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Chris Smith - We Remember!

ISSUE 224 | MAY 2026



Community magazine for Wombourne, Swindon, Penn & Kinver

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Village Voice

Community magazine for
Wombourne, Swindon, Penn & Kinver

Cover story

This month in our magazines we are thinking more about birdlife and somewhat quirky garden ornaments.

Well-stocked bird feeders greatly assist birds to supplement their food intake especially when food is in short supply. Throughout the spring and summer months a bird feeder will help to increase the number of birds visiting your garden and help them to successfully raise their chicks. Birds do, however, like routine – so remember to try and fill your feeders regularly. There is a wide range of bird feeders available in a host of different styles and indeed some even offer ‘squirrel proof’ qualities. This is also a great way to involve your children to start teaching them about nature around our homes.

Gail



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Please note that the closing date for our competition this month is **FRIDAY, 22nd MAY 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 **JUNE 2026** edition of **VILLAGE VOICE** is

MONDAY, 18th MAY 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 **Friday 22nd May 2026 – GOOD LUCK!**

Congratulations to **MIKE BULLOCK** of **KINGSWINFORD** who was the lucky winner of the two tickets on offer in the **APRIL 2026** edition.

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BRAINTEASERS

We have a variety of puzzles this time, some ridiculously easy and others much more difficult. If you need the answers (and we bet you will!) they can be found on page 70.

1. Our first group of questions are homophones—pairs of words that sound the same such as Head Covering (hair) and Mad in March (hare). See if you can get these:
 - (i) Poverty / Work dough
 - (ii) Mrs Horse / First citizen
 - (iii) European country / Unfed
 - (iv) Wear down / Glass container
 - (v) Poem / Debt
2. Which is correct: Six and seven IS fourteen or six and seven ARE fourteen?
3. If a hen and a half lay an egg and a half in a day and a half, how many eggs would six hens lay at the same rate in six days?
4. This is one of the hardest we have set! A petrol tanker drives at a steady 30mph but the drain plug is incorrectly fitted and it is dripping petrol as it drives along. A carelessly discarded cigarette end ignites the dripping fuel and the flames travel along the road towards the tanker at 25mph. After 26 miles the tanker stops. How long will it be before the flames reach the tanker?
5. A few Rebus puzzles. Just say what you see:
 - A. O-ER-T-O-
 - B. Zain, Yain, Xain, Wain, Vain, Uain, Tain, Sain, Rain, Qain, Oain, Nain, Main, Lain, Kain, Jain, Iain, Hain, Fain, Eain, Dain, Cain, Bain, Aain.
 - C. You are given two dice, what are the odds that when you throw them the total on the two upper faces will be an odd number?

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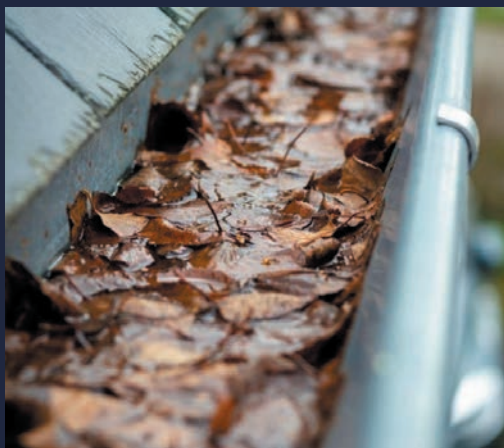
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it's a fact!

- ★ In the mid 1800s the Smestow Brook was identified as a potential source for supplying water to a wide area of the Black Country including Tipton, Wednesbury, Kingswinford, Sedgley, Oldbury, Rowley and Stourbridge. The South Staffordshire Mining District Waterworks Co. estimated that around 10,649,000 gallons a day flowed down the river and promoted a bill through Parliament to extract water from the brook. This, however, was opposed by the Kidderminster Carpet Manufacturing Co. which was concerned that there would be no water left for them to extract further down the river chain. Eventually Parliament refused the application and the bill failed.
- ★ The two decades from 1865 until 1885 saw a number of pubs and ale houses in Kinner auctioned off. In December 1866, for example, *The Lock Inn* was being offered by Mr Ashcroft, an auctioneer based in Snow Hill, Wolverhampton. The property going under the hammer was quite substantial and included a brewhouse, yard, stabling for 30 horses, piggeries, gardens, two additional cottages, weighing machines and a large coal wharf adjoining the canal. It apparently “*enjoys a very profitable and extensive trade*”. In May 1883 another pub—*The Fosters Arms*—was also offered for sale. This, however, was much less desirable. It was described as “*closed, low-rated, old-licensed house*” and as well as the premises, the licences and the effects were offered for sale for an extra £15.
- ★ Black Country footballer Pat Beasley who played for Fulham and then became player-manager of Bristol City obviously had fond memories of Kinner. As a schoolboy playing for Amblecote he scored 13 goals in the 26-0 game at Kinner!

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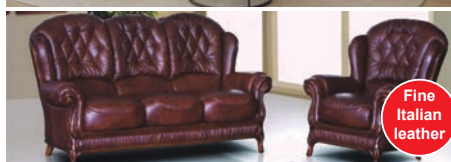
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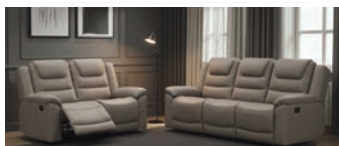


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A VERY STRANGE CASE



In 1867 a very strange case came before a local magistrate, Mr Fereday, at a special court held at the Stamford Arms Hotel In Enville.

The case involved Thomas Bowker, a rate collector from Trysull accused of having feloniously sent to the Rt. Hon. George Harry Grey, Earl of Stamford & Warrington a letter demanding £50 with menaces.

Originally the case was due to have been

heard at Enville Hall itself but it was felt that as this was the home of one of the parties this was unseemly. However, the hearing took place without either party being legally represented and the questioning of the witnesses being carried out by the clerk of the magistrates' court in Stourbridge.

