

BLUNSDON

VILLAGE MAGAZINE

December 2024

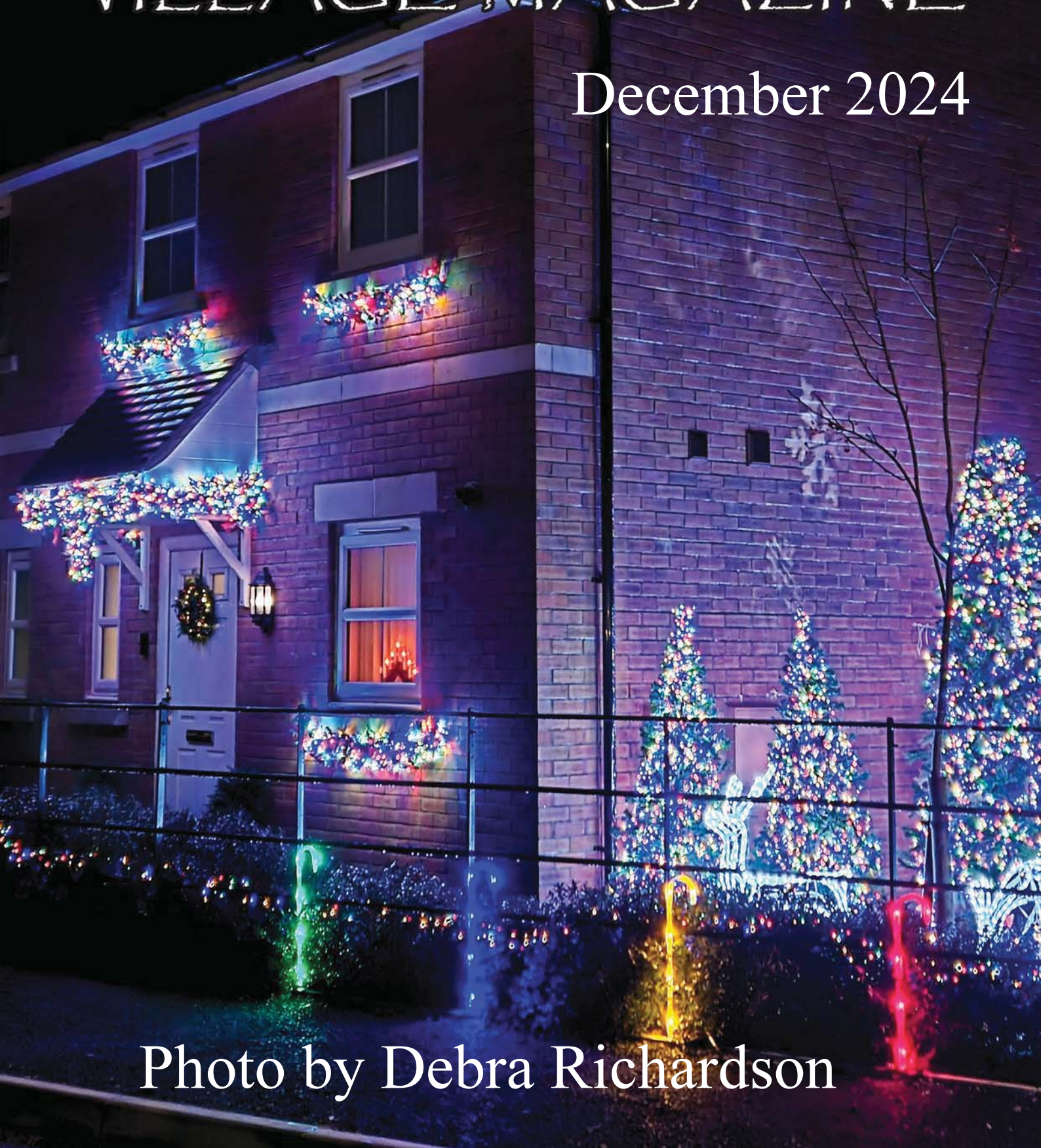


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1st Blunsdon Scout Group – Scouts' Christmas Post



- Scout Christmas stamps for sale in the village shop now – only 35p each CASH ONLY
- Special green post box in the village shop
- Last time for posting 4pm Tuesday 10th December.

Swindon Scouts can deliver your Christmas cards in Swindon and surrounding villages for just 35p each. Scout Christmas stamps are now for sale in the village shop – cash only please. Cards must be posted in the special green Scout Post Boxes and ours will be in the village shop from now until 4pm Tuesday 10th December.

This is one of our major fundraising events and one that all our members, from little Beavers to big Explorer Scouts, can get involved with so thank you for your support. <https://swindonscouts.org.uk/post/>

Our Group has had a busy few months with our Explorer Scouts hiking in the Brecon Beacons, Scouts and Cubs camping at Youldbury near Oxford and the Beavers helping to clear leaves from around the Church.

