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and ALL SAINTS, BLACKHAM



PARISH MAGAZINE



February 2026



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

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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	
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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
Withyham Church Cleaning Rota	Mrs Anne Radford	01892 770021
Family Support Work	Mrs Miriam Boobier	01892 662780
Church Administrator	Mrs Bridget Clayton withyhamchurch@gmail.com	07775 864310

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From the Rectory

Dear Friends,

In his 1965 hit album *September of my Year*, Frank Sinatra sang: *'It was very good year' speaking of 'When I was 17... 21... 35.'* In the final verse, he sings, *'But now the days are short, I'm in the autumn of the year. Now I think of my life as vintage wine, from fine old kegs, from the brim to the dregs. It poured sweet and clear; it is a very good year.'*

There was a man named Denis Waitley, a motivational speaker, who was trying to catch an internal flight in the USA for a speaking commitment. He was late and was running through the airport terminal. He reached the gate just as the official closed the door. Denis explained his dilemma, but the official refused to reopen the door. Denis' annoyance turned to anger. He stomped out of the boarding area and returned to the ticket counter to lodge a complaint and reschedule his flight. His anger increased as he waited for over 20 minutes in a line that hardly moved. Just before his turn at the ticket counter, an announcement over the loudspeaker changed his life forever.

Denis Waitley realised that by missing that flight, his life had been saved. Flight 191 from Chicago to Los Angeles on 15th May 1979 had crashed on take-off killing all the 271 passengers and crew on board. Denis never lodged his complaint, but he did keep his unused ticket for Flight 191.

When he got home, Denis pinned the ticket to a notice board in his office. In the aftermath of that experience, whenever he felt irritated or upset, he just looked at the ticket from Flight 191. It was an unforgettable reminder that life is a precious gift that should not be undervalued.

In verses 10 and 12, the author of Psalm 90 in the Old Testament wrote, *'the days of our lives are seventy years; or if by reason of strength they are eighty years... it is soon cut off and we flee away... So, teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.'*

Personally, I'm happy to go along with the prevailing '70 is the new 60'. However, I'm even more encouraged by the continuing resilience and determination of a generation now well into the tenth decade who I meet regularly and who remain active and engaged in life.

James Campbell

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Ages 1 to 4



JUST DANCE

Churchwardens' Notes

by Jill Pardey & Gilly Halcrow

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

Withyham Church looked splendid with two Christmas trees donated by the Gibson family. The Church flower ladies had also done a magnificent job with their decorations, which lasted until after the New Year.

The Carol Service held a fortnight before Christmas got people into the festive spirit, and Blackham enjoyed its carols the Sunday before Christmas. The weather was kind for the Outdoor Nativity, which was well attended.

The Carols at Buckhurst followed and attendees well looked after by Lord and Lady De La Warr. The Christingle Service included a procession of children and adults around the Church, with lighted candles, culminating in a tableau of the Christmas story. On Christmas Day the Church was so full that people had to sit in the belfry, and the congregation enjoyed singing familiar carols.

By Plough Sunday on 11th January the new year snow and freezing cold had gone and the Church had returned to normal.

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Church Calendar – February 2026

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

All services at Withyham unless stated

Sunday 1st – 4 th after Epiphany	9.45 am	Zoom
	11.00 am	Holy Communion
	6.30 pm	Candlemas Evensong
Sunday 8th – 2 nd before Lent	11.00 am	Matins
	4.00 pm	Service of Wholeness and Healing
Sunday 15th – next before Lent	9.45 am	Zoom
	11.00 am	Matins
Wed 18th – Ash Wednesday	12.00 pm	Holy Communion (BCP)
Sunday 22nd – 1 st after Lent	11.00 am	Matins
Sunday 1st March – 2 nd after Lent	9.45 am	Zoom
	11.00 am	Holy Communion
	6.30 pm	Evensong

The next service at Blackham will be on Sunday 29th March

Parish Registers – December 2025 and January 2026

Baptisms

On 20th December the christening of Sylvie Kay PECK, daughter of Lucy (MURRAY WILLIS) and James, took place at St. Michael and All Angels Church, Withyham.

On 3rd January the christening of Otto Andrew Eric OWTRAM, son of Alice (nee CAMPBELL) and Simon, took place at St. Michael and All Angels Church, Withyham.

On 11th January the christening of Annabelle Lacy Stephanie HYAMS, daughter of Cassie and Sam, took place at St. Michael and All Angels Church, Withyham.