The Earl of Stamford gave evidence that he had received a letter saying that he had overheard a conversation in London between a member of the Earl's stables and a racing tout in which confidential information was being passed for money. The letter said that the identity of the informant would be revealed for £50 in the form of a cheque made payable to John Jefferies and sent to R.A.D at the Wolverhampton Post Office.

The Earl immediately informed the authorities who investigated. Meanwhile he wrote to R.A.D saying he would not correspond with anyone that refused to give their name. The next witness was Thomas Lawley, the schoolmaster at Trysull, who said that he knew Bowker and could identify the handwriting on the letter as his. Catherine Solloway of Trysull then gave evidence that Bowker had asked her to go to the Post Office in Wolverhampton to collect an envelope addressed to "R.A.D."

When she returned home Bowker called on her and took the letter. Catherine and her husband Thomas Solloway were later to run *The Vine Inn* in the village.

The final witnesses were Inspector Goddard and Sergeant Baldwin from the local police who said that, when arrested, Bowker admitted that he had written the letter because he had taken £50.00 from the rates that he had collected.

Mr Fereday, the magistrate, committed Bowker to stand trial at the next Assizes in Stafford. However, because of the "atrocious nature of the crime" he said that the prisoner must provide two sureties of £200 each and the prisoner of £400 himself before bail would be given. This Bowker could not do and therefore spent the time prior to his trial in Stafford gaol.

For some reason it seems that the trial never went ahead and there is no record of any conviction for Thomas Bowker, although the Bowkers certainly continued to live in the village until the early 20th century when a Miss Priscilla Bowker was the sub-postmistress.



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RAWHEAD AND OTHER MINING TALES

There is no doubt that in days gone by one of the hardest and most dangerous occupations was coal mining. Thousands of men throughout the region would spend countless hours in cramped, dark and damp conditions where at any moment a pitfall, explosion or flood could mean instant death. The job seemed to breed a particular type of man for whom a close connection with his comrades was especially important. This feeling of community translated itself into a

Frequently these beliefs centred on death, the ever-present threat every time that they went underground. One of the most common customs was that when a miner died in a mine none of his colleagues would venture underground until after the funeral. It was said that the spirit of the dead man would inhabit the mine until the body was finally buried.

It wasn't just the spirits of the dead, however, that could be found in the pits. Small imps or sprites were said to live in the darkest, deepest shafts of the mines. These were commonly referred to as "knockers" because at a time of impending disaster they would knock on the pit props warning the miners to return to the surface as soon as possible.

It was said that amongst the "knockers" there were also mischievous individuals who thought nothing of hiding the miners' candles, picks or shovels. Indeed, it was also said that on occasion the sprites would turn nasty and actually attack the miners themselves.

One of the most common beliefs within the mining community involved the presence of women around a pit. It was generally felt that a woman seen at the pithead would bring nothing but bad luck—and if the woman had red hair then a tragedy was certain to befall one or more of the men. Similarly it was said that if a miner saw a woman with a squint whilst on his way to work then he would not go underground for at least a week.



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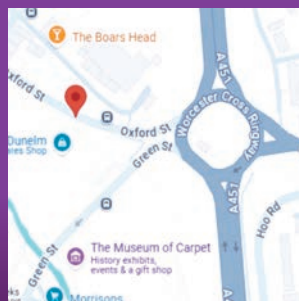
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ON THE RIGHT TRACKS

Last month we looked at the construction of the track from Gornal through to Wolverhampton. In this edition we look at the freight traffic that used the line.

Although the railway line through Wombourne only survived as a passenger route for just seven years it continued to be used for a variety of other trains for a further 33 years.

By far the business year for the line was 1937 when the Royal Agricultural Society held its Annual show at Wrottesley near Wolverhampton. The station and goods yard at Tettenhall was made into a giant farm where over 1000 cattle, 600 horses and equally large numbers of sheep, goats and pigs were delivered for onward travel by a fleet of lorries to the show ground. Although the show itself only lasted four days in July, activity on the railway lasted well over a month.

The coming of the Second World War in just two years, however, halted any thought of similar events although it did bring another type of traffic to the line. On 9th June 1944 an ambulance train from Oxford arrived at Tettenhall with almost a hundred casualties who had been involved in the D-Day invasion. The casualties were transferred to ambulances, buses and even private cars which took them to various local hospitals. Two further trains arrived at Tettenhall in the next month but then it was decided to make Wombourne the terminus for the trains as it was felt this was more central for distribution of the casualties to local hospitals. In total over 30 such trains were received at Wombourne station.

After the War the line returned to normal working with freight trains mainly using the line not only for local traffic but also increasingly for long distance trains. Many of these passed through Wombourne at night as, when they reached the main line, they had to give way to the scheduled passenger trains. Carpets from Kidderminster to Manchester, Morris cars from Cowley to Liverpool, bananas from Southampton to Crewe and coal from Cannock to Stourport were all regular journeys—but all that changed with the Beeching report.

In next month's edition we take a look at the demise of the line.



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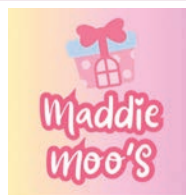


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CONUNDRUMS FROM THE PAST

We came across this series of conundrums in what was left of a copy of an old parish magazine. There were only a few pages (not including the cover) and from the information we could not identify either the date of its publication or the church that issued it.

**What is that which we often do not find
where it is but find where it is not?**

Fault

Why is a clock the pattern of humility?

Because it holds its hand before its face and is continually running itself down however good its work may be.

**What word is there of five letters which
by taking away two only one is left?**

Stone

**What is that putting its eye out leaves
nothing but a nose?**

Noise

What kind of servants are best in hotels?

The inn-experienced

**How do we know heat travels faster than
cold?**

Anyone can catch cold.