We have nearly 90 children in our Group and if you would like your son or daughter to join, please get in touch.

- Beavers 6-8 – Alison Iles, Beaver Scout Leader 1stBlunsdonBeaverScouts@gmail.com
- Cubs 8-10½ – Nik Phillips, Cub Scout Leader planecrazy5@hotmail.com@gmail.com
- Scouts 10½-14 – Mark Tredgett, Scout Leader markanthonytredgett@gmail.com
- Explorers 14-18 – Tom Dent, Explorer Scout Leader ESUAthena@gmail.com

Steve Iles, Group Scout Leader, 1st Blunsdon, 07885 188079,
iles.swindon@gmail.com

We prepare young people with skills for life



It's the most wonderful time of the year... December already! We've got some exciting updates for you all.

Easyfundraising Thank you for supporting us so we can serve you. In November we received £127.80 from our amazing customers who've signed up to Easyfundraising, which has gone towards repairing our large freezer which cost us £180 + VAT. This simple service helps us raise money for the shop and café while you're shopping online, at no extra cost to you. If you haven't signed up yet, please consider doing so by scanning the QR code instore, or visiting the link we've posted on our social media.

Unity in the community We're proudly supporting many events happening across Blunsdon this Christmas:

- **Shop and café late night opening** - Thursdays and Fridays until 7pm
- **St Leonard's Church Christingle Service** - Sunday 1st December at 4pm
- **Advent Window display** - Thursday 5th December at 5pm (maps on sale now for £2 in the shop)
- **Blunsdon Preschool Christmas Carols** - Wednesday 18th December at 1:30pm
- **Swindon Scouts Christmas Card Delivery Service** - stamps on sale now until Tuesday 10th December (cash only)
- **Blunsdon Preschool Christmas Carols** - Wednesday 18th December at 1:30pm

Festive treats, plus much more! Step into Christmas with our new festive menu, from a traditional mince pie slice to our decadent candy cane luxury hot chocolate, we have a sumptuous treat to tickle every taste bud! We've also got a gorgeous selection of gifts in the shop, including our new range of wines – keep an eye on our social media for more details. We'll also share our Christmas and New Year opening times there too.

New Year, new ventures... coming in January 2025 We'll be introducing the **Blunsdon Community Shop Monthly Draw**. Purchase a £2 ticket in the shop and choose your lucky number between 1 and 300 (increase your chances of winning by purchasing more than one ticket). A winner will be selected on the 1st of every month using a random number generator. Half the money raised from the ticket sales will be the prize pot, the other half will support ongoing improvements in the shop and café.

As a special thank you to our shareholders, we'll be trialling a new **Shareholder Loyalty Scheme**. Each time you spend over £10 in the shop (only) you'll receive a stamp. Once you have a full card of 10 stamps, you'll receive £5 off your next shop transaction. If you're not a shareholder yet, just ask a member of staff next time you're in the shop about joining!

Thank you for all your support this year both in the shop and café, and at events. Sending Seasons Greetings to all of you, from all of us.

Opening Hours Mon, Tues, Weds, Sat: 8am – 5pm Thurs -Frid: 8am -7pm
Sunday: 8am – 4pm Café shuts at 4pm Mon - Sat, 3pm on Sundays



Blunsdon Village Garden Club

There will not be a club meeting in December because a Christmas lunch for members will take its place.

We have a varied programme of talks and activities throughout the year. If you are interested in finding out more about us, why not come along and join us at our next meeting at 7.30pm on Thursday 9th January 2025 in the small Village Hall.

Our speaker will be Margie Hoffnung who is a Conservation Officer and will be giving us a talk on

the Threats to Historic Landscapes. She has a horticulture degree and has worked at Westonbirt Arboretum and Highgrove. She completed an MSc in the conservation of Historic Gardens and Cultural Landscapes at Bath.

A copy of our programme for 2025 can be found below.

Visitors are very welcome and for a small cost of £3 there will be an interesting sociable evening with refreshments and an optional raffle.

Season's Greetings to you all.

Jenny 07949087317

Blunsdon Village Garden Club Programme 2025

Date	Speakers	Subject
9 th January	Margie Hoffnung	Threats to Historic Landscapes
13 th February	Rebecca Brain	Myth Magic and Medicine in the Garden
13 th March	Nicola Hope	Organic Gardening, happy plants, happy minds
10 th April	Dr Francis Burroughes	The Victorian Head Gardener
8 th May	Vanessa Berridge	Kiftsgate Court Gardens Three generations of women gardeners
17 th May	ANNUAL CLUB PLANT SALE	
12 th June	Paul Green	Plants for all seasons (Demos)
10 th July	Club Outing	
	No Meeting in August	
11 th September	Nathalie Mignotte	TBC
9 th October	AGM Followed by Bill King	The Poppy – Symbol of Remembrance
13 th November	Lynda Warren	Sugar and Spice
11 th December	****CHRISTMAS****	

Book sale at St Leonard's

As I write this text we are preparing for our annual craft and book sale event.

