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and ALL SAINTS, BLACKHAM



PARISH MAGAZINE



December 2025 – January 2026



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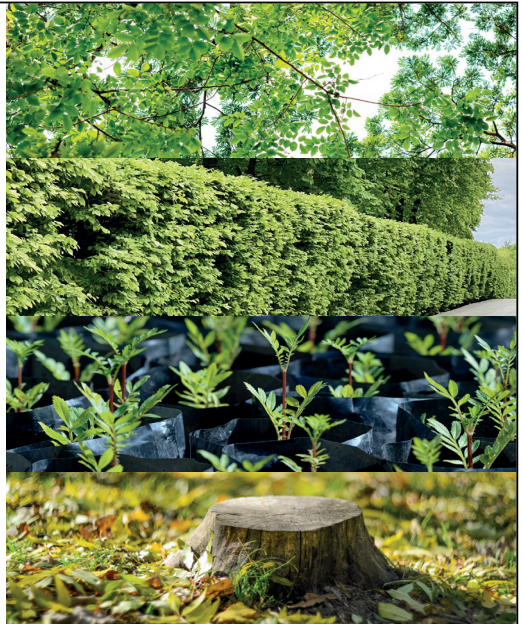
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The Parish of St Michael & All Angels, Withyham, with All Saints, Blackham

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Rector	The Rev. Canon James Campbell The Rectory, Withyham, TN7 4BA withyhamrector@gmail.com	01892 770069
Churchwarden	Mrs Jill Pardey	01892 661882
Churchwarden	Mrs Gilly Halcrow	01342 826183
Sexton & Verger	Mr John Collins	01892 662389
Licensed Reader	Mr Donald Yonge	07872 529740
Organist	Mrs Sue Stone, GRSM ARCM DipEd	01892 770978
Deputy Organist	Mr Peter Ellefsen, BSc CEng MIEE	01892 653965
Bell Tower Captain	Contact Mrs Gilly Halcrow	01342 826183
Hon. Treasurer	Mrs Anne Barker	
Hon. Secretary	Mrs Alison Hunnam	01892 770347
Parish Safeguarding Officer	Mr Donald Yonge safeguarding.withyhamchurch@gmail.com	07872 529740
Blackham Church	Mrs Sue Schooling	01892 740397
Withyham Flower Guild	Mrs Jill Pardey	01892 661882
Withyham Altar Linen	Mrs Diane Pedder	01892 770240
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From the Rectory

Dear Friends,

‘And is it true? And is it true, this most tremendous tale of all, Seen in a stained-glass window’s hue, a baby in an ox’s stall? The maker of the stars and sea, become a child on earth for me?’

The more mature readers may know that these lines come from John Betjeman’s poem ‘Christmas’. The one-time Poet Laureate, knighted in 1969, campaigner and TV personality died in 1984. He grew up attending church but lost his faith at boarding school and refused to be confirmed. He came back to faith whilst at university, drawn particularly to the Anglo-Catholic High Church end of the C of E.

Betjeman once said, *“The one fundamental thing is that Christ was God... Really I don’t think life would be worth living if it weren’t true.”* This emphasis on Jesus living as a man who came earth runs through all his religious poetry and appears at the climax of ‘Christmas’ which ends, *‘That God was man in Palestine and lives today in bread and wine.’*

John Betjeman believed that the presence of God could be revealed in the whole of life. He wrestled with the conflicts between his Christian beliefs and his doubts. He had a lifelong fear of death but used to sit with dying patients at St. Barts Hospital holding their hands. Those visits helped him come to terms issues in his own life and strengthened his belief that God can be experienced in the unlikely of places.

He once wrote to his friend, John Sparrow, *“My view of the world is that man is born to fulfil the purposes of his Creator, to stand in awe of him and to dread him.”* He added that in this way he differed from most poets of his generation who were agnostics and had the idea that humans are either *‘the centre of the Universe or a helpless bubble blown about by uncontrolled forces’*.