**What is that of which there are only two in
every year and yet there is one every day
and two every week?**

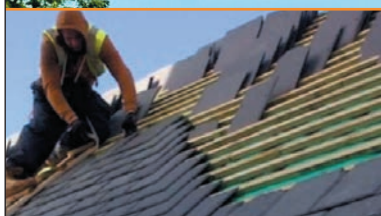
Vowels

**What is the difference between a chicken
and a dirty housemaid?**

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CHARITY FOCUS

THE GEOFF HILL CHARITABLE TRUST Registered Charity No. 1067258

The Geoff Hill Charitable Trust was founded on 18th March 1997 by the late Geoff Hill MBE. The object of the charity is to support or promote such charitable purposes to the discretion of the trustees. The grants are limited to within the local area of the West Midlands. Unfortunately, it was decided that to maximise assistance to local schools, hospices, hospitals, scout/guide groups, sports clubs and other charities or organisations that no donation will be made to individuals.

Geoff started his charity from personal savings and always felt that the success of his business—the Geoff Hill Store in Amblecote Stourbridge - was thanks to his loyal customers. In gratitude, he felt that he wanted to give something back to the community! Therefore, the Charitable Trust was founded to help needy charities and causes in the local area.



To increase funds Geoff organised large raffles and dances at the Stourbridge Town Hall and other local venues. He was awarded the MBE by Prince Charles (now King Charles) in October 2004 in recognition of his work (our photo (left) shows a very proud Geoff wearing his MBE together with his wife Sue).

To date The Geoff Hill Charitable Trust has helped 1,827 different causes and has donated just under £1 million.

The charity has gone from strength to strength. All donations are carefully monitored and hopefully go a long way to improving the quality of life for many people within the area that we live. The charity helps hundreds of organisations each year, giving grants from a few hundred pounds to a few thousand.

Any group, charity or good cause in need of funding can write to: The Geoff Hill Charitable Trust, 7 High Street, Amblecote, DY8 4DE. We would emphasise that we are unable to give to private individuals.

The Geoff Hill Charitable Trust is proud to continue the good work that Geoff Hill MBE started originally from his personal savings.

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A MOST REMARKABLE COUPLE

When a young widow called Sarah Marsh travelled to Wolverhampton in 1828 to hear a debate about “The supremacy of the Pope” she could hardly have realised that eventually she would fall in love with and marry one of the young clergyman taking part.

Sarah was an extremely rich young woman of some standing in the community who had inherited a great deal of property (including The Lloyd) in both Penn and Wombourne after the death of her husband and when she invited the clergyman—William Dalton—and some of his friends for dinner the invitation was no doubt accepted with alacrity. The couple got on well and when Sarah endowed at St George’s Church in Wolverhampton with a sizeable donation she suggested that he be appointed vicar. Unfortunately he had already accepted a position in Liverpool and the church there



refused to release him. Despite this setback William and Sarah married in 1831 and spent their time split between Liverpool and Wombourne.

Time passed and when another new church was planned (and largely paid for by the now Mrs Dalton) in Wolverhampton, William Dalton’s name was put forward as the first incumbent. This time he was able to negotiate a move from Liverpool and so he moved Wolverhampton to become vicar of St Paul’s on the Penn Road, a position he was to hold from 1839 until 1859. During this time he—and his wife—were deeply involved in the creation of a number of other churches in the area. The last of these was St Philip’s (above right) of which he became Perpetual Curate.

In addition the churches which the Daltons were also involved in established several church schools and an orphanage. This became the Royal Orphanage in 1900 and—now much changed—is the Royal School, Wolverhampton.

In February 1852 Sarah Dalton died and whilst he continued to live at The Lloyds her husband spent much of his time in the writing of various religious works until, in 1864 he met and married a young lady his age.

The second Mrs Dalton moved into The Lloyd and they had some 16 years of marriage before William Dalton died. He was buried in the churchyard at Wombourne and, whilst his widow continued to live at The Lloyd for a short while she then moved down to the south coast at Eastbourne. Touchingly, she named her new property The Lloyd in remembrance of the happy days she spent with her husband William in Staffordshire.

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- 26th June IAN HENLEYS The Power Of The Plectrum

JULY

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- 5th July FITZ OF LAUGHTER with MARK SIMMONDS
- 11th July SOAAR presents JOHN OTWAY
- 17th July STOURBRIDGE PRIDE
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NEAR DISASTER FOR PARISH OUTING

In the late 1960s and early 1970s the annual Parish Outing in Wombourne was eagerly awaited by many in the village. On two successive years—1969 and 1970—however the trips nearly ended in disappointment.

In 1970 around 150 adults and children embarked on three coaches for the trip to Wicksteed Park near Kettering in Northamptonshire. The convoy got as far as Birmingham Airport (which was then known as Elmdon Airport) when one of the coaches broke down. It was not repairable at the roadside so the passengers had to disembark and squeeze onto the other two coaches. The two remaining coaches got as far as Coventry when one of them had a minor traffic accident. The police were called—and so the excess passengers had to make themselves scarce in case the driver found himself charged with overloading! Fortunately after insurance details had been exchanged the coaches were allowed to continue and the passengers had an enjoyable time—although on the return journey the metallic trim on one of the coaches became detached, causing something of a stir. The previous year the problem was not coaches breaking down but rather the fact that one of the conveyances was a double decker bus—and the route include a low bridge! Fortunately the bus stopped before hitting the bridge but it did mean a 20 mile detour had to be endured by the excited passengers.



One of the many attractions of Wicksteed Park at the time was its miniature train which ran around the perimeter of the site. Wicksteed is particularly known for the fact that it was the location of the very first children's slide back in 1922.

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If you have any concerns about your dog the local vets should always be your first port of call—a telephone call for advice may (or may not) need to be followed up by a visit. Of course cost may be a concern—which is why many owners today choose to take out pet insurance.

Finally, if you are going away on holiday the only real way of ensuring that your pet is properly looked after is to book a place in a boarding kennels. Again, a surprisingly cheap option but one that ensures that your dog also has a holiday and returns to you fresh and full of vitality.





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Whilst recently talking to Karen Hayes who for many years ran the highly successful Occasional Cakes in Kingswinford, I asked her if she could come up with a cake recipe for Spring and she did not disappoint with her Lemon Drizzle cake.

