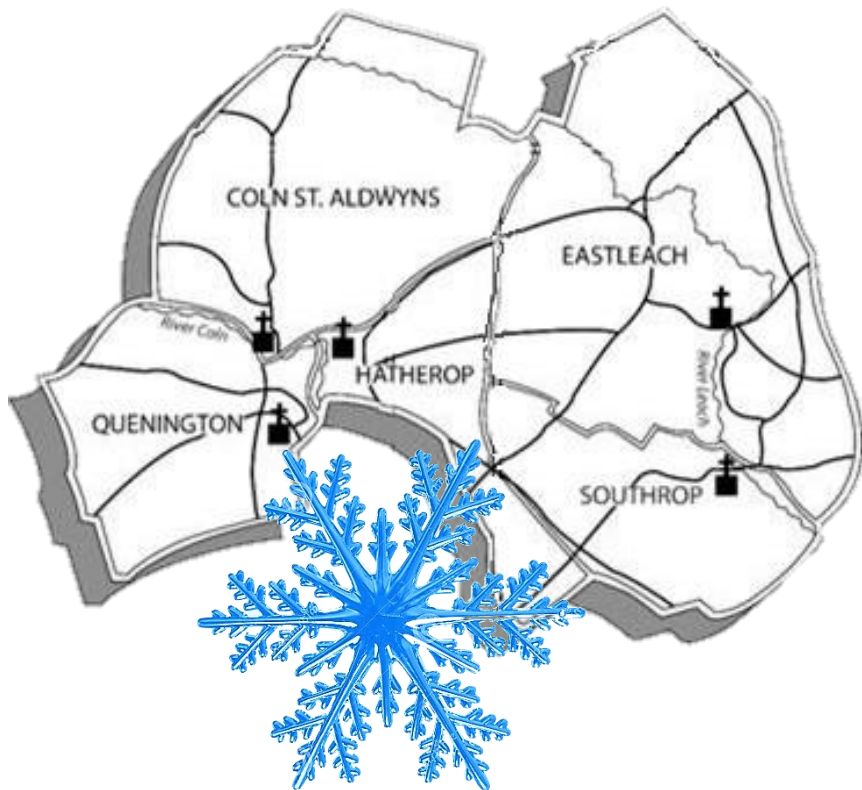




# CHEQS

# MAGAZINE



# January 2022

# COTSWOLD TREES

*Professional Tree Surgery - over 21 years' experience*

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email: [info@cotswolddrystone.com](mailto:info@cotswolddrystone.com)



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- Well rotted and screened horse manure
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Let your horses and ponies be bedded in the utmost comfort and may your broad beans be as big as bananas.

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[www.ponsonbyfarms.co.uk](http://www.ponsonbyfarms.co.uk)



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or email: [enquiries@fairfordbadmintonclub.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@fairfordbadmintonclub.co.uk)  
[www.fairfordbadmintonclub.co.uk](http://www.fairfordbadmintonclub.co.uk)

## THE KEEPERS ARMS, QUENINGTON



- FREEHOUSE
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[thekeepersarms.co.uk](http://thekeepersarms.co.uk)

01285 750 349

[landlord@thekeepersarms.co.uk](mailto:landlord@thekeepersarms.co.uk)

*Hello from...  
Sue Futtu*



It's a little-known fact perhaps, but from 24<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> January 2022 it is Village Halls Week, a national campaign aiming to shine a spotlight on the contribution which England's 10,000+ village halls make to rural communities. As the Treasurer on Eastleach Village Hall's management committee since 2013, I'm here to celebrate our lovely little hall and hopefully raise its profile in the community!

