

# KINGS NORTON

## Parish Magazine



### Special Needs

Our changing attitudes towards difference

### Ken Tinkler

An astonishing wartime career

### Bird Feeders

How they help small species fight infection



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# Welcome

**EDITORIAL**

Many people find this time of year hard to bear. Maybe you are one of them. It can be difficult to remain cheerful and optimistic when the hours of daylight are few, the cold and the damp have seeped into your bones and the weather has driven you indoors. Where do you turn when your spirits need lifting in winter?

I discovered a love of birds at an early age. Growing up in a Kentish village, I was inducted into the RSPB's Young Ornithologist's Club while still at primary school by the wife of a local doctor, a Mrs Bird (I kid you not). Since then, I have found that the one thing guaranteed to put a smile on my face, however bleak the day or dismal the news, is the sight or sound of a bird. Something about them lifts my spirits in a way I can't fully explain, which is why it's a relief to discover that the habit of feeding them in winter (p.32) is probably doing more good than harm. Did you know that, as a nation, we spend £300 million a year on bird feeding products?

If birds don't do it for you, on page 18, Carolina Ariza has some suggestions for coping with life in a world where good news often seems hard to find. And, if her tips are not enough then, in this month's edition, you have the inspiring example of 97-year-old Ken Tinkler (p.7), Larry's article on our improving attitudes towards people with all kinds of special needs (p.4), two recommendations for day trips (p.13 & p.24), a ready-made annual plan for your kitchen garden (p.29) and Thelma's encouragement to "do better" in 2024 (p.26).

Draw the curtains, turn on the lights, grab a blanket, make a cup of tea and settle in for this month's perusal of your parish magazine.



*David Ash*

# Special Needs

There has been a substantial revolution taking place in society as to how we perceive and treat people, young and old, who have what have become known as “special needs.” Disability as a concept is widely understood as the effect upon a person’s life and prospects when, through illness, birth defects or accidental injury, they are unable to function to the same degree as an “able-bodied” person. When we include mental health in this mix of needs, those appearing to be able-bodied suffer from the less visible symptoms of disability incurred through severe emotional or neurological disturbance.

Within a generation, the words used to describe the spectrum of disabilities has changed dramatically. The revolution which brought us to regard all members of our society as having equal rights and opportunities, whatever their physical or mental abilities, changed our language and attitudes forever. I was recently given a book on the



Monyhull History



**The Revd Larry Wright is the Rector of Kings Norton Parish**

history of Monyhull Hospital entitled “Monyhull 1908-1998, A History of Caring” by Deborah Hutchings. It charts the changes which took place between the emergence of the pioneering vision of a therapeutic colony, created to cope with “sane epileptics and the feebleminded”, as they were described in 1909, to the closure of the hospital in 1998. That closure took place when “Care in the Community” legislation reduced the number of such institutions, replacing their services with community homes and support workers, placed in ordinary streets and neighbourhoods. What had been locked away from view was now part of every community. It is a fascinating testimony to the dedication of the staff and also to the changing attitudes towards disability in our society.

Christian churches have been influenced by these new perspectives on illness and disability generally and in their healing ministry in particular. In previous



PHOTO BY BEN MULLINS

centuries, illness was seen as an affliction either from God or caused by malevolent forces at work in creation. This cannot be entirely explained away by science. Jesus' healing stories include physical and mental healings. Miracles still happen. While scientific improvements in medicine have become paramount, faith continues to play a part in the lives of the suffering, complementing treatment while bringing comfort and hope.

These changing attitudes towards difference have become a feature of our educational system. Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) are now a vital feature of schools. Childhood disadvantages may result in a dysfunctional adult.

SEND practitioners bring a range of support services and daily techniques to ensure that all children, whatever their abilities, have equal access to high quality education and care while at school.

At a recent visit to our church school, Hawkesley Church Primary Academy, in my capacity as Chair of Governors and SEND link governor, I spent the afternoon reviewing all aspects of what is officially called the school's SEND offer. "Offer" is a word we associate with having a choice to take something or not. It is used in a school setting so that parents and carers may make an informed choice as to a school's suitability for caring for their child if they have SEND needs. Some children are

diagnosed with special needs only after they have started school and, in such cases, their learning pattern is adjusted to their needs.

Hawkesley School's SEND lead is Mr Adam Sale, a teacher who has taken on the role as part of his eagerness to help children to gain the most from education and from the Christian ethos of the school. He describes himself as being "passionate" about SEND and, with a large percentage of the pupils registered as having special needs, his passion is much in demand.

What does SEND provision look like in a school? Firstly, pupils with a diagnosis or who obtain a diagnosis while at school are ranked according to the mildness or severity of their needs. Any child who is not learning at the rate of his or her peers, even with additional teaching support, is considered for a review and this may include external professional help. Each pupil with SEND needs is given individual attention by a learning mentor while still being part of a class as much as possible. They will have individual learning plans which stress their strengths and weaknesses and teachers monitor their progress regularly with Mr Sale. In turn, he is responsible for communicating with parents and carers regarding the



progress their child is making and for listening to their concerns. Partnership between home and school is a vital relationship in the progress of pupils.

Mr Sale also monitors the school environment and speaks with teachers regarding adjustments which could be made in classrooms. Subdued lighting may be appropriate or the inclusion of clock references to mark the lesson changes. Bright colours may be attractive to some but to other pupils they can be a distraction, so paler colours are introduced for noticeboards, and so on. Some SEND pupils will be seen wearing noise-cancelling headphones around school as the inevitable noise of many children chatting can be oppressive.

Do these measures make a difference? In terms of behaviour, certainly. Any visitor will be impressed by the calm and orderly manner in which pupils move around the school. It is often SEND children whose behaviour becomes challenging if they are not supported. Educationally? That will only be known at the set times of the year when they are assessed. But, if they are supported and cared for through their years at Hawkesley, the benefits will be seen throughout their lives.

# Ken Tinkler

## *An Astonishing Wartime Career*

I always feel a sense of awe when I'm with someone who has been closely involved with events at the centre of world attention, especially if I meet them in an everyday environment. It was like that when I met Ken Tinkler, the father of our friend the Revd Jayne Crooks. The word "incredible" is used far too often these days, but you could use it to describe Ken's early life.

He is an astonishingly alert, energetic 97-year-old, bright and articulate. Telling his story in these few hundred words is going to be a challenge.