Funerals

On 1st December the funeral of Alan Alfred COWING who died on 25th October aged 83 2025 took place at St. Michael and All Angels Church, Withyham, followed by an unattended cremation at the Kent & Sussex Crematorium, Tunbridge Wells.

On 10th December the burial of Lenorah ('Lorna') MERCER who died on 6th November 2025 aged 93 took place at St. Michael and All Angels Church, Withyham.



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10.00AM - 12.15PM

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Groombridge Film Society



Sunday February 15th
Groombridge Village Hall



THE ROSES

Ivy (Olivia Colman) and Theo (Benedict Cumberbatch) are the perfect couple – but when their marriage turns sour nothing can save it from total destruction.

Doors open - 18.30 Box Office closes - 19.10 Film Starts - 19.15

Membership £20 pp - Members £3 - non-members £7.50

Cash and Cards accepted

Come early to socialise and to enjoy our **licensed bar**



THE SUSSEX CHARITY FOR CHILDREN
SINCE 1890

Family Support Work January 2026 update

by Hannah Rothwell,
FSW Digital Fundraising &
Communications Executive

Dear Friends,

The start of the New Year brings a natural sense of renewal. Our practitioners begin re-engaging with families, reconnecting with schools and other professionals, and putting new plans in place to support families and help them find fresh ways to address the challenges they face.

Each year we are very grateful for the many children's books donated before Christmas. We hold on to most of these donations until February, when we start preparing for **World Book Day** in early March. Our practitioners are invited into the office to choose books for the children they support, ensuring each child receives a book that feels personal, whether it's by a favourite author or on a topic they love. We also include a colouring book as an extra treat. If you would like to donate a new children's book for this event, we would be very grateful. We are very keen to receive books suitable for older children and teenagers.

We will soon begin planning for **Mothering Sunday** on 15th March. Each mum we support will receive a small gift, often made up of toiletries donated at Christmas. Extra gifts, including chocolates, would be very warmly welcomed.

On another note, our **Share the Warmth This Winter Appeal** has raised over £25,000 and counting! Thank you so much to everyone who has donated. The challenges faced by the families we support are often heightened during the winter months, placing additional strain on finances and health. This year, an estimated 65,300 households across Sussex are living in fuel poverty. We will continue to raise funds through this campaign until the end of March.

For those who receive a **Winter Fuel Payment** and are able to do so, please consider sharing part or all of your payment with our families by donating to FSW. Please donate here: www.justgiving.com/campaign/share-the-warmth-25

December's work in numbers

- 272 visits to families
- 516 phone calls or remote support to 285 adults and 224 children
- 38 supported meetings with other agencies
- 58 group sessions held supporting 452 adults and 302 children
- 162 food deliveries made, including Christmas Hampers!

Prayer points

- For breakthrough in the challenges that Sussex families face
- Praise God for all he has planned in 2026 for FSW, and for us to partner in His plans

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

Withyham Parish Council Budget 2026-2027 – Withyham Parish Council is pleased to confirm that, for 2026-2027, the amount a Band D household will pay for the Parish Council portion of Council Tax will be £171.75, representing a 0.9% decrease compared to last year. This reduction comes despite a slight 0.1% increase in the overall Council budget, due to an increase in the number of Band D properties within the parish.

In December 2025, following recommendations from the Finance Committee, the Council approved a total budget of £270,451 for the year. After allowing for expected income of £34,720, the Precept – the amount requested from Council Tax – will be £235,731.

This budget will support ongoing community projects, maintenance of local amenities, and essential services across the parish. Withyham Parish Council remains committed to providing high-quality, effective services that deliver value for money for residents.



By carefully managing public funds and planning for the year ahead, the Council ensures that residents continue to benefit from well-maintained facilities, community initiatives, and essential services, while keeping the financial impact on households as low as possible.

Frozen Road: Spot It, Report It – The icy weather during January has left potholes, cracks, and slippery paths across the parish. Help keep everyone safe by reporting any issues you see – every report counts. Quick reporting helps problems get logged, prioritised, and fixed faster. Report issues to East Sussex Highways at www.eastsussexhighways.com or call 0345 60 80 193.

Withyham Parish Council Grants – Local groups are invited to apply for Withyham Parish Council’s 2026-27 grants to support activities that benefit our parish. Applications should show how your project aligns with the Parish Plan 2024-28 priorities. The Council considers grants at quarterly finance meetings until the budget of £10,000 is allocated. The first meeting for 2026-27 funding is on Monday 23rd March 2026, and applications must be submitted by noon the previous Monday. Projects must take place between 1st April 2026 and 31st March 2027; retrospective funding cannot be provided. Please contact the Parish Office for an application pack.



