



## Editorial

Welcome to the February edition of our Parish Newsletter.

It is often said that mid to late January is the bleakest time of the year for many of us. Days are dark, cold and often wet, Christmas celebrations are past and the world news is at times desperate. For some, Christmas has also worsened their financial worries, and they cannot see a way out.

If you are concerned about someone or are yourself in distress, please contact one of the councillors or the clerk who can signpost you to experts who can help.

We hope you will find one or two articles here that will lift your spirits and interest you.

We are delighted to welcome David Fairlamb to the team. He has very kindly agreed to fill the gap left by Jim Baldwin. David was a good friend of Jim's and told me how grateful he was to be taken under Jim's wing when he first arrived on the Island some years ago now. David shares Jim's knowledge and love of nature and this comes across clearly in his writing.

Do look out for information on a new group, "Wednesday Walkers." A great way to remain fit and meet new people and please add the Spruce up Day (25th April) to your calendar. It would be lovely to see some new faces. We are entered into the Best Kept Village award, so let's show Fishbourne at its best!

We are all concerned about the imminent closure of Elenors Grove. We can but hope that it will end sooner than anticipated. Quarr Abbey expect to be badly affected, so one thing we can do is support them. Perhaps stop off on a walk for a cup of tea and a slice of cake?

*Sarah Talbot*

# Newsletter

## Upcoming Roadworks – Eleanors Grove

As residents of Fishbourne and Wootton may already be aware, as part of a drive to reduce water leakage across the Island, Southern Water will be replacing 500 metres of ageing water mains along Elenors Grove starting on February 2nd and finishing in late April.

At meetings held in December, parish councillors were informed by Island Roads that it will not be possible to maintain 2-way traffic along Elenors Grove during the project because of the length of the roadworks.

During the works, Elenors Grove will be one-way, with no access towards Ryde. Island Roads have agreed two diversion routes; one for light traffic (cars etc) and one for HGVs. A copy of the diversion map is printed below.

Traffic from Ryde travelling westbound towards Wootton will still be able to use Elenors Grove, albeit it under traffic light control.

Regular bus services (i.e. the no. 4 and no. 9) will be able to travel eastbound through the roadworks, as will emergency service vehicles, but all other vehicles must follow the diversion.

Parish councillors raised concerns that road users may choose to ignore the official diversion and to travel along Firestone

Copse Road. To that end, Island Roads and Southern Water emphasised that this **Firestone Copse Road is NOT an approved diversion route** and, if road users decide to use that route it will very likely lead to traffic jams as the road is not wide enough to accommodate two-way traffic, particularly at the Wootton end of the road, by the campsite.

Southern Water has emphasised that access to properties will be maintained throughout, although residents may have to follow the diversion route depending on where on the road the contractors are working.

There may be a short interruption to water supply for customers directly affected by the works whilst their property is connected to the new water main. Those residents will be given at least 48-hours' notice, and interruptions to supply should last no more than 4 hours.

### How to contact Southern Water:

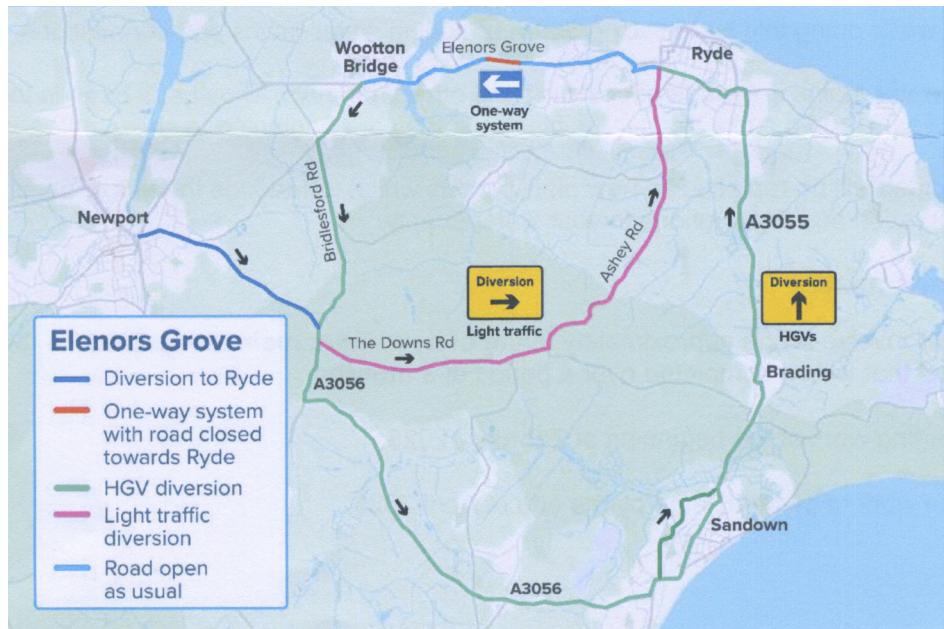
Phone: Call 0330 3030 368 and quote reference "PRN 835149"