Having lived in relatively humble circumstances in the Cambridge and Peterborough areas until he was 17, he could hardly have expected that within a year he'd be on the other side of the world and less than a year later he'd be present at those world-shattering events. He was born on a farm in Hook, a tiny hamlet near March in Cambridgeshire in September 1926. After the minimum period at school, Ken (aged 14) and his father (the family now living in Peterborough) went to work at the British Thomson and Houston company (later



MICHAEL  
WRITES  
REGULARLY  
ON LOCAL  
HISTORY

► KEN  
TINKLER WITH  
DAUGHTER  
JAYNE  
CROOKS



PHOTO BY MICHAEL KENNEDY

Hotpoint), making parts for the Wellington bomber aircraft.

After a couple of years of frustrating 12-hour shifts at the height of the Second World War, he decided to join the Royal Navy. Initially he was told that he was too young, but he persevered and eventually

signed up just before his 17th birthday In September 1943.

He began training on the land-based facility HMS Ganges. Unusually, he had chosen as his discipline the increasingly significant specialisation of radar, partly because his sister Cissy had a job that involved making components for radar equipment. He tested out



radar equipment in Yorkshire and on the Isle of Man. Then he went to the naval gunnery school in Chatham, helping to pioneer the link between radar and gunnery warfare.

In the summer of 1944, his life changed when a policeman arrived one midnight with a railway warrant, telling him that he was required to board the troopship SS Stratheden, as part of a group of naval recruits destined for the island of Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). "It was all so awe inspiring", he says.

It was in Ceylon's Colombo harbour that Ken was assigned to the ship that was to become, in his word, "mother" to him and his crewmates for some two years. It was the Q class destroyer HMS Quadrant. Destroyers were the Navy's most versatile ships, capable of taking part in major battles, but also light and versatile enough to escort and protect convoys and large battle fleets.

HMS Quadrant joined up with a British fleet that included the battleships King George V and the aircraft carrier Indefatigable. In December 1944 the fleet was sent to Australia, where in Sydney Ken spent his time fitting American radar systems to the British ships and adapting them for gunnery control.

Ken remembers fondly how he and his colleagues were

encouraged to meet Australian families. He still maintains contact with the daughter of one family after eighty years.

In Australia, Quadrant soon became part of the newly formed British Pacific fleet, destined for the war with the Japanese in the West Pacific. In February 1945 the fleet joined up with the American Fifth Fleet, creating a formidably powerful force.

Ken was then plunged into the realities and extreme dangers of naval warfare. Quadrant's duties were mainly air sea rescue work behind the fleet's aircraft carriers and generally protecting the fleet's bigger ships (popularly known by destroyer crews as "Lumbering Beasts").

The air sea rescue duties were dramatic. "When our fighters came back from their sorties, some of them had sustained damage to their undercarriage and couldn't land properly. The decks had to be clear at all times, so those planes were simply pushed into the sea: our job was to rescue the pilots before the planes sank."

Ken also remembers that, while the British carriers had steel decks, their American equivalents were made of wood. "Once this became known to the Japanese Kamikaze pilots, they focused on the American ships. I have



▲ THE  
JAPANESE  
SURRENDER,  
USS MISSOURI,  
TOKYO BAY,  
2<sup>ND</sup> SEPT 1945

“vivid memories of watching them sailing over the horizon on fire.”

As the fleet proceeded up the east side of the West Pacific coast they weren't always prepared. “We took a pasting off Sumatra. We didn't know that there was a Japanese air force and a naval base there, but we certainly did when we got there!”

As the fleet proceeded, the war with Japan showed no real sign of abating, even though the war with Germany in Europe had ended in May that year. Two cataclysmic events brought matters to a head: the dropping of atom bombs by American planes on Hiroshima and Nagasaki on 6th and 9th August 1945. HMS Quadrant and other vessels were lying about 35 miles off the Japanese coast, probably as close to these events as it was possible to be safely. “We never heard the explosions and we never

► ADMIRAL SIR BRUCE FRASER, COMMANDING THE BRITISH PACIFIC FLEET, SIGNS THE INSTRUMENT OF SURRENDER ON BEHALF OF THE UNITED KINGDOM. KEN WAS THERE!

saw any mushroom clouds, but we just knew something was up."

Japan reluctantly decided to surrender on 15th August, and the Pacific fleet had the unenviable role of moving into Tokyo harbour. "Our chiefs didn't know whether the Japs had depth charged the harbour, and they decided that they wouldn't let the big ships in because they were deep in the water. So we, the destroyers, had to go in and fish around in the harbour to make sure there were no depth charges. It was extremely frightening."

Then there was the job of going round the little islands in that part of Japan, letting the infamous "suicide boats" know that the war had ended. "We were carrying Japanese officers and we flew the Nippon flag, the Royal Navy flag and also the Union Jack: but we didn't know whether they'd come charging out at us and we were praying that they would see the

flags. They did, otherwise, we would have been blown clear out of the water."

Ken was philosophical: "You were in that situation and you did what you had to do whatever the circumstances. I went in a boat and came out a man." Quadrant ultimately landed on the main Japanese island of Honshu, and he was able to see first-hand the devastation caused by the atom bombs.

Ken shortly became even more central to the momentous events of the time: the formal surrender of Japan on the American flagship, the USS Missouri, in Tokyo Bay on 2nd September. He was ordered to join the crew of the small pilot boat which took the senior British representative, Admiral Sir Bruce Fraser (*photo below*), from the British fleet to the signing ceremony.

After the capitulation of Japan, Quadrant was used for policing





duties, and then escorted hospital ships back to Sydney. Then came an ignominious end for the heroic destroyer; with the other Q class ships, it was handed over to the Australian Navy, stripped of all equipment, and ultimately sold to the Japanese for scrap, heartbreaking for Ken and his fellow crew members. Ken returned to England and, along with many other sailors, waited for his discharge. It took a while to come through, but he did have the experience of serving with Prince Philip, whom he came to know personally, at HMS Corsham, a land-based training camp in Wiltshire. He remembers cycling through deep snow to the local post office to pick up mail, some of which was for the Prince from his new fiancée Princess Elizabeth! A Royal Postman!

In civilian life again, he continued to achieve significant things. Back home in Peterborough, he joined the diesel manufacturer, Perkins Engines, becoming General Foreman. He retired in 1986, but then returned as a consultant on overseas projects. He also developed a long involvement in gliding, becoming a pilot and an instructor with the

British Gliding Association. He still proudly shows off his logbook, listing more than 1000 hours of flights.