Our previous books and bygone sale / exhibition was (in my opinion) a grand success. We are always willing to try something new, therefore if you have any thoughts on something different/ new / quirky - we'd love to hear from you.

Along with prolonging the life of your favourite novel we are passionate about getting everyone to read - children and adults alike!

Books can be ideal presents and fun. Use your imagination and immerse yourself in a short story, whodunnit, murder mystery (not that immersive !!) or recipe ideas, gardening tips, along with a variety of children's literature. I'm currently reading a series of DI Banks books, thanks to the person who donated them. You may have watched it on TV but the actual detail can be lost. That's what reading an actual book does, you find the detail, the emotion, the terrain, the weather, the absolute ambiance of the place. It's almost like being on holiday! Give a book a go.

Quick update on our craft event - we raised just over £250, the charity we have chosen this year is the Swindon Women's Refuge. This will help with the good work etc that they provide.

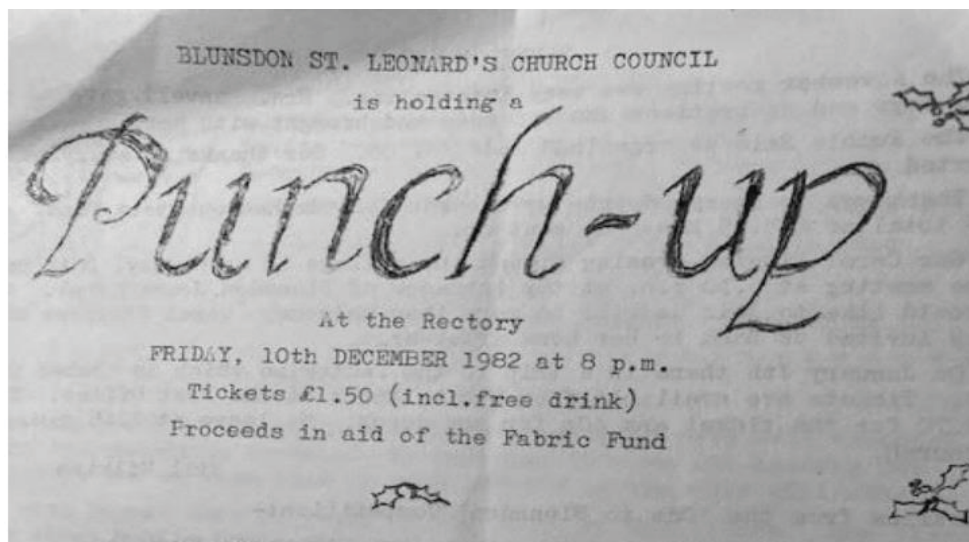
Of course our thanks go to all that have helped and encouraged us over the past year, and especially to you the generous public that come along month after month.

Sadly we have decided to cancel our December sale due to its close proximity to Christmas. We look forward to seeing you in 2025 after a well earned rest over the festive season. Wishing you all a happy and peaceful Christmas

Barbara and Jane and Josie

Down Memory Lane

This month here's something festive from the 1982 Magazine, let's hope a good time was had by all and this reminisce brings back happy memories for those of you who may have attended the event.



BLUNSDON WI - November

This month's speaker was Alan Holland from Twigs - Therapeutic Work in Gardens which is based in Cheney Manor. He brought the gardens to life through a slideshow showing

what a valuable service they provide in restoring their users well being.

Our other activities included an early Christmas shopping trip to the Lakeland shop in Cirencester where we were treated to a private shopping experience with nibbles to taste. We bought them out of delicious chocolate brandy beans though not to sure if any these boxes will last as long as Christmas.

There was a trip to the Wyvern to Gareth Malone's singalong giving us a chance to sing his life story - some of our group with better voices than others.

Our next film club will be seasonal and discussing 'Its a Wonderful Life' - several members have never watched it yet.

Whilst book club is discussing the less seasonal 'The Sunrise' by Victoria Hislop

Our Annual Christmas Dinner will be at the Heart in Hand on 10th December.

Our first meeting of 2025 will be on Tues Jan 21st with a talk entitled Wing Walkers.

If you fancy joining our friendly group, please don't hesitate to give Anna a call to find out more 01793 706392

Wishing you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year from Blunsdon WI



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Parish Council News –December 2024 and January 2025

Now is the time of year when I would like to wish all of the Parish Residents a Happy and Peaceful Christmas and a Good New Year.