Online: [southernwater.co.uk/contact-us](http://southernwater.co.uk/contact-us)

### How to contact Clancy (contractor for the project)

Email: Jenny Keirle, Customer Liaison, Clancy [jenny.keirle@clancygroup.co.uk](mailto:jenny.keirle@clancygroup.co.uk)

*Ed Hopper (Chairman)*



## People you may need to contact on the Parish Council

### Ed Hopper – Chairman

Telephone: 07973 899882

Email:

ed.hopper@fishbourneiow.org.uk

### Cheryl Fontana

Email:

cheryl.fontana@fishbourneiow.org.uk

### Carolyn Dugdale

Email:

carolyn.dugdale@fishbourneiow.org.uk

### Sarah Talbot

Telephone: 07772 165000

Email:

sarah.talbot@fishbourneiow.org.uk

### Christine Woollin

Telephone: 07703 730320

Email:

chris.woollin@fishbourneiow.org.uk

### Vince Carter (Tree Warden)

Telephone: 07985 147900

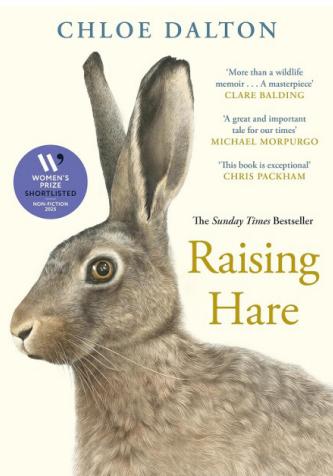
### Katie Riley (Clerk)

Telephone: 07772 950343

Email: clerk@fishbourneiow.org.uk

### Ian Dore IOW Councillor

Email: ian.Dore@iow.gov.uk



## “Raising Hare”

by Chloe Dalton

This is a beautifully thoughtful and compassionate book which tells the story of how senior political adviser, Chloe Dalton, comes upon a newly-born baby hare one day near her remote country cottage. At first, she thinks that she should leave the tiny leveret to be reclaimed by its mother, but later it becomes clear that the

animal is alone and extremely vulnerable. She takes it home and so begins her apprenticeship in the upbringing of a wild creature. Dalton makes choices such as not to name the animal so that she does not compromise the leveret's freedom. She searches extensively for information about all aspects of a hare's life in order to help it to thrive whilst still helping it maintain its wild nature. Information comes from a variety of sources including the eighteenth century poet William Cowper, who himself raised hares, and in a poem described the food that hares like to eat.

Chloe Dalton has a meticulous eye and describes every feature of the growing hare in minute detail. Her writing is tender, precise and at times emotional. The baby leveret brings a meaning to her life which she would never have imagined possible, as their lives become intertwined. The novel is the chronicle of an extraordinary relationship between a human and animal. It reminds us of the importance of maintaining a sense of awe and respect towards nature and wildlife and of how extraordinary trust and hope can grow from the most unlikely situations.

If you are interested in what happens to the leveret you simply must read the book!

## The Case of the missing Owners

*Confessions of a Cat-sitter series, from a local author, columnist...and cat-sitter.*

With dark evenings still with us, but not for too much longer, I thought I'd recount a very spooky cat visit I made this winter. Of course, while cat-sitting, involving little else but feeding cats, isn't normally seen as frightening (apart from the litter trays), it does have its moments and the following visit was one of the strangest. In truth, it wasn't even a visit, but rather a pre-visit, whereby I nip round a customer's house to receive a list of unreasonable demands about things such as how their V.I.F. (Very Important Feline) would like their prawns served in the morning.

I arrived at the house one cold drizzly evening just as light was fading, and found it to be impersonating the Mary Celeste. The Mary Celeste, of course, was a ship found adrift, completely devoid of crew. There were no signs of struggle or storm, and unfinished meals were on the table, but the ship was completely empty. It was one of the great maritime mysteries, and my customers' house displayed some eerie similarities.