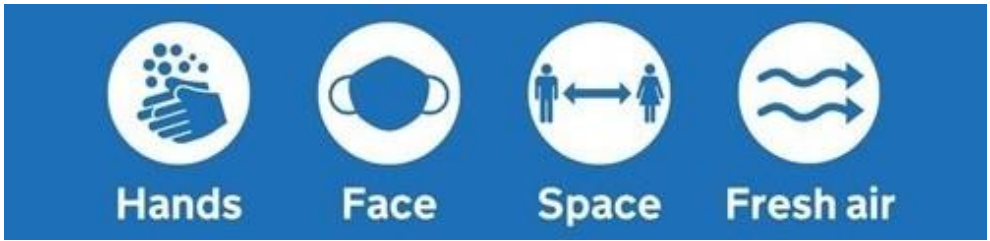


Tucked away at the top of the village, part of the hall is several hundred years old, but it started its later life as a Reading Room, given to the village in the 1950s by the Bazley family. It's been used for an astonishing variety of activities over the years, from village parties to beer festivals,

and school discos to dog therapy classes... and it is, of course, the home of Eastleach Village Fete's famous White Elephant extravaganza (and we very much hope the Fete will be up and running again next summer, pandemics etc. permitting).

Over the last couple of years, we've been fortunate enough to have been awarded two grants which, together with hugely generous donations of time, expertise and money from villagers, have enabled major refurbishments to be carried out. There is still more to be done and the committee's fundraising work continues, but we are a determined bunch! We are also delighted that the hall finally has fibre-optic broadband up and running, and will hopefully have its own website later this year.

As for me, although there never seem to be enough hours in the day (my day job is teaching English at Farmor's in Fairford), I have a great affection for our hall, which always feels a friendly and special building with its own character. I love seeing it bustling and full of life when it's in use, but checking in on it when it's empty and peaceful is always a calming and regenerative moment in my week. We are very lucky to have such a wonderful facility in our community – let's make the best possible use of it! Contact us at [eastleachvhall@gmail.com](mailto:eastleachvhall@gmail.com)



The Omicron variant of Covid is a continuing threat in our communities. Please continue to follow government guidelines. During the winter, we may continue to see events cancelled at short notice, so please check local publicity.

*Follow the star...*



Messy Church  
 Quenington Village Hall  
 Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> January at 4pm  
 Everyone welcome



## DON'T FORGET TO CLAIM YOUR STATE PENSION!



In the past, you would have received your State Retirement Pension automatically. This is no longer the case - you have to claim it to receive it! At Citizens Advice, we have been contacted by an increasing number of people who did not realise this.

You should get a letter from **the Pension Service** no later than two months before your 66<sup>th</sup> birthday (the current State Pension age) telling you what to do to claim your pension. If you do not receive this letter, you can still make a claim in the four months up to reaching your state pension age.

It is important to claim your State Pension as soon as you can, as there may be delays in payment if you leave claiming it too close to your 66<sup>th</sup> birthday, which could lead to financial difficulties for some people.

**How to claim:** The quickest way is to apply online at [www.gov.uk/get-state-pension](http://www.gov.uk/get-state-pension) but if you don't have access to the internet you can request a form by calling **the Pension Service on 0800 731 7898**.

You can check your State Pension age online [www.gov.uk/state-pension-age](http://www.gov.uk/state-pension-age)  
 Further information: [www.gov.uk/new-state-pension](http://www.gov.uk/new-state-pension) or [www.citizensadvice.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk).



If you need any help to claim your State Pension or experience problems with claiming, contact one of our friendly advisers at **Stroud and Cotswold Citizens Advice: 0808 800 0510** or **0808 800 0511 Monday to Friday 10am to 4pm (calls are free from landlines and most mobiles)** or use our online email page at: [www.citizensadvice-stroudandcotswold.org.uk/stroud-cab-email-advice.php](http://www.citizensadvice-stroudandcotswold.org.uk/stroud-cab-email-advice.php)

We are now able to see a limited number of clients whose problem cannot be dealt with on the phone in person at our Cirencester office. Due to Covid, we cannot offer drop-in sessions, but if you need face to face advice you can be seen by appointment only. We are planning to open our outreach sessions gradually from now onwards.

## **EASTLEACH & SOUTHPROP FRIENDSHIP CIRCLE**

**Thursday, 6<sup>th</sup> January at 3pm, Eastleach Village Hall**

If you or an elderly friend would like to join, please contact Sally Parris 01367 850321 or Jane Jenkinson 01367 850393. Members are welcomed from all the surrounding villages.