At the prompting of his daughter Jayne, he came to Kings Norton during 2022, developing a serene yet remarkably active lifestyle. But he never forgets those astonishing days when he learned to be a man under the most dramatic of circumstances.

You can see Ken's reminiscences for the BBC by typing "BBC Ken Tinkler" into YouTube's search engine.



**DIANA COMMON**

# THE LAPWORTH MUSEUM OF GEOLOGY



This museum has something to interest everyone, from dinosaurs to rocks and fossils and minerals.

It was founded in 1880 and is named after Charles Lapworth, one of the most important geologists of the time. It is



one of the oldest specialist geological museums in the UK. Many of the specimens were collected in the Midlands.

In 2016 the Museum was refurbished with the help of funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund and now has modern galleries with displays which explain the specimens in context. The history of the Earth, evolution of life on Earth, volcanoes and earthquakes are included. Upstairs there is a gallery of minerals.

There is a programme of events engaging with the public including workshops for schools and family events at weekends.

The Museum is on the University of Birmingham campus, in the original semi-circular red brick building near the clock tower, with the entrance from the Bristol Road side of the building.

Admission is free, donations are encouraged. There is something for every age group.

Public transport links are good. Parking is usually easy at the weekend but difficult Monday to Friday. There are several cafes nearby on the campus.



# Adam Meets the Amaranths

It's cold and wet, so it's time to settle down, be warm and sift through the new plants on offer for 2024.

Plants of distinction on the net [plantsofdistinction.co.uk](http://plantsofdistinction.co.uk) have a very large collection of seeds, including 2024 introductions. They also have the best types of old favourites, many being F1 hybrids. The 'What's New' section is fascinating. For grow-your-own veg fans there is a very interesting listing of new and unusual tomato seeds to try. You can download their latest catalogue or, I think, receive it by post after phoning 01449 721720.

If you prefer to buy plants, I have not been let down by J Parker's. Do



remember that their plants will come as rooted plugs and will, in my opinion, need growing on before planting out.

I have settled on the notion of perennial borders of distinction grown from seed, plus containers filled with free-flowering plants, as the way forward. For me, for the future, drought tolerance is becoming essential and is not that difficult to achieve. You need to remember that in the first year all plants may need some watering.

The Amaranth family includes some spectacularly coloured cultivars. I have noticed that some borders at National Trust properties have been filled with their tassel flowers in red and gold. A flowering stem of *Amaranthus tricolor* is to be found on the coat of arms of Gonville and Caius colleges Cambridge where it is referred to as 'flowers gentle'. A lovely name.

"The Prince of Wales Feather" or *Amaranthus hypochondriacus* (odd name) and two shorter varieties, "Green Thumb" and "Pygmy Torch" have RHS Awards of Merit and are



not difficult to grow. All Amaranths like a well-drained soil in full sun.

*Amaranthus tricolour* "Joseph's Coat" has no tassels but has large leaf clusters of bright red and yellow stripes on the end of long stems. I have seen pictures of examples of some six feet in height growing in Texas. You might not be so lucky but it's worth a try.

After these two giants, it is a bit of a relief to introduce you to the Globe Amaranth, a fairly compact plant bearing rounded flower heads which is available in most colours except blue. The flower heads appear all

summer and make a good cut flower. They can even be dried for arrangements to last the winter. Personally, I am not too keen on dried flowers but the flower arranger may find them irresistible.

I was going to suggest that you try *Heliotrope* as a Victorian favourite, now somewhat out of fashion. Research revealed that they are very poisonous to dogs and cats, so perhaps not if you have pets.

*Phlox paniculate* was once very popular for the back of borders but did have a tendency to mildew, although not in every year. Have a look at the RHS site and you will find listed several *Phlox* with an RHS award. Perhaps newer varieties have some resistance to the fungal pest. They are best obtained in small pots for planting out in autumn or spring. If they are happy, they will soon form clumps ready for splitting, an almost foolproof method of propagation!

Next time I will be revealing my seed sowing routines. All the best for gardening in 2024.



# The Men's Group Do **CURRY** **n**IGHT

When the date of the Men's Group November meeting was fixed, we couldn't know that it would be one of the coldest nights of the winter with temperatures well below zero.

Breaking into a frozen-up car creates a real challenge when you are in a hurry, which meant that Yours Truly was the last to arrive at the New Masala Merchant Restaurant in Stirchley.

The November meeting is the last of the year and tradition for Men's Group decrees that it's an early Christmas curry for everyone.

The Steering Group, for want of a better name, sampled the restaurant menu in October and gave the venue a thumbs up. We made a tentative booking, then it was left to me to organise! We currently have 24 members in the group, some never miss; others dip in and out of arranged activities.

The next month consisted of a constant flurry of emails back and forth putting together a definitive list of diners. Decisions as to menu preferences also had to be conveyed to the restaurant. However, the best laid plans can still go awry. My

numbers didn't match the number that turned up so frantic squeezing in of other table settings brought us up to an impressive total of 18.

The waiters were charming and really obliging as I checked and renegotiated menu choices with them. Nothing was too much trouble, and the complimentary poppadoms were an added bonus.

I suppose that the most important thing to consider is the quality of the food and it's not my place here to provide a detailed review but all I can say is that from the comments and clean plates it was 5 star and highly recommended by all. I shall certainly be going back again.

So, after two successful years Men's Group is still alive and kicking. The programme for 2024 is planned and printed. Programme cards are available in St Nicolas' Church so, if you qualify for membership (i.e. a church or parish connection and male) and fancy joining us at any of the activities or meetings you will be most welcome. Why don't you give us a try in 2024?





## Funerals November 2023

2 November	Peter George Salmon	91	Cr.LH
6 November	Ernest Stephen Edwards	80	In.CY
16 November	Jean Noke	88	In.CY
17 November	Sheila Seabourne	89	In.CY
21 November	Brian David Field	91	SN.Bu.CY
29 November	Eileen May Woods	94	Cr.LH
30 November	David Andrew Beeby	51	In.CY
30 November	Cyril Westwood	89	In.CY

Bu : Burial, Cr : Cremation, CY : Churchyard, In : Interment of Ashes

Churchyards & Crematoria

LH : Lodge Hill, SN : Service at St Nicolas' Church

# Compassion *Fatigue*

When tragic events happen, no matter how far away from us they are, it's hard not to pay attention. Many of us empathise with the people in these situations and wonder how we can get involved, or if there's anything we can do to help. Over the past few years, we've borne witness to a series of pivotal global events, from the COVID pandemic to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, as well as many natural disasters. Just when it seemed that things could not get worse, last month conflict in Gaza escalated. With so many tragedies following so closely after one another, some of us may be finding that as much as we want to engage with what's going on, we have no more sympathy left to give and would rather switch off from what's going on around us.