Ingredients:

225g slightly salted butter
225g caster sugar
4 large eggs
225g self raising flour
1 lemon for juice and zest

For the topping:

2 juiced lemons
150g icing sugar



Method:

Heat the oven to 170 or gas 4. Beat together all the butter and sugar until light and fluffy and then add the eggs one by one mixing slowly. Sift in the flour and lemon zest and combine. Grease and line a loaf tin and spoon in the mixture. Cook for 45 to 55 minutes depending on oven—test the cake with a skewer to ensure it is cooked. Leave the cake to cool in the tin but before it is completely cold mix together the lemon juice with the icing sugar. Spike holes in the cake (diagonally so that the juice doesn't run straight out) and pour the mixed icing sugar all over the cake allowing it to drip into the cake. Leave to go cold. Store in a cool dry place ...never store cakes in the fridge, ideally in an airtight container.



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it's a fact!

- ★ Following the Battle of Worcester in 1651 members of the defeated Royalist army scattered throughout the local countryside pursued by the victorious Roundheads. One of the Royalists was found hiding in a tavern on the outskirts of Kinver but, despite being substantially outnumbered he put up a brave fight, injuring one of the soldiers. Once overcome, though, he was strung up on a large elm tree outside the tavern—which stood on what is now known as Gallows Hill.
- ★ In September 1931 a Hawker Hart two-seater RAF aircraft was forced to make an emergency landing at Halfpenny Green airfield. Having brought the aircraft safely to the ground the pilot, 21 year old Donald Hylland of the 33rd Squadron based at RAF Bicester, had to take further action to avoid running into a hedge. Despite still moving at a relatively fast speed he applied the wheel brakes which caused the aircraft to overturn, smashing the propeller and damaging the wings and tail. Hylland himself escaped with just a minor cut on his face.
- ★ 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 grates and 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.

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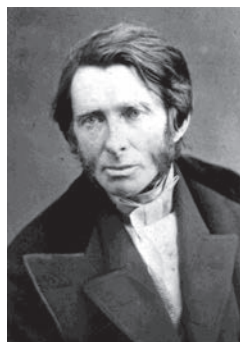
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it's a fact!

★ In January 1886 Joseph Bond, a licensed victualler of Church Lane, Tipton appeared at Wolverhampton Police Court charged with unlawfully and maliciously publishing a defamatory libel concerning the Hon Philip James Stanhope of Wombourne, the unsuccessful candidate in a recent Parliamentary election in Wednesbury. One of the mainstays of Stanhope's manifesto was that he wanted pensions banned. Just a few days before the election Bond distributed several thousand leaflets saying that in fact Stanhope had received a pension of £2,000 from the Navy. This was completely erroneous, a fact that Bond later admitted and for which he apologised. In the light of the apology Stanhope said that he was prepared to drop the case but the stipendiary magistrate said he thought that it was such an important case and such deceptions were becoming so commonplace during electioneering that the Public Prosecutor should consider pursuing it. The case was therefore adjourned (although later it was abandoned).

★ The Rev. William John Heale was Wombourne's longest serving vicar, having been in the post for 49 years between the years of 1849 and 1898. A graduate of Oxford University, he felt that the existing St Benedict Biscop Church was not suitable for the growing population of the area and so he engaged an Oxford architect, George Street, to demolish most of the existing building and replace it with a larger church. This new building was consecrated by the Bishop of Rochester in 1867. Rev. Heale was also responsible for the rebuilding of the church's vicarage and schoolroom as well as being instrumental in setting up the parishes of Trysull and Swindon.



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Our very good friends at Prestwood Cave Nursery have very kindly provided the prize for this month's competition. Our two lucky winners will each win a 14" Hanging Basket.

Will you be a lucky winner?!

Please note, only one entry per person – multiple entries will not be entered into the draw.

All you have to do is search out the square below for the 16 words associated with **PRESTWOOD CAVE NURSERY** 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, 22nd May 2026**. Good luck!

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T	P	S	E	L	A	S	R	S	V	I
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E	O	W	P	O	T	S	D	M	C	S
M	C	G	N	I	N	E	D	R	A	G

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1. STONEWARE
2. POTS
3. GIFTS
4. CHARITY
5. PLANT
6. SALES
7. LOCAL
8. PRESTWOOD
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THE SENTENCE OF THE COURT

Almost two hundred years ago courts never bothered with 'community sentences' or 'conditional charges'. 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 March 1831 John Swatkins (22), Thomas Lloyd (53) and Thomas Timins (19) were each sentenced to death for "*maliciously and feloniously setting afire a stack of barley*) belonging to Richard Williams of Wombourne.



A similar sentence was handed down a year later when Thomas Scriven of Himley was found guilty of stealing one ewe sheep from Thomas Chadwick of Kingswinford. More common in those days, however, was transportation to Australia. In 1883 William Walker (42) was sentenced to Stafford Assizes of stealing sheep at Wombourne, the property of William Perry. He was transported for life. A Wombourne resident, John Jones, was convicted of pickpocketing William Wells at Wolverhampton races and was sentenced to seven years transportation. This was the same sentence given to George Allen (13) who stole a pair of boots. 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 25 years they were sent to Van Diemens Land (Tasmania).



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WINES: SOME OF ENGLAND'S STILL AND SPARKLING FAVOURITES

A review by Trevor Langley

Multi award-winning Denbies Wine Estate (Est. 1986) is located in Surrey. Utilising several grape varieties, Denbies produces both high-quality still and sparkling wines. My votes (Still):



DENBIES FLINT VALLEY (11.5% vol). This dry white wine pleases on the nose with fresh citrus notes that carry through to the flavour. Splendid with poached and smoked salmon.

DENBIES SURREY GOLD (11% vol) is a medium-dry, white wine and is good for the nasal senses, with the fragrant bouquet enticing to the floral/fruit hints for the mouthfeel and the palate's delight. Pairs very well with foods of a spicy nature, including many Asian dishes of cuisine.