## **FRIENDS OF FAIRFORD & LECHLADE COMMUNITIES**

### **New Administrator Required**

Friends of Fairford & Lechlade Communities are recruiting for a new Administrator. This is a permanent, part-time position working from home and flexible hours. If you are interested in the role, or know of someone who might be, please send a c.v. to [Fairford.lof@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:Fairford.lof@hotmail.co.uk) or get in touch with Christine Barker on 07767 408409 for an informal chat.

### **House-to-House 2022**

We are looking to bring back our House-to-House event next year. In order to do this, we would need to ensure we have enough volunteers to make it a success. If you are interested in being a volunteer or a co-ordinator for your area please get in touch and let us know: [gm@friendsoffairford.org.uk](mailto:gm@friendsoffairford.org.uk). Thank you.

### **Covid-19 Community Funding Support – remains open for applications**

The fund established to provide financial support to local organisations, charities, volunteer groups, families and individuals who have been impacted by Covid-19 remains open for applications. To date, from 57 applications, grants of approximately £55,424 have been made. This has provided financial support to 39 different charities, organisations, families and individuals within our area of benefit.

Please refer to our website for details of how to apply and the criteria we use to assess applications ([www.friendsoffairford.org.uk](http://www.friendsoffairford.org.uk)).

Girlguiding is the UK's leading charity for girls and young women.  
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level

To find out more visit [www.girlguiding.org.uk/interested](http://www.girlguiding.org.uk/interested)

## NEWS FROM THE SCHOOLS

**Hatherop Church of England Primary School** *Caring, Believing, Achieving*



We had a very festive lead up to Christmas with lot of events for the children and their families to enjoy. Our PTA arranged a fantastic 'Christmas in the Playground' event, which included a tombola, cake sale, games and a raffle. After a long wait, Skylark class performed their Nativity play, 'Whoops-a-Daisy Angel'. We were all so impressed with their confidence as they sang and acted in front of an audience.



The Vicar came into school during Advent to talk to the children about the meaning of Christmas, and spent time with each class making Christingles, which were used in the Christingle service at church.

### SCHOOL GOVERNOR REQUIRED

There will be a vacancy on **Hatherop C of E Primary School Governing Board** from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2022 and we are looking for someone from the nearby community to join us in supporting our important local school. The objectives of the Governing Board are to set strategic direction, ensure accountability, evaluate school performance and approve and monitor the school budget.

Members of the Governing Board come from a wide range of backgrounds who work together for the benefit of the school. No specialist knowledge is needed as training and support is available.

If you are interested or require further information, please contact:  
Penny Ibbotson, Clerk of Governors on [clerk@hatherop.gloucs.sch.uk](mailto:clerk@hatherop.gloucs.sch.uk)





As always, the end of Term 2 was an exciting time. Through careful planning we were able to go ahead with most of our Christmas events: craft afternoons, parties, the Cygnets nativity performance - A King is Born, nativity in the woods and 'Experience Christmas' in St Peter's Church... and still keep everybody safe! A new addition this year was singing Christmas songs at the Hilliers Garden Centre, Lechlade, for their late-night shopping event. Inspired by the deaf



actress, Rose Ayling-Ellis, in *Strictly Come Dancing*, we sang and used signing for 'We Wish You a Merry Christmas'. Watch a video of the performance on our website at: <http://www.southrop.gloucs.sch.uk/index.html>

This term our theme is Respect, which is one of our key school values. In the Swan class our topic is the Anglo Saxons. The class will be taking a trip to the Corinium Museum to find out more about Mrs Getty of Lechlade, as part of this topic! In Cygnets the topic is Famous for Five Minutes, looking at famous figures through time. We will soon be getting back to Forest School at Macaroni Woods for Reception and Year 1 and swimming at Cricklade Leisure Centre for Year 3 and 4.

If you have a child who is due to start school in September 2022, the deadline for applications is 15th January. There is still time to contact us at the beginning of term if you want any additional information about our school.

## **QUENINGTON VILLAGE HALL COFFEE MORNING**

The Village Hall Committee would like to thank those who have expressed their thoughts about the continuation of the coffee mornings. Due to the Covid variants still being an issue, it has been decided NOT to hold one in January. However, the coffee mornings will continue when it feels safer to encourage people to gather together, so look out for news of a re-launch in the spring!