If you've been feeling this way, just know it doesn't mean you lack sympathy for others. Rather, it may be a sign that you have "compassion fatigue".

Compassion fatigue is a stress response that results in feelings of apathy or indifference towards those who are suffering. This phenomenon is particularly common in healthcare. Health and social workers may be particularly prone because the nature of their



CAROLINA PULIDO ARIZA IS A DOCTORAL CANDIDATE IN COMPASSION FATIGUE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF PLYMOUTH

work often means sharing the emotional burden of their patients. Psychologists have also found that people with certain personality types may be at higher risk of experiencing compassion fatigue. For instance, people who tend to hold their emotions in, but are prone to pessimism and worrying, are more susceptible. The term is also increasingly used to describe a general desensitisation of public concern for social problems.

But why, as journalism professor Susan Moeller writes in her book *Compassion Fatigue*, do we "seem to care

less and less about the world around us", even when the news stories and images we see are so haunting and shocking?

Science offers us one explanation, and that is that an excess of compassion can lead to depression, burnout and feeling overwhelmed. Compassion fatigue acts as a "survival strategy" to overcome being exposed to the suffering of others. The media may also partly play a role in this phenomenon. Many publications are aware that when there's a cascade of crises, our level of concern appears to diminish. So, publications strive to capture

▼ COMPASSION  
CAN LEAD TO  
DEPRESSION,  
BURNOUT AND  
FEELING  
OVERWHELMED



attention with increasingly vivid content to keep viewers engaged. According to Moeller, journalists do this by discarding events that lack drama or lethality compared to previous ones, or by employing bolder language and imagery in their stories. This is then paired with near-constant exposure to the news, our phones giving us ready access to catastrophes and world events as they happen. This intensified and recurrent exposure to ever more vivid, distressing events creates an ideal environment for compassion fatigue to surface.

Regardless of the reasons you may be experiencing compassion fatigue, it isn't a permanent phenomenon. There are many techniques you can use to cope and overcome it. Here are some.

## 1. Acceptance

Don't feel guilty for feeling disengaged from the news. It's normal to find it distressing when



PHOTO BY CHRIS YANG

hearing traumatic news stories, or seeing distressing images. This coping technique is called avoidance and explains why so many of us want to switch away from troubling things. Knowing and accepting that this is a normal response given the circumstances is the initial step to overcoming compassion fatigue.

## 2. Set boundaries

Take charge of your news intake by deactivating notifications and controlling when and how often you engage with it. Not only can this improve feelings of compassion fatigue, it may also have other benefits. For example, excessive social media use can disrupt sleep, so managing news consumption, especially before bedtime, can help.

## 3. Slow down

Witnessing others' suffering can trigger stress responses in our body, including an accelerated heart rate. If you find you're feeling anxious or stressed when consuming news, relaxation techniques, such as meditation and deep breathing, can help. Loving-kindness meditation may be particularly helpful for improving wellbeing and compassion. This meditation

technique involves focusing on the positive and cultivating feelings of love, compassion and goodwill towards oneself and others.

#### **4. Connect with nature**

Taking a walk in nature can help reduce stress levels. This may also help to alleviate compassion fatigue, as elevated cortisol levels (known as the "stress hormone") are linked to chronic stress, burnout and emotional stress – all of which can worsen compassion fatigue.

#### **5. Be nurturing**

Caring for plants or pets profoundly affects wellbeing. Nurturing living things fosters personal fulfilment, and companion animals can reduce negative emotions, mitigating some of the effects of compassion fatigue.

#### **6. Take action**

Try addressing problems you can solve instead of dwelling on insurmountable issues. Volunteering might be one way to do this. It's also linked to better mental and physical wellbeing. Charitable giving can also increase happiness and wellness, which may



mitigate the effects of compassion fatigue. These concrete actions can restore a sense of agency, reducing the helplessness associated with compassion fatigue.

#### **7. Seek support**

If you're finding it difficult to cope or your compassion fatigue has been happening for some time, you might consider seeking support. A specialist or therapist may be helpful, but guided videos, tutorials or online meditation resources can also work.

Hopefully, by implementing these tools, you can reclaim agency over your emotions, accept them and work towards restoring your wellbeing.

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## **YOUR PARISH CHURCH**

If you cannot find what you are looking for here, you will probably find it on the Parish Website ([www.kingsnorton.org.uk](http://www.kingsnorton.org.uk)). Alternatively, please ask questions at the Parish Office, which is open between 10.00 am and 1.00 pm, Monday to Friday.

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0121 458 3289 • [www.facebook.com/kingsnortonteam](http://www.facebook.com/kingsnortonteam)**

### **THE MINISTRY TEAM**

Rector .....	The Revd Larry Wright
Parish Lay Minister .....	Pauline Weaver
Curate .....	The Revd David Booker
Honorary Assistant Priest .....	The Revd Jayne Crooks
Lay Readers .....	David Ash, Cate Bennett, Fay Fearon, ..... Ruth Howman, Parisa Pordelkhaki
Lay Preacher .....	Steve Wright
Music Minister.....	Sylvia Fox
Pastoral Care Team Coordinator.....	The Revd Jayne Crooks
Pastoral Care Advisor .....	Susan Farrell
Learning & Discipleship Coordinator.....	The Revd Mark Bennett

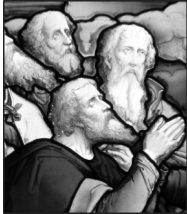
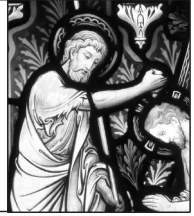
### **THE CHURCH WARDENS**

St. Nicolas' Church.....	Peter Hay & Julie Hill, Mark Sandilands
Hawkesley Church .....	Jim Clarke

### **OTHER CONTACTS**

Parish Administrator.....	Susan Farrell
Acting Finance Officer .....	Simon Hill
Verger and Groundskeeper .....	Shane Williams
Safeguarding Coordinator .....	Annette Dickers
Regular Giving .....	The Revd Jayne Crooks
Flower Arranging (0121 486 2837).....	Alison Blumer

We are a Church of England Parish serving all in Kings Norton through St Nicolas' Parish Church, and, in partnership with the Methodist Church, through Hawkesley Church, meeting in the Primary Academy.