Especially, I would like to thank all the Parish Councillors who give their time freely and with goodwill, and to our Clerical and caretaking and cleaning Staff who work hard for the Parish and keep us in order.

We would also like to say a special thank you to **Paul Schofield** our Groundsman who has recently decided to leave us. He has looked after the Churchyard and Cemetery and other areas across the Parish and has done a sterling job for us over the years. We wish him well for the future.

Parish Christmas Tree

As with every year there will be a Christmas Tree at the Village Hall, I hope Santa will come on Christmas Eve to leave some presents, which we can redistribute to those in the Parish who are unable to enjoy Christmas for some reason. If you know of someone in that category, please let me know and maybe I will get Santa to visit their chimney...

Enforcing the Reparation of the Poor Planting around Hayfield Wood

Many of the significant trees around the development are dead and need replacing and much of the planned planting has not come to fruition. I met with a representative of Hayfield and a SBC Planner to agree a remedy. Hayfield agreed that there was a deficit and are working towards a solution to the problem.

Blunsdon Multi Use Games Area – Linley Road.



We are excited to say that work will shortly begin on the redevelopment of the old tennis courts. There will be some disruption and inconvenience to some of you and we apologise but the end result will be so much better for the school and users of the facility.

Ermin Street Project

The work to resolve this stalled project is slowly being resolved and I hope to have better news in the next Magazine.

Blunsdon Recreation Ground Pavilion The deep clean went well in the Pavillion and we have plans to install better extraction and ventilation to help with condensation. We are also looking to extend the 'patio' area to the front, rear and side and install some better matting

to help protect the Club Room floor. We're also looking at increasing the storage area for users and upgrading the kitchen area.

As part of the re-modelling plan for the Pavilion we applied for a grant to install an Air Source Heat Pump and Solar Panels and disappointingly this application was rejected. The process of trying to raise funds to complete the overall works is slow I'm afraid.

Community Allotment – I am pleased to say that Blunsdon Preschool are using the allotment, and we have now installed two benches, remembering two of our residents.

Planning Applications

S/24/1256 | Demolition of garage, erection of 1 no. dwelling (Class C3) and associated works. | Land Adjacent To 16 Turnpike Road Blunsdon. **The PC supported this application.**

S/AMEND/24/1339 Non Material Amendment from previous application (S/23/0883) relating to LEAP play equipment and layout changes, and extension of the road to the front of plot 74. Land At Hill Cottage Blunsdon Hill Blunsdon. **The PC are not required to comment**

S/HOU/24/1293 Erection of a two storey side extension. 29 Ceres Road. **The PC decided to object to this application for several reasons.**

Planning Decisions

S/EIA/24/1113 Request for Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Screening Opinion for a proposed solar farm. Land East Of Little Rose Lane Little Rose Lane Blunsdon Swindon. **The Parish Council are unable to comment upon this application – however we have requested that the decision not to provide an opinion is reviewed.**

S/TWC/24/0969 Works to Tree Within Conservation Area. Holly Cottage 48 High Street Blunsdon **Application Granted**

S/23/0920 Erection of 4 no. dwellings. Land Adjacent To Eden Field Kingsdown Lane Blunsdon Swindon. Status: **Application Granted after Appeal was granted by the Planning Appeals Inspector.**

S/22/0457 Erection of 5no. self-build dwellings (use class C3) and associated works. Longfield Kingsdown Lane Blunsdon Status: **Application Granted,**

Speedwatch Our hardy volunteers are out regularly helping with road safety in the Parish.

This has led to many prosecutions by local Police for those abusing the law. They always need volunteers and provide training. Please contact me if you are interested in helping and I will arrange for someone to contact you.

Date	Location	Vehicles	Speeding	%	Maximum	Speed Limit	Start	Finish	Location
24/10/2024	Sams Lane	46	13	28%	33	20	08:00	09:00	High St junction
21/10/2024	High St.	145	19	13%	30	20	16:00	17:00	Heart in Hand
14/11/2024	Ermin St	116	13	11%	44	30	10:30	11:30	Minerva Heights
31/10/2024	High St.	163	12	7%	28	20	15:45	16:20	Heart in Hand
26/10/2024	Tadpole Lane	192	4	2%	41	30	10:00	11:00	Telephone Box
25/10/2024	Lady Lne	362	7	2%	43	30	16:00	17:00	Cycle Track
01/11/2024	Lady Lne	333	6	2%	42	30	15:25	16:25	Cycle Track
15/11/2024	Broadbush	247	4	2%	37	30	08:35	11:35	The Shrubby
16/11/2024	Tadpole Lane	249	3	1%	37	30	09:00	10:00	Telephone Box
08/11/2024	Broadbush	319	1	0%	37	30	15:00	16:00	The Shrubby

Parish Council Meetings –

The next two months' Parish Council meetings will be on **Monday 2nd** and **Monday 16th December 2024 and Monday 6th and Monday 20th January 2025**, at 19:30 in the Village Hall. If you want to come along, please let us know, details are on the Parish Council, notice boards, Website in the Blog section and on our Facebook page.