# VILLAGE CONTACTS

## PARISH COUNCILS

### Coln St Aldwyns

Chair: David Hicks Beach 01285 750482  
Clerk: Clare Brignall 01285 752662 [colnsaparishclerk@gmail.com](mailto:colnsaparishclerk@gmail.com)

### Hatherop

Chair: James Hart [hatheropparishcouncil@gmail.com](mailto:hatheropparishcouncil@gmail.com)  
Clerk: Jacky Sykes as above

### Eastleach

Chair: VACANT [www.eastleachparishcouncil.org](http://www.eastleachparishcouncil.org)  
Clerk: Ann Tyldesley 01367 860130 [eastleachpc@btinternet.com](mailto:eastleachpc@btinternet.com)

### Quenington

Chair: Mike Scott 01285 750433 [www.queningtonvillage.uk](http://www.queningtonvillage.uk)  
Clerk: Penny Ibbotson 01285 750000 [queningtonpc@gmail.com](mailto:queningtonpc@gmail.com)

### Southrop

Chair: Tim Guest 01367 850189 [www.southrop.org.uk](http://www.southrop.org.uk)  
Clerk: Vanessa Lawrence 07876 252398 [spcclerk2017@outlook.com](mailto:spcclerk2017@outlook.com)

## VILLAGE HALLS

**Eastleach** [eastleachvhall@gmail.com](mailto:eastleachvhall@gmail.com)

**Quenington** [www.queningtonvillage.uk](http://www.queningtonvillage.uk)  
[queningtonvillagehall@gmail.com](mailto:queningtonvillagehall@gmail.com)

**Southrop** Caroline Simmons 01367 850171  
[southropvillagehall@gmail.com](mailto:southropvillagehall@gmail.com)

**Jubilee Close** Andy Howarth 01367 850400



## SCHOOLS

**Hatherop C/E Primary School** 01285 750318  
Head, Taryn Hancock

**Southrop C/E Primary School** 01367 850246  
Heads, Megan Davies & Julia McLellan

**Hatherop Castle School** 01285 750206  
Head, Nigel Reed

## OTHER VILLAGE COMMUNITY GROUPS

### S & E Friendship Circle

Jane Jenkinson 01367 850393 & Sally Parris 01367 850321

**Quenington Baby & Toddler Group (CHEQS+)** Term time on Mondays - please book weekly, in the preceding week  
[margaret.stranks@gmail.com](mailto:margaret.stranks@gmail.com) 07729 129578 (WhatsApp preferred)

## COLN COMMUNITY STORES



[www.colnstores.co.uk](http://www.colnstores.co.uk)

or 01285 750294

	Shop	Café	Post Office*
Monday - Friday	8am - 4.30pm	8am - 3.30pm	9am - 12.30pm & 1.30pm - 4pm
Saturday	8am - 2pm	8am - 1pm	9am - 11.30am
Sunday	9am - 1pm	9am - 12pm	CLOSED

\*NB the collection from the post box outside the Stores is at **4pm Monday - Friday**

Thu 30th Dec	short hours	8am - 2pm	8am - 1pm	9 - 11am
Fri 31st Dec	New Year's Eve	8am - 2pm	8am - 1pm	9 - 11am
Sat 1st Jan	New Year's Day	<b>Closed</b>	<b>Closed</b>	<b>Closed</b>
Sun 2nd Jan	Sunday hours	9am - 1pm	9am - 12pm	<b>Closed</b>
Mon 3rd Jan	Bank Holiday	9am - 1pm	9am - 12pm	<b>Closed</b>
Tues 4th Jan	return to normal hours			

## SHOP & POST OFFICE - SOUTHPROP VILLAGE HALL



Coffee Morning,  
shop & Post Office:  
Wednesdays 8.45am to 11.45am

## FRIENDS OF FAIRFORD & LECHLADE COMMUNITIES: VOLUNTEER TRANSPORT



Email [voluntarycarservicelof@gmail.com](mailto:voluntarycarservicelof@gmail.com) to request a driver for transport for appointments, or call **07540 798226** on **Monday-Friday between 10am and 1pm**  
If the line is busy, leave a message and you will be called back.