Groups can also raise funds by hosting a Saturday morning Community Café at Groombridge Village Hall, keeping all the profits after costs. Hosting a café has been so popular all the 2026 slots are full, but you can join the 2027 waiting list by emailing Stephanie at stephanie@withyhamparishcouncil.org.uk

Don’t miss the chance to secure support and make a difference in our community.

Make a Difference, Become a Parish Councillor – Withyham Parish Council is looking for a new Parish Councillor to help shape local services, projects, and initiatives. This is your chance to represent residents, influence decisions, and work with a friendly, motivated team to improve our community.

No experience is needed just enthusiasm, commitment, and a passion for your community.



Withyham Parish Amblers

Saturday 21st February



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.GOV.UK

for more information: 01892 864 557



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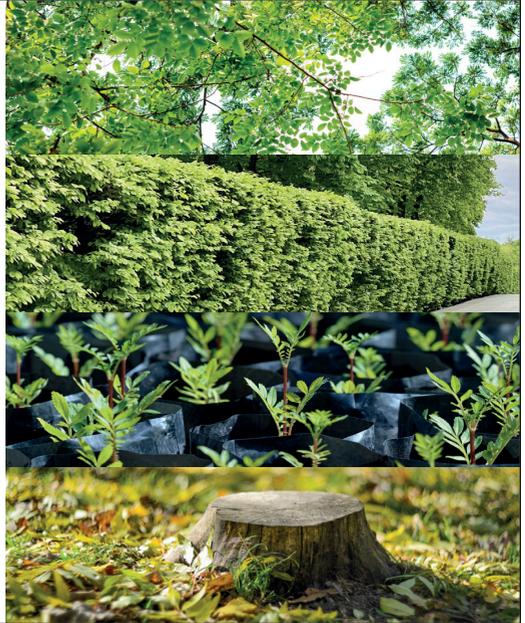
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100 CLUB AND THE WINNERS For

January 2026 are:

£20 - Fenella Murray-Willis

£15 - Ann Yang

£10 - Linda Charlton

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

QUIZ: DELAYED UNTIL 21ST MARCH 19:30 FOR 20:00

THE SOUP GROUP: THURSDAY 5TH, 12TH, 19TH AND 26TH FEBRUARY 11:00 - 14:00

FRIDAY CAFÉ: FRIDAY 13TH FEBRUARY 10:30 - 12:00

NEXT HALL LUNCH: THURSDAY 19TH MARCH 12:15 FOR 12:30

Meet The Menders at Forest Row Repair Café

by Fleur Britten

Regulars of Forest Row Repair Café will know that if you've been directed to the bike room for a repair, you'll often hear the laughter first. It's where volunteers Renny Leach, Jeremy Paine, John Hayes and Nick Fenner power through not just bike fixes, but also blade-sharpening, and repairs of small furniture items, garden tools, sewing machines, wetsuits, inflatables – anything that can be resurrected with the right glue, nails, patches, or, simply, repair smarts.

Between them, they have a vast bank of knowledge. Renny from Forest Row, a “nearly” retired biotech director, is driven by his scientific interest “to explore how things work and how they can be repaired”, (he's also rebuilt, plumbed and rewired three houses). Jeremy, a retired police officer from Scaynes Hill, is also self-taught, with a talent for garden tools, thanks to the needs of his landscape gardener son-in-law. John, a gardener from Sheffield Park and self-taught “tinkerer”, is motivated by a dislike of “throwing stuff away.” And Nick, who grew up watching his father construct a glasshouse nursery business largely out of war surplus materials, seems “to have inherited his liking of making and fixing things”, and even as a boy, Nick was undertaking complex car repairs.

The room buzzes with camaraderie. “We ask each other's opinion if something's tricky, and often collaborate to make repairs quicker,” says Jeremy. Naturally, the good cheer extends to customers. “It's rewarding to see people leave with a smile, especially if I've been able to teach something useful,” says Renny. “We have lots of fun,” Jeremy adds, “and always ask the clients about themselves.” Indeed, when chatting to one lady, Jeremy recounts, “she disclosed that she was on her own and this made things difficult. She asked if we also ran a dating service.” Well, the Repair Café is a great place to meet like-minded people.



