

# *Hilltop News*



*December 2012 & January 2013*





# A Season's Greetings from the Good Neighbours...

One of the strengths of our community is the willingness of so many people to offer a helping hand to others. The **Hilltop Villages Good Neighbours Group** was formed a year ago by caring villagers who wished to get more involved in voluntary activities for the local community. If you would like to get to know the Group, you are most welcome to join them for tea at Cholesbury Village Hall at 3.30pm on **Thursday 6 December**. The Group will also be dealing swiftly with its first AGM.

Also launched this time last year was the volunteer-run **Severe Weather Car Scheme**, to help fellow parishioners with vital transport needs. The Good Neighbours Group will be running this scheme again this winter.

Volunteer drivers who have 4x4s or vehicles with winter tyres will be available daily from 9am – 7pm and there is a special telephone number to use to contact the scheme coordinators: 0845 8 735 737.

The Scheme helps local people get to an urgent medical appointment, to restock essential food supplies, or collect an urgent prescription. It may sometimes be possible to 'rescue' stranded villagers! If weather conditions prevent social services reaching a client, and near neighbours are not available, then volunteers may also be able to help with certain vital tasks. If you are unable to get out due to bad weather, do not hesitate to get in touch and please draw attention to anyone you know who might benefit. The Group also welcomes anyone with a suitably equipped vehicle to become part of the team.

If you would like to know more about, or become a volunteer with the Good Neighbours Group, see [www.cholesbury.com](http://www.cholesbury.com) and follow the link to Good Neighbours Group or contact Chris Brown, email: [goodneighbours@cholesbury.com](mailto:goodneighbours@cholesbury.com) or Phone: 758890.

*\*Look out for the leaflet in this edition of Hilltop News and keep in a safe place\**

*The Hilltop News team wish you all a very merry Christmas and a happy New Year.*



## Also in this issue...

- The stories behind our Jubilee stones
- Managing land for the benefit of wildlife
- A trip to the House of Lords

## Plus our regular features...

**Chris Brown** reports on the disease affecting our ash trees.

**Jim Hetherington** goes batty!

Our **Curvaceous Cook** serves up another festive treat.

*...plus all the news from our churches, school, pubs, clubs, councils and societies.*



## Front cover

*A seasonal illustration by Michael Spark.*



## THE PARISH COUNCIL

*The Parish Council will be submitting its annual precept demand to Chiltern District Council shortly and we will be holding this to the current level of £9,800 and not asking for an increase. This means that we will have to be extra careful how we spend our funding, as one definite increase in our spend next year will be the emptying costs for the second dog waste bin.*

Speaking of which, I am delighted to announce that the dog waste bin we ordered in the summer arrived at long last and was installed at the end of October. It is situated by the noticeboard and litter bin in the car park at the Cricket Club and, when I inspected just a week after installation, it was already half full, showing that dog walkers have been very quick to make use of it. If you do walk dogs in that area, do please remember to use it! Its purchase was partly funded by the HCCPS and the Cricket Club, both having an interest in the immediate area, but the council will pick up the annual emptying fee.

Highways work will slow up and probably cease entirely for some time over the winter if the weather is too bad to do any but the most important emergency work. However, I do think that this winter we have better roads due to a pothole blitz and a lot of road patching this summer and autumn.

Going forward, this parish has the chance to nominate its worst roads for repairs and/or resurfacing in 2013. After a Transport for Bucks (TfB) meeting at Bucks CC in December (at which our councillor, Tricia Birchley, will be present) we will know how successful we have been in our bid. Our number one priority is the stretch of Cholesbury Lane from the school to the Full Moon, which has been badly damaged and temporarily patched in recent years. We

have also asked for other roads to be taken into consideration but, as usual, money is severely limited and there are many hands reaching for the same pot. Rest assured that we are following the process with an eagle eye and do not intend to let this parish's highway issues get lost at County Hall level.

The grass verges have been cut for the last time this year by Bucks County Council contractors and they will remain tidy until the spring. We do have a few localised flooding problems which make themselves apparent whenever we have unusually heavy rain, as in November, but Jon Dickens or TfB can arrange emergency drainage where necessary. Sometimes more complex mechanical ditch-digging is required, as is currently the case in Jenkins Lane by Gilberts Hill, but if you do know of any areas that flood regularly and don't drain quickly please let me know, as often it can be remedied by clearing the gullies and kerb weirs of grit and leaves.

We have now completely sold out of Diamond Jubilee commemorative bricks and I am pleased to report that the final figure the Parish Council has been able to add to its on-going St Leonards Parish Hall Playground Fund is £266.83. This is half as much again as our budgeted donation of £500 for this year and there is now over £2,500 in the dedicated fund.

Finally, I wish everyone a happy and peaceful Christmas - and roll on spring!

Susie Bell, Clerk to the Council  
758408 parish.clerk@f-12.co.uk

### Your councillors are:

John Allen, Chairman: 758095  
Nigel Blomfield, 758314  
Chris Brown, 758890  
Phillip Matthews, 758205  
John Minting, 758206  
Francis Sanger, 758767  
Liz van Hullen, 758800

## THE COUNTY COUNCIL

One of the most successful years in the history of Britain is drawing to a close and I'm sure we all cherish memories of the Diamond Jubilee and Olympic Games. The icing on the cake was Bradley Wiggins winning the Tour de France and then collecting an Olympic gold medal a fortnight later and Andy Murray going on to win the US Open: his first major Grand Slam title. But perhaps we should be taking more pride in the success of the British athletes who won their gold medals in the rowing events at Dorney Lake, in Buckinghamshire!

Closer to home, Steve Norris spoke recently in Chesham about HS2 from a Government perspective, and it appears he is closely involved in UK infrastructure projects since the time when he was Minister for Transport. (Did you know the average tenure of the MforT since WW2 is just 18 months?) His initial thoughts centred on the capacity angle rather than speed. He was told that the Optimised Alternative would offer the capacity envisaged for HS2 at a fraction of the cost and be operational far quicker. One think of light was his support for a bored tunnel through the Chilterns AONB (despite the teething problems currently experienced with Crossrail). He felt this was viable and that tunnelling methods would improve greatly over the next ten years.

As in previous years, the Government's final financial settlement for local government for 2013/14 is unlikely to be known until Christmas week. We are fortunate in Chiltern District to have some of the longest life spans in Britain, but I've said before: unless we manage the costs of people who need council support with



their lives carefully, there is a danger that a high percentage of Council Tax will be spent on their care needs. The County Council is ahead of the field in announcing Prevention Matters, a service to enable people to be supported in the community, reducing the need for health and social care services. We can point them in the direction of local activities and services to enable them to lead sociable and independent lives. Volunteers will be key to success and the pub lunch scheme organised by the Hilltop Villages Good Neighbours Group and the church tea afternoons are great examples of community spirit.

Boundary changes announced in 2011/12 mean that Chiltern Ridges Division is changing by almost 50 per cent, gaining Lowndes and Asheridge Vale wards in Chesham and losing Little Kingshill and Little Missenden. This involved reselection for the Conservative County Council candidate and I was overwhelmed by the support shown by local members of the Party. I pledge to continue to do my best to support your interests at County Hall if you re-elect me in May. I think you know I have the energy and determination to make things happen fast!

Finally, I hope you all have a very enjoyable Christmas with family and friends. Soon after this newsletter is published, some of us will be following news of the HS2 Judicial Reviews, which are due to be heard in the High Court from 3 December, and anticipating the outcomes in the New Year!

Tricia Birchley (Chiltern Ridges Division)  
01296 621138







*Future Olympians?*

## HAWRIDGE & CHOLESBURY C of E SCHOOL

*The Autumn term began with us playing catch-up with a couple of events postponed from the Summer term due to the poor weather. On 12 September our all new and improved Sports Day reintroduced competitive sports and was enjoyed by the children, staff and parents -nothing was as competitive as the parents' race! The PSA hosted a successful Family BBQ in the school grounds.*

There have been book exchanges, organised by Miss Wilmshurst, for children and adults to exchange freely books they have read.

The range of after-school clubs is ever expanding, enriching our learning environment. The Year 5/6 Cookery Club was oversubscribed, as was the Drawing Club and we were lucky enough to welcome Mrs Sallie Bright (nutritional

therapist) who came to talk about healthy packed lunches. Those parents who attended benefited from her knowledge and we hope, if she comes again, more parents will come along and hear what she has to say. A healthy lunch can improve concentration, help your child to flourish and ultimately improve performance in school.

The biggest innovation created by Miss Bramble and her team has been the new creative curriculum. Judging by the buzz from the staff and children, this will lead to great things. The year groups have been paired, except for Windmills, and have chosen a book as a theme. Using this as a starting point, the curriculum has been rolled out to include literacy, maths, science, art, PE, RE and much more. The classrooms look amazing, school visits have been inspiring and this is just the beginning!