Ian Jankinson – ianjankinson@blunsdonparishcouncil.co.uk – 07702 684281

*****BIN COLLECTION DAY is changing*****

From Christmas Day (25 Dec), all households will see their collection days move by two working days, due to a change in the way Swindon Borough Council operates its services. As a result of the change, the Council will be able to avoid a 40,000 backlog of collections accruing from households whose current collection day falls on either Christmas Day or Boxing Day. By moving collection days permanently, council crews will not have to catch up on accrued collections caused by the Christmas bank holidays at any point in 2025.

It will also help crews focus on the huge task of collecting the larger volumes of waste and recycling generated over the Christmas period.

This means that from Weds 25 Dec 2024, all households will need to put out their waste and recycling out for collection two working days further on from the day they currently do.

For residents whose waste and recycling collections currently take place on different days, these will both move by two working days. Importantly, this is a permanent change to collection days that will remain in place throughout the whole of 2025. Details of the changes are set out below:

Expected collection date:	Revised collection date:	New collection day:
Wednesday, 25 December	Friday, 27 December	Two days later - Friday
Thursday, 26 December	Monday, 30 December	Two days later – Monday
Friday, 27 December	Tuesday, 31 December	Two days later - Tuesday
Monday, 30 December	Wednesday, 1 January	Two days later - Wednesday
Tuesday, 31 December	Thursday, 2 January	Two days later - Thursday
Wednesday, 1 January	Friday, 3 January	Two days later - Friday



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From the Rector's pen

Doesn't a year pass quickly. Advent, Christmas, New year seem to appear more swiftly each passing season. This is a time of year that I have mixed feelings. It is a season of great joy to many, as some await the coming of St. Nicholas in all his Coco Cola decked finery. Others celebrate the first and second coming of their saviour. God made man and the culmination of the Father's long awaited plan for his creation. Both are important to me. For eight years I was privileged to serve as Papa Noel, in a special school, visiting hundreds of children and bringing smiles and hope to those who see the world differently. Although I struggle as many do with the commercialism of Christmas, the opportunity to serve those whom we are told by Christ to become like, and bring them joy was wonderful. Both Christmas and New Year are also a place to reflect on new life, beginning again, a new start. Whether you are a Christian or not, take this opportunity, to decide this coming year, to commit to bringing joy to those around you. Maybe look for one act of kindness a day, a smile to a stranger, greet someone on the bus, offer to mow a lawn or make way for someone in a queue. The gift of kindness is not limited to Christmas. God bless you and a joyful Christmas to one and all.

Rev Phil Goodey Tel 07841 106717

Email: rector@stmichaelshighworth.com

St Leonard's Christmas services

- Sunday 1st Dec: No 10am Communion Service. Christingle Service 4pm.
- Sunday 8th December: Morning Worship 10am.
- Sunday 15th December: Family Communion 10am.
- Sunday 22nd December: No 9am Breakfast Church. Carol Service 6pm.
- Christmas Eve Tues 24th Dec: Crib Service 3pm. Holy Communion 11.15pm.
- Christmas Day Wednesday 25th Dec: Christmas Holy Communion 10am.
- Sunday 29th December: Morning Prayer Reflective Service 10am.

Blunsdon Baby and Toddler Group

We meet every Wednesday morning in St Leonards church from 10 to 11.30am, term time and holidays.

The group includes foster carers, parents and grandparents, so a good mixture and plenty of experience if you wish to pick people's brains!

We ask £1 per session to cover costs; this includes hot drinks and biscuits. There might be singing and craft sessions as well so come along and see who we are.

St Leonard's Church, Blunsdon, Reordering Project

After a very long time data gathering, consulting and report writing, we have some important information about the refurbishment and re-layout of our 13th century Parish Church and some good news. This project establishes the facilities to not only support a growing congregation but also the local community. It includes, underfloor heating, insulation, kitchen, toilets, storage, meeting areas with an open and flexible layout.

An overwhelming questionnaire result: As you may know, during the summer we gathered over 100 questionnaires asking local residents their view of our plans. We received overwhelming support for all elements, with positive support of between 80% and 90% for all the questions. The points of concern we discussed and then revised our plan accordingly, deciding to keep the choir stalls and retain the chancel as a quiet area.

In other consultations, we held an open afternoon at the church, had visits from Historic England and the Church Buildings Council, as well as members of the diocesan advisory committee. We also met with local clubs and societies, who let us have many letters of support. They showed interest in using the facilities in the future.