John Betjeman constantly celebrated God’s presence in the natural world, in ancient church buildings which he enjoyed visiting, and in the hearts and minds of believers and doubters everywhere. In his writing he profoundly influenced a generation in the way people looked at their surroundings, and by his sharing of his own beliefs hopes and fears, encouraging his readers to look afresh at their own attitudes and beliefs. He can still speak today to a younger generation who ask, *And is it true? And is it true, this most tremendous tale of all...*

Happy Christmas... when it comes.

James Campbell

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Churchwardens' Notes

by Jill Pardey & Gilly Halcrow

We experienced a busy November at St. Michael & All Angels, Withyham and All Saints, Blackham.

On 2nd November an All Souls Day Service was held at Withyham. This is a service held for family and friends who have sadly lost loved ones during the year and had their funeral services in the Parish. The service is not primarily for the current year but also to remember those lost from the past, and all were welcome. A list of those we wished to remember was read out and as in previous years, this was a healing and moving service.

Remembrance Sunday happened on 9th November with another moving service at Withyham. The names of those killed in WWI and WWII were read out by our Patron. After that a short service was held at the Lych Gate at Blackham, this time with James Castle lowering the flag at the appropriate time, in the middle of the road, stopping the traffic.

The Autumn Churchyard clear up took place on Saturday 22nd November, and mainly involved leaf sweeping in some very seasonal rain! The following day, Will Hazelwood, the Bishop of Lewes, was very warmly welcomed to Withyham and conducted the Holy Communion Service.

The Real Nativity

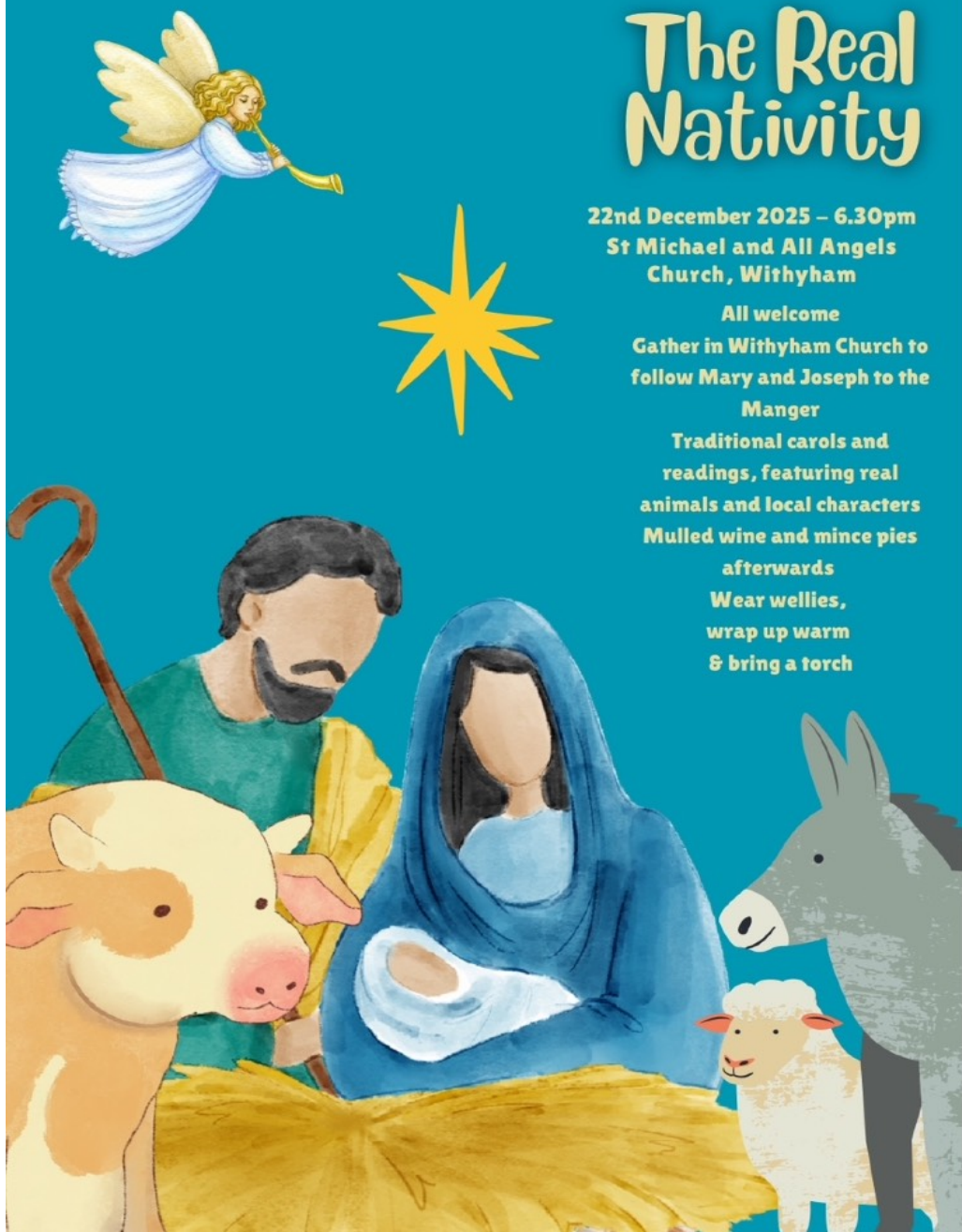
22nd December 2025 – 6.30pm
St Michael and All Angels
Church, Withyham