As an example, Years 3 and 4 have

chosen Charlie and the Chocolate Factory. They had a letter from Willie Wonka inviting them to a chocolate factory in Chesham, where they were greeted by two Oompa Loompa's, and will also visit a certain museum in Aylesbury. In December they will make sweets and chocolates for sale to pupils and parents. There are many things planned but, as we hope to keep an element of surprise, they will have to be reported at a later date.

The annual Christmas Bazaar will take place on **Saturday 8 December**. Please come along and enjoy the festivities. There will be a range of stalls, carol singing, Santa's grotto and a children's room, manned by the staff, where children can choose a gift and have it wrapped and labelled, all in secrecy.

The Nativity Play this year is being written and produced by Miss Wilmshurst and Mrs Davey based on their chosen text of the Jolly Postman, and I look forward to seeing how the Jolly Postman ends up

in Bethlehem! The performances will take place on **11 and 12 December**: tickets are limited so book early. Our carol service will take place on **20 December** and the PSA will host our Christmas lunch on the same day.

As you can see, this is a very busy term and we owe thanks to all staff and the PSA for making the learning experience at H and C so special. Miss Bramble leads tours of the school on alternate Wednesdays during term time and we welcome prospective parents and visitors from the community to come and see our fantastic school.

We now welcome bookings for the hall and kitchen for all your local functions and celebrations. The new facilities make the school a fabulous venue.

Finally, there are vacancies for lunchtime supervisors, both paid and voluntary - contact the school office if you can help.

*Judy Joseph, Vice Chair Governing Body*



*Willie Wonka delights Years 3 and 4*



## LOCAL HISTORY GROUP

**H**aving kicked off our season with two excellent talks, at which I was pleased to see so many new faces from around the villages, we continue our 50th Season with our next meeting on **Friday 7 December** with Mike Farley, who is a former Bucks County Archaeologist and also a nationally renowned expert on Saxon and Medieval England. As we have in our midst one of the finest examples of an Iron Age hill fort in southeast England and also the remnants of some medieval ramparts close by, it is most applicable that Mike is talking to us on Moats, Motts and Castles in Buckinghamshire.

We start the New Year with two further talks on themes very much local to our area. You may have seen the government's announcement of the forthcoming commemoration of The First World War. Well, on **Friday 4 January** we get this underway on a local basis with a talk entitled *The Lee in World War I*. Local historian, Mike Senior, will be our speaker.

The following month, on **Friday 1 February**, we go no further than a 'brick's throw' to hear from another local, Jim Matthews, on Local Brickmaking. The



Chiltern Hills may be known for its chalk, but without the presence of good quality reserves of clay the people and the local economy would be all the poorer.

Meetings start at 8.15 sharp and all three are at St Leonards Parish Hall, which will be open from 8pm.

You don't have to be a history buff to enjoy our talks, so if you are new to the area or have just not got around to coming along before now, why not join us at a meeting, just £3 on the night. Alternatively annual membership is great value at £8 for adults and free for those 16 years and under. With eight evening meetings, normally on the first Friday of the month, plus a newsletter, other member events and access to our archive of photographs and other material documenting the history of the houses, people and events in the Hilltop Villages, there is something of interest on offer for everyone.

Chris Brown 758890

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## CHOLESBURY cum ST LEONARDS HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY

*After weeks of rain, putting the garden to bed for the winter has been a priority for all of us over the past month. The nights are drawing in and we certainly seem to be moving towards winter.*

**T**here has been a lot of coverage recently of ash dieback or 'Chalara fraxinea' (See Nature Notes). This disease threatens to devastate Britain's 80 million ash trees, having already destroyed 90% of those in Denmark. I have a personal interest in this issue as we have a large ash tree in our garden.

The disease affects trees of all ages but it does not affect Mountain ash (*Sorbus aucuparia*). Young trees can be killed in one season and older trees tend to succumb after several seasons of infection. The Defra chief scientist has stated that we should not rush to cut down mature trees but keep up the survey work and identify where the disease has spread and where it is resistant.

Leaves from an infected tree often suffer from wilting and black or brown discolouration. In severe cases the entire crown may succumb to the disease, with shoots, twigs and branches dying back. On stems, if the bark is peeled, the wood underneath has a brownish to grey discolouration.

### What do you do if you suspect ash dieback?

You need to report suspected cases of ash dieback by contacting the Food and Environment Agency on 01904 465625 or the Forestry Commission on 0131 314 6414. The Forestry Commission has a guide to the disease which you can download.

### Top tips to be getting on with over the next month

- Place bricks under pots to prevent waterlogging.
- Tidy and cut back the dead stems of your perennials.
- Clear top growth of annual climbers.
- Prune climbing and rambling roses and shorten tall stems on standard roses.
- Order bare rooted roses for planting in the winter.
- Move wrongly positioned shrubs.
- Check your winter protection for outside taps, and check any tender plants have been covered or brought indoors.
- Start reducing the watering of houseplants.
- Send off for seed catalogues to plan spring sowings.
- December is a good time to take hardwood cuttings such as dogwood, willow, forsythia and philadelphus.
- Prune open grown apples and pears (but not those trained against walls).
- Prune acers, birches and vines before Christmas to avoid bleeding.

Finally, after all this hard work we wish you a peaceful Christmas and look forward to seeing you again next year.

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year

Barbara Baddon

## Learning Difficulties Teacher

Offering one-to-one or small group help and advice.

For more information or to arrange an introductory consultation, contact:

**Graine Hyslop**

T: 01494 758773

M: 07841 986531 E: [graineh@yahoo.com](mailto:graineh@yahoo.com)



# HAWRIDGE & CHOLESBURY COMMONS PRESERVATION SOCIETY

## Jubilee Memorial unveiling

Arrangements are in hand for the re-positioning of the Pudding Stones and the commemorative plaque is ready to be attached to one of the stones. On **Sunday 9 December** at 11am we will have a short ceremony to unveil the memorial on the site of the Jubilee Beacon and we hope to see you there. Afterwards, we will adjourn to the Full Moon for celebratory mulled wine to toast Her Majesty. Our thanks to Philip Matthews and John Caple for moving the stones and to John Kilpatrick for affixing the plaque. We are also very grateful to the Parish Council for their donation towards the plaque.

## AGM

Our AGM was held on 20 November. A report of the proceedings will be included in the next edition of Hilltop News. Annual subscriptions of £10 per member became due at the AGM and may be paid to our treasurer, Ben Lewis, 7 Sandpit Hill Cottages, Cholesbury Lane, Cholesbury HP23 6NF (758843). Ben can also provide you with an email form if you wish to pay by Standing Order. He can be contacted by email at [lewis.cholesbury@gmail.com](mailto:lewis.cholesbury@gmail.com). As always, membership subscriptions form a large and important part of our income for the year. Although much of the work on the Commons is done by the working parties, there are a number of ongoing expenses and your subscriptions help pay for such necessities as rolling of the bracken to make it less vigorous; cutting and collection of the grassy areas to help encourage native wildflowers and grasses; renewing signs; insurance for the

tractor and public liability; equipment maintenance; and the many other sundry expenses which regularly crop up. All of this is necessary to keep the Commons as the wonderful amenity which we have on our doorsteps.

We welcome members from anywhere in the area though only residents of Hawridge and Cholesbury are allowed to vote, according to our rules. However, since we hardly ever vote, this isn't really an issue.

## Fungus walks

Clive Carey kindly led two fungus walks at the top of Hawridge Hill on 21 and 28 October. It was amazing how different the species were in the space of only one week. On each occasion Clive started by showing some of the fruits of his foraging beforehand and he gave us very useful tips on identification; what to avoid; their sometimes quite distinctive smells; how to cook the edible varieties: and he dispelled some of the myths such as not taking too many from one spot.

Although there were only a few of us at the first of the walks, there were nearly thirty at the second. Whilst it is good to see so much local enthusiasm for fungi, at any future walks we will try to limit the numbers so that participants are able to see and hear better. Fortunately, Clive is happy to run more than one walk. We do very much appreciate the time and effort that he put in to share his expertise with us. Thank you, Clive.



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## Horse Rides

We are also very grateful to Peter Hall for erecting the new signs on the Commons. Hopefully, this will help reduce the numbers of riders who stray onto the walking tracks.

## Working Parties

After successful working parties on the pond and at the top of Ray's Hill, the first working party in November was called off due to the appalling rain. This is very unusual. Our hardy volunteers are out in most weathers and they deserve our appreciation for the hard work that they do.

The last working party of the year will meet on **2 December** on the bottom ride near to Cholesbury Bottom, when they will be clearing up the fallen apple and hawthorn trees. The working parties will resume on **6 January** beside Mermaid Cottage, opposite the Full Moon, where we will be removing some of the clumps of gorse and other scrub to keep the grassland open. There will be a bonfire. Further working parties will be held every fortnight until the end of March. Details will be advertised on the New Grapevine and in the next Hilltop News.

Members of the Get Out There Project hope to come again in mid - November and will work on the blackthorn on the bottom ride near to Horse Block Lane. Again, we are very fortunate in having their help.