Our next step: These updated plans have been now passed onto the next stage towards full authorisation. You will see over the next month or so a public notice outside the church outlining the changes. Inside the Church, the updated plans will be on display for any final comment. The church is open Tuesdays and Thursdays , 9am to 3pm.

Thanks need to go to Mike Gibbin (project leader), Jeremy Chadburn (architect) and Derek Webb (engineer) who have worked tirelessly to bring this about. The process has been very challenging and has required tenacity and patience.

We will now be seeking sources of funding, so if you have any ideas for fundraising please do get in touch. Similarly, if you would like to be involved in any way, please contact one of the churchwardens, Helen at griff9999@btinternet.com or Paul at paulwmorris777@gmail.com If anyone has any questions or concerns, they can raise them with the churchwardens or directly with Bristol Diocese. Details will be on the public notice.

Helen Griffiths



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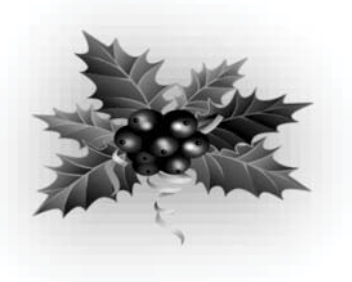
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Notes from the Editor

The Magazine Committee wish all our readers a happy Christmas and healthy New Year.

A big thank you to our advertisers and others who have funded the printing and delivery costs of the Magazine. Thank you to our printers, ESP Colour Ltd for their hard efforts to keep things affordable. Thank you to our contributors who provide the content month on month and to our delivery boys and girls who ensure the Magazine lands on your doorstep. It's a real community effort, thank you.

The magazine is run by volunteers from the village. All your ideas, comments and contributions will always be welcome.

Blunsdon Village Magazine is available to read online at Blunsdon Parish Council website: blunsdonparishcouncil.co.uk

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Front Cover: Festive home and garden off Broadbush

Your February Magazine will be delivered from: 31st Jan 2025

Magazine issue	Deadline for items for inclusion
Dec/Jan	22nd Jan 2025

TWO BIG “THANK YOUS” FROM ST LEONARD’S CHURCH

Thank you firstly to Ann and Trevor and family for a very successful quiz evening. It was a very enjoyable evening and the church appreciates all the hard work that went into this fund raising event.

Secondly thank you to the Beavers, Cubs, Scouts, Explorers, leaders and parents who helped clear the churchyard of leaves on Saturday 9th, prior to our Remembrance Service.

??????? Village Quiz

Congratulations go to The Colonel and Amber's Team who won the Village Quiz which was held in the Village Hall on Friday 8th November.

We would also like to thank everyone who provided raffle prizes, with special thanks to the Village Community Shop, Blunsdon House Hotel, Ogbourne Golf Club and Earthline.

The event raised £716.00 for St.Leonards Church.

Thank you all for your support.

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Thurs	8.30am - 10.40am	8.45am - 12.15pm
Frid	8.30am - 10.40am	8.45am - 12.15pm

Blunsdon Social Walking Group 2024 Alex Kasperczak & Jim Morris

At the beginning of 2024 we started a Social Walking Group here in Blunsdon. The main reasons were to get a chance to meet new people, get some gentle exercise and learn a little about the beautiful countryside around our village. And if the Community Shop gained a little more sales, that would be an additional benefit.

On the 2nd and 4th Thursday of every month we do a circular walk, starting and ending at Blunsdon Community Shop. Walks are between 3 - 5 miles, and the routes are tailored depending on the time of year and the weather.

So far, we've done 21 walks. 44 different people have joined us, and if you'd attended all 21 walks (no-one has!) you'd have covered a distance of 80 miles! We've walked a total of 875 miles, more than Lands End to John o'Groats. The average number of walkers is 11, but it's ranged from 6 to 19.

We asked what some of our walkers think about it, and this is what they said...

Social walking is a walk for exercise, a chat with different people, a chance to discover the Blunsdon area and a cuppa in our Community Cafe. Such a healthy and uplifting way to spend a couple of hours.

Although I was nervous to join a new group I'm so glad I did! Not only was I made welcome, I have met some lovely people and enjoy lots of chats along the way. The walks are enlightening about the village and a lovely way to enjoy exercise.

I really enjoy these 60-90 minute circular walks around the village. Jim makes a real effort to add a poetic comment on the views or a bit of local history, find some mud or a herd of deer. I find it much easier to relax and chat when engaged in a joint activity and it's a great way to make friends and find out more about where we live.

But there's no need to take their word for it! We'll be restarting in January 2025 so please join us! We'll be walking back from John o'Groats to Lands End!



A Recipe from CookFoodFan

Ready for Christmas!

After featuring Yorkshire Parkin as my recipe in the November magazine, I was pleased to watch the technical challenge on the Great British Bake Off on 29th October. The bakers had to make Parkin, described as a Bonfire night classic, glad I'm not the only one who thinks this.