## CHEQS DIARY 2022 (COVID PERMITTING!)

Thu 6 <sup>th</sup> Jan	3pm	Friendship Circle, Eastleach Village Hall	p2
Sun 2 <sup>nd</sup> Jan	4-5.30pm	Messy Church, Quenington Village Hall	p11
Wed 5 <sup>th</sup> Jan	9 - 11.30am	40 <sup>th</sup> Anniv. Southrop Shop, Southrop Village Hall	p11
Fri 21 <sup>st</sup> Jan	6.30 for 7pm	Coln Cinema, Vicarage Cottage Barn, Coln	p11
Sun 30 <sup>th</sup> Jan	5pm	Choral Evensong with choir, St Andrew's Eastleach	p9

## CHURCH SERVICES



PLEASE CHECK & ABIDE BY THE LATEST GOVERNMENT COVID REGULATIONS

### Coln, Hatherop & Quenington

Jan 2 <sup>nd</sup>	10.30am	Holy Communion	St Swithin's, Quenington
	4pm	Messy Church	Quenington Village Hall
Jan 9 <sup>th</sup>	10.30am	Holy Communion	St John the Baptist, Coln St Aldwyns
Jan 16 <sup>th</sup>	10.30am	Holy Communion	St Swithin's, Quenington
Jan 23 <sup>rd</sup>	10.30am	Holy communion	St John the Baptist, Coln St Aldwyns
Jan 30 <sup>th</sup>	10.30am	Holy Communion	St Nicholas, Hatherop
	6pm	Evensong	St John the Baptist, Coln St Aldwyns

### St Andrew's Church, Eastleach

Services are at 11am: usually Morning Prayer on the 1st, 3rd, and 4th Sundays, and Holy Communion on the 2nd Sunday. On any 5<sup>th</sup> Sundays, the service is also usually at 11am, but on **30<sup>th</sup> January, the morning service will be cancelled in favour of Choral Evensong at 5pm**. This service will be with the choir of St Lawrence's, Lechlade, to mark Candlemas.

Details of set readings and Psalms, and those reading the lessons, will be available on the church notice board in the porch.

### St Peter's Church, Southrop

Jan 2 <sup>nd</sup>	9.30am	Holy Communion
Jan 16 <sup>th</sup>	9.30am	Morning Prayer

Please see local notices for any extra services.

**Williamstrip Chapel:** Mass is usually celebrated on Sundays at 9.30am

### Fairford & Lechlade Churches

Please check notice boards and websites, or phone the church contact person.

## CHURCH CONTACTS

### COLN ST ALDWYNS, HATHEROP & QUENINGTON CLERGY

Rev Simon Brignall The Vicarage, Church Lane, Coln St Aldwys GL7 5AG  
(Thu, Fri, Sat, Sun) 01285 752662 [chqvicar@gmail.com](mailto:chqvicar@gmail.com)

### EASTLEACH & SOUTHPROP CLERGY

Rev Andrew Cinnamond The Vicarage, Sherborne Street, Lechlade GL7 3AH  
(day off Tuesday) 01367 253651 [vicar@stlawrencelechlade.org.uk](mailto:vicar@stlawrencelechlade.org.uk)  
Gordon Land 01367 252050 [walreader44@gmail.com](mailto:walreader44@gmail.com)  
(Lead Minister for Eastleach)

### C of E CHURCH WARDENS

CHQ VACANT  
Eastleach Tim Lawson 01367 850756 or 07855 264360 [timglawson@me.com](mailto:timglawson@me.com)  
Southrop Jerry Hibbert 07766 084051 [jerry@hibbertalph.com](mailto:jerry@hibbertalph.com)

### C of E SAFEGUARDING OFFICER

CHQ Edwina Hicks 07970 799270 [chqsafeguarding@gmail.com](mailto:chqsafeguarding@gmail.com)  
Eastleach Nicole Backhouse 07780 605717  
Southrop Rhona Reid 01367 850295

### C of E YOUTH WORKER

CHEQS & beyond Chris Saunders 07918 732040 [saundersc2014@gmail.com](mailto:saundersc2014@gmail.com)

### CATHOLIC PARISH PRIEST

Father Michael Robertson 01285 712586 [michael.robertson@cliftondiocese.com](mailto:michael.robertson@cliftondiocese.com)