In the past, they have done a great deal to help clear the gorse from the heather regeneration area. This is very hard work for anyone, but especially for those who are not used to this type of work. The Get Out There Project is a very worthwhile scheme helping people from London experience new and different work and environments. We hope that, after their hard work, they will have time to see some of the fungi and other aspects of the Commons.

## Ash dieback

We are obviously concerned about the spread of this wind-borne disease and will remain vigilant so that we can inform the relevant authorities should we be unfortunate enough to find evidence of it on the Commons.

## Butterfly Cards

On a happier note, if you are having problems sorting out some Christmas gifts, remember that our cards make a delightful present. They are available from Sue Phillips (757202).

Lindsay Griffin





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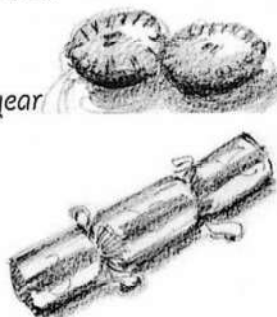
# A quiz for Christmas

Get in the mood for the festive season by trying to answer as many of the following questions about Christmas.

Answers on page 48.



1. What is the biggest selling Christmas single record ever?
2. Kriss Kringle is Santa's name in which country?
3. Who banned Christmas festivities in 1647?
4. Which of Rudolph's reindeers has the name of another animal?
5. In which year was the Queen's speech first televised?
6. From the song 'Twelve Days of Christmas', what was given on the 9th Day?
7. What did St Francis of Assisi introduce to Christmas?
8. Which singing group hold the record for most Xmas number 1 singles?
9. Victorian postmen were commonly called what because of their red uniforms?
10. Which country sends a Christmas tree to London each year to thank Britain for its help in World War II?



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## ST LEONARDS PARISH HALL

The Parish Hall Committee intends to appoint a Hall Manager who will be responsible for ensuring that the hall is maintained in good condition and is ready for use by hirers.

The hall is used on a daily basis by regular hirers, who can usually be relied upon to leave the hall in good condition. It is also used by occasional hirers for family functions, exhibitions, concerts etc.

Main functions of the job are to:

- Ensure that the hall is clean and fit for use by hirers.
- Ensure that hirers leave the hall as they found it.
- Carry out minor maintenance including light bulbs, minor plumbing and heating problems.
- Identify work to be done by outside contractors and advising the Committee.

- Monitor the hall user report book to identify items requiring action.
- Carry out a weekly inspection of the playground and fire alarm system.

We envisage a requirement of approximately two hours per week.

Note that general cleaning is done separately and does not form part of this job.

This is a paid position: terms to be agreed with the successful applicant.

Applicants should apply to me at [dfclarke@btinternet.com](mailto:dfclarke@btinternet.com) or phone 758567.

The Hall Committee is also looking for a new Bookings Secretary to replace Sandy Clarke, who has done this job for the past four years.

*Dave Clarke*  
Chairman, Management Committee

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## CHOLESBURY-CUM-ST LEONARDS W.I.

The WI year is drawing to a close and in December we shall have our Christmas meeting, which is for members and invited guests.

We welcome in the New Year by meeting again on **Monday 21 January** and one of our own members, Paddy Thomas, will be speaking about the County WI archives, which are held in the Stuart Lodge office at High Wycombe. Paddy has been working with the archives together with fellow member from Flackwell Heath Evening WI, Elizabeth Dinnage, who will also be speaking. They have called their talk 'The Bucks Federation Archives – Heirlooms and Past Glories'. They will bring some of these heirlooms along and there should be some interesting stories to hear.

At the Annual Meeting in October, Carol Henry was re-elected as our President. Please phone her on 758435 for more information about WI and our activities.

## NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH



Police advise a number of ways to protect your home:

- Visit a local retailer to pick up a 24-hour segment timer for under £5. The timer can be used with a lamp, radio or TV to give the impression that someone is at home.
- Mark your valuables with your house number and postcode using a UV pen. If you do not have one you can request a free UV pen by contacting the Community Safety Team on 01494 732089.
- Register your valuables via [www.immobilise.com](http://www.immobilise.com). This is free and takes just a few minutes. If your valuables are stolen, it will allow you to tell the police, your insurer and the second-hand trade, assist in recovering your property and catch the thief.
- Keep valuables out of sight.
- Lock your doors and windows. If you have a UPVC door make sure you have double locked it.
- Sheds and outhouse burglaries have increased across the Thames Valley region. Thames Valley Neighbourhood Watch Association has a new padlock alarm which has a 110-decibel siren. If tampered with it lets out short sharp beeps, and if continually tampered will send out a very loud siren. It is operated by a battery keypad, is weather resistant with a zinc alloy hardened shackle and costs £14.00.

For further crime reduction advice you can visit the Thames Valley Police website, or call 101 and ask to speak to a Crime Reduction Adviser via the 24-hour Police Enquiry Centre.

*Shirley Blomfield 758314*

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# Not at all batty ...the only flying mammals

*Many people dislike and have an irrational fear of bats. Revulsion is probably compounded by the creature's peculiar shape, by the fact that it is nocturnal and by its association with black magic and Count Dracula. Popular sayings are generally misconceptions: bats are not blind or batty, nor do they suck blood or seek to entangle themselves in your hair. They are harmless and very interesting flying mammals that can play a useful role in controlling harmful insects.*

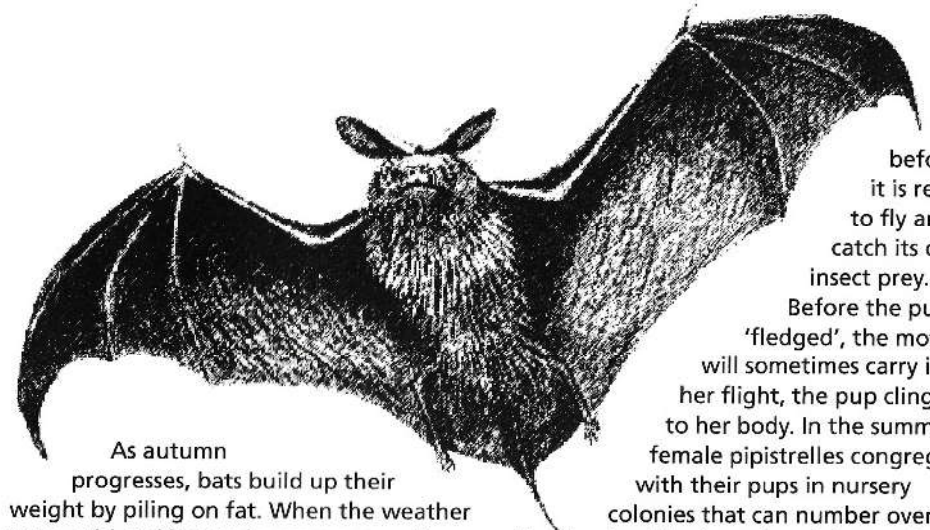
There are about a thousand different species world-wide but only about thirty in Europe and still fewer in Britain, where only sixteen species live and breed. All our bats are suffering from the decline in habitat and food supply and some are not far from extinction. Crop spraying not only kills insects but contaminates the survivors: bats die from eating accumulated poisons or their ability to breed can be impaired. How often have we come across cases where man's intervention has impacted our animal populations?

Bats belong to the order Chiroptera, (literally hand-wing) and, despite their strange appearance, are not much different in structure from other mammals. The German name fledermaus (flying mouse) is misleading for bats are more closely related to humans than to mice. In a bat's forelimb, the four digits or fingers are greatly extended to carry the wing membrane

between them. The fifth digit, or thumb, is not linked to the membrane and has a large claw that is used to hang or pull itself along. The wing stretches to meet the hind legs on each side: these legs are little used and therefore poorly developed. Unlike birds, bats fly by flapping the outstretched digits, not the entire forelimbs.

All British bats feed on insects after dark. When flying fast at night, twisting and turning in the gloom, they manage to avoid obstacles and track down their prey by means of an elaborate echolocation system. Ordinary bats emit sounds through the nose or mouth depending on the species. These ultrasonic sounds (not the squeaks we sometimes hear) are reflected so rapidly that the sender can detect if an object is soft or hard, stationary or moving. If the object is travelling, bats can tell how fast and in what direction: insect prey is very precisely detected and despatched. Some bat species have developed enlarged ears for improved reception of the high frequency echoes. One can buy a bat detector that not only converts bat calls to frequencies we can hear but also enables the hearer to differentiate between the different bat species operating at different frequencies.

Because flying burns up a lot of energy, bats need to consume a phenomenal number of insects – up to a third of its body weight daily. The pipistrelle, the most common and smallest of our bats (with wings folded it can fit into a matchbox) can put away as many as 3,000 insects in a single night!



As autumn progresses, bats build up their weight by piling on fat. When the weather turns cold and insects become scarce, they seek suitable hibernation quarters: cool places with a stable temperature. Bats then conserve energy by lowering their blood temperature and slowing their metabolism so that they can survive weeks or months without food, living on accumulated fat.

