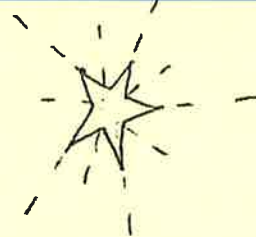


Stansted Mountfitchet

The Link



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St John's
STANSTED

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The Christmas muddle

It seems to me that we are in a bit of a muddle about Christmas. On the one hand, 'Advent calendars' have become 'Countdown calendars' – featuring characters out of 'Toy Story' or 'Barbie'. On the other, our Christmas stamps this year have once again adopted an explicitly religious theme – a range of international images of Mother and Child. My tendency, as a Christian, is to be sad about the former and glad about the latter. I am sure others will have the opposite reaction. In a society that has become increasingly secular, we have two sorts of celebration mixed up. Rather a muddle in fact.

I can understand responses to the muddle that try to clarify it – by going back to a 'mid Winter festival' of some kind, and keeping this separate from the Christian celebration of the birth of Christ. The latter would then be celebrated with reverence by those who believe in it. When my children were young, I often longed to be able to separate out all the peripherals of turkey, holly, decorations, stockings and over-excited children from my own wish to spend some time in worship. For many, the problem is not overload but the fact that Christmas seems just to bring misery – a deeper loneliness or isolation, a season that is about as far from 'tidings of comfort and joy' as it can be. And for all of us, I suspect that there is at some level awareness that the commercialised images may be a parody of the ongoing struggles of daily life. This is a time when credit card bills

rocket sky high, when debt increases and those who are excluded feel this more than ever. It is easy to be critical of the commercialism of Christmas, blaming this for all the problems. Yet if I am honest, I love it all – not just the services, but even the piped carols in shops, the decorations and crackers and glitter. Certainly I missed the aspects of public celebration when I lived in Pakistan for 7 years.

Thinking about the muddle that is Christmas makes me realised that little has changed. Jesus was born within a Jewish community living in occupied territory, under Roman rule. This was a people seeking to observe their religion in a society where Caesar was seen as God. The story with which we are all so familiar is of a mother who was unable to focus on the birth of her child thanks to a requirement to travel to be registered. Not much chance for her to prioritise her baby. He was born into obscurity and muddle. And the Christian belief is not that he stayed separate from all the muddle and mess, but that he showed a way to be in it with integrity and with love for those most damaged by it. In fact, the adult Jesus reserved his harshest criticisms for the religious people of the day who set themselves apart from ordinary folk and their celebrations and difficulties. Today, he would be as likely to turn up at the office Christmas party as at Midnight Mass, and probably more at home sitting beside someone sleeping on the streets under flickering neon decorations than at a service of Nine

Christmas Services at St John's

- **11 December**
3pm Christingle Services
- **18 December**
6:00pm Nine Lessons and Carols, at St Mary's, Farnham
- **Christmas Eve**
3:00pm Crib Service
11:30pm Choral Eucharist
- **Christmas Day**
8:00am Holy Communion
9.30am Parish Communion
- **1st January, New Year's Day**
9:30am said Holy Communion (*this will be the only service on this day*)

From the Registers

Baptism:

21st October: Finley Jack Sweet,
Ellie Alisa Henderson

Wedding:

8th October: Tracey Marie Hester to
Michael Francis George Linegar

Funeral:

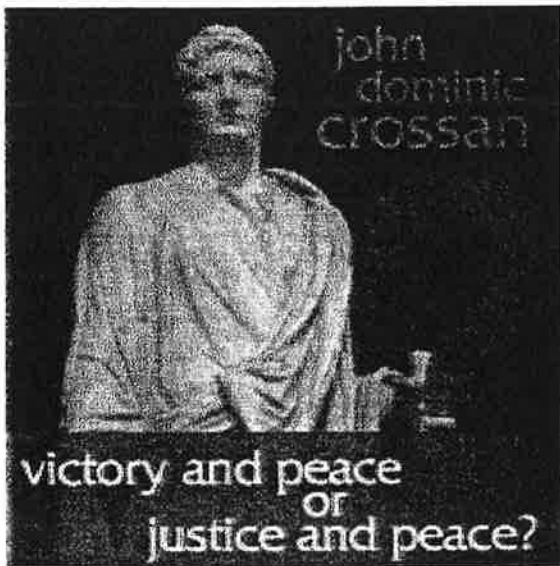
16th September: Leonard Foster - St Mary's
3rd October: Eileen Rachel Halsey - St Mary's
20th October: Virginia Peggy* Alice Sandford -
St John's and Parndon Wood
27th October: Dorothy Rosemary May Stone -
Parndon Wood

Lessons and Carols.