The front door was wide open, but nobody except the resident cat Mya was to be seen. Mya and I walked slowly down the darkened hallway, glancing at one another tentatively (well, I was tentative; I think Mya was just wondering if I was going to

feed her). As we stepped into the lounge, I couldn't help feeling this resembled an episode of Scooby Doo, only with a foot high cat rather than a 7-foot dog.

Suddenly, the Alexa home assistant announced, 'Here's your reminder – pick up my ass.' Okay, that was odd but, given that my somewhat elderly customers had once mentioned a total inability to control Alexa, not altogether surprising. I listened as Alexa repeated her reminder, just to check I hadn't misheard. Sadly, I hadn't.

I touched the kettle – very recently boiled, but no hot drinks anywhere. I headed slowly upstairs, feeling edgy, with Mya at my side the entire way. We looked around all the silent rooms, Mya sniffing every corner, possibly for clues. Baffling...they'd boiled the kettle, then left the house with the front door wide open, and left Alexa repeating a quite disturbing reminder. As I checked the last empty bedroom, I got quite a shock – there, peering into the window from the darkness outside, an upstairs window, was a man's face. A terrifying recollection of the movie Salem's Lot came to mind as I bravely considered legging it, but Mya's meows halted me in my tracks and I walked slowly to the window. There, standing on an adjoining flat-roof and frantically waving at me, was my customer, John. What the hell?!

'My ladder fell over!' he yelled. 'I've been stuck up here for quarter of an hour.' I noticed he had a cup of coffee up there,

so two mysteries solved, but not Alexa's odd reminder.

'Where's Margaret?' I asked as I repositioned his ladder, knowing that Margaret was the only member of this dynamic duo capable of recording a reminder of any kind.

'She went to pick up Mya's flea stuff from the vets,' he replied.

Aha, things suddenly made sense – Margaret had only managed to record half of her intended message and Alexa had slightly misinterpreted it.

So, happily nothing terrifying after all. Unless you're a flea.

## New Walking Group

"Wednesday Walkers" with Ann and Carolyn.

Join us for a monthly walk around the Fishbourne area.

When? 2nd Wednesday of the month.  
Where? Quarr Abbey Cafe 10am for 10.30am start.

First walk: Wednesday 11th February  
Dogs welcome

Hope to see you there.

For more info contact Carolyn:  
Telephone: 07771767897  
or Ann: 07779 349228

# Clerks Corner

We are still seeking to fill our remaining vacancy on the Parish Council. Perhaps you are new to the area or looking for an opportunity to meet new people? We would be grateful for your input, we only meet once a month on a Tuesday evening for a maximum of an hour or so, and the five current members are a very friendly community minded group. Please drop me a line at [clerk@fishbourneiow.org.uk](mailto:clerk@fishbourneiow.org.uk) to express an interest, this is all that is required to apply.

I have been asked to remind residents that Ashlake Copse Lane is a bridleway, and it is an offence under s34 Road Traffic Act 1988 for any unauthorised motor vehicles to use it without authority. Anyone who does so should be reported to the Police (preferably with a photo showing the registration number). It should be noted however that there are drivers with lawful authority who are within their right to drive over the path, i.e. those who own the land over which the path runs, or other properties/land which may benefit from a private right of way with vehicles in the deeds to their own property/land (known as an easement).

The Parish Council held its first meeting of the new year in January and agreed the budget for 2026/27 and to keep the precept at £17,000. This equates to approximately £37.55 per year for each

band D council taxpayer and we believe that this provides good value for Fishbourne residents. Within the budget we have allocated an amount to support events in the community. In the past we have been grateful to the Bedfords who have organised some fantastic get togethers for the Jubilee and Coronation and we would love to hear from you if you have any ideas and might be interested in organising something in the future.

We hope to see as many volunteers as possible at our next Spruce Up Day on Saturday 25th April. This one is particularly important as it is just before judging starts for the Best Kept Village Awards. Last year we entered for the first time and came 3rd in the "medium sized village" category so let's see if we can do even better this time!