If a 'pink' wine is required, I would like to suggest **DENBIES ROSE HILL** (11% vol). Summer fruits come to mind for this easy-drinking delectation, which I found refreshing and great to add colour to a dining table, as well as for al fresco occasions. A fantastic accompaniment to salads and white meats. My votes (Sparkling, aged, bottle-fermented):

DENBIES GREENFIELDS (12% vol). The colour of golden-straw entices to the aroma and the tasting – an excellent example of a sparkling wine. Crisp, rich and with an extended palate.



DENBIES WHITEDOWNS BRUT (12.5% vol) is very popular, satisfying a lot of sparkling preferences and tastes. With fresh, ripe fruits evident for the mouthfeel, I found this production to be crisp and most pleasurable.

DENBIES CUBITT BLANC DE BLANCS (12% vol) is a much sought-after sparkling production from this company, which is only produced in the best of seasons. The quality is very much appreciated by many. The bouquet is pleasant and appealing, then, the taste buds are activated, continuing on, to a grand finish.

For all information about Denbies, including stockists, wine tastings, forthcoming events, Denbies restaurants, hotel, loyalty club, tours, weddings/receptions and a lot more, please make contact and/or visit their website, which I found very interesting.

Denbies Wine Estate, Dorking, Surrey RH5 6AA. Tel: 01306 876616. E-mail: info@denbiesvineyard.co.uk Web: www.denbies.co.uk

**COMING UP IN THE
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WINES: SOME FAVOURITES OF LEBANON



As always,

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Trevor Langley

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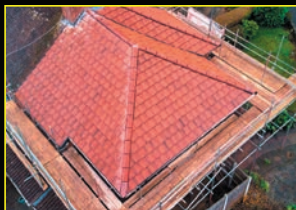
it's a fact!

- ★ The Church Register for Wombourne for 1636 shows that: *"In this yeare happened a terrible fire at Swindon which in the space of one houre consumed and burnt downe seaven dwelling houses and other buildings, together with a great quantity of corne, wool, bedding, brasse, pewter, wearing apparel, implements of husbandry and other things to the value of two thousand pounds and upwards. The fire happened as it pleased God, through sparkes flying out of Mr Lidiat's Forge which settled on the thatch of John Mathew's barne and being carried with a great winde, it was so sudden and unresistable that it could not be quenched. It happened upon the 16th Jun about three of the clock in the afternoon."*
- ★ The Wodehouse Mill dates back to at least 1570 when it was used as a corn mill. In the mid 17th century it was converted into a malting mill for about 20 years before it reverted to milling corn. In 1814 it suffered a serious fire and it was not until 1840 that it was rebuilt and restored to work, this time as a mill for cattle feed. It continued in this role until 1976 when it finally closed.
- ★ In 1956 the old Brierley Hill Secondary Technical School became Brierley Grammar School For Boys and a number of pupils from Wombourne, Swindon and Himley would make the long journey there and back for the next five years of their lives. In the same year Ounsdale Comprehensive School in Wombourne opened—and was an immediate success. In fact, over the next few years its reputation was such that a number of prospective pupils were sent to live with grandparents and other relatives in the area in order to qualify for a place at the school.



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THE WOMBOURNE MURDERER

In mid June 1839 Christine Collins left Preston aboard a canal barge called 'The Staffordshire Knot' en-route for joining her husband in London.

Unfortunately for her the crew of the barge—Captain James Owen, William Lambert, George Dobell—proved to be less than welcoming and by the time that the vessel had reached Rugeley there were reports of arguments between the crew and their passenger who had locked herself in the cabin. The lock-keeper and his wife at Hoo Mill Locks also witnessed an apparent struggle between a woman and a man on the towpath.

The barge's cabin boy—12 year old Isaac Munn—then told one of the lock-keepers that Mrs Collins had disappeared and that it was assumed that she had fallen overboard. The lock-keeper immediately reported this to the authorities who decided to drag the canal. Within hours they had found the body of Christine Collins weighted down with a length of chain which was quickly identified as having been on 'the Staffordshire Knot'. Not surprisingly a man-hunt started for the three crew members.

George Dobell was also known as George Thomas and his family home was at Smestow Bridge near Wombourne. This was searched but no sign of him was found - which was not surprising especially as there was an outstanding warrant for his arrest on poaching charges dating back from 1827. William Ellis, however, was caught and he told the police about a secret hiding place in the house. A second search not only found the hiding place but also a very dishevelled George Dobell and George Thomas as well. The three crew members were taken to Stafford Gaol and their trial took place in April 1840. All three were found guilty and condemned to death. Although Ellis was later given a reprieve the other two were hanged, with a crowd estimated at 10,000 witnessing the spectacle. The hanging was carried out by Calcraft, the High Executioner assisted by George Smith of Dudley. Interestingly, Colin Dexter re-worked this story in his book 'The Wrench Is Dead' one of the Inspector Morse mysteries.



Life on the canals is now a lot less dangerous than it was in the 1830s and the canal network is now used primarily for leisure.

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A LITTLE BIT ABOUT VILLAGE VOICE MAGAZINE

With our new readers in mind we thought that we would include a few facts and figures about the magazine.

- ♦ **VILLAGE VOICE** has been published since 2005 and in that time we have distributed more than 2 million copies of the magazine.
- ♦ We publish three separate editions – Sedgley/Gornal/Coseley/Tipton and Kingswinford/Wall Heath/Wordsley as well as this one.
- ♦ The majority of our magazines are delivered door-to-door in the appropriate areas. Our distributors strive to ensure that all magazines reach their correct destination and alter the distribution pattern each month in order that we reach a wider circulation.
- ♦ We are always happy to include details of clubs, societies and charities (space permitting and if non profit making)) without charge. Our contact details are on page 3.
- ♦ Not only are our advertising rates extremely competitive but we do not insist on rolling contracts or pre-payment.
- ♦ We offer a free design service for all advertisers who do not have their own artwork.
- ♦ We still have a number of advertisers who have been with us since our very first edition back in January 2005.
- ♦ Whenever possible we aim to have editorial taking up at least a third of the magazine, ensuring it is much more than just pages full of advertisements.
- ♦ We always have a competition with a range of excellent prizes including family tickets to many of the top entertainment venues in the area.