The next Repair Café is on Saturday 21st February at Forest Row Community Centre.

KINGS' HALL WITHYHAM



SATURDAY 21ST MARCH

7.30 for 8pm start

**£12 per person (includes two
course meal)**

Raffle and Bar (cash/card)

To book a table:

call Rick on 07851 638634



The Soup Group

Thursdays in the Kings' Hall, Withyham
between 11 am & 2pm (see dates below)

We offer hot drinks all day, with a choice
of two soups (served at 12:30)
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: February 5, 12, 19 and 26, plus March 5 and 12

Let's
Chat

Let's eat
CAKE!

FRIDAY CAFÉ

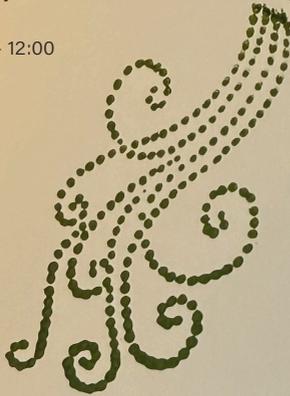
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WHAT TIME?

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



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The National Year of Reading

by Kate Phipps



St Michael's is Going All In: We are just two months into 2026, and two months into the *National Year of Reading*, a UK-wide campaign aimed at inspiring more people to make reading a regular part of their lives. From the buzz of excitement around new stories to the quiet magic of children lost in books, this year is all about celebrating reading in every form and encouraging a lifelong love of it.

At primary level, reading is absolutely vital. It forms the foundation for all learning, helping children develop language, confidence, and understanding across every subject. Strong reading skills open doors and minds, not just in school, but in life as well.

At our school, reading is woven into every part of the day. We are incredibly fortunate to have our PTA-funded Treehouse Library, a special space that captures the joy of books. Opened by the much-loved author and illustrator Chris Riddell, it offers a rich and inclusive range of reading material. From beautifully illustrated picture books and large floor books perfect for sharing, to chapter books, non-fiction, and dyslexia-friendly texts, there is something for every age, interest, and reading ability.

The library is one of those spaces that makes you want to stop, curl up, and read for a while yourself, and the children feel the same. They read everywhere; on beanbags, in quiet corners, outside when the weather allows, and even on the stairs. One pupil is often so engrossed in her book that she reads on her way to break and regularly needs a gentle reminder to watch where she is going!

Watching a child disappear into a story is a little reminder of the wonder reading brings. When children choose to read and become completely absorbed in a story, they are building imagination, empathy, and confidence without even realising it. As Roald Dahl so beautifully wrote in *Matilda*: “The books transported her into new worlds and introduced her to amazing people who lived exciting lives. She travelled all over the world while sitting in her little room in an English village.”

We warmly invite the local community to come and read with our children. You might be surprised at the fulfilment a simple half hour can bring to your life, and the gift it gives a child.

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Crowborough Choral Society CIO is Registered Charity No. 11161460
Image - Keith Henshaw via ChorGps 2026

A FSW Thank You by Miriam Boobier

Thank you so much for all your support for Family Support Work (FSW) during the past year. The generosity in the run up to Christmas, as always, was amazing, with so many gifts and donations given to help families celebrate the festive season. With best wishes to you all for 2026.



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Groombridge Horticultural Society by Sue Obbard



Another year rolls around and here's hoping we get perfect weather for gardening with just the right amount of sunshine and rain. We had our AGM in January and are pleased to welcome two new committee members; Mark Gyngell and Hannah Mashford.

We hope existing members have rejoined and received the list of exciting events we have planned for 2026. If you haven't had a chance so far and would like to join, or re-join, we're now in the 21st century and accept BACS payments. Members get 10% discount at Royal Mires, Babylon and Coolings garden centres, and 15% off plants at Double Diamond.

Groombridge Horticultural Society (business account)

Sort Code 09-01-55 A/C 86878602

Ref: your name and SUBS

Our next meeting is on Thursday February 19th at 8pm in the main hall. Fiona Parrott (senior gardener at Sheffield Park) will give a talk entitled *Spring Splendour* about designing with bulbs in pots and borders. Lastly, thanks to Richard Gray – our website has been revamped... please do take a look.

groombridgehorticulturalsociety@gmail.com

www.groombridgehorticulturalsociety.co.uk



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 www.underwoodsman.co.uk

Forest Row Repair Café

**Saturday 21st February
 from 10am – 1pm**

Forest Row Community Centre,
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 Last orders at 12:30pm