Within the budget we have also agreed to contribute to an enhanced Public Realm Officer Service (this used to be called the Environment Officer Service). This provides dog-related services, including enforcement, education, and collection of stray dogs; enforcing environmental crime legislation in the public realm, such as littering and fly-tipping; implementing and monitoring Public Space Protection Orders (PSPOs) to maintain community safety and deter anti-social behaviour; inspecting coastal safety equipment to protect residents and visitors; inspecting Waste Transfer Notices. The service can be

contacted via 01983 821000 or email [PublicRealmOfficers@iow.gov.uk](mailto:PublicRealmOfficers@iow.gov.uk)

Please get in touch directly with one of the Parish Councillors or with myself if there is anything you'd like to raise – we are always grateful for you bringing things to our attention. If it is within our remit to help, we will always do what we can.

## Key contacts you might find useful are:

- Island Roads for any highway issues (flooding, fallen trees, highway obstruction, traffic lights not working etc). Online at <https://fms.islandroads.com>, or in an emergency (01983) 822440.
- Southern Water, if there are flooding issues that affect your mains sewage/public drains. Online at [www.southernwater.co.uk](http://www.southernwater.co.uk) or by calling 0330 303 0368 (24-hour service).
- Illegal parking can be reported directly to the Isle of Wight Council at - <https://www.iow.gov.uk/transport-and-parking/parking/general-parking/report-a-contravention/> Please be aware that not all reports will result in a visit, but each will be reviewed and a decision made, based on available resources.
- Planning Enforcement complaints, including reporting any alleged illegal works to protected trees, and a range of other online planning actions can be made anytime online at [Enforcement \(iow.gov.uk\)](http://Enforcement (iow.gov.uk))

Katie Riley



## Victorian Christmas Tea at The Albert Cottage Hotel

*Albert Cottage Hotel in East Cowes was once part of Queen Victoria's Osborne estate. Albert Cottage was bought in 1852 by Prince Albert to be part of a Botanic Garden development of Osborne House and was used, together with the adjacent Osborne Cottage, by Royal guests. When Queen Victoria died in 1901, her son, Edward VII, retained both of the cottages for the use of Princess Beatrice, the*

youngest of Victoria's children. Much later in 1999 it was turned into a hotel and retains much of its Victorian charm and character.

The Fishbourne book group very much appreciated the festive decor of the hotel when we held our Christmas tea party there on Thursday December 18th. The food, as ever, was delicious and the helpings were generous as we sat by a roaring fire and enjoyed each other's company. As part of our afternoon, we participated in a seasonal literary quiz and each of us contributed to a pile of beautifully wrapped second hand books as a Secret Santa gift. The task of reading

our selected book lay ahead, ready for discussing at January's meeting.

As a book group we approach our 4th birthday in March and, over the years, have explored many varied texts together. It is always a great pleasure to share the discussions about what we are reading and to be able to appreciate ideas which are often different to our own. We continue to welcome new members and our next meeting is on Thursday January 29th at 10.30am in The Fishbourne Inn, where we will be talking about our Christmas gift books and discussing "Mornings in Jenin" by Susan Abulhawa. Our February meeting will be on Thursday 26th, with a book still to be chosen.

If you would like to know more, please call Cheryl on 07910849302.

## This is your Newsletter!

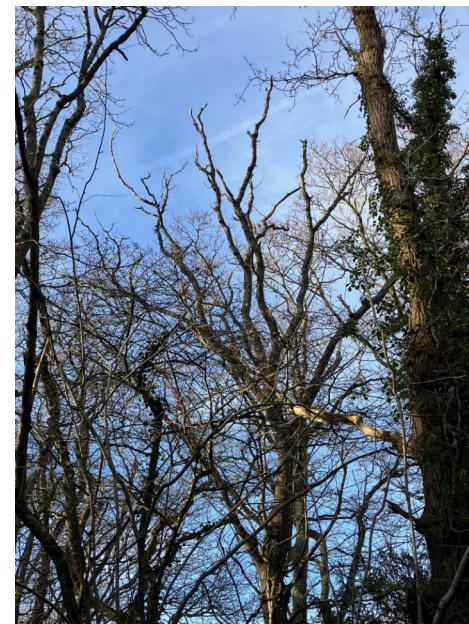
Are you happy with the content? Do you find the articles interesting or informative? Please let us know what you would like to see in the Newsletter. Contact: [sarah.talbot@fishbourneiow.org.uk](mailto:sarah.talbot@fishbourneiow.org.uk)



*Dying Ash tree adjacent to public right of way posing a potential danger to walkers.*



*Small dead tree hung up across public right of way.*



*Dying ash tree in woodland adjacent to but possibly distant enough from a public right of way to pose a greater threat to the owner than the public.*

## Tree Safety Issues

Now the leaves are off the trees it is relatively easy to see which are dead or dying and which have dead limbs. If you own such a tree you will almost certainly have some liability should it fall and hit someone. This article seeks to raise the issue of tree safety and offers general advice for tree owners who want to keep their trees safe.