Gail Smith

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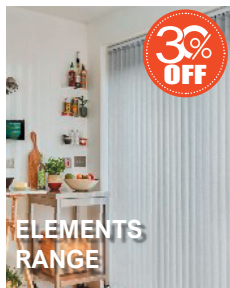


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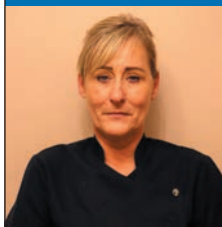
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HIMLEY CHURCHMAN SETS UP CHARITY

When Henry Antrobus, Rector of Himley, died in 1766 his will was full of charitable requests—and a couple of threats. The churchman requested that he was buried in the same grave as his mother in St Edmunds Church, Dudley and that a marble monument be affixed to the wall with the inscription “*Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of who I am chief*”. He asked that his estate at Hokeham (Oakham) be sold and a sum of £600 be put to a pay a school mistress to teach 40 poor girls of the parish of Dudley to read, sew and knit. In addition some of that money should be put aside to clothe the girls and buy books for their education. Antrobus was obviously a relatively wealthy man as he had another property in Rowley Regis and he gave orders for this to be sold and the money used to clothe six poor men every 1st November. Finally he requested that the rest of his money should go towards the building of a gallery within St Edmunds Church.

Surprisingly he made no provision for any of his money to be left to Himley church. The threats in the will were aimed firmly at the executrix of Antrobus’ will, Elizabeth Perry. He made it abundantly clear that if she did not fulfil the requests in his will without delay then “*she must answer it at the dreadful day of judgement*”. On a more practical level he also paid a solicitor friend to check that she did fulfil them!



Although he was Rector of Himley, Henry Antrobus left most of his money to St Edmunds Church in Dudley



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ARE YOU LOOKING FOR A SPEAKER?

One question that I am frequently asked is whether I can supply the names of speakers—granted there are a lot of names available via the internet but what if you are not well versed in computers? Over the course of the next few months we will be providing the names and details of various local speakers. So, if you are a speaker and would like to be included free of charge in this feature, then please email your details together with a current photograph to Gail at villagevoice@hotmail.co.uk

MICHELE BIRCH

Michele offers a varied range of talks. She draws on her own family history by way of using family links and demonstrations of **Japanese gift wrapping techniques**—this is a popular talk towards Christmas time especially.

She also has a great interest in **poppies**—glass fantasy film demonstrations and an involvement in poppy displays. This is a highly popular talk towards November.

Another talk is **the power of colour and their affects on people suffering with mental health issues**. A further talk is **'Food and Your Mood'** which looks at the effect of food on our mood and why it is so important to eat healthily.

As well as being a health and wellbeing tutor for adult education Michele is also a life coach offering talks on positive thinking, resilience, motivation and self-esteem. She also offers the opportunity to tailor her talks to cater for any given audience and is more than happy to talk to organisers about their requirements.

For availability, please contact Michele either by email at:

michelebirch6@gmail.com

or telephone on **0791 853 2284**

BARRY PICKEN

Barry has been giving talks to local clubs and societies for over 20 years and covers a variety of topics currently including:

'Red Flowers and a Bag of Old Bones' - the story of the Poppy and the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior

'The Habsbergs, the Hohenzollerns and the Romanovs - from obscurity to oblivion'

'They took their Lifeboat to the top of the mountain' - the Lynmouth Lifeboat January 1899

'Edith Cavell - heroine or spy'

'Railway wagon 132' - who were the three most important people to be carried in a goods wagon

All of the talks are given with a power point presentation

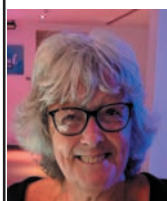
For availability, please talk to Barry

either by email at:

bpicken119@aol.com

or

Telephone **07940 743807**



KATE ROUND : Kate has been doing talks to local clubs and societies for over 15 years, on behalf of Dudley Museums Service, and is based at the iconic Red House Glass Cone, the home of Stuart Crystal. Kate talks about the glass industry, the artistry, and legacy of cut-glass, and the lives and skills of the people who made it.

Check out her website <https://kateround.com/>

All of her talks are listed with a description of content and all are presented with slides. For availability, please talk to Kate either by email at:

kateround.round@gmail.com or telephone on **07968 396679**

JOHN HOMER - A BLACK COUNTRY BLOKE!

For many years he has been involved with West Bromwich Albion, the Albion Foundation and the Black Country Living Museum, and is also a founder-member of the 'ME, MYSELF AND I' group which is a dementia support group for carers.



He is a speaker on everything and anything to do with the Black Country and local football.

His talks are a "pot-pourri" of stories, anecdotes, jokes, poetry and songs about the Black Country and life in general!

For further details of talks available please contact John either by:

Telephone: 01384 236827

Mobile: 07818 291578

Email: johnhomerwba@hotmail.co.uk

KAREN EVANS

After completing a History degree Karen taught in primary schools before retiring in 2015. She then wrote two 'Grim Almanac' books for the History Press and she is currently writing for Family Tree Magazine on all things genealogical. Her love and enthusiasm for history was the impetus for her talks be it Regency dancing or using DNA in her own research. Karen's talks include:



'The Ultimate Black Sheep'—this uncovers an 1823 murder in her family which sent her on a thrilling and fascinating journey of discovery.

'Where does my family come from?' -

Unlocking the secrets of DNA testing—this talk covers areas such as understanding how the test works in very general terms.

'Dancing in the time of Jane Austen' - every savage can dance according to Mr Darcy but what would he have seen in the ballrooms of the day?