So the challenge for Christians is neither to reject all that is not 'religious' about Christmas, nor to get so taken up – either by the secular or the religious aspects of the season - that we ignore those who are excluded by it. We believe that 'God so loved the world' that he sent his son to show us the way to live. He will be born in the family disputes, in the queues at Tesco's and on our streets – if we will only let him. Our muddles and our difficulties are as much his business as our joys and celebrations and worship. At Christmas we celebrate the birth of one called 'Emmanuel', which means 'God with us' – in all of it.

Caroline Currer

Advent Study Group



The gospel writers chose titles for Jesus which were identical to those which contemporary leaders were using of themselves. Early Christians had set themselves the task of giving the names for political power a new meaning, a meaning which they had seen in the life of Jesus of Nazareth.

*This is a DVD based course with the Roman Catholic New Testament scholar **John Dominic Crossan** on Tuesdays before Sundays in Advent, starting 8pm sharp at the Rectory; also on Wednesdays at 1:30pm at 21 Park Road.*

*Led by **Caroline Currer** and **Andrew Spurr**. The Sunday sermon will be drawing from themes which have been discussed at each session.*

22nd and 23rd November

What is the character of your God?

29th and 30th November

What is the content of your faith?

6th and 7th December

What is the purpose of your prayer?

13th and 14th December

What is the function of your church?

ST JOHN'S CHURCH HALL

An Appeal for Architectural Generosity

St John's Church Hall is one of the village's principal public venues and, apart from church related activities, hosts Sideways Pre School; Karate, Art and Ballet Classes; NCT, Women's Institute and Huw Johnson Club Meetings; Occupational Therapy Sessions, The Village Music Club and many other periodic activities including private parties and so on. Built in the late sixties/early seventies, the Hall is beginning to feel and look its age and, as funds become available, we have embarked upon a process of modernisation. A couple of years ago an extension was added providing much needed storage space and this was followed by the creation of a Committee Room out of two smaller rooms.

We are now looking to upgrade the main hall, entrance lobby and toilets. The Management Committee would be enormously grateful for *freely given* professional thoughts and ideas from charitably minded architects or others similarly involved in building design, on what is possible and achievable. Armed with these ideas, the Committee will decide what it will do and then it will instruct appropriate professional advisers in the normal way. Whilst we would clearly appreciate further free or subsidised assistance, this is not our objective at this stage; we simply want thoughts and ideas for consideration.

If you can help, please ring me, Alastair Richardson, on 07850 295109.



SHALOM

In November, Sue and John Bree gave a very informative and moving talk about the Christmas Shoe Boxes, organised by the Samaritan's Purse Charity. The statistics are staggering – 43 million shoe boxes have been distributed in various parts of the world since the project began in 1990. A large proportion of these come from America, home of the founder of Samaritan's Purse, Franklin Graham (son of Billy Graham) – but we are also doing our bit, with an anticipated 1,250,000 shoe boxes being sent out from the UK this year. Despite this, we were surprised to learn that the demand is so great, that each child will only receive one shoebox in his or her lifetime. For many of them, it is the only gift that they will receive in their entire life – a very humbling thought. We watched two videos, and the looks of sheer delight on the children's faces when they opened their boxes was so moving, that we were all nearly in tears! Sue has been with the distribution team to Mozambique, and both Sue and John went to Romania, and we were shown pictures of their visits – again very moving. Sue and John will be returning to Shalom next Summer, when they will be telling us about Samaritan Purse's other projects including water filters, building projects, and children's holidays and football camps.