One reason for writing this article now is the increasing prevalence of Ash Dieback. Many readers will already have noticed that lots of our ash trees are dying. What you may not realise is that this fungal disease makes ash trees quite brittle and likely to break apart or shed limbs unexpectedly. This makes them potentially unsafe for a tree surgeon to climb and dismantle, so early intervention is advisable. Further advice on Ash Dieback is available at <https://forestrycommission.blog.gov.uk/2024/05/11/responding-to-ash-dieback-assessing-your-risk-and-what-you-can-do/>

In terms of your potential liability the National Tree Safety Group has published a very helpful guide entitled 'Common sense risk management of trees', available online at <https://ntsgroup.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/NTSG-full-guidance.pdf>

The introduction to Chapter 5 states that tree owners have a legal duty of care and provides an overview of the law in relation to tree safety, including the standard of inspection expected of a reasonable and prudent landowner. Chapter 6 explains what is meant by reasonable, balanced tree risk management, and Chapter 7 explains how the guidance can be applied. Pages 92 – 93 outline the sort of approach

a court might expect a private householder to have adopted should harm have been caused by a garden tree. In short, a tree owner has responsibilities that should not be ignored.

If you own trees and are looking for advice the Arboriculture Association maintains directories of approved consultants and tree surgeons, see <https://www.trees.org.uk/>. Unfortunately, not many tree surgery companies on the island are registered with the Arboriculture Association but many are still eminently competent in the services they provide. Key qualifications they should hold include use of chainsaws as well as climbing and aerial rescue. In terms of insurance the Arboriculture Association recommends they should hold public liability insurance of £5m or higher, employer's liability insurance, and professional indemnity insurance where they are providing advice about tree safety.

Before undertaking any tree work it is important to check first whether your tree is covered by a Tree Preservation Order or is located within a Conservation Area. The Council's Planning Department can confirm whether permission is needed, and their website includes general advice about working on trees at: <https://www.iow.gov.uk/environment-and-planning/planning/trees-and-hedges/working-on-trees/>. If a tree is an immediate and imminent danger to life or property, you do not need permission to make it safe, but the council recommends contacting a professional arborist and taking photographs first to avoid possible prosecution. It is always best to check first though by ringing the Council's tree officers on 01983 823552.

Felling of large volumes of timber (i.e. more than 5 cubic meters in any 3-month period) requires a felling licence from the Forestry Commission. The regional office that covers the Isle of Wight can be contacted on 0300 067 4420 for advice.

Tree ownership can be seen as both a privilege and a responsibility. Neither I nor the Parish Council has professional indemnity insurance so we are unable to give detailed advice as to the safety of your trees. Instead, this article seeks to highlight where you can obtain advice and guidance so that you can make informed decisions about their management and any potential risks that might arise.

*Vince Carter (Tree Warden)*

### Dates for your diary

#### Parish Council Meetings

10th February 18.30 at RVYC  
10th March 18.30 at RVYC  
14th April 18.30 at RVYC

#### Parish Surgeries

24th February 09.30 at RVYC  
24th March 09.30 at RVYC  
28th April 09.30 at RVYC

#### Coffee Mornings

5th February 10.30 – 12noon at RVYC  
5th March 10.30 – 12noon at RVYC  
2nd April 10.30 – 12noon at RVYC

#### SPRING SPRUCE UP DAY

SATURDAY 25th APRIL 10 – 12  
Refreshments for participants at RVYC.



## Royal Victoria Yacht Club

Hard to believe we're into a new year! 2025 seemed to pass in a flash! The club had another busy and successful year, both on and off the water, hosting open events and club racing, not to mention cadet activities, courses, radio-controlled (RC) racing and adult sailing. More of the same is planned for 2026.

My final year as Commodore has come to a close. I have hugely enjoyed these three years (and the three before that as Vice-Commodore). It has been a privilege to be elected to the 'top job', but one which would have been nigh-on impossible without the support of the team of flag officers, officers and committee members who run our club on behalf of our members. The team during my tenure has been amazing; full of enthusiasm and ready to meet any and all of the challenges thrown at us. I am very grateful to our Management, Sailing and House

Committee members. I couldn't have done it without you all.