All welcome

Gather in Withyham Church to
follow Mary and Joseph to the
Manger

Traditional carols and
readings, featuring real
animals and local characters
Mulled wine and mince pies
afterwards

Wear wellies,
wrap up warm
& bring a torch



Church Calendar – December 2025

St. Michael and All Angels, Withyham, with All Saints, Blackham

All services at Withyham unless stated

Sunday 7th – 2nd in Advent	9.45 am 11.00 am 6.30 pm	Zoom Holy Communion Evensong
Sunday 14th – 3rd in Advent	6.30 pm	Carol Service, Withyham
Saturday 20th	6.00 pm	Carol Singing, Buckhurst Park
Sunday 21st – 4th in Advent	9.45 am 11.00 am 6.30 pm	Zoom Christingle Service Carol Service, Blackham
Monday 22nd	6.30 pm	The Real Nativity
Wednesday 24th – Christmas Eve	4.00 pm 11.00 pm	Crib Service Midnight Communion
Thursday 25th – Christmas Day	11.00 am	Christmas Day Service, followed by a short Communion
Sunday 28th – 1st after Christmas	11.00 am	Matins



This issue of the Parish Magazine is the last until February 2026, as it allows the editorial, finance and distribution team, all of whom are volunteers, a well earned break over the festive period.
We will be back and raring to go in the New Year.



Church Calendar – January 2026

St. Michael and All Angels, Withyham, with All Saints, Blackham

All services at Withyham unless stated

Sunday 4th – 2nd after Christmas

9.45 am	Zoom
11.00 am	Holy Communion
6.30 pm	Evensong

Sunday 11th – 1st after Epiphany 11.00 am Plough Sunday Service

Sunday 18th – 2nd after Epiphany

9.45 am	Zoom
11.00 am	Matins

Sunday 25th – 3rd after Epiphany 11.00 am Matins

Sunday 1st February – 4th after Epiphany

9.45 am	Zoom
11.00 am	Holy Communion
6.30 pm	CandlemasEvensong

The next service at Blackham will be on 29th March

Parish Registers – November 2025

Baptism

On 26th October the christening of Alfred Charles Willoughby Spencer LYTTON, son of Camilla and Christopher, took place at St. Michael and All Angels Church, Withyham.

Marriage

On 1st November the Service of Blessing following the marriage of Quinten and Sindy WARING took place at St. Michael and All Angels Church, Withyham.

Funeral

On 19th November the funeral of Derek William MUMFORD who died on 30th October aged 96 took place at St. Michael and All Angels Church, Withyham, followed by cremation at the Kent & Sussex Crematorium, Tunbridge Wells.