### WILLIAMSTRIP CHAPEL CHAPLAIN

Rev J Felix Stephens OSB 01285 740374 [jfs.osb@ampleforth.org.uk](mailto:jfs.osb@ampleforth.org.uk)

### FAIRFORD UNITED CHURCH

Rev Wendy Tucker 01285 653655 Secretary: Rachel Emmerson 01451 844532

### OTHER INFORMATION

**HOSPITALS** Fairford: out-patients only 0300 421 6470 Cirencester 0300 421 6200  
**SURGERIES** Hilary Cottage, Fairford 01285 712377 Lechlade Medical Centre 01367 252264  
**PHARMACIES** Boots, Fairford 01285 712350, Lechlade Pharmacy 01367 252285  
**GCC COMMUNITY WELL-BEING SERVICE** 01452 528491  
**WORKING FOR WELLBEING** 07555 738138 contact the coordinator for groups, info & help  
**POLICE** non-emergency: phone 101 or email [101@gloucestershire.police.uk](mailto:101@gloucestershire.police.uk)

**Quenington Defibrillator** outside Quenington Village Hall for use by anyone in emergency.  
Trained volunteers available on **01285 610210** but ALWAYS RING 999 FIRST!

PLEASE LET THE EDITOR KNOW IF THE TIMETABLE NEEDS UPDATING (updated April 2021)

**Bus Service 76** Mon, Tue, Thu: Southrop 09:16, Eastleach 09:24, Hatherop 09:30, Quenington 09:37 to Fairford & Cirencester. Return leaves Cirencester at 12:40 and Fairford at 13:28. Sat: **S** 09:47, **E** 09:54, **H** 10:00, **Q** 10:07, **F** 10:15 Return leaves Ciren 14:20 Fairford 15:05

**Community Connexions Community Bus** book in advance on 03456 805029 for the door-to-door service on Thursdays to Cirencester; free with a bus pass or £8 each way.



# SOUTHROP COMMUNITY SHOP

40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebrations, Wednesday, 5<sup>th</sup> January



After a severe winter in 1981/2, when the villages were cut off by snow, local residents Judith Hubber and Angela Scales, had the idea for a Community Shop in Southrop Village Hall, to stock basic goods. This shop opened in January 1982.

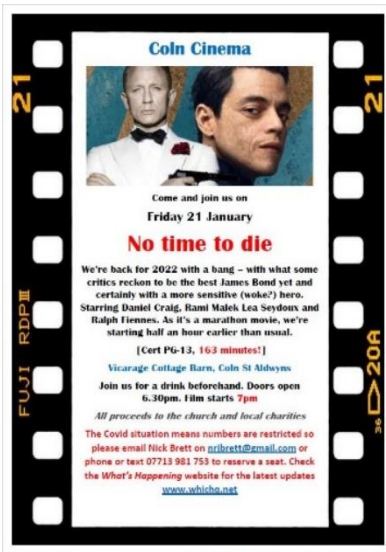
Forty years on, it is hoped (Covid permitting) to hold a celebration at Southrop Village Hall, on Wednesday, 5<sup>th</sup> January, during the normal shop/coffee morning hours. The originators of the idea have been invited to attend, and villagers are welcome to join in the celebration. Do feel free to contact Margaret Davey on 01367 850347 to check whether or not the event is still able to take place.

## COLN CINEMA

Friday, 21<sup>st</sup> January, 6.30pm for 7pm start  
Vicarage Cottage Barn, Coln St Aldwyns

Back for 2022 with a bang, **No Time to Die** is what some critics reckon to be the best James Bond yet, and certainly with a more sensitive hero. As it's a marathon movie, we're starting half an hour earlier than usual. Join us for a drink beforehand. A donation is requested (proceeds to local charities) so please bring cash.

The Covid situation means numbers are restricted so please email Nick Brett on [nrbrett@gmail.com](mailto:nrbrett@gmail.com) or phone or text 07713 981 753 to reserve a seat. Check the *What's Happening...* website for the latest updates [www.whichq.net](http://www.whichq.net) Cert. PG-13, 163 minutes.