We believe that the church in Kings Norton exists to be a worshipping, transforming partnership in Christ, to live out God's radical hospitality for all and to be equipped for work in God's world

**1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of the Month**

9.00 am	Holy Communion (Book of Common Prayer)
10.30 am	Holy Communion (Children's activity : Muddy Church)
12.30 pm	Baptisms
6.00 pm	Taizé Prayer

**2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of the Month**

9.00 am	Sung Matins (Book of Common Prayer)
10.30 am	Morning Praise for All Ages (Child-friendly)
6.00 pm	Holy Communion with Anointing & Prayer for Healing

**3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of the Month**

9.00 am	Holy Communion (Book of Common Prayer)
10.30 am	Holy Communion (Children's activity : Godly Play)
12.30 pm	Baptisms
6.00 pm	Evening Worship

**4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the Month**

9.00 am	Holy Communion with Choir (Book of Common Prayer)
10.30 am	Outdoor Service in St Nicolas' Churchyard (Child-friendly)
6.00 pm	Compline (Night Prayer)

**5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the Month**

9.00 am	Holy Communion (Book of Common Prayer)
10.30 am	United Service

All services are held at St Nicolas' Church. For further details, see the weekly newsletter on the Parish Website at [www.kingsnorton.org.uk](http://www.kingsnorton.org.uk)

**M.G.M.**

# Beyond the Hills

With a new year comes a new venue for your correspondent of all that's artistic. I'm taking you to the hills. "Which hills?" you may ask. Perhaps the first verse of this poem will provide a clue.

*So far in the distance  
Their peaks can be seen,  
And lit by the sunlight  
Familiar they lie,  
Their image and beauty  
Their shape and their form,  
So blissful and peaceful  
They reach to the sky.*

The hills in question are the Malvern Hills and the venue is the Festival Theatre, Malvern, now known as **The Malvern**

**Theatres** (*photo right*). With a distinguished history but not without its ups and downs, this remarkable venue has survived and thrived.

Situated not far from the centre and near the hills, with Priory Park behind, the theatre is set in what could be described as the best of natural England and Victorian town planning. Be advised that parking is sparse near the venue so be prepared to walk. It is possible to get there by train but it's a two-hour journey via Hereford.

Like most modern theatres, it offers a mixture of live

↓ **So far in the distance. The Malvern Hills seen from the Waseley Hills near Rubery, November 2023**







PHOTO BY TANYA DEDYUKHINA

entertainment, films, programmes for young people and one-off events. Their January programme is typical of the theatre’s highbrow, middlebrow entertainment menu.

For those who enjoy grand performances streamed to a theatre near you, they are showing, on 7th January, the New York Met’s Opera “Nabucco”, bringing alive the wonders of ancient Babylon in this story of honour and betrayal. More opera from The Met is available on 27th, this time live streamed for their very modern production of “Carmen”, set against the background of modern trafficking, this is sure to be a sensation.

On 11th January, you can sway along with a pint of Guinness in your hand to “One Night in Dublin”, a musical extravaganza of covers of the best-known Irish



rock & folk bands of the past 30 years. Shamrocks optional. Also in January, they have two tribute bands, one to Johnny Cash and the other to the rock legends of recent years.

Theatre wise, Michael Frayn’s “Noises Off” continues its British tour. This play-within-a-play comedy got rave reviews when it came to Birmingham recently. The football-based play “Dear England” is also on tour at Malvern in January. Meanwhile, the ever-popular “Blood Brothers” rounds off their theatrical fare for the month.



**“MGM” writes on cinema, theatre and the arts.**

For those who enjoy classical music there is also an evening with the English National Orchestra performing Mozart, Dvorak and Barber. More information is on their website, or give them a ring.

# Resolving to do better in 2024



THELMA MITCHELL IS  
THE FORMER LEAD  
CHAPLAIN AT  
BOURNVILLE COLLEGE

*I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year, "Give me a light that I may tread safely into that unknown". And he replied "Go into the darkness and put your hand into the hand of God. That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way."*

These are the opening words of the poem "The Gate of the Year" by Minnie Louise Haskins, who was a British poet and academic, born in 1875 and who died in 1957. The words are best known for being quoted by King George VI in his Christmas message in 1939. They struck a chord with a country facing the uncertainty of war.

Traditionally, the beginning of a new year is a time to reflect on the past year. Resolutions are made to do better in the coming year. The dictionary defines resolve as: i) (verb) decide firmly on a course of action or firm determination or ii) (noun) find a solution to a problem or a contentious matter.

How do we personally, and as a nation, resolve to do better in 2024? One of my resolutions is to not buy any more books until I have read and reduced some of the towering, teetering *tsundoku*\* of books threatening to topple off the bedside table! (That resolve should last at least a week). There are more serious resolutions, of course, but perhaps too many and some too personal to mention here. But I would like to be kinder, especially with those folk whom I find difficult to like. Maya Angelou said, "People will forget what you said. They will forget what you did. But they will never forget how you made them feel."

First, though, we have the revels of New Year's Eve to survive. I am now beyond staying up after midnight and partying the

## 積ん読

*\*Tsundoku: a Japanese slang term for the acquiring of books with the intention of reading them one day soon but letting them pile up.*

night away. I am not totally sure I ever was up to it! In Scotland, however, our cousins celebrate Hogmanay with enthusiasm, a great deal of partying, Scottish dancing and bagpiping. The word used there for New Year celebrations, Hogmanay, possibly derives from the French word, “hoginane”, meaning “gala day” though its origins are not really known. It is recorded as being in use following the return of Mary Queen of Scots to Scotland in 1561. It has its roots in the Viking celebration of the Winter Solstice, as well as in Samhain, the Celtic pagan celebration of the end of the harvest season.