We have a great team with a diversity of skills and expertise on Management on all our committees. These roles are all taken on by volunteers, who give up their time to improve the club for all our members.

I do feel privileged to have been part of such a vibrant and passionate club. The club has seen many changes and I was pleased to have the opportunity to contribute to some of them.

I believe that our club is now a welcoming and inclusive environment where every member – whether a seasoned sailor, someone just starting out, or non-sailing member – feels valued and supported. RVYC has a great ethos based on voluntary effort and camaraderie which makes it a very special place. Whether it's through racing, rallies, social events or

cadets, it's the sense of unity that makes RVYC the club it is today.

We must remember that the club thrives because of the efforts of (and input from) our members. Volunteering, taking part in club activities and supporting events (and one another) make our club great.

Members' continued enthusiasm and giving their time are essential to our success. We simply could not operate as we do without you.

We have continued to diversify to encourage even more people to enjoy the wonderful waters on our doorstep. The radio-controlled (RC) racing group has gone from strength to strength, with races twice a week throughout the year. They're all a highly-competitive group who can enjoy racing from dry land! The SUP group has also been successful in encouraging new people out on to the Creek (and further afield).

As my term is now over, I'd like to offer the incoming Commodore and the team my very best wishes for another busy year in 2026, and express my sincere thanks to the officers, trustees, committee members, volunteers and members for their support over the last three years.

Our Wednesday winter talks restart in February. Once again, there's a wide-ranging mix of subjects as you can see below.

*Helen Vbra (January 2026)*

### Wednesday night talks and other events

*Talks commence at 7:30pm*

4 February *Dr Simon Penn*  
**New Dinosaur Discoveries – A window into an ancient ecosystem**

11 February *Captain Jon Kidd*  
**Cowes Harbour Master**

18 February *John Matthews*  
**My life of crime – Solicitor and Coroner**

25 February *Simon Nutman*  
**From Green to Red, stories from the Fire Brigade to the Ambulance Service**

4 March  
**Wednesday Night Quiz with Colin**

11 March *Peter Donaldson*  
**The Evolution of Robotic Surgery and its role in the Treatment of Prostatic Cancer**

18 March *Capt Martin Phipps MBE*  
**History of Trinity House**

25 March *Hilary Martin*  
**Sunbeam and the Half Models.**



**Copy for the next issue of the Newsletter by 15th April 2026 at the latest. Please send to [sarah.talbot@fishbourneiow.org.uk](mailto:sarah.talbot@fishbourneiow.org.uk)**



## The Parish Church of the Holy Cross Binstead

(in plurality with St Peter's Havenstreet, All Saints' Ryde and St John's Ryde)

A very busy December kicked off with an enjoyable and successful St Nicholas Day fair held in the church on 6th December, which featured a fascinating display of family nativity sets, some of them collected from around the world, a visit from St Nicholas himself (alias Santa Claus), and numerous stalls selling craft, books and raffle or tombola tickets. A few days later we welcomed the pupils from Year 4 at Binstead School who spent a morning in the church setting up the Christmas nativity figures pictured above, decorating the Christmas tree, making Christingles and Christmas cards and singing carols. This year, it was the turn of Holy Cross to host the annual joint carol service with members of Binstead Methodist Church, which is always a joyful celebration of our shared beliefs. As always, the church was beautifully decorated for Christmas and the services were very well attended with several hundred people coming into church over

Christmas to remember and give thanks for the birth of Jesus with all that that means for each one of us. Now we are looking forward to our annual Candlemas Lunch at Appley Manor at the start of February.

The church porch is looking very smart, having undergone a refurbishment in time for Christmas, though the churchyard is suffering from the efforts of an enthusiastic

family of moles, who haven't yet been put off by the cold weather. Both All Saints' and St John's churches are still closed while building works are completed, with regular worship taking place in their church halls, so that Holy Cross continues to be the venue for weddings, funerals and baptisms from across the plurality. If all goes to plan, All Saints' will be back in use by Easter and St John's shortly after. The monthly Coffee and Chat in Church (3 C's) mornings take place during the winter months on the third Saturday morning of each month, providing an opportunity to share a chat over coffee in a warm environment. All are welcome and you never know who you might encounter.

Please do check the weekly pew sheet on the website ([www.holycrossbinstead.org.uk](http://www.holycrossbinstead.org.uk)) to keep in touch with all the services and events that are happening.