And now we are moving towards Christmas, so I thought I would share some easy recipes, homemade but using shop bought ingredients. Starting with mincemeat, a quintessential Christmas ingredient which I love. I usually make about 11 dozen mince pies, a lot for family members! These are Mincemeat Pinwheels. Alternatively some savoury options, different ingredients but using the same method.

Mincemeat Pinwheels

375g Puff Pastry (shop bought sheet ready rolled)
400g mincemeat
1x clementine, zest only (or zest of ½ orange)
1 egg, beaten

Pinch of salt
40g dried cranberries
100g brown sugar
1 tbsp icing sugar

1. Line 2x baking sheets with greaseproof paper.
2. Unroll the puff pastry sheet, spread the mincemeat over the pastry leaving a small gap on the long edges.
3. Scatter over the dried cranberries and grate the clementine zest all over.
4. Roll the pastry up from the long edge (use the paper that comes under the pastry to make a tight roll).
5. Pop on a baking sheet and into the fridge for 15mins.
6. Put the oven on to 200°C (gas mark 6).
7. Using a sharp knife cut slices about 2/3cms thick and place them on lined baking sheets. Brush with beaten egg.
8. Bake in the oven for 15-17 mins, until golden.
9. Leave to cool for 10 mins on the trays, then dust with icing sugar and enjoy.

TIP: you can freeze them after cutting into slices and cook from frozen as required, cooking for about 20mins.

Making pinwheels with alternative fillings are just as easy. Perhaps savoury ones as an appetiser, to go with drinks or as part of a buffet table. Use the same method as above.

* 2 tbsp pesto, 2 tbsp chopped sundried tomatoes, 100g chopped jarred roasted red peppers and 50g grated parmesan+ more for garnish.

* 200g Spinach cooked, dried and chopped, 100g crumbled feta, 2 x finely sliced spring onions, 50g grated parmesan and seasoning

* Ham slices, grated cheddar cheese, oregano, chilli flakes and seasoning.

OR invent your own filling. Perhaps get the children to come up with a pizza filling.

Happy Christmas

The Chatterbox Thankful for Another Year on the Clock

I swear that the length of time that passes between putting the Christmas tree and decorations back in the attic to getting them down again ready for another festive season gets shorter with each passing year. For a child, Christmas takes forever and a day to come around – as does a birthday – but when adulthood comes along, I find I’m still picking up glitter from last year when another ton of it appears.

And, so, here we are as 2024 reaches a conclusion and a bright, shiny new year is in our sights. I’m not really one for new year’s resolutions; I think there are already so many pressures in this modern world that adding to them is counter-productive. If we do start something new, then that’s great, and hopefully it’ll be the start of something fulfilling and wonderful but, equally, if we don’t, it’s not the end of the world, it’s just the end of the year.

What I think is much more important than striving for sometimes impossible goals which could bring a sense of failure and disappointment if we don’t succeed, is being thankful for the things we HAVE achieved and the positive experiences we’ve had throughout the year. Your first thought may be that it’s been a really lousy year, difficult in almost every respect when, perhaps, you’ve been troubled by poor health, endured family squabbles and the car cost a fortune in repair when it failed its MOT. Yes, we can all find reason to complain but how about some of the good things that have happened?

I’m sure there must have been something that’s worth feeling thankful for, as well. They don’t have to be massive events like inheriting a fortune from an uncle you never knew you had or finding a Faberge Egg in a car boot sale. We choose what effect events have on us and sometimes it’s the smallest things that can mean the most when we look back at what’s happened through the year. A coffee with a dear friend who haven’t seen all year, or your little grandson singing you a song that he learnt at playschool are both heartwarming moments. Finding a piece of jewellery under the bed that you thought was lost forever can bring tears of happiness. A hospital appointment where you’re reassured that there’s nothing seriously wrong can lift the world from your shoulders. Having a trip with your loved one and seeing a beautiful view together gives you precious memories. Conquering a fear of travelling alone by taking a train ride to confront it can make you feel empowered and strong. Eating fruit or vegetables you’ve grown in your own garden can bring an enormous sense of pride. Giving your time to a charity or completing a challenge to raise money for a cause that’s important to you can give you a sense of achievement and fulfilment.

There are so many reasons to feel thankful and positive that you may overlook these as “just something” that happened. But they’re so much more than that. It’s a bit like looking at your half-filled glass and deciding whether it’s half full or half empty. Some may even complain about the shape of the glass but, after seeing the news on TV some days, I’m just glad that there’s water in my tap.

I hope your Christmas is full of warmth, kindness and special moments that make you feel thankful, and I’ll look forward to chatting with you again in the new year.