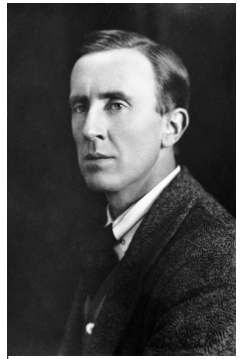
Oliver Cromwell’s parliament passed a law in 1640 which banned the celebrations of Christmas. As a consequence, in Scotland, the festivities were relocated to New Year, to Hogmanay. Now both are celebrated but Hogmanay remains the chief holiday. The Edinburgh Hogmanay Street Party is one of the biggest New Year’s Eve celebrations in the world.

Then there’s Scottish “first footing”. The first person over the doorstep after midnight on New Year’s Eve should be a tall, dark male. My uncle of Scottish name and descent, who was dark-haired, though admittedly not very tall, would leave the house at about 11.55 pm to knock and be re-admitted as the clocks struck midnight and the hooting of the ships on the Mersey began. He would be carrying a gift of a piece of coal, which he’d just taken from the coal bucket, symbolically to bring prosperity to the household. The eating and drinking, with the women wanting “a nice cup of tea”, would begin again. Oh, we knew how to have fun in those days!

In Revelation chapter 3 verse 2 we read, “Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die.” This is a message which the Church, and the nation, might reflect on and resolve to do better. We see wars and violence escalating in Ukraine and the Holy Land, as well as further afield, and the future feels as uncertain as it must have done in 1939. Now, while the rich and privileged hang up their posh frocks, reality kicks in for the rest of us. Two million UK citizens always hungry, increasing numbers of children living in abject poverty, food banks running out of supplies, domestic violence again on the rise. Issues, ruthlessly exposed by Covid, are ignored by most and still not even acknowledged by those in power. We see systematic racism, overcrowded and mould-ridden housing, where accommodation is available, under-



PHOTO BY LUCREZIA GARNIELLOS



investment in social care, a collapsing health service, the wanton destruction of our fragile eco-systems and our waterways polluted to the edge of death. We are still the sixth richest country in the world. We **must** resolve to challenge these injustices and do much better.

*All that is gold does not glitter,  
not all those who wander are lost;  
the old that is strong does not wither,  
deep roots are not reached by the frost.  
From the ashes a fire shall be woken,  
a light from the shadows shall spring;  
renewed shall be blade that was broken,  
the crownless again shall be king.*

These encouraging words are from the author of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. John Ronald Reuel Tolkien (photo top right) was born to English emigrés of German descent in Bloemfontein, South Africa, in 1892. However, he always considered himself English. Following the sudden death of his father when he was three, his mother brought him and his brother back to his grandparents' home to nearby Kings Heath. They later moved to Sarehole (Hall Green), which inspired some of the scenes in his books, as well as other parts of the Worcestershire countryside. Tolkien was educated at King Edward's School, Birmingham.

His mother became a Roman Catholic against the wishes of her Baptist family, who disowned her. Shortly before she died prematurely of diabetes in 1904, at the age of 34, she assigned the guardianship of her sons to Father Xavier Morgan, to be brought up as "good Catholics". The inspiration of Tolkien's Christian faith, inherited from his Baptist grandparents and Catholic mother and guardian, runs through his writings. So do hope and reassurance.

I close with a prayer, as we step into a new year with our hand in the hand of God. *"God of compassion, at Christmas you make us understand through the coming of Christ on earth, that you love the world and each one of us. We entrust to you all those who have no future, to whom hope is lacking. We ask you, as 2024 unfolds, reveal your presence to all those who are in the night and who wait to see your light."*

Handwritten text in a stylized, cursive script, possibly a form of shorthand or a specific dialect, arranged in two vertical columns.

# THE HUNGRY GARDENER

## Our Plan For Sowing & Growing



Claire is a keen kitchen gardener, ably assisted by her son Charles.

Hello, good morning, new year! It's the start of the growing year with all your plans, ideas of what you and your family will be eating this year.

I wonder what you learned from last year's harvests. It was a challenging year, wasn't it? It started quite well with a hot, dry June and then July was like a deep autumn when it rained heavily for a month and right through St Swithins day, not stopping fully until mid-August. Like two short summers. We did really well for harvests as, this year, I had planned crops for a wet or a dry summer with lots of peas, beans, courgettes, cucumbers, tromboncino, achocha, all loving the wet; and we were lucky that the outdoor tomatoes didn't succumb to blight until September. The apples didn't thrive, but we had another bumper crop of quinces and the medlars and rose hips did really well.

So I will try to repeat a similar wet-loving-dry-loving crop selection this year. Who knows what the season will throw our way?

We've replenished our flock of hens with two new pullets who should be giving us daily eggs as soon as the light levels improve, so I will be on the look out for spring veg that goes exceedingly well with eggs. I'm just pondering that idea the first thing that popped into my head was white or purple sprouting broccoli with yummy, runny yolk.

I wonder if you saved any seeds? The abundant seeds we saved this year were beans, peas, tomatoes, Babbington leek bulbils, achocha and luffa. If you are looking for inspiration, January is the perfect time to take your seed box around to a friend's house. Have a cuppa, a catch-up and a rummage



through each other's seed collections. You never know what you might find or what knowledge you may share from different growing experiences. Last year, I did this with a good friend who had lived in various places in Europe and the States. In the States, they experienced really cold winters and her seed box really was a treasure trove of hardy varieties. She had a tomato seed of which I had been trying to find an open-pollinated version for years (Roma). It grew really well for me last summer and now I have lots of my own seed. The Roma is the ideal tomato for sun dried tomatoes, which I love (or the UK version of dehydrated tomatoes which I dehydrate in our air fryer).

Here's my seed sowing plan. It changes slightly every year and then adapts, depending on what the weather sends our way. Often life gets busy and I get late with sowing or planting out, but at least this is my intention until my mum obligations, school and work get in the way!

**January** is the time to start chillis and aubergines (from mid-January). They need heat so I use a heated propagator; but you can use any

warmth you have available. Do you have an airing cupboard you could start them off in? Or a radiator? They will want as much light as you can give them so, if using an airing cupboard, just keep them in for initial germination and then give them loads of light. Got some mirrors you can use around the seedlings to maximise the low light levels in January?

In **February**, there's a catchup opportunity to re-sow chillis and aubergines. My first few attempts are often hit and miss as these don't germinate easily for me. From Valentine's Day you can start the tomatoes if you have a greenhouse (or wait until March if you don't). Start them off on a windowsill. Start peas and broad beans off.