Blackham Village Hall Christmas Market



Saturday 6th December
10am – 12.15pm

*Lots of lovely produce for sale: homemade pasties,
* cakes, scones, chutneys, jams, free range eggs, bread,
bird food, honey, handmade craft items perfect for
Christmas gifts, raffle and lots more Christmas
treats.*

*Enjoy a glass of mulled wine & a mince pie
or a
cup of delicious coffee/tea and homemade cakes*

We look forward to seeing you!!

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CELEBRATING CHRISTMAS 2025

WITHYHAM & BLACKHAM CHURCHES

Sunday 14th Dec. 6.30pm: Carol Service, Withyham

Saturday 20th Dec. 6.00pm: Carol Singing, Buckhurst Park

Sunday 21st Dec. 11.00am: Christingle Nativity Service, Withyham
6.30pm: Carol Service, Blackham

Monday 22nd Dec. 6.30pm: The Real Nativity, Withyham

Wednesday 24th Dec. 4.00pm: Crib Service, Withyham

11.00pm: 'Midnight' Communion, Withyham

Thursday 25th Dec. 11.00am: Christmas Day Service, Withyham
followed by short Communion



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Family Support Work November 2025 update

by Hannah Rothwell,
FSW Digital Fundraising &
Communications Executive

Dear Friends,

In November, things really began to ramp up as we prepare for Christmas in the Food Bank. The seasons shift quickly from harvest food to turkeys, gift deliveries and festive planning. Soon we will be snowed under with generous donations from our supporters. If you would like to help, please check our website or social media for the items we currently need.

We are keen to share some highlights from our work with families in October, which was an encouraging month for Family Support Work. Our main family event took place at Berwick Church during half term, and despite the rain, it was wonderfully well attended. Families enjoyed a thoughtful blend of outdoor walks and creative indoor activities, including stained-glass card making, decorated candles, Christmas crackers, clay modelling and decoupage. A warm lunch of cottage pie, and delicious cakes provided by the church made the day feel especially welcoming. Many families expressed heartfelt thanks for the event and shared how much it meant to them.

Alongside this, our practitioners continued their vital one-to-one support with families. Richard, our practitioner in Uckfield and Rotherfield, reported working with primary school children, many living with Autism, ADHD, anxiety or low self-esteem. With village schools often short on funding, FSW remains essential in bridging this gap, offering tailored emotional and practical support where statutory waiting lists are long.



October's work in numbers

- 230 visits to families
- 677 phone calls or remote support to 275 adults and 189 children
- 63 supported meetings with other agencies
- 54 group sessions held supporting 598 adults and 415 children
- 72 food deliveries made

Prayer points

- Please pray for families facing long delays on what can feel like endless waiting lists for support for their children
- As winter arrives, please pray for provision and practical help for families experiencing financial difficulties
- For our staff; for good health, strength and energy throughout the winter months, so they can continue supporting families well

Contact me at hannah@familysupportwork.org.uk or on 01273 832963





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Notes From Withyham Parish Council

Withyham Parish Council serves residents of Blackham, New Groombridge (the East Sussex side of the River Grom), Marden's Hill (St John's, Crowborough) and Withyham.

Full action from this meeting is available at www.withyhamparishcouncil.org.uk and www.facebook.com/WithyhamParishCouncil

Minutes can also be obtained from the Clerk via the Parish Office on 01892 864557 or clerk@withyhamparishcouncil.org.uk

Join Our Friendly Speed Watch Team – Withyham Parish Council supports Speed Watch, a friendly community project helping to keep our roads safe. Small teams of local volunteers use radar speed guns at police approved sites to remind drivers to slow down. No fines are issued but letters are sent to raise awareness and encourage safer driving. Volunteering is sociable, rewarding, and a great way to help your community. If you are Interested, get in touch to find out more.

Thermal Imaging Camera Loan Scheme – Residents are invited to borrow the camera to identify areas of heat loss in their homes, helping to make properties warmer and more energy efficient. The scheme is free to use, and the camera can be borrowed for a short period. If you'd like to book a slot or find out more, please contact the Parish Office.