Before hibernating, bats will have mated. Females have a unique form of delayed fertilisation. They keep the male sperm separate from their eggs and avoid ovulating until they know they will be strong enough to sustain a forthcoming pregnancy. They are not alone in doing this: I am reminded that badgers, and about one hundred other mammals, can control the timing of birth and thereby lengthen the gestation period.

Bats can live for twenty years but do not multiply rapidly. The female is at least three years old before she begins producing. She then gives birth to just a single pup and she may then go on to have two further litters that year. When the pup is born, it can weigh as much as one quarter of its mother's body weight – the equivalent of a woman weighing 60kg producing a child of 15kg! As the female bat has to fly while pregnant it is small wonder that she decides to have her young one at a time! The bat suckles her pup for three to four weeks

before it is ready to fly and catch its own insect prey.

Before the pup is 'fledged', the mother will sometimes carry it on her flight, the pup clinging to her body. In the summer, female pipistrelles congregate with their pups in nursery colonies that can number over a hundred, while the males club together elsewhere, keeping out of trouble!

The Bat Conservancy Trust (BCT), formed in 1990, is a British charity dedicated to the conservation of bats and their habitat. It runs a National Bat Helpline (0845 1300 228) providing information to anyone seeking advice on issues relating to bats which are, of course, strictly protected animals. Although bats do not make a nest, they do need roosting sites. Bat boxes are artificial roosts designed to encourage bats into areas where roosts are rare. The BCT website illustrates a range of boxes that one can make or buy. These include more sophisticated versions that can be integrated into a wall or facade of a building.

It is some years since our own bat box was occupied. I suspect that we are not alone and that this is yet another indicator that there has been a seemingly inexorable decline in the number and species of animals living in our lovely villages.

*I should welcome any suggestions from readers on future subject matter; this article completes ten years of writing about Hilltop creatures and I am running out of ideas!*

*Jim Hetherington (758836)*



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## HAWRIDGE & CHOLESBURY CRICKET CLUB

A number of season-ending events brought the 2012 cricket year to a successful end. Firstly, the Colts finished their season with a highly enjoyable Parent/Child Six-a-Side tournament in early September. Over 80 people participated in a highly exciting event, which finished in the near dark. This was followed by awards for the best players of the season, presented by each of the team coaches. These were to...



### **Under 10 (Manager: Andy Holdsworth)**

**Batting:** Luke Barker  
**Bowling:** Archer Holdsworth

### **Under 11 (Manager: Ian Hames)**

**Batting:** Kaleen Butt  
**Bowling:** Henry Matthews

### **Under 12 (Manager: Dave Timmins)**

**Best overall player:** George Stay  
**Most improved Batter:** Daniel Stokes  
**Most improved Bowler:** Christopher Timmins

### **Under 13 (Manager: Digger Reading)**

**All rounder:** Andrew Taylor

A special fielding prize went to Max Collins who, although only 10, had an outstanding season as wicketkeeper, often playing for age groups above his own: clearly a talent to be nurtured.

Overall, this has been a wonderful season for the Colts. Outgoing head coach Digger Reading and his team of managers deserve the highest praise.

For the seniors, the awards evening kicked off with a highly insightful and topical presentation on the 2012 Olympics, by club member Andy Halliday, who also happens to be the Great Britain Men's Hockey Manager. In addition, Phil Wright



ran one of his famous quizzes.

### **Winners of the awards were...**

**Best Batsman:** Sean Robinson  
**Best Bowler:** James Cath  
**Best Fielder:** Ben Drane  
**Players' Player:** Ian Hames

A special mention also went to Alex Neal for his fantastic final six to win the final tour match in the New Forest in July.

The final event of the season before the AGM was a club Greek Night on 24 November, held in place of the Dinner Dance, which was not well attended in 2011.

Please note that the AGM is on **Thursday 6 December**, starting at 8pm. Only fully paid-up senior club members have the right to vote, but all current and prospective members are welcome to attend. With an expected return to the Mid Bucks League in 2013, this is an important meeting.

**Use your club or lose it!**

Brian Ralphs, Chairman, Hawridge & Cholesbury Cricket Club

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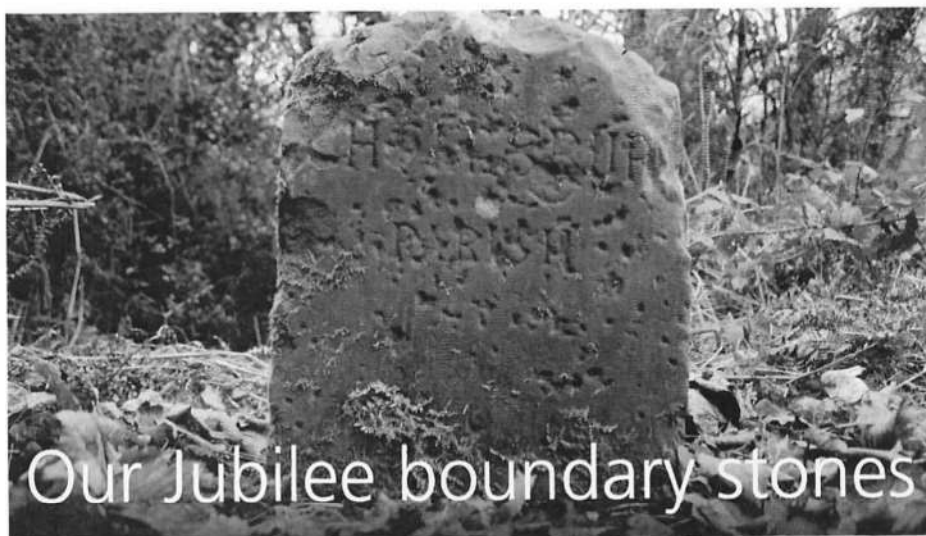
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## Our Jubilee boundary stones

*Hawridge and Cholesbury Common is unusual in having two boundary markers. One smaller one lies along the footpath at the bottom of the Common. It is about two feet high and simply states 'Hawridge Parish' on the south side and 'Cholesbury Parish' on the north side.*

A larger boundary stone stands on the Common opposite the Full Moon. This was erected to commemorate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee of 1897, although it was not in place until the following year. The Victorian lettering is nearly illegible now, but a new plaque was added in 1999 to mark the end of the millennium. The following appeared on the pages of the Bucks Herald at the time of the Jubilee...

**'Diamond Jubilee celebrations...**  
In June 1897 the two parishes of Hawridge and Cholesbury set up a common fund to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee. There was a dinner and tea for every parishioner with the catering done by the publicans: Messrs James Pallett of the 'Bricklayers Arms',

*The smaller boundary stone*

John Bishop of the 'King's Head' and Harry Wright of 'The Moon'. A huge tent which held nearly 400 people was decorated in red, white and blue crinkled paper, and the tables were bright with flowers. A sports afternoon was held with many prizes. These included a mile race which was won by F. Baldwin who ran it in 5 minutes and 25 seconds. There was a Hawridge versus Cholesbury tug of war, won by Cholesbury. In the evening the Common was lit up with Bengal lights, and a huge bonfire was lit, and the party ceased at midnight.'  
(Bucks Herald 26 June 1897)

### **'Diamond Jubilee stone...**

In June 1898 the Hawridge and Cholesbury Jubilee Committee wrote to the Highway Committee of Aylesbury Rural District Council asking permission to erect "a monumental jubilee boundary stone on the Common, 45 feet from the road leading from Cholesbury to Hawridge". The committee raised no objection.'  
(Bucks Herald 2 July 1898)

'The Diamond Jubilee boundary stone was erected and dedicated on Monday 25 July 1898 at 5pm. The stone was paid for

by the Hawridge and Cholesbury Jubilee Committee with money left over from the events the previous year. Mr Henry J. Turner of Braziers End, the Chairman of the Committee, gave a speech and donated the stone to the public on behalf of the Jubilee Committee. Further words were then given by the Rev William Smith Norris, Rector of Hawridge Church, and two local farmers: Mr John Newman Hobbs and Mr William Darvill. The National Anthem was then played by the St Leonards band under bandmaster Mr Gurney. Mr Turner also presented each village with a Diamond Jubilee mug.'

(Bucks Herald Saturday 30 July 1898.)

*Our thanks to faith heritage writer Neil Rees for sending us these newspaper reports. The Chairman of our Local History Group, Chris Brown, adds the following background to the Jubilee celebrations of 1897...*

For much of the 60 years preceding the Diamond Jubilee, Victorian social reformers had been striving to address the deprivation suffered by the poor. These honourable ambitions were only just starting to make a difference to the lives of the poorest villagers.

On the one hand there were a few well-off families, including the Lord of the Manor, who in turn were beginning to employ a few locals as servants. In contrast, many locals were still suffering the same hardship and deprivation that had blighted the communities for many years.



*The Diamond Jubilee stone*

Casual labouring work on the land and straw plaiting could not provide families with a living wage and several still relied on periodic payouts from the Parish, in return for which they did menial work such as stone breaking or road mending. Alternatively they could look forward to a period in the Aylesbury Union Workhouse. Cholesbury Parish had itself become bankrupt in the 1830s, having been unable to raise sufficient income from landowners to pay 'poor relief.'

So Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee celebrations were not only seen as the commemoration of the life of a dearly loved monarch, but a rare opportunity for local people to forget their troubles, uplift their spirits for a short while at least, and



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enjoy a hearty meal and festivities paid for by their better-off neighbours. In addition to the events reported above there was a church service at noon, a cricket match between married and single men, children received gifts and school prizes and an oak tree was planted. The villagers, rich and poor, sat down as one community for a sumptuous tea, with a rousing speech from the Lord of the Manor. Fireworks followed as tradition demands.

Victoria's Diamond Jubilee stone is a tangible reminder of all these events. One hundred and four years later, on **Sunday 9 December** this year, a new monument will be unveiled, close to the boundary stone, to commemorate Queen Elizabeth II's Diamond Jubilee (see H&CCPS news). In another one hundred years or so on, what might local historians remark on life in our villages in 2012?



## Lee Patrick

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# Our vulnerable God



by the Reverend  
**David Burgess**

**E**ach Christmas, worshipping the newborn baby in the manger is something we teach our children from a very early

age. Together with that, quite often, come early lessons in the care and handling of baby brothers and sisters: many toddlers will be facing the situation where they are no longer the youngest in the family. Some of them take to this change in their lives quite easily, others find it harder. Jealousy and sibling rivalry can show their selves quite early on.

Babies bounce and are amazingly resilient at times, but they can be fragile and vulnerable, as can older children, as can those young people and adults with special needs. We shouldn't need the Jimmy Savile revelations and stories of the mistreatment of disabled adults in care homes to remind us of this, but somehow we're always taken aback and brought up short by these sorts of cases.

I'm no expert, but I'll hazard a guess that a first-century Palestinian room or shed full of animals was not the ideal environment in which to give birth to a baby! Jesus led a life full of risks, full of vulnerability, and this pattern was laid down for him right at the start. Homeless new-born baby, refugee in fear of his life, itinerant preacher, convicted criminal... the risks didn't stop.

I'm always struck by the Bidding Prayer at the start of the service of Lessons and

Carols (usually nine of each, but that does vary!) There are a number of versions of this prayer, but each has as its centre section a reminder of Jesus' humanity and the fragility of his early life. The modern version has this to say:

*"...lest we forget he was born to poverty, we remember at this season all who are hungry or cold. And lest we forget he became a refugee, we remember now the stranger and the lonely among us. And lest we forget he felt the pain of life and death, we remember now those who are ill, or anxious, or bereaved."*

It helps us to remember, I think, that vulnerability is at the centre of the Christmas message, and indeed at the centre of Christianity itself. This speaks to our pride, our self-sufficiency, and our complacency, and challenges them and us to the core.

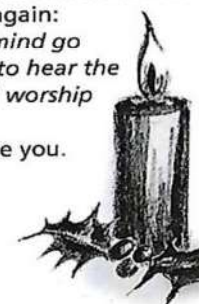
We have a very full Christmas programme within the four parishes: there really is something for everyone, and that's deliberate. Hilltop News gives you the programme in detail.

Do come and join us as we celebrate the birth of the God who is at once almighty and fragile, all-powerful and vulnerable. To quote the Bidding Prayer again:

*"... let us in heart and mind go once again to Bethlehem, to hear the message of the angels and worship afresh the Son of God."*

We'd be delighted to see you.

*David*





# CHURCH SERVICES - DECEMBER 2012 – JANUARY 2013

DATE	DAY	St John the Baptist THE LEE		St Leonard's ST LEONARDS		St Laurence CHOLESBURY		St Mary's HAWRIDGE		NOTES
2 Dec	Advent Sunday	8.00 am 11.00 am	Holy Communion Matins	11.00 am	Parish Communion with Sunday School	9.30 am	Holy Communion	9.30 am	Christingle	<b>Mid-week Holy Communion</b> 10.00am at The Lee on First Wednesday  <b>Holy Communion, Matins &amp; Evensong</b> Book of Common Prayer  <b>Parish/Family Communion &amp; Morning Services</b> Common Worship
9 Dec	Advent 2	10.00 am	Three Parish Communion	50 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary of John Hull's Ordination at The Lee			9.30 am	Holy Communion		
16 Dec	Advent 3	10.00 am	Christingle	3.30 pm	Family Service – Nativity with Carols	6.00 pm	Carol service	11.00 am	Parish Communion	
23 Dec	Advent 4	6.00 pm	Carol service	6.00 PM	Carol Service	9.00 am	Communion with Carols	-	-	
24 Dec	Christmas Eve	3.30 pm	Nativity	11.30 pm	Midnight Communion	-	-	5.30 pm	Carol Service	
25 Dec	Christmas Day	10.00 am	Parish Communion	11.15 am	Christmas Family Service	-	-	10.00 am	Parish Communion	
30 Dec	Sunday after Christmas	10.00 am Four Parish Service at Hawridge – ringing-out the old year <i>[said Communion at The Lee at 9.00 am]</i>								
6 Jan	Epiphany	8.00 am 10.00 am	Holy Communion Matins	11.00 am	Parish Communion	9.30 am	Holy Communion	9.30 am	Family Service	
13 Jan	Baptism of Christ/Plough Sunday	10.00 am	Parish Communion	6.00 pm	Parish Communion	10.45 am	Matins	9.30 am	Holy Communion	
20 Jan	Epiphany 3	10.00 am	Family Service at Lee Common Methodist Church	11.00 am	Shared Communion	Shared Communion with St Leonard's				
27 Jan	Epiphany 4	10.00 am	Parish Communion	9.00 am	Breakfast Service	9.00 am	Quiet Communion	10.45 am	Parish Communion	

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## FROM THE REGISTERS

### ST LEONARDS

#### Holy Matrimony

29 September 2012 - Natalie Claire Legge and Peter Havelock Marsden

#### Holy Baptism

4 November 2012 - Cecily Charlotte Nisbet

## CHURCH MATTERS

### ST LEONARDS

"My bounty is as boundless as the sea.  
My love as deep...For both are infinite"



On Saturday 22 September - a glorious late Summer day - **Caroline Coates and Derrick Fuller-Webster** celebrated the Blessing of their Marriage surrounded by family and friends.

David led a thoughtful service, talking of the value of love, and the readings and prayers had a distinct and pertinent naval theme. Caroline looked wonderful in a cream jacket and honey-coloured silk dress with an amazingly pretty hat, whose angle didn't waver throughout the day! The groom looked great too!

A fantastic lunch followed in the Village Hall (which has never looked quite so elegant...) with serious but extremely amusing speeches by the groom, his best man and his eldest son. The cake was cut with the P&O Company's Officers Sword and we think the honeymoon was spent buying cattle in Canada!

We wish them much happiness in their life together.

**Natalie Legge and Peter Marsden** were married in St Leonards Church on 29 September - the third generation of



*Caroline and Derrick Fuller-Webster*

Natalie's family to do so. Natalie, who looked beautiful in a cream satin dress with a long train, was accompanied by bridesmaids (and a young page) whose deep purple dresses echoed the beautiful flowers throughout the church, which had been arranged by Natalie's Aunt.

A wonderful poem, 'The Meaning

of Marriage' was read by Daryl Legge. Peter's grandfather read from the German author, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, whose last line encapsulated the entire service - 'It is not your love that sustains the marriage but from now on the marriage sustains your love'. It was truly a family occasion.

There was a marvellous Wedding Breakfast after the service in a marquee behind the Village Hall and the young couple lead the dancing.

**Little Bears Pre-School** celebrated their harvest on 9 October, bringing generous gifts of food for others less fortunate than themselves. Their numbers continue to grow and we continually run out of chairs in the Church Room afterwards! They join us again for their Christmas Service, when Virginia will lead them through the story of the Nativity. The wonder on the faces of these young children when they see the crib revealed for the first time never changes... it is for them, and indeed for all of us there, the beginning of Christmas.

**Jazz Night** - Just over £1,000 was raised for St Leonards Church when we



*Natalie and Peter Marsden*



*Lou's Sextet at the Jazz Night (photo courtesy of Michael Murdoch)*

were entertained by Lou's Sextet on 3 November: a great evening's entertainment and a delicious supper. Our particular thanks to Diana Osborne for her excellent organisation and to Ann Horn and everyone else who cooked and helped.

On Wednesday 24 October, those at the **Tea Party** were delighted to have a short talk by Tony Thompson. Tony, who is the Chiltern Prevention and Response Manager, has a particular interest in rural communities and spoke in a simple and friendly way about fire safety in the home. He explained that arrangements could be made for a home advice visit and that if an appliance such as an electric blanket did not meet the rigid safety standard, it could be replaced free of charge. We hope that many of you will have sent off the form he left behind.

The **Christmas Tea Party** has been brought forward to **Wednesday 19 December**. There will be the usual short Christmas entertainment in the Church beforehand so do try and join us! We can collect you and take you home. Please contact Anne Lake 01296 620169 or Anne Butterworth (758700).

On **23 January**, Julie Treharne from Chesham CAB will come to speak briefly on how older people might save money on energy bills.