Additionally, remember that Holy Cross Church is open every day for visitors and for those who are seeking a quiet place in which to reflect or pray – or, indeed, just to pop in and read the notices about what's happening in the church.

*Rodney Fox (Reader in the parishes of Binstead, Havenstreet and Ryde)*

### SPRUCE UP SATURDAY

**25<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 2026!**



Are there areas near you that could benefit from a litter pick, a weed, a wipe or a general 'spruce up'?

If so, please join us on

**Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> April 2026 from 10am.**

To reward for your hard work, we invite you for a drink and a snack from midday at the Royal Victoria Yacht Club.

If you would like more information or to register your interest, please contact one of the Parish Councillors or the Clerk.



**FISHBOURNE PARISH COUNCIL**

Email: [clerk@fishbourneiow.org.uk](mailto:clerk@fishbourneiow.org.uk) Tel:07772 950343



Welcome to The Fishbourne Inn, a warm cosy venue to meet for coffee, a meal, drinks and more.

See our website for a full list of all our activities and offerings.  
Look forward to seeing you soon.



## Quarr Abbey

### The Crib

Christmas 2025 marked an anniversary of sorts at Quarr. It was the thirtieth year of building our Crib in the nave of the Abbey Church. The tradition was started by Abbot Cuthbert in 1996, and the Crib was initially placed to the side of the nave before being moved to its current position on the central steps.

The form of the Crib has varied over time as experiments were abandoned. Flour proved unsuitable for snow as it was blown about by the draught every time the door opened. And a running water feature led to visitors running for the loo. The moving figures were more successful, yet they had to be retired when their little

motors started to protest noisily when put to work. But the original Neapolitan figurines have stood the test of time.

I started building the Crib in 2007 and quickly settled on a basic design which I've largely stuck to; nevertheless, I do try to introduce a few novelties each year. This year our gardeners provided some wonderful lichen encrusted boughs. At some nine feet high they give the Crib a vertical dimension for the first time.

Moving rocks is the first major task. Some two truckloads are needed, and they provide the necessary foundation for the whole structure. Bricks and paving slabs, for the streets and buildings of Bethlehem, come next, and then a transformation occurs when the orange sand and green moss is added. Suddenly, the greys and browns come alive with colour.

Of course, the figures lie at the heart of any Crib. All the persons from the Bible story are there and more besides. This is important, for the Christ-Child, the God-

Man, was born into our everyday world; it was this motley crew he came to save. And so, we see women in the market-place, a procession of musicians, working men sitting by a fire, as well as the expected shepherds on a hillside, and three kings further off, transfixed by the sight of that wonderful star.

I am particularly fond of the figure of a sleeping shepherd. I always wonder what he means. Is he oblivious to the drama unfolding so near him, or is he, rather, the bearer of a dream which unveils the significance of it all? Sleep is a mysterious thing.

A meaningful detail is the manger. It is a stone trough and foreshadows the tomb. It teaches us that this Child is born to die. The three trees overhanging the stable reinforce the message. They foreshadow the three crosses of Calvary. At Christmas we are already looking forward to Easter. By dying, Christ will destroy our death and rising, restore our life. The Christmas hope is no mean one.

*Brother Duncan Smith*

### Quarr Abbey Art Gallery Exhibitions March and April

#### February 2026

The Quarr Abbey Exhibition advertised on the poster (right) will now run throughout February

#### March 2026

March 05 – 11 I Love Wight (A)

March 12 – 18

**Br Duncan Smith and Sarah Talbot**

March 19 – 25

**Fishbourne Art Group**

March 26 Mar – 01 Apr

**Simonne Mason**

#### April 2026

April 2 – 8 **Hollie Jackson**

April 9 – 15 **Lynne Alden**

April 16 – 22 **Kerry Bishop**

April 23 – 29 **Crafty Artists**

April 30 – 06 May **Sophia Flowers**

**Exhibition**

**Monastic Journeys of  
Medieval and Modern  
Quarr Abbey**

**Dates:** Thursday 15 January to Tuesday 10 February 2026

**Time:** 10am to 4pm daily (Open 11am on Sundays)

**Location:** Quarr Abbey Art Gallery

**Admission:** Free

**Tours and Talks on**  
**Saturday 17 January and**  
**Tuesday 27 January 2026**

**Timetable**

10:30: Meet Fr. Brian at the Art Gallery.  
10.30-12.45: View of Exhibition and Tour of the Ruins.  
13:00: Lunch – There is a short prayer service for 10 minutes in the Abbey Church at 13:00, sung by the monks, for those who wish to attend before lunch..  
14:45-15:30: Talks: Meet back at the Art Gallery.