**Show some love for your broken
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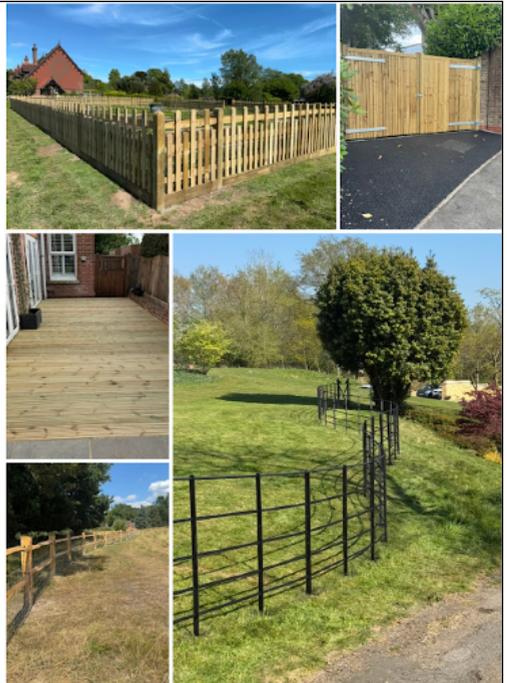
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Computer Corner

Zen and the Art of Computing by Roger Lyon



Computers and phones are everywhere. It is so easy to get sucked into them, losing awareness of time and self in endless clicks and scrolls. How could the principles of Zen enhance our relationship with these wondrous monsters?

Zen begins with mindfulness – being fully present in what one is doing. When you use a computer, begin by noticing your posture and breath. This is not mysterious, simply to bring the body and the mind into the same place. Before touching the keyboard, take a breath. This small pause reduces the reflex to act unconsciously and sets the tone for deliberate engagement. Each time you switch tasks, repeat the pause. Over time, this cultivates steadiness, preventing the restless endless jumping that fragments attention and creates digital exhaustion.

A second Zen principle is simplicity. Keep your digital environment clean: delete redundant icons, close tabs that are not essential, and finish one operation before beginning another. The practice of efficiency is doing what must be done with minimal distraction, whether sending of an email or buying the shopping.

Zen values ritual and boundaries. In the digital sphere, these help to conserve your attention and energy. Fixed times for checking messages, clear endings to the workday, and intentional transitions away from screens help to reduce the classic digital-junkie need to do ‘just one more thing’. Use a physical action – closing the laptop lid, turning off the monitor – as a symbolic gesture of release.

Meditating for five minutes before you start work steadies the attention; five minutes afterward helps dissolve the residue of mental noise. Choose something simple such as a spoon, plate or pencil – an everyday item – and calmly select thoughts about it for five minutes. Small deliberately chosen actions repeated regularly can have a remarkable effect.

Finally, enjoy some gratitude for your device. When used with awareness, it becomes an instrument of expression rather than escape. The Zen practitioner bows to their cushion before sitting; likewise, you may like to mentally acknowledge your device before setting off to work. In an age seemingly characterised by struggles on every side, our freedom arises not from domination but from respect.

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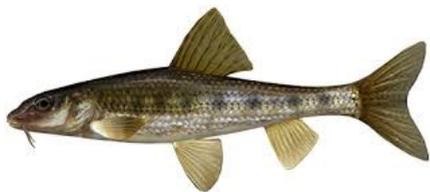
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The Final Word... Greenland by Robert Veitch

I can imagine the user of this keyboard is not the only one who believes everything emanating from the mouth of Donald J Trump is the truth, whole truth, and nothing but the truth. But looking at just a few of his recent claims from the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland;

- The United States “gave Greenland back to Denmark” after World War Two – it was never a US territory.
- Regarding NATO, “the US was paying for virtually 100%” – in 2025 it was 62%, and during the highest year it was 70%.
- Trump has not “been able to find any wind farms in China” – the Chinese are the largest global generator of wind power.
- The UK takes “92% of the revenues” from North Sea Oil – actually it’s 78% of profits.

There are times when one might be forgiven for thinking that a Bond-era Daniel Craig is about to turn up, and stand face to face with Trump as the President reveals his dastardly plan for global utopia during a Mexican stand-off. And yes a Mexican stand-off is still possible because *fact check* the wall ain't built and Mexico hasn't paid for the 438 miles of wall along the 1,954 mile border that was built during Donald J's first term. His social media platform of choice... Truth Social 😂

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