*Cecily Nisbet baptism*

We don't have a **Breakfast Service** in December so the next one will be on **Sunday 27 January**.

Alexandra and James Nisbet brought their second daughter, Cecily, to be christened on Sunday 4 November. Cecily, who wore a beautiful Victorian christening robe, seemed to enjoy her special day enormously. She was supported by her little sister, Millie, and her godparents, Jane Lloyd, Caroline Daly and Jeremy Cottle. There was a lovely gathering of family and friends, all of whom returned to Lane End House for lunch after the service. We are delighted to welcome another young family into the village and wish them a long and happy stay in St Leonards. Millie is already a keen Sunday-Schooler!

#### **Christmas ...**

**Sunday 16 December**

3.30pm: Family Service and Nativity

**Sunday 23 December**

6pm: Carol Service

#### **Christmas Eve**

11.30pm: Parish Communion

#### **Christmas Day**

11am: Christmas Family Service

Please do join us.

## CHOLESBURY

Our Four Parish service was held at the end of September and we enjoyed a talk with slides by Roger Lane speaking for **Work Aid**. Some of us had not realised that a successful international charity is based just down the hill in Chesham. The charity was started by concerned Christians in Amersham.

Work Aid refurbishes tools and sends them to Africa to enable people to start up their own businesses including building, car maintenance, sewing, knitting, mechanics and carpentry. Work Aid sends out staff to help with training and technical expertise while ensuring the tools reach the right people: which include AIDS victims. Women are prominent in these vital,



*Helping the Work Aid charity*

small businesses. The scale of the charity's work became clear when we heard of the despatch of tools in container loads. Such transport is expensive and Work Aid sells refurbished tools at their Townsend Road facility to cover costs. Cholesbury resident,



*Shoeboxes filled with Christmas gifts*

Jo Hobbs, visited Zambia last year on behalf of her school in Chesham and gave sewing machines to a group making products from old food sacks.

Roger asked for volunteers to help run the growing charity and invited us to visit the factory. The congregation had collected various tools and sewing machines that were piled into Roger's car and later a cheque for £188 was donated.

Thirty three **Shoeboxes** were filled with Christmas gifts for distribution to families and children in Eastern Europe. This was

quite a relief as, in past years, Louisa had become the champion box filler, but she is now away at music college. Thank you to all from the Hilltop parishes and beyond who contributed. Many of the boxes were piled up near the church entrance and brought to the altar early in the service by four young Cholesbury boys. The theme for the day was how a small gift goes a long way and we thank Jamie Carruthers for reading the parable of the mustard seed. We are also grateful to Alice Hobbs who focussed our thoughts as she led us in prayer.

On 10 October, a group of fifty visited the **House of Lords** on a trip organised by Liz Green to help raise funds for Cholesbury church. The event involved a tour of the Houses of Parliament, communion in the Crypt Chapel, lunch on the balcony and Questions in the chamber of the House of Lords. This was a truly memorable day and we thank Liz for all her hard work. A report appears elsewhere in Hilltop News.

Christmas is approaching and Carols will be sung at Cholesbury church and in the village. You are welcome to join us. Our Candlelit Carol service is at 6pm on **Sunday 16 December** with David Clarke's choir: followed by mulled wine. Carols will also be sung on **Sunday 23rd** at our 9am Parish Communion. We will be Carol Singing at various houses around the village on **Monday 17 December**, meeting in the village hall at 6.30pm to start singing at 7pm. Bring torches and wrap up well!

## HAWRIDGE

**H**awridge Church Walking Group - It is with much regret that we are unable to continue our walks. Thank you to everyone who has supported us through the years. The walks and coffee afterwards have been very special, with all of you contributing to their



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success - Margaret and Joan (758332).

**Supper Evening** - This was a most enjoyable evening on 20 October, held at the school, with an excellent supper. Hatty Foden Ellis, Shivani Gudka, Maisie and Mollie Bradfield and all pupils of Pam Hearn, entertained us with their singing, flute, clarinet and piano. Kenneth Brown followed with a marvellous brass quintet and we all enjoyed the contributions of Tom Seal, Judy Bullock, Guy Williams, David Burgess and Elizabeth Tomlin after supper. Each contribution was a unique performance which made the evening go with a swing. The music ranged from Handel's Halleluja Chorus to one of the latest hits 'Titanium' with some amusing poems in between. Thank you everyone who supported the evening and a special thanks to the artistes!

**Family Christingle - Sunday 2 December** at 9.30am. The collection will be given to the Children's Society. Christingle celebrations are not just a wonderful way for children and adults to get together: they also raise essential funds to help vulnerable children. We welcome you to come to this service to support the Children's Society.

**Christmas...**

**Christmas Eve**

We are holding our usual Carol Service at 5.30pm.

**Christmas Day**

Parish Communion at 10am.

**Sunday 30 December** - Special Four Parish Service to ring out the old year at 10am. This will be an informal service with readings, carols and refreshments and an opportunity to ring the bells. Please do join us at any time during the morning up to 11.30am.

## WINIFRED BUTLER

It is with sadness we report the death of Winifred (Win) Butler, late of Chiltern Cottages and our thoughts are with her son Frank (the postman) and the family. There will be a full tribute in the next edition of Hilltop News in February.



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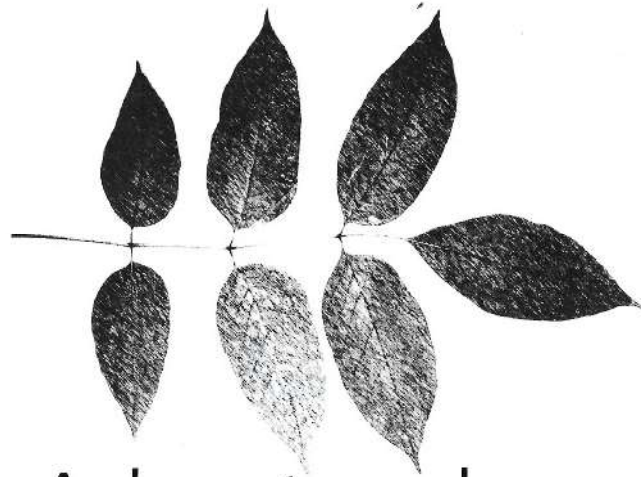
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## Ashes to ashes

*The big news in the forestry world of late has been the confirmed arrival in the UK of Ash Dieback disease. There had been previous reports about disease attacking oak, chestnut and larch, but these have been seen as less catastrophic on the whole population. Unlike the reporting in the UK of other outbreaks in trees, the suddenness of this one seems to have taken everyone in authority by complete surprise.*

However, the death of ash trees had been attributed to an unknown fungus pathogen causing dieback in Polish ash trees way back in 1992. It was not until 2006 that the exact species of fungus was isolated and named as *Chalara fraxinea* - *Fraxinus* being the genus name of the ash tree. Unlike most of the flora and fauna we are used to dealing with, fungi are known to exist in two forms, 'sexual' and 'asexual', and it is not unusual for only the latter of these to be firmly identified. This frequently presents a problem for microbiologists tasked with isolating the

offending pathogen as it is usually from studying the sexual form that any control measure is developed. In this case it took until 2010 before the essential information about the offending species was found, by which time ash trees were succumbing across northern Europe as far as Germany.

By early 2012 it had arrived in Scandinavia and in March it first appeared in the UK, within saplings imported from the Netherlands to a nursery in Bucks. Disease was identified in other nursery-supplied trees across the UK soon after, and the first wild infestation reports were in East Anglia in October. Whilst infection may not have arrived in wild trees around here yet, as it is mainly transmitted on the wind, it seems likely not to be far off. In the UK ash supports over 100 insect species that in turn support the woodland bird population. So the destruction of ash stands could have a significant wider impact on the local ecology. For information on identifying infected trees there is an excellent video from the Forestry Commission at [www.forestry.gov.uk/chalara](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/chalara).

Sadly, in the absence of any imminent

way of combating the disease, it looks like we are in for a major catastrophe of similar proportions to the havoc that Dutch Elm Disease caused in the 1960s and 70s. Today there are virtually no mature elms in southern England. Locally, what has survived the scourge of elm bark beetles, have been small bush elms located in hedgerows. It turns out, however, that whereas the English elm succumbed to the disease, this is a long-ago introduced species of the tree. A whole number of so-called 'native elms', including more resistant ones from Cornwall, Cambridgeshire and Essex, have largely survived the infestation. It is also apparent that there have been several previous elm disease outbreaks throughout more recent and pre-historic periods which have wiped out much of the national heritage trees for a generation or so before more resistant stock has managed to re-supply our wild places once again. We can only hope this will be the case for the ash!

Most insects are fast disappearing from the scene during late autumn. Except for the few species that are migrants to the UK, others need to find a way to overwinter: as an egg, larva, pupa or adult, and a suitable place to hang out. Each to their own and nature provides these in abundance: however, we provide plenty of opportunities too in dry or air conditioned, warm or cool, light or dark.