**Special Offer for Booked Lunch**  
**£10 per person**

Choice of Soups  
Crumble and Custard  
Hot Drink (Tea/Coffee)

**Booking is essential for these two special days:**  
See the events page on the Website; [www.quarr.org](http://www.quarr.org)



Winter Heliotrope



Primrose in December



Robin



Dunnock



Song Thrush



Great Tit



Small Tortoiseshell

# Nature Notes from NATURAL LINKS

## Winter Blooms

There is a plant that blooms in January that produces a distinctive scent, likened to cherries, but also aniseed or vanilla. The Winter Heliotrope, a close relative to the native Butterbur was introduced to UK gardens in the 19th century but has since become naturalized in the wider countryside and can form dense carpets in some areas, with their kidney-shaped leaves and spikes of mauve-pink flowers, only seen on the male plants in the UK.

Though there have been cold snaps over the winter, most notably in the first week of January, several native plant species have bloomed early, such as Primrose, Dog's Mercury, Common Dog Violet and White Dead-nettle. The name for Primrose comes from 'prima rosa', Latin for 'first rose', though they belong to the Primulas, rather than the rose family. The wild Primrose is native to the UK and can range in colour from white to pink, though modern garden cultivars can be a myriad of different hues. They are an important early source of nectar for emerging insects such as butterflies, pollen beetles and flies and it is thought that bumblebees are one of the main pollinators. As one of the earliest plants to flower, Primroses have attracted much myth and legend, particularly representing renewed growth and the promise of crops to come.

## Early Songsters

Although the season of spring is still a few weeks away, many of our resident birds are already in song and in the early stages of proclaiming breeding territories.

Apart from a brief period when they are in moult in late summer/early autumn, Robins sing for much of the year. Unlike the majority of bird species, they hold territories in winter and both males and females sing during this time, reflecting their strong instincts of territorialism. Dunnocks usually start singing in January, but unusually for bird species, both males and females have their own territories. The territories of the males are larger than the females which means they overlap and this can lead to many different mating strategies including females mating with several different males and 2 males, effectively, sharing a female and helping to raise a single brood.

The loud, repeated phrases of the Song Thrush is a familiar sound in southern

England at the turn of the year, though it may be early March before they begin singing in the north of England and Scotland. Males will often perch on the topmost branches of trees to ensure their song travels the greatest distance and firmly establishes the territory. Of all our songbirds, Great Tits have the most extensive range of songs and calls, with over 80 being recorded from males and females. Most recognized is the 'teacher, teacher' song which is the most common song at the height of the breeding season. Great Tits will take readily to nest boxes and need an entrance hole of around 28mm in diameter, whereas both Blue Tit and Coal Tit prefer a smaller entrance hole of around 25mm. This year the National Nest Box Week runs from 14 to 21 February, for more information visit [www.nestboxweek.com](http://www.nestboxweek.com)

## House Guests and Headlights

Some species of UK butterflies are seen in houses or outbuildings during the winter, particularly Small Tortoiseshells, Red Admirals and Peacocks. They enter a state of dormancy or 'torpor' to conserve energy, though they may become active again during very mild winter weather and, if protected from the worst of the winter weather, they will be truly back on the wing again in early Spring. During winter, male Winter Moths are the most likely moths to be seen flying weakly in car headlights, especially near woods or hedgerows. Females are unable to fly, having only rudimentary wings about only a third of the length of the body. Another moth to look out for as we go into late winter is the Hebrew Character as the adults emerge to feed on sallow catkins. They are named from the black mark in the centre of the wing which resembles the Hebrew letter 'nun' equivalent to our 'n'.

## Natural Links

Based on the Isle of Wight, Natural Links seeks to connect and inspire people with wildlife and the natural world. There is a monthly events programme on the Island and Birdwatching/Wildlife Holidays around the UK and abroad, particularly specialising in trips to Southern Africa. For more information visit [www.naturallinks.life](http://www.naturallinks.life) or you can request a copy of the events programme via e-mail [natural.links@outlook.com](mailto:natural.links@outlook.com). All photos by Dave Fairlamb and Graeme Ruthven of Natural Links.