**March** is a brilliant month for seed sowing. It's a second chance for any tomatoes that didn't make it. Look out for when the weeds are ramping up and everything is shooting out of the ground because this is the cue. The light levels are such that you can germinate pretty much anything if you can keep them at the ideal germination temperature, which is usually printed on the seed packet

and will be available online. I start sowing cooler crops this month in the greenhouse. For me, it's onions and early brassicas that need lots of time, like Brussels sprouts. In the allotment, I plant the salad potatoes.

**April** is the month for the Mediterranean veg: courgettes, cucumber, pumpkins and sweetcorn. If it's mild enough, you may be able to use an unheated greenhouse (I did last year) but keep an eye on your night-time temperatures. The safest way is to use indoor window sills. Mine are full to bursting by this point. Perhaps I grow too many things, but I wouldn't be happy without tons of seedlings. The cucurbits (courgettes, cucumber, pumpkins) are my favourite veg to grow because they start from a modest-sized seed and they grow to such large plants. Charles helps me sow these and really is an expert. In the garden, I start sowing the root vegetables directly into a raised bed every two weeks or so until about July. In the allotment, some of those early brassicas are getting big enough to plant out.

**May** is beans month. Charles is also a pro at sowing these. We sow French beans, runner beans, dwarf beans and chickpeas. I might give lima beans another try this year in the greenhouse. It is also a catchup month. If any of the courgettes or sweetcorn failed to germinate, there's still plenty of time. May is a good month to sow brassicas as, by now, they don't tend to bolt to seed.

**June** is a busy month, as we should have passed the last frost. I start with planting out the tomatoes as they are

a bit harder to the cool nights than the cucurbits, which I plant towards the end of the month. It is also a social month as we've always got too many seedlings for the room available in the beds. They have to find good homes so we are very sociable in between all the planting out. Lots of play dates in the garden and, if the weather is kind, barbecues. Some things we do are grilled courgettes, broad beans and my famous salad potatoes with mayo made with the hens' eggs. Things do get quite delicious in June.

**July-August** is when we get our winter veg seeds out. We like to do winter cabbages, winter radishes and mustards. Something I am trying this year is sowing some calabrese broccoli and growing in the greenhouse. I do this with Kai Lan, the Chinese broccoli which has such sweet tender stems and can over-winter if you protect it from the frosts. Over the last few years, I've grown a few mustards in the greenhouse, keeping one to grow really big for mustard seed and then it comes out when I plant the tomatoes. This winter I am trying to grow mustards outside as well to see where the mustards are happiest and whether they can cope when we get really hard frosts.

Well, that's the plan. We will see what this year brings and make the best of it in our cooking, eating and preserving. Who knows what seeds I will discover in seed swaps to adapt and weave into the plan? Whatever happens, we will make the best of it. Wishing all the best for your new growing season. We can't wait to get sowing!

# Bird Feeders

How they help small species fight infection

Every day, throughout the world, people put huge quantities of food out at feeding stations for birds and other wild animals. Although we know that connecting with nature benefits human health and wellbeing, scientists still know relatively little about the consequences of providing food for wildlife. My team's most recent research, however, has found that feeding garden birds in wintertime seems to make them more resilient to infection.

Winter can be tough for small birds. During cold winter nights, small birds reduce their body temperature by several degrees. While this would be lethal for a human, it saves lots of energy, helping birds to survive particularly cold nights. However, reducing body temperature is risky, and hypothermic birds are slow to



PHOTO BY LUCASZ RAWA

wake and respond to a predator.

A reliable food supply at bird feeders can help small birds avoid starvation and survive the harsh winter. Our previous research showed that birds with access to feeders do not need to reduce their night-time body temperature as much as birds that did not have access to feeders. The extra energy birds get from human-provided food means they don't have to



HANNAH WATSON IS A RESEARCHER IN EVOLUTIONARY ECOLOGY AT LUND UNIVERSITY IN SWEDEN



take the risk of becoming severely hypothermic.

Supplementary feeding is controversial since it can also negatively affect wildlife. Birds congregate at feeders, often in large numbers, coming into close contact with one another. Some studies suggest bird feeders have contributed to the spread of infectious diseases such as trichomonosis, which caused huge greenfinch mortalities in the UK in the mid-2000s.

Some people are also concerned that bird feeders may discourage birds from learning to forage for themselves. However, research suggests that supplementary food makes up only a small portion of birds' diets, and that birds do not become dependent on human-provided food.

We were curious about whether the frequent use of feeders could boost birds' immune systems, making them better equipped to fight an infection.

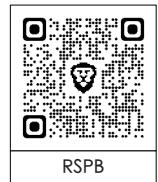
Vaccination readies our bodies to tackle a disease by delivering a small dose of a virus or bacterium. Similarly, regular exposure to low doses of pathogens at feeding stations, as a result of infected birds depositing pathogens on



to feeders, could better prepare birds to fight an infection.

So, we investigated whether supplementary feeding could make great tits more tolerant to an infection. In a forest in southern Sweden in October 2022, we set up bird feeders that were routinely visited by large numbers of great tits along with lower numbers of blue tits, chaffinches and crested tits. These bird feeders were refilled every few days to ensure a constant supply of peanuts and sunflower seeds throughout the winter.

In late winter, after birds had been visiting bird feeders for several months, we captured



great tits at sunset and gave them a "fake infection", injecting them with a small amount of material from the cell wall of a bacterium. This triggered the great tits' immune system to think it was being attacked by an invading pathogen, without introducing any of the harmful components of the bacterium. At the same time, we simulated infection in great tits from another part of the forest, where there had been no access to feeding stations during the winter.

One of the first responses of the body to fight off an infection is to raise body temperature and develop a fever. While the "infected" great tits slept, we measured their body temperature throughout the night. We compared the fever responses of great tits that had visited bird feeders throughout the winter with those of great tits that had not visited feeding stations.

We found the great tits that had been using feeders did not increase their body temperature as much as the great tits that didn't have access to feeding stations. Although fever is important in helping the body fight infection, raising the body's temperature requires a large investment of energy. Fever and associated inflammation also cause some damage to the body. The best immune

response is a careful balance of mounting defences strong enough to tackle the invading pathogen while minimising damage to the body.

So, the supplementary-fed birds seemed to adequately fight the "infection" without using up their precious winter energy supply.