Join Our Amblers Team – Do you enjoy connecting with the outdoors? Are you friendly, reliable, and a good leader? You could join our Amblers Team, helping to lead local walks and encourage others to enjoy our beautiful countryside. It's a great way to meet people and stay active! Get in touch to find out more.

JOIN US!

We have a vacancy for a Parish Councillor to be filled by co-option.

Parish Councillors:

- Help shape local services and projects
- Represent residents' views
- Work to improve our parish for everyone

You don't need any special qualifications, just an interest in your community and a willingness to get involved. Training is provided.

For eligibility criteria and to find out more contact the Parish Clerk Kelly Gaynor at clerk@withyhamparishcouncil.org.uk or call us on 01892 864557



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 Do you have a few hours to spare a month to become part of our walking team?







**YOU could be part of our
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More Info: ☎ 01892 864 557 ✉ stephanie@withyhamparishcouncil.gov.uk
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£15 - John Ankersmit

£10 - Ralph Millington

December 2025 are:

£20 - Richard Standring

£15 - Lyn Tier

£10 - Yvonne Gregory

Christmas Bonus

£60 to Sue Stone

The Kings' Hall Withyham

We are very grateful for everyone's support but are happy to encourage more local people to become members and help our fundraising for further maintenance and improvements to our hall. Our numbers have risen back to 100 so a big THANK YOU to our new and continuing subscribers!!

Each number costs £12 per year, if you would like to join, please contact Rick Hunnam 07851 638634 or email chair@withyhamvillagehall.co.uk.

What's on?

Forthcoming Events in the Withyham Village

THE SOUP GROUP: THURSDAY 4TH, 11TH AND 18TH DECEMBER 11:00 - 14:00

FRIDAY CAFÉ: FRIDAY 12TH DECEMBER 10:30 - 12:00

THE SOUP GROUP: THURSDAY 8TH, 15TH, 22ND AND 29TH JANUARY 11:00 - 14:00

FRIDAY CAFÉ: FRIDAY 9TH JANUARY 10:30 - 12:00

QUIZ: SATURDAY 7TH FEBRUARY 19:30 FOR 20:00

Withyham Parish Council's



Community Cafe



with



Groombridge Pre-School

Everyone Welcome!



Saturday 6th December

10am -12pm Groombridge Village Hall



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The Soup Group

Thursdays in the Kings' Hall, Withyham
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We offer hot drinks all day, with a choice
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with a roll, tray bakes and fruit

Come and meet and chat and/or
use the Wi-fi so the hall is your workspace

Welcome to all ages
Cost £2 per person

If you would like to help make soup, a traybake or serve drinks,
please contact Meg Stafford 07972 161243
or megstafford@me.com

Dates: 4th, 11th & 18th December, 8th, 15th, 22nd & 29th January 5th, 12th, 19th
& 26th February and 5th & 12th March

Let's
Chat

Let's eat
CAKE!

FRIDAY CAFE

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WHAT TIME?

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2026 Dates

9th January
13th February
13th March
10th April
8th May
12th June
10th July
14th August
11th September
9th October
13th November
11th December

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Withyham Parish Council's



Community Cafe



with



Groombridge WI

Everyone Welcome!



Saturday 17th January

10am -12pm Groombridge Village Hall

Withyham Parish Amblers

Saturday 17th January




Meeting at: Hartfield Weekend Car Park - TN7 4AA

9am Meet to walk at 9.15am

Approx. 1hr 20. Suitable footwear recommended. Well behaved dogs welcome.



WWW.WITHYHAMPARISHCOUNCIL.ORG.UK

for more information:  01892 864 557





The Learning Curve

by Lisa Fitzsimons



A Governor's Perspective: This column offers a glimpse into everyday life at Withyham St Michael's Primary School and this month we want to highlight an important part of the school that works quietly behind the scenes: the governing board. As a governor, I feel privileged to witness the energy and enthusiasm that fill the school throughout the year, and I wanted to share what makes it such a special place for children and the wider community.