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It is often said that these days things aren't built to last. That certainly wasn't the case back in 1975 when Patricia Langley-Poole started up the Thamesdown Singers, later to become Thamesdown Ladies Choir, or TLC. The world now looks vastly different to how it did back in the 70's, but one thing certainly hasn't changed – and that is the ethos behind this very successful ladies' choir - fun, friendship, singing, and raising money for local charities.

Their first concert of 2025 will be at St Michael's Church, Highworth, on Saturday 5th April, sharing the bill with Splash of Red from Fairford and Shrivenham Ladies Choir.

TLC are always keen to welcome new members into their 'family' and would be pleased to hear from you if you'd like to know a little more. You can contact us through our website, www.thamesdownladieschoir.co.uk, find us on Facebook or email our membership secretary lesley.hemingway@gmail.com



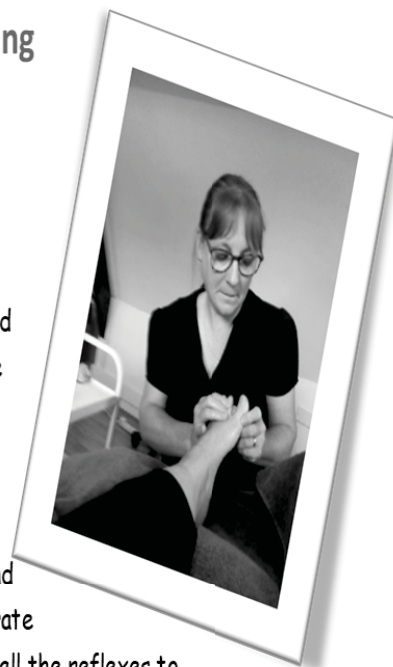
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Reading with Wine



Hello...it's very nearly time to Step into Christmas! It will come as no surprise that the final prompt challenge for the year (where did that time go?) is a Festive read! Following on from non-fiction November, it's time to go the other way and lose ourselves in festive joy.

The Works have such a brilliant range of festive cosy reads in their 3 for £6 offer, you can stock up on presents and treat yourself! My top recommendations would be Christmas at the Borrow a Bookshop (I love the Borrow a Bookshop series) by Kiley Dunbar, a Merry Little Meet Cute by Julie Murphy and Sierra Simone or The Nightmare Before Christmas by Alex Pine (his winter killer series is fantastic) If you like a proper Christmas movie vibe then go for The Christmas Tree Farm by Laurie Gilmore. It is the third book in the Dream Harbour series and possibly my favourite so far; you can currently buy all three for £16.50 too. Kira North is not full of Christmas spirit...in fact she has none; despite the fact that she lives on a Christmas Tree Farm and has a dream of making it a sustainable project. She soon learns that not everything you see on Instagram is real and that community spirit also equates to Christmas spirit. I loved Kira and her fierce need to be independent, particularly as it began to crumble when Ben, a self-diagnosed people helper finds himself on a mission to explore the farm. It's funny, it's cute, it's got amazing scenic imagery, friends galore and of course, it's got Christmas spirit in abundance. You'll feel the need to sit down with a stroopwafel and a Mulled Wine for the full seasonal experience. On that note, Marks and Spencer are once again leading the way with their festive drinks, seek out a bottle of their White Mulled Wine. With flavours of pear, lemon and vanilla it lends itself to those that prefer a sweet palate and bonus, your house will smell delightful too! It's the perfect pairing for this book as it's a festive treat that is sweet throughout.

Proving that Marks and Spencer is the place to be for festive drinks, I've also gone with them for my second pick this season, the Christmas on the Beach. It is a premixed cocktail and comes in a fabulous printed bottle (again, one for a gift, one for you!) The flavours here are cranberry and orange with warming spices, a perfect twist of the summer 'on the beach' beverage. And whilst we are on the topic of twists, Christmas in Castleby is a great choice if you like your festive reads a little darker, with a few thrills and twists. Who is out there to spoil this picture-perfect Christmas and will the community figure it out in time? This is book six in the Castleby series by J.M Simpson and the characters have become long standing friends. I could see a Santa Saturday happening in Blunsdon...all along the route of the advent windows- a sign that it is beginning to look a lot like Christmas!

Thank you for coming along this year of challenges with me, I hope you found some new favourites for both your shelves and wine glasses. Please share your completed challenges with me @reading_with_wine on Instagram, I love to see your pairing as much as I enjoy making my own. With no magazine now until the end of January, I shall generously state January is read what like month! Hopefully, you might have some bookish gifts to choose from. If you chose to do dry January, there are some great non-alcoholic options out there to try, have fun exploring! And if you don't- explore some new wines for 2025...just remember to read as much as you like but please drink responsibly. New year; same rules! Once again, I hope you have a very merry, bookish Christmas and a page turning new year!



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