## GIRL GUIDING

Guides is open for girls aged 10-14 years, on Mondays in term-time at Meysey Hampton Village Hall (less than 4 miles from Quenington) 7pm-8.30pm. To find out all about Guides, or to register your interest, go to [www.girlguiding.org.uk](http://www.girlguiding.org.uk)

## QUENINGTON VILLAGE HALL 100 CLUB - DECEMBER WINNERS

1<sup>st</sup> (£45) no. 54 - Mitch Watkins  
2<sup>nd</sup> (£25) no. 24 Mike James    3<sup>rd</sup> (£15) no. 4 - Ray Sheldon

The prizes for December were bigger than usual, as at least 50% of the takings must be given out in prizes each year. The usual 1<sup>st</sup> Prize is £15, and 2<sup>nd</sup> Prize £10. If you'd like to join the 100 Club for 2022 (or to renew your membership) please contact Antonia Faulkner on 07581 294139 or email [queningtonvillagehall@gmail.com](mailto:queningtonvillagehall@gmail.com) as there are still plenty of places available. The 100 Club is open to all CHEQS residents, with the profits supporting the upkeep of the hall.

## BURFORD SINGERS

*Catherine Martin writes:* Although our next concert isn't until April, postal booking (when most of the best seats go) starts and closes in January, so if you want to benefit from that, the details are below.

This is the performance we had planned for Easter 2020, which of course, sadly, had to be cancelled. Note the change of venue from our usual Burford location to Cirencester Parish Church.

### **Burford Singers – Bach St John Passion** **Saturday, 9<sup>th</sup> April at 7pm, Cirencester Parish Church**

Burford Singers with  
William Wallace (Evangelist)  
Jon Stainsby (Christus)  
Jessica Cale (Soprano)  
James Neville (Alto)  
Freddie Long (Bass)  
Baroque Ensemble Canzona  
Theresa Caudle (Leader)  
Conductor: Brian Kay



Tickets £25 (reserved) and £15 (unreserved) Postal booking 13<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> January  
Via The Madhatter Bookshop, 122 High Street, Burford OX18 4QJ  
Booking form available from <https://www.burfordingers.org.uk/events/>  
Online booking from 20<sup>th</sup> February to 8<sup>th</sup> April (Booking fee applies) available at <https://www.burfordingers.org.uk/buy-tickets/>  
Booking in person (unreserved tickets only) from 20<sup>th</sup> Feb to 8<sup>th</sup> April from  
The Madhatter Bookshop, 122, High Street, Burford OX18 4QJ and  
Cirencester Visitor Information Centre, Corinium Museum, Park Street, Cirencester  
GL7 2BX and on the door.

Full details on our website <https://www.burfordingers.org.uk/events/>



## GEORGE PONSONBY, PONSONBY FARMS, GREAT LEMHILL, SOUTHROP

When I set off on my (almost) daily run, I head for the village of Southrop and back, a distance of about two miles. I tend to do this at dusk and off to my left,

all the way to Southrop, I hear grey partridges calling - two or three pairs. When I started running, about five years ago, I didn't hear a single call on that same short run. What have we done to change things round? In this modern age of intensive farming, how have we made room for this wonderful, enchanting, iconic bird?

I was born and brought up in Little Faringdon, where my dad farmed for many years. My fascination for the grey partridge started about forty years ago, in my first job after leaving the Royal Agricultural College, Cirencester. Working for an agrochemical company, I'd had 6 months' training, and was sent to Hampshire, aged 21. With the aid of my brand-new Ford Escort, equipped with a very loud stereo system, I became the company's rep in that region. This was the era of arable farming when nature was temporarily wrong-footed by the 'wit' of the scientist. I saw at first-hand what the chemicals used by farmers, particularly insecticides, were doing to wild life. I also happened to be living in what had been the heart of grey partridge country. At that time, the early 1980s, people were pioneering the **conservation headland**: a 6-metre area at the edge of arable fields, where pesticide sprays are reduced, or eliminated altogether. The aim is to encourage growth of broad-leaved weeds, and the insects which live on them. These insects, in turn, are vital food for young birds. The weeds and their seeds provide food for small mammals, and the flowers are important nectar sources for butterflies. Conservation headlands often host rare and declining plants, and many species of beneficial insects.