While we found that the use of feeding stations made great tits more tolerant to an infection, this could also enable infected great tits to stay active, spreading infection between birds. On the other hand, the greater risk of disease transmission at feeders may be countered by the stronger immune systems these birds could develop due to better nutrition from the food provided by people in parks and gardens.

You can reduce the risk of disease by keeping feeding stations clean. Follow wildlife charities' guidelines on how to set up a feeding station and what food to put out ... and what food to avoid. Great tits are a common visitor to gardens in Europe, so there's a good chance a bird feeder could attract these colourful birds to your home.

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# Another Year Begins

January is such a funny month. Christmas has been and gone and chances are we are broke. The weather is miserable and all the focus seems to be on gyms, diets and holidays we can't afford. To make matters worse it is both Dry January and Veganuary, not really the best month for either of those to be held, although understandable, given the excesses of Christmas. It is no wonder that, in years past, our ancestors had more festivities planned to help relieve the gloom.



There are Twelfth Night parties with the traditional “galette des rois” sometimes known as King Cake or Twelfth Night cake (vegan recipes are available) with its hidden charm. Whoever finds the charm in their slice is king or queen for the night. To be honest, if there is cake, I'm in.

Then there is Wassail where neighbours shared a drink out of the wassail cup, a bowl full of warm spiced cider and roasted apples. After they had shared a drink, the bowl was taken to the orchard and a toast drunk to the trees then any leftovers were poured over the roots to ask for a good harvest. It was a noisy and somewhat riotous affair. If you



PAULINE IS THE  
LAY MINISTER AT  
ST NICOLAS'  
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wanted, you could have spiced apple juice instead of cider; then it fits in with dry January and Veganuary!

Perhaps, though, it is time for us to come up with some new January traditions. In the December magazine, Claire Lindow wrote about the Danish concept of “*hygge*” and had all sorts of tips for things to do. Curling up in a blanket with a good book, getting out the board games and the crochet hook.

But we could add in other things, such as planning the garden for the coming year, inviting friends over to play the board games, or hosting a coffee morning.

One of my chaplaincy colleagues shares with her congregation and friends in January each year the idea of star words. A star word is simply a star-shaped piece of paper with a word printed on it. Every person receives a random star word and is asked to reflect on that word for the coming year. People are invited to ponder what significance this word might have in their lives, and how God might be speaking to them through that simple message.

It links to the Wise Men who travelled great distances to offer their gifts to the new

born Christ child, responding to the gift first given to them. They received God’s gift, then offered their gifts to God. In January, as we commemorate the arrival of the Wise Men and remember their offerings, this simple piece of paper symbolises God’s generosity in our lives. It is a practice I have shared with colleagues here and would like to offer to you; so if you would like a star word this January, let me know.

Wishing you all a very happy 2024.

# Christmas Cruises

I will begin with the time I spent at sea on the Canberra and the dreaded Christmas Cruise which was a two-week trip from Southampton. Of course, the cruise was not dreaded by our passengers; but the crew members, especially the catering staff, wished they could be ashore to celebrate with their families and friends and we all felt rather gloomy. Nevertheless, we had to put on happy faces, and remind ourselves of the generous tips that would usually come our way at that time of year.

In the galley, the chefs would be tetchy and the F-word was more common than usual as the stewards in the restaurants collected the dishes from their passengers, who were pulling crackers and wearing paper hats.

I was a First Class Cabin Steward and was greeted on Christmas morning, while serving early-morning tea, by a couple in one of the more expensive cabins. They wished me a merry Christmas and then proceeded to order a three-course breakfast. I sighed inwardly. This meant that I had to go back down to the galley after preparing trays and crockery, to queue there and to listen to the moaning cooks shouting that nasty word. One just had to carry on and smile through gritted teeth!

In later years, when I was a Petty Officer Cook with the container fleet, the Christmas experience was more pleasant. I would plan well ahead with the catering office, perhaps even as early as when we were in Australian



**Eddie is all at sea at Christmas**

waters. An extensive Christmas was planned and, if possible, I would ask the ship's agent to get menus for a big Christmas dinner. I liked the challenge and would get my Second Cook & Baker involved in planning the menu. The result was that we looked very professional. I like to think that we made a five-star effort which, these days, would cost at least £60 per head anywhere.

One year, our ship was alongside in the port of Genoa in Italy for Christmas. On Christmas Eve, the local Mission to Seamen held a midnight service which, surprisingly, many of the crew attended. The building was very old and had a chapel with a beautiful painted ceiling. It was not a long service, but it was very moving, led by an elderly priest, and the atmosphere was lovely.

The next morning, I was up early to prepare the Christmas dinner for everybody and a cold buffet for later in the day. All went well: the catering crowd worked effectively together

and a happy Christmas spirit prevailed.

However, in the officers' dining room, all seemed rather quiet during the Christmas lunch, until, that is, Dan the steward, managed to break the ice. The Captain was sitting at his table with other senior officers, including the Chief Officer's wife, who was on board. All of a sudden, the calm was shattered by a loud burst of laughter. Dan, a man in his 50's, had been serving the Captain's vegetables, leaning forward over his shoulder with a spoon and fork and looking a little red-faced, since he had already consumed quite a lot of booze. When his trousers fell down around his ankles, revealing a pair of blue boxer shorts, everyone lost their composure, including those of us who had been watching from the galley! Dan's evident embarrassment made the incident even funnier and our Christmas even more memorable.

I hope my tale has made you smile and wish you all a very happy New Year.

## Jennifer Hughes Lic Ac, MBAcC

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10 DECEMBER 2023

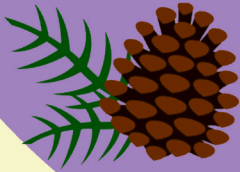
ST NICOLAS' PATRONAL FESTIVAL

WITH BAPTISMS

PHOTO BY DAVID ASH

AND TOY SERVICE





# WESTHILL HOUSE DAY NURSERY



Open 07.30 – 18.00  
Monday – Friday



All year round spaces available from birth to 5 years



Free funded places for 2, 3 and 4 year olds



Before and after school club



Holiday club for over 5s during school holidays



Fresh and healthy food cooked on site



Qualified, dedicated and experienced staff



Large garden and playground



0121 458 2308



[info@westhillhousedaynursery.co.uk](mailto:info@westhillhousedaynursery.co.uk)



[Westhillhousedaynursery.co.uk](http://Westhillhousedaynursery.co.uk)



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