Adult lacewings can frequently be found living out the colder months in our sheds and out-buildings. They are not social animals but usually amass in choice locations. Their normal colouration is bright green, an essential camouflage to avoid predation. On taking up winter roost their colour changes over a period of a few days from bright green to pale pink or cream. Opinions vary as to the rationale. Some say it is the adoption of a more neutral hue to avoid detection. Others suggest it is the

consequence of not feeding, whilst a third theory, which seems the most plausible, suggests it is the natural process of slowing down the body clock and gradual re-absorption and better utilisation of valuable proteins.

One consequence the impact of unusual and unseasonal weather has had on the fruit harvest has been the greater-than-normal quantities of both in situ and windfall fruit that has started to ferment. As these are a favourite foodstuff for both invertebrates and birds, there have been reports of wasps caught in a drunk and disorderly state and a number of sightings of song birds such as blackbirds, song thrushes and redwings falling off their perches at dusk or becoming disorientated during flight and colliding with buildings.

If there was life insurance available for squirrels, then premiums for January would be sky high. During this month grey squirrels don their best coats and go courting. This involves high-level gymnastic displays and the leaps from bough to bough have such a high degree of difficulty, they result in many more miscalculations and accidents, which accounts for an increased number of fatalities. Take care of low flying squirrels when out and about! That's all this time. Comments and questions as usual to [chrisbrown@rayshill.com](mailto:chrisbrown@rayshill.com) 758890

Chris Brown

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# Christmas at Ashridge

**H**ave you been for a walk through the National Trust Ashridge Estate lately? It is beautiful at this time of year. A frosty morning is the perfect time to enjoy the woods - and a home-made bowl of soup afterwards at the Brownlow Café.

'Ashridge at Christmas' takes place on **Sunday 2 December**, bringing you original gifts from local craftspeople and suppliers. The NT shop and cafe will be open all day, too. The day runs from 10am to 4pm and it costs nothing to park or get in. It is based around the Ashridge Estate Visitor Centre, Monument Drive, Ringshall, HP4 1LX.

And if the family could do with a breath of fresh air during the Christmas break, get signed up for the now-traditional and always sold-out walk on **Tuesday 27 December**. This gentle circular walk starts at 10am at the Visitor Centre, finishing at midday with mulled wine or a soft drink and mince pies. To book, phone 01442 851 227 - tickets are £6 for Friends of Ashridge, £7 all other adults and £5 for under 16s.

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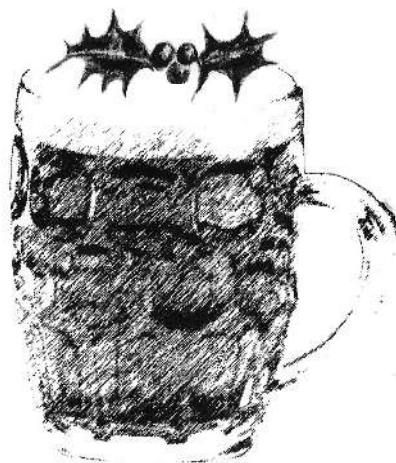


# Winter news of Hilltop Pubs

*In mid 2012, the life of the Hilltop pubs had reached a nadir of decline. The Bull remained derelict, The Full Moon closed for a while following the departure of Annie and Peter Alberto, and The White Lion was (and still may be) closed and forsaken. Although the situation at the Full Moon is recovering, there was little to give confidence about the future of The White Lion when this was written in mid-November. On the bright side, The Black Horse and The Rose and Crown soldiered on with their accustomed competent management and promotional skills. However, they only marginally benefited from spill-over trade from the closures of their neighbouring pubs.*

As has been reported previously, the Pubcos are the root of all evil. In the case of The Full Moon, it is Admiral Taverns and, for The White Lion and The Black Horse, it is Punch Taverns. Without listing the unpleasant financial follies of Admiral Taverns, suffice to say that they overstepped the limits of financial tolerance in their attempts to milk the maximum return for themselves out of what has been their flagship pub, forcing the Alberto's reluctantly to relinquish their 11-year tenure. Hilltop News and surely all our readers wish them good health and happiness for the future.

Punch Taverns provide a classic case study in financial mismanagement. Their debt to bondholders was five times their annual revenues up to August this year, and the debt was 38 times the concurrent pre-tax profits. Although they are trying to sell



off 1500 of their estate of 4500 pubs to try to comply with banking covenants, the sale proceeds they have realised fall far short of values necessary to close the gaps in their balance sheet. Locally, efforts to sell The White Lion and The Black Horse have failed. In the case of The Black Horse, Punch is holding out for a premium sale price, whilst sale of The White Lion has been agreed several times recently at discounted prices, only to see the buyers withdraw before completion.

\* \* \*

Although Sandra Taylor and Peter Broom are on a short-term tenancy with Punch at **The Black Horse**, they are carrying on as though it has permanence. Peter has maintained his reputation for being a perceptive and accomplished cellar man with occasional beer festivals and well-kept real ales. As a team, their forte is managing large events such as the Debbie Curtis Radio Big Band concert last summer and a bonfire night extravaganza for 500 guests this autumn.

An evening of buffet food and Christmas carols, led by familiar local voices, is scheduled for **22 December**, and quiz

evenings are popular on alternate Monday nights. Promotional dining prices will apply for meals on Wednesdays and Thursdays in December through to February and family oriented food service will start at 5:00pm on Fridays and Saturdays.

Now well into their fourth year of owning **The Rose and Crown**, Kerry and Marc Heywood have a well-deserved reputation for good dining and a cellar with a discerning choice of real ales, ciders and perry. During the holiday season, they plan to hold a family party leading up to Christmas complete with a visit from Father Christmas. Lunch on Christmas day can be booked although numbers will be limited to keep the atmosphere cosy and congenial.

With three years to run on Admiral Taverns' lease on **The Full Moon** property, a new tenant has taken on the business. Since he is based in Kent and runs a stable of seven such pubs, he has appointed Sarah Hawkes to be the manager for all of the local operations. From a management point of view, the burden of bookkeeping and staff payroll is performed by the lessee's own back office staff.

Despite the period of closure in September, the previous cadre of staff has been retained including Mikey, the chef who joined last spring. Although the atmosphere of **The Full Moon** should not change much, it is being refreshed under new management. The familiar telephone number, 758959, has been recovered, the Wi-Fi access has been restored, and a website will be developed in due course.

Holiday season party bookings are being taken. Thursday is curry night, Friday is steak night, and promotional senior lunches are offered on Mondays. The traditional Boxing Day breakfast will take place on **26 December** when you can expect the customary pandemonium to prevail.

Although **The White Lion** reopened on 9 November, there can be no confidence as to its status when this issue of Hilltop News is distributed. Since the loss of Gary Heap and

with Michelle moving on, the management of the business has been in the hands of various shady operators, rank amateurs, substance abusers and (lest we forget that amazing fortnight) Hansel and Gretel. The new managers who arrived in mid November expressed distress at what they saw as a pub with no prospects and stated a disinclination to carry on after barely three days on the job.

The most rational business prospect for this scale of pub is for a couple with home equity or other cash resources to negotiate an affordable purchase price, move in to it as their primary home and operate as a family business with minimal employment costs. There is scope for expansion of revenues by creating a 40-seat, glass dining pavilion overlooking the valley just north of the kitchen. Without some early recovery, the probable outcome is another derelict pub building.

And speaking of which, readers on the Bellingdon village mailing list and of the New Grapevine will have seen Jim Matthews' announcement that H.G. Matthews has bought **The Bull** in its entirety, including the accompanying 15 acres of land. Their business purpose is to locate clay deposits and apply for planning permission to extract it little by little for their brickworks.

During the prolonged abandonment of the buildings by Fortitude Investments, there was extensive damage to the fabric of the main building due to neglect, vandalism and outright theft of lead and copper. Although H.G. Matthews is currently making the pub building secure from the elements to stabilise its condition and dry it, there are no plans for an immediate return to trading as a pub/restaurant. However, should future prospects improve for the trade, there is little doubt that Jim would push forward with re-establishment of such a business.

*Bill Ingram*



# House of Lords visit



*A group of fifty smartly dressed people from the Hilltop villages boarded a coach on Wednesday 10 October. Our destination was the House of Lords – a visit organised by Liz Green. On arrival, we were met by a charming and elegant lady who greeted us with “Hello, I’m Hazel” and we realised we had met Baroness Byford, Liz’s mother.*

**T**he necessary security was not too burdensome and we were soon in Westminster Hall, the site of the trial of King Charles I in 1649. Three features of the Houses of Parliament will be for me abiding memories: it is a huge building, there is great activity and history is everywhere.

We were divided into three groups and our guides took us through many halls and rooms, each steeped in history. Walls were covered in historic portraits, including all six of Henry VIII’s wives. We saw gilded thrones, sand from the beaches of the Normandy landings and striking statues of past Prime

Ministers. Churchill and Peel were full size and in prominent positions while lesser premiers were smaller, but still remembered.