The governing board plays a vital role in supporting the school's vision, helping it thrive, and ensuring every child gets the best possible start. It's a responsibility that has brought me great personal fulfilment. We work closely with the headteacher and leadership team to support initiatives, maintain high standards, manage resources effectively, and promote the wellbeing of pupils and their families. In doing so, we help shape the school's future while ensuring it remains welcoming to all.

We are especially proud of how new pupils are supported at every stage, quickly becoming part of our caring school family, a true reflection of the school's inclusive ethos and the dedication of its staff.

Being part of the board is deeply rewarding. It provides a window into the many responsibilities involved in running a school today, from balancing budgets and resources to supporting staff and pupils, while offering the chance to use your skills for good and make a real difference in local children's lives. You don't need to be an education expert, just someone who cares about helping young people thrive and values the unique role a school plays in a small village community like Withyham.

We currently have vacancies for both parent and co-opted members and would love to welcome new people to our friendly team. To find out more, please contact the school office at **office@st-michaels.e-sussex.sch.uk**





Withyham
st Michael's Primary



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Blackham Village Bon Natale Christmas Masquerade Party

This year... celebrating Christmas in Italian style!

Saturday 20th December at 7pm

The BETSI Christmas Party at the Village Hall welcomes Blackham villagers, along with their friends and families starting Christmas 2025 as a community.

Tickets are £12 and include a two-course hot Italian meal and other tasty Italian treats, raffle ticket, mask, entertainment, quiz, and the usual festive fun.

There will be an affordable cash bar, Secret Santa, and all proceeds go to the Blackham Community Fund, which this year enabled us to support the installation of a second defibrillator in the village, safety signs, children's Easter Egg Hunt, and make our events such as Firework Night and the Summer Party on the Green affordable and inclusive for everyone.

This is a 'ticket only' party. Email: betsi@a264.co.uk



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Groombridge Film Society
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BRIDGET JONES

Mad about The Boy

125min

Cert 15

Renee Zellweger - Hugh Grant - Chiwetel Ejiofor - Leo Woodall

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Groombridge Film Society
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 Sunday January 11th
 Groombridge Village Hall
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PG 13 100min

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Groombridge Horticultural Society

by Sue Obbard



What a wonderful year it has been for us gardeners. This December we are having a rest from organising events, ready to hit the ground running in 2026. Our AGM is taking place on 15th January, at 7.15pm in the clubroom, where we will be available to start collecting your £5 annual membership fee. It promises to be an exciting year because we have two new prospective volunteers for the committee, really good speakers lined up, plus outings, and our own new merchandise. At 8pm the AGM will be followed by a talk from Hamish Brett (head gardener at Scotney Castle) about the castle and it's garden. On 19th February, Fiona Parrott (senior gardener at Sheffield Park) will be our speaker, and on 12th March it will be Steve Edney (co-owner of the No Name Nursery). In the meantime, Happy Christmas everyone.

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Having written the **View From The Boundary** column since October 2024, it's author, Suzanne Whiston, has now stood down from the role. We thank her for her efforts over this period and wish her well for the future. If you wish to make a booking at the Blackham sports field or pavilion for your event, please visit www.ashurstvillage.org.uk

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Christmas Tree Recycling by Richard Moxham

We offer an eco-friendly way to dispose of your Christmas tree, collecting it from your home for recycling, courtesy of Hospice in the Weald. This popular service is offered to residents covering twenty postcodes in West Kent and East Sussex. In fact, anyone living in any of the postcodes TN1 - TN20 can take advantage of this service, so pass the message on to friends in the area.

It could save time while raising funds to provide free care for those facing terminal illness and their loved ones. In exchange for your donation, the Hospice elves will collect and recycle your 'finished with' Christmas tree. No hassle, no waste, and no needles in your car.

The team of amazing volunteers will be collecting trees from 10-12th January.