For a full list of talks available and availability please contact Karen on **07462 801829** or email her at **karenevansdna@gmail.com**



ALAN PEACE: Alan began his working life as a printer but has also been a youth worker and a professional climbing instructor. His high altitude climbing career has sent him around the world to places such as The Alps, Russia, Argentina, Norway, Italy, Morocco, Tanzania and Mongolia. He spent 10 years as a volunteer lorry driver with the German Red Cross delivering humanitarian aid throughout Eastern Europe and for 27 years was the Senior Warden of the Himley Park estate near Dudley. He is an Ambassador and volunteer fundraiser for Cancer Research UK and a local councillor and in his spare time he skips a 70 foot narrowboat running day trips.

Himley Hall—Past, Present and Future—Concentrating mainly upon the social history of the Himley estate and the many notable people who have visited.

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 40 years of working with both children and animals!

The 1000km Stroll—backpacking the South West Coast Path—Back in May 2021 Alan travelled to Minehead in Somerset to begin backpacking the 1000km long South West Coast Path in aid of Cancer Research.—an eight week expedition and the follow-up expedition the reverse way in 2022.

For a full list of talks and availability please contact Alan on 07791 900445 or email him at alrobpeace@btinternet.com

BRAINTEASERS ANSWERS

1. (i) Need and Knead
(ii) Mare and Mayor
(iii) Hungary and Hungry
(iv) File and Phial
(v) Ode and Owed
2. Neither. Six and seven make 13 not 14!
3. 24. It is actually a lot more simple than it at first seems. Each hen lays an egg and a half and therefore each lays four eggs in six days—and six hens would therefore lay 24 eggs in six days.



4. The answer is 10 minutes and 24 seconds—but the explanation would take a page in itself so you'll have to take our word for it!
5. A: Painless operation
B: No pain, no gain
6. The odds are 1 in 2 or 50%. The number showing on the first die is not of consequence. Whether it is even or odd the chance of it being the opposite on the second die (thereby ensuring the total is odd) is still just 1 in 2.

**WATCH OUT FOR MORE
BRAINTEASERS NEXT MONTH**

COMPETITION WINNERS

The answer to our Wordsearch Competition in the **APRIL** edition was **PAINTS** which was misspelt. The two lucky winners who each receive a **£50.00 B&Q GIFT VOUCHER** are:

MRS J. BRITTON of **BILSTON** and
RACHEL JEWELS of **KINVER**

You can find this month's competition on page 46.

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.



Pattingham Drama presents

The Hypochondriac

a Comedy, adapted from Molière by Roger McGough

13th to 16th May 2026 at 7.30 pm - Pattingham Village Hall

Tickets £12 online at www.ticketsource.co.uk/pattingham-drama
or phone line: 0333 666 4466

OR WHATEVER by John Sparry

“Beware! It’s the ‘AbramMen’”

By 1403—Henry IV had won the Battle of Shrewsbury, although possibly hiding under the refectory table when the log-man came round for his money.—a religious house, St Mary of Bethlehem, founded in Bishopsgate, London, in 1247, had been converted to a home for the insane.

Those inmates considered not too out of order or control—of the ‘Abraham’ Ward—were allowed to go out begging in order to add a little more to their meagre diet.

As always, the rogues, and those known as ‘canting coves’ (whining thieves) thought ‘this could keep us in the manner to which we ought to be accustomed.’ Today, in order to save time they mainly use the phone.



“Ar tell you what, lads, we’ll pretend we’re maniacs—some of us won’t need to do much acting—an’ we’ll go around a-whining’ we’re from Bedlam.” (This was the corrupted pronunciation of Bethlehem, the previously mentioned hospital).

“An’ we’ll be sure to scare ‘em” - to be topical read scam—”an’ they’ll come across with the old spondulicks” (one wonders whether Henry IV was considering joining them).

And so the Abram’men pursued their dreaded vagabondage around England: ‘With a sigh like Tom O’ Bedlam’ wrote Will Shakespear in King Lear. The ‘Sham Abram Coves’ would have ensured that Ann Hathaway kept her cottage door bolts well-oiled.

**Due to my shaky handwriting,
for ‘Rover’ in the April issue
please read ‘Roller’ - the slang
for a Rolls Royce which
Mr Geoff Cookson could not
countenance.**

By John Sparry, Ridge Cot, 15 Enville Road, Wall Heath
Mobile: 07831 342209

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

A PENN (COMMON) PORTRAIT

For hundreds of years Penn Common has been an area well known to residents of Wombourne as well as the neighbouring areas of Sedgley and Wolverhampton.

In the early 19th century the centre of the Common was used as a racecourse with horses coming from all across the Midlands to take part in the two-day race meetings held several times a year. By the end of the century, however, horse racing had fallen out of fashion and a group of sporting men met in 1892 to make plans to convert much of the Common to a golf course. The plans were agreed by the commoners and the Duke of Sutherland (the Lord of the Manor) and in 1893 work commenced on draining parts of the land and constructing a course. The South Staffordshire Golf Club was formed and it became very popular. In 1908, however, the Club moved to Tettenhall and the Penn

Gold Club was formed to run the course. In the 1920s and 1930s the Common was a popular place for locals to take a stroll and call at one of the several pubs and tea rooms that existed. One of the most popular was the "Turf Tavern" which overlooked the duck pond. The Turf was kept by Daisy Collins for many years and she was just one of several well-known characters that were associated with the Common. One of the others was "Gypsy Smith", an old lady who spent most of the year travelling the Midlands in her caravan but who always



Sedgley-Born Archie Compston was a regular at Penn Golf Club before moving on to greater things as a professional at Coombe Hill Golf Club in Surrey where he taught King Edward VIII to play the game. Compston played in the first three Ryder Cup competitions against the United States.



A postcard view of the duck pond on Penn Common from the 1920s.

spent some of the summer months on "the Common". When she died she was buried at St Bartholomew's Church overlooking Penn Common and it is said that her caravan and its contents were later burned on the Common in accordance with Romany custom. When the bricks were made for a specific order the name of the customer was stamped on each brick and there are still a number of houses in the area where the name of the original owner can be seen on the bricks. Also on the Common was Penn Brewery which, although initially very successful,

it was unable to compete with the rise of the larger breweries that started to appear at the beginning of the 20th century.