The schedule was hectic as we progressed rapidly through the Palace of Westminster, and we noticed small groups sitting in one of the great halls. These were business meetings, with peers discussing affairs of state and the informality was striking. Some of us took Communion in the Crypt Chapel and we were reminded that Christianity is an integral part of Parliament. A service takes place once a week and is open to MPs, peers, members of their staff and their guests, and can also be used for MPs and peers to hold weddings and baptisms. We were also shown the broom cupboard at the back of the Chapel where a protesting Suffragette had once hidden!

Lunch was enjoyed in the Cholmondeley Room and it is hard to think of a finer setting. The room overlooks the Thames and we sat at spacious tables that had

doubtless entertained a wide range of guests over the years. The food was sumptuous and complemented by fine wine. The master of ceremonies announced Baroness Byford, who made a formal welcome. David Burgess said Grace before lunch and later thanked Hazel and Liz for arranging the event.

In the afternoon we were in the visitors’ gallery to witness the House of Lords at work. There was a session of Questions started by The Noble Lord Taverne, who was answered courteously by other peers. The House was full and those who spoke were relevant and brief. Our last stop was in the shop where gifts, including Speaker Bercow’s Malt Whisky, were available.

The PCC records show that Liz Green first mentioned this very special event last November and since then she has dealt with all the arrangements at the Cholesbury end while Hazel made the House of Lords arrangements. This was an ambitious day out and selling tickets was not easy. Liz filled the coach, succeeded in her project and gave us all a memorable day. Thank you very much, Liz.

*John Farmer*

## PUB LUNCH CLUB

The Pub Lunch Club meets on the second Wednesday of each month at the Rose and Crown in Hawridge. It is open to anyone living in or near to our four Hilltop Villages, but in particular it aims to provide an opportunity for those who might otherwise not find it easy to get to local social events. If a lift is needed this can be arranged. On offer is a two-course meal for just £8, prepared and presented by hosts Marc and Kerry, landlords of the Rose and Crown. The event is organised by the Hilltop Villages Good Neighbours Group.

The next few dates for your diary are **12 December, 9 January and 13 February**. Booking must be made in advance to Janet Hopkinson, via email [janethopkinson@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:janethopkinson@tiscali.co.uk) or phone 757059.



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*During the summer I spent a lovely couple of hours walking part of the 100 acre farm in the Hilltops owned by Jef Bell and Linda Rogers. I was particularly interested in meeting them as they have practised non-intensive, chemical-free land management on the site for the past 19 years.*

**A**s we walked around on an unexpectedly glorious sunny afternoon, it quickly became apparent that Jef and Linda are true custodians of the land and that they get a great deal of satisfaction from the wildlife that surrounds them.

Jef spoke of the pipistrelle bats and swallows that share their outbuildings and stables. I noticed a viewing platform he built in the woodlands from which to see the comings and goings of the local fauna. Nearby a lesser spotted woodpecker had made a home in one of the trees by knocking a perfect hole into the trunk. In fact their woodland is a fantastic habitat for many species of bird, including tree creeper, buzzard and woodcock.

Tawny owls inhabit the area and Jef is now trying to encourage barn owls and so increase the biodiversity on the land. Jef and Linda make sure their grassland meadows keep a deep litter layer and so

support a healthy population of voles, mice and shrews on which the owls feed.

Over the years a number of woodland mammals have been sighted on the farm, including badgers, roe deer and stoats. Evidence of the elusive dormouse has even been noticed, by the distinctive holes they make in fallen seed pods. Unfortunately, brown hares have been in decline over the past ten years, which echoes the pattern across the rest of the UK. This may be due to the current farming practice which cuts and gathers hay crops in July when the leverets (young hares) are still sheltering in the fields.

From mid-July to early August, Jef and Linda harvest hay from the meadows. They do not use insecticides or pesticides on their land or crops; preferring instead to work in harmony with nature. Although their crop may be smaller than commercially grown hay, it is packed full of nutrients because it contains wildflowers and herbs which are otherwise killed off by chemical sprays.

This means the meadow hay is not only beneficial to insects, butterflies and bees, but also to the lucky horses who feed on it! I noted buttercup, daisy, red and white clover, knapweed, bird's foot trefoil and lady's bedstraw as I walked through the meadows. Where certain areas of the grassland are still in flower and not had time to seed at the time of mowing, Jef makes sure to mow round the flowers to allow them their full life span to set seed.

A plant survey carried out in 2007 designated this land as a County Wildlife Site because of the extensive range of indicator species: those used to define whether an area contains ancient woodland, meadowland or hedges. For example, a minimum of ten indicator species are required to qualify for ancient woodland – this site had 22!

As part of the management of the site, Jef has cleared parts of an old larch plantation to help encourage new deciduous woodland and created a new woodland

edge alongside one of the meadows to protect an established badger sett.

Common spotted orchid, previously unseen on the farm, has recently flowered in the new woodland, indicating that the site's biodiversity is improving. In addition, Jef and Linda practise a three-year rotational hedge-cutting plan as part of Defra's ELS (Entry Level Stewardship) to maintain the best habitat for biodiversity.

After the site was assessed by the Hertfordshire Wildlife Site Project for its value to local wildlife, Defra concluded:

*'You are on the edge of a high priority area for farmland birds, arable plants, bats and dormice and vulnerable grassland and associated species. This means that any options you manage that benefit these habitats will be very beneficial to your area. Having walked the farm with you it was clear that you are doing over and above the requirement of management options: the level of biodiversity is impressive.'*

Jef and Linda are true custodians of the land for future generations and if other land owners did the same we might just be able to repair some of the damage that intensive farming, industry and indiscriminate housing has done to the countryside.

Michelle Storm

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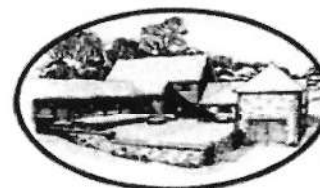
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## Answers to Christmas Quiz on page 12

- 1 'White Christmas' by Bing Crosby: over 50 million copies since 1942!
- 2 Germany
- 3 Oliver Cromwell
- 4 Vixen
- 5 1957
- 6 Nine ladies dancing
- 7 Carols to formal church services
- 8 The Beatles: 1963, 1965 and 1967
- 9 Robin: hence the redbreast's regular appearance on Christmas cards
- 10 Norway

## 100 Club winners

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## CURVACEOUS COOK

### Slow roast pork

*This is the most wonderful party food, or for any big occasion when you have time to prepare in advance, but just want to forget it on the day. Perfect for Christmas, and if there are any leftovers they are great in a hot roll or salad. The juices make a wonderful soup or gravy base.*

*I use Jamie Oliver's porchetta mix, from his Jamie's Italy book, to rub on the meat before cooking, and have then adapted all sorts of recipes to this really easy one. Four of us made it for the village barn dance earlier in the year, and everybody agreed that it really was as easy and trouble free as I promised, and the recipients were all delighted, so give it a go...*

*In a coffee mill or small processor, whizz up:*

*4 tablespoons fennel seeds (even if you don't like fennel, you won't taste it)*

*3 small dried chillis (ditto!)*

*2 lbs rock salt (he uses 3, but 2 is enough)*

*4 or 5 torn bay leaves, ideally fresh*

*1 lemon, zest only*

*Rub as much of this mix as you need for your joint. I used whole shoulders of Hazeldene Farm British Lop pork, but we also rub this on chops! I keep any leftovers in a jar in the pantry for months.*

*You can leave it for a bit or cook straight away*

*Place the pork in the pan on top of some chopped carrot, celery, garlic, rosemary, onion and the lemon you have zested, with ½ bottle white wine poured over it, though water will do, as you will produce a lot of juices.*

*Cover with foil, and cook on moderate heat (or top oven of Aga) for 30 minutes, then turn oven down to low (or bottom oven of Aga) and leave for 12 to 24 hours. We left the whole shoulder for 24 hours, for a smaller joint, leave for less, but be aware that it will shrink.*

*To get fabulous crackling I always peel the skin off when pork is cooked, and put it on a baking tray in a hot oven for 10-15 minutes to crisp up, but watch it, it will turn very quickly.*

*For our event I actually collected lots of pork skin from the farm earlier in the week and cooked that ahead of time...it all went! I don't rub with salt or oil or anything else – just make sure that the skin is dry.*

*The pork will keep warm for ages, especially if you wrap it in a blanket or towel on top of the foil. We had to do this to get to the hall, and they all remained lovely and hot.*

*The meat will probably not carve into neat slices, but as we were putting it into buns with stuffing and apple sauce that really didn't matter. I believe the trendy name for this is 'pulled pork'. Each whole shoulder fed about 30 people one big bap.*

**Lulu Stephen: [bellingtonm@hotmail.com](mailto:bellingtonm@hotmail.com)**



## Hilltop News

We welcome all news, letters and articles which are of general interest and relevance to the Hilltop Villages. Material for inclusion in the February/March edition should be sent to Graham Lincoln or Anne Butterworth (Church Matters) by **9 January** latest. Please note that photos sent online must be at least 2,500 x 1,750 pixels in size.

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