Please register via the Hospice's website hospiceintheweald.org.uk



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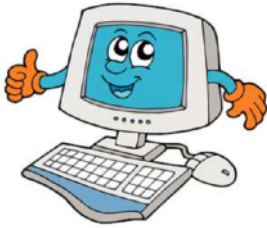
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Computer Corner

Privacy in the Age of the Pocket Computer by Roger Lyon



Our phones know a surprising amount about us – where we go, who we call, and what we browse. They are marvels of modern life, yet behind their convenience runs a quiet stream of data flowing outwards, often without our notice.

Every smartphone collects information to make things easier: location for maps, Bluetooth for earphones, Wi-Fi for quick connections, permissions so apps can use the camera or contacts. Each request feels harmless, but together they build a detailed picture of our habits. Some data helps improve services; some simply feeds advertising engines. Either way, it's easy to forget how much our pocket computers are talking behind our backs.

The good news is that protecting your privacy doesn't require technical skill – just a little attention. In your phone's *Settings* → *Privacy and Security*, review *Location Services* and decide which apps truly need them. The weather app might, the shopping app probably doesn't. Where possible, choose 'While Using the App' rather than 'Always' so tracking stops when you close it.

Next, check *Bluetooth and Wi-Fi scanning*. Phones can keep searching for networks even when those switches look 'off' – disable this in advanced settings. Look through *App Permissions* and remove access to the camera, microphone, or contacts for anything unnecessary. Ten quiet minutes doing this is the digital equivalent of locking the garden gate.

Modern phones also include *privacy dashboards* that show how often each app uses sensitive data. Seeing this at a glance can be enlightening – and a reminder to tidy up permissions now and then. Over the last years privacy has become less about secrecy and more about housekeeping: small, regular actions that keep our digital life in order. Your phone is more of an assistant than a mirror. It reflects your habits, but you decide what it should show.



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The Final Word... on Christmas ads by Robert Veitch

It seems this Christmas, the festive TV advert that's capturing the nation's zeitgeist hails from Waitrose. You know the one, a mini rom-com featuring Keira Knightly and Joe Wilkinson, who bond over Sussex Charmer cheese.

I can't say I've bumped into either of them in my local Waitrose, although Joe Wilkinson and I share the same school, though different vintages. In our local Waitrose you won't even see local acting royalty in the form of Cate Blanchett, because she's definitely a Tesco girl. The highest rated celebrity supermarket encounter I've managed was Kerry Katona in Morrisons, in her pyjamas, more than once. But she was always very friendly – albeit Dairy Lea cheese triangles over Sussex Charmer.

At the Boots tills at Gatwick Airport, I did once turn to look at the lady next to me, also purchasing miniature toiletries, and it was the lovely Anthea Turner (remember her?). We had 'a swooning moment' but it was brief, and she couldn't pay fast enough. We 'shared' the same flight to Edinburgh, but at different ends of the aircraft.

If any reader manages 'a moment' bonding with Santa over some Gruyère or Roquefort during December, be sure to let us know and we'll sign you up for the Lapland 2026 campaign!

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Local Information

Kings' Hall, Withyham	chair@withyhamvillagehall.co.uk bookings@withyhamvillagehall.co.uk	
Chairman:	Rick Hunnam	01892 770347
Lettings:	Mrs Meg Stafford	07972 161243
Blackham Village Hall	venues4hire.org/venue/details4815	
Bookings:	Mrs Ruth Gubbins blackhamvillagehall@gmail.com	07890 303791
Groombridge & Hartfield Medical Practice	Withyham Road, Groombridge, TN3 9QP Old Crown Farm, High Street, Hartfield, TN7 4AD	01892 863326
Beacon Surgery , Beacon Road, Crowborough, TN6 1AH		01892 652233
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Citizens Advice	Crowborough	08082 787811
Withyham Parish Charity	<i>Trust providing financial help for those in need</i> Applications should be made to Gilly Halcrow	01342 826183
Withyham Parish Council (WPC)	The Old Station, Groombridge, TN3 9RD www.withyhamparishcouncil.org.uk clerk@withyhamparishcouncil.org.uk WPC Office hours: Monday 12:00 - 17:00 Tuesday - Friday* 09:30 - 12:00 *closed on Wednesdays during school holidays.	01892 864557
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