Today the Common is given over almost entirely to leisure and you are more likely to bump into a golfer than a brickmaker, or a birdwatcher than a brewery worker wandering around what is one of the most important open spaces in the area.

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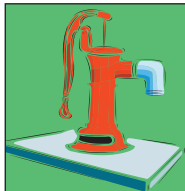
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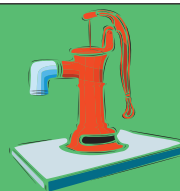
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The Wombourne, Swindon, Penn & Kinver PARISH PUMP



**KINVER
COMMUNITY
LIBRARY**

Have you thought about volunteering? It is a great way to meet people, make new friends and get involved with the local community.

National Volunteers Week runs from 1-7 June, so we are celebrating this with a Volunteers Coffee Morning on Saturday 6 June at the library. Come along between 10.00am and 12 noon to find out more about volunteering opportunities, have a chat with existing volunteers and try some delicious homemade cakes! We would love to see you.

The library is located in Vicarage Drive, Kinver DY7 6HJ, just off the High Street, and you can call us on 01384 872348 or see our website at

www.kinvercommunitylibrary.co.uk



www.pennsingers.org.uk



Sun Moon & Stars

Penn United Reformed Church

(WV4 5QP)

Saturday July 4th 2026

Featuring

Vocabella

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Tickets: Brian - 01902 652992

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Penn Singers supporting
Jericho House

**THE
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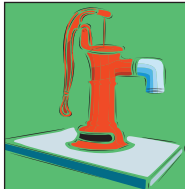
Member of the National Association of Choirs

The Penn Singers have for many years supported local charities.

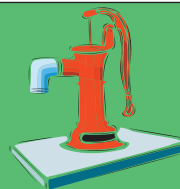
They have recently made donations to the Black Country Mental Health Trust and at their July concert they will be handing over a cheque amounting to almost £1000 to the Acorns Children's Hospice.

**knit &
natter**

**at Sedgley Community Centre
10am -12 noon every 3rd Saturday
at the Coffee Morning.
FREE ENTRY ALL WELCOME**



The Wombourne, Swindon, Penn & Kinver PARISH PUMP



ANOTHER HIMLEY HALL SNIPPET

From 1992-1994 Himley Hall was closed for major renovation work to be carried out which resulted in many features and anomalies being discovered. One of those involved the ground floor oak floorboards in the main reception area which the caretaker used to lovingly polish. In 1947 when the coal board, who had purchased the property from the Earl of Dudley, were carrying out work to convert the building to offices, a fire broke out which completely destroyed the south wing. The fire began on the first floor and when the ceiling collapsed onto the ground floor it protected the solid oak floorboards to a certain extent. After the fire, when the clear up and rebuilding began, as the floorboards were only scorched, the contractors simply lifted them turned them over and re-used them in order to keep the costs down! This was only discovered in 1993 when, as part of the renovation project, it was decided to replace the boards. The contractor carrying out the renovation work simply cut through them with a circular saw and upon them being lifted it was discovered that they were scorched on the underside.

Alan Peace - Himley Hall and Park Senior Warden 1985-2012



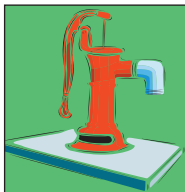
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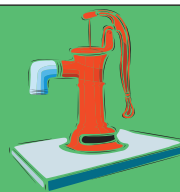
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For further information please contact
Lorraine on **07855 200 736.**

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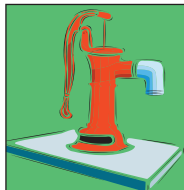
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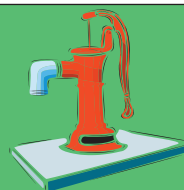
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Staffordshire
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Do you live in the Wombourne area? Are you interested in Crafts?

Do you want to join or help set up a craft group at Wombourne Library?

We're investigating if people would like to attend a regular craft group at Wombourne Library. Groups are a great way to meet new people, share ideas and skills and learn new things. We're looking for people who may wish to help look after the group or who just wish to come along and join in.

Contact Wombourne Library on
01902 506055 or
email

Wombourne.library@staffordshire.gov.uk

NATIONAL SERVICE (RAF) ASSOCIATION

We are a group of men who did their National Service in the RAF back in the 1950s. We meet every month at midday on the second Tuesday of the month in the Community Hub at RAF Cosford, Wolverhampton WV7 3EX where we have a guest speaker and generally put the world to rights.

As we say every Remembrance Day, we who are left grow old and sadly our membership is dwindling, but we feel that there may be readers of Village Voice who were Erks and who might be interested in joining us for the sum of £5.00 per year. This covers the postage of our monthly newsletter, The Erk, *(for those who may be confused, an Erk was the slang name for another rank in the RAF).*

If anyone is interested, please do come along to one of our meetings where you will receive a very warm welcome. Alternatively, please contact Gail at Village Voice (at villagevoice@hotmail.co.uk) who will pass on our contact details.

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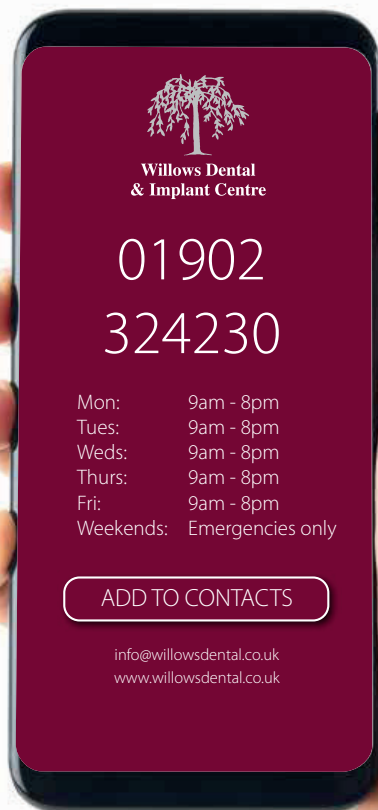
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