall Heath & Wordsley

PARISH PUMP



WEDNESDAY SENIORS GROUP 50+

invite you to enjoy afternoons of speakers and entertainment on the 1st and 3rd Wednesday each month at 2.00pm at Wordsley Green Community Centre, Wordsley DY8 5BN

21st January 2026 : The group are holding an **'Open House'** which is a free afternoon with entertainment by U3A Singing for Fun Group. Tea, coffee and biscuits will be served.

18th February: **Crime Prevention.** Richard Gwynne and Sarah Nixon from Brierley Hill Police, advise the group on crime prevention.

4th March: **Across the World on a Tea Towel.** Fiona Lucas will recall her adventures and misadventures throughout her worldwide travels, with her vast collection of tea towels.

18th March: John Hamer Optician. Nicci will talk to us about **DVLA requirements for older drivers.**

Visitors are most welcome to come along and hear how we organise this very friendly group. Open to Ladies and Gents.



MEN'S BOWLS AT WORDSLEY COMMUNITY CENTRE—YOUR COM- MUNITY NEEDS YOU!

If you have time on a Friday afternoon, why not pop along to see us between 1.00pm and 4.00pm and join this highly popular group for Short Mat Indoor Bowls, Cards and Dominoes. There is always lots of laughter and jollity with this group and it is the perfect way to meet new friends and enjoy a nice cup of tea/coffee and, of course, cakes and biscuits!

All equipment is supplied. If you have never played before that is not a problem as the group welcome all abilities. There are subsidised subscriptions.

If this is of interest to you, please give Bob a call on 07572 321401 and leave a message with your name and telephone number or contact the Community Centre on 01384 273186.

THE NEXT PARISH PUMP WILL
BE IN THE **FEBRUARY 2026**
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Don't forget that insertions are free if you run a Group or Association that is non-profit making. Please send your details via email to Gail at **villagevoice@hotmail.co.uk**

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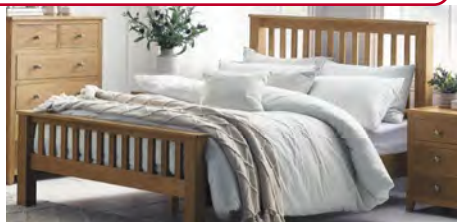
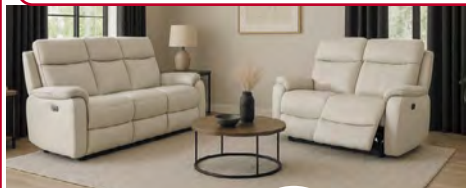
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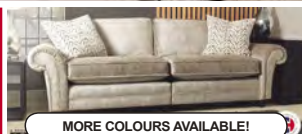


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