Back near Southrop, brothers Stan and Walter Hinton were farming locally. Through the 1950's, 60's and 70's they had plenty of wild partridges on their land, until farming became so intensive that it was incompatible with what a grey partridge needs. I got to know Stan well, and he passed on a lot of his knowledge - they were halcyon days for me, something I shall always be very grateful for. After spending some time as a farm

manager, I started farming in my own right in 1991, and four years later, I was able to buy my own farm - from Stan Hinton.

Over time, I've assembled seven adjoining farms: my own, and six that I farm on contract farming agreements - much of this land had been farmed for many years by the Hinton family. We grow all combinable crops - winter wheat, winter barley, spring barley, winter rape, peas and beans. Although some of the land is not the best of farming country, it's reasonably good land for the wild grey partridge, a species which I've been keen to see increasing again in this locality.



There are government-funded environmental schemes which pay farmers for planting habitat, and several of the farms were just coming to the end of their five years in one of the schemes. The new Countryside Stewardship Scheme appeared to offer options for almost everything a Grey's heart desired: over-winter stubbles, beetle banks, flower-rich margins, supplementary feeding, wild bird cover, and unharvested cereal conservation headlands - all just right for what we had in mind!



We have been blessed with smallish fields with some pretty good hedges. Some farmers give their hedges a very severe 'short back and sides' every September, which denudes them of any winter berries and also two of my favourite wild flowers - the blackthorn and the hawthorn. Our hedges are full of berries in the winter, and flowers in the spring - except when they have their four-yearly trim.



The 2-metre strip beside a hedge is known as the “cross compliance” strip, which farmers are not allowed to touch - but because our hedge bottoms had become so bare, after years of spray-drift and rabbit grazing, they were desperately lacking nesting cover. I got permission from DEFRA to plough right up to the hedge bottom in many fields, and plant a two-metre strip of cocksfoot. Now we have hedges of perfect width and height, with a tremendous bit of nesting cover at the base of almost all of them.

With good nesting habitat in place, we now needed an abundant supply of insects where the chicks would be hatching. We tried conservation headlands, but as the land had been farmed so intensively for 50 years or so, the weed seed-bank in the soil was almost non-existent: we didn't get enough weeds to make a difference. We rather went off the unharvested cereal headlands, as they became a haven for huge quantities of rats, which are a perfect nuisance! What worked for us was the flower-rich margin option: sowing species of plants that insects would quickly colonise.

In order to hold on to a substantial number of birds over the winter, when the losses can be high, we needed to put in more habitat. Beetle banks are grass mounds, about 2 metres wide, which run through the middle of larger arable fields. We put in half a dozen beetle banks in some of the larger fields, sowing a mainly cocksfoot mix on the bank itself, with a kale mix on one side, and mainly a flower-rich margin on the other. Soon the Greys were making good use of them - a great example of how they respond to being spoilt rotten. We also scattered a fair bit of mustard seed on some of the stubbles to provide a bit more cover.

We have about 5% of our arable land growing wild flowers and crops that provide food for birds in the winter. This is most rewarding when I see a huge cloud of gold finches lift from a patch of teasels on a cold day in January. An unexpected bonus has been that the wild flower strips around many of our fields are hosting a plethora of insects that not only feed the young birds but also, rather amazingly, appear to be eating the aphids that attack our wheat crops. Consequently, our use of insecticides has dropped dramatically. This is a virtuous circle: we use less insecticide, we have more spiders and beetles which, in turn, eat more aphids and other pests.



Farming in the UK is going through a seismic change once more. Having left the EU (which, bizarrely, most farmers voted to do), our subsidies are being reduced over a period of seven years and we have the option of either getting out or shaping up. We have, at least, been given plenty of time to adapt - 35 years ago, farmers in New Zealand got about 24 hours warning! Farming is not for the faint hearted - it is very often a white-knuckle ride - but I think most farmers would agree that we do it because of our passion for growing crops, encouraging wildlife, or for rearing stock. The thrill and satisfaction I get from growing my crops are as strong today as they were when I started farming forty years ago.

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