On 5th December, Rev'd Keith Page will lead an Advent Meditation, and on 19th December, we will be holding our Christmas Party. Both are at 7 Blythwood Gardens and start at 8.00pm. All are most welcome.

Marion Dyer

UNITED REFORMED

Chapel Hill

Minister Rev'd David Simpson
11 Church Manor
Bishop's Stortford
CM23 5AF
Tel: 01279 504900

Contact Mrs Janet Townsend
58 Chapel Hill
Tel: 01279 812593

Preachers for December

- 4th 2.30pm Rev'd David Simpson - Communion
11th 10.30am Mr P Smith
18th 10.30am Rev'd David Simpson - with Methodists and Friends. Christmas Carol and Gift Service
25th 10.30am Rev'd Dr Janet Tollington - with Methodists. All age worship for Christmas Day

Dates for your diary in December:

- 3rd 7.00pm Charity music quiz for shoe box transport. For tickets telephone 813977
4th 3.30pm Afternoon tea (after service) For lifts telephone 814850 or 812593
5th 6.00pm Pilots for children 5-13 years. For information telephone 813433
17th 4.00pm Christmas Concert at St Mary's Church
7.00pm Joint Christmas party with Methodists in URC Hall
19th 2.30pm Monday Club, open to all For information telephone 815137
19th 6.00pm Pilots for children 5-13 years. Tel 813433

Operation Christmas Child

The Lecture Hall was a hive of activity on 8th November, with everyone packing shoe boxes. One hundred and forty boxes were filled with items donated by many kind people, including 100 tennis balls from the Tennis Club. By the time the boxes were picked up on 17th November there were over 200, including some from Manuden Guides and Brownies; add to this over 60 from the Catholic Women's Group, and we were well over our target of 250 boxes.

This year after the boxes have been checked at the Harlow centre, they will be packed straight into a container ready to be shipped direct to Mozambique. If anything is removed from the boxes at this stage as unsuitable (chocolate, talcum powder, clothing etc) it is sent to a central warehouse where it is either sold and the money used for transport costs, or packed into boxes to go direct to children's homes, orphanages or hospitals around the world. **NOTHING IS THROWN AWAY.** On behalf of all the children and the Operation Christmas Child team I would like to say a big thank you to all who support this very worthwhile cause.

Please come and support our **Live Music Quiz** with *Charity* on 3rd December, 7.00pm for 7.30 pm. Tickets are only £5 which includes a scrumptious ploughman's supper. Tables of six preferred, but you are most welcome to come on your own and make up a table on the night. Please bring your own drink and glass. All profits will go towards the transportation costs of the shoe boxes. For tickets tel 813977 or 814059.

Hope to see you there.

Janet Townsend

METHODIST

Meets in Quaker Meeting House, Chapel Hill

Minister Rev'd Keith Page
2 South Road
Bishop's Stortford
Tel: 01279 654475

Secretary Mrs Catherine Dean
49 Recreation Ground
Stansted
Tel: 01279 813579

Email methodists@stansted.net

All services start at 9.30am unless otherwise stated

Services and preachers for December

- 4th 9.30 am Friends Meeting House – Michael Dyer
11th 9.30 am Friends Meeting House – Rev'd Keith Page. Communion
18th 10.30am URC - Rev'd David Simpson
25th 10.30am URC – Rev'd Janet Tollington

This year we shall be having a joint Christmas party with our friends from the United Reformed Church. This will be at 7.00pm on Saturday 17th December in the United Reformed Church Hall.

In the past it has been our tradition to hold a joint service with the Friends on the Sunday before Christmas. This year, they will be joining us at the United Reformed Church on 18th December, where the three congregations will be sharing a Christmas service.

We give a very warm welcome to anyone who would like to join with us at any of our services.

Marion Dyer



ROMAN CATHOLIC

St Therese of Lisieux
High Lane

Priest Father Joe White
The Presbytery
St Therese of Lisieux
High Lane
Stansted
Tel: 01279 814349

Masses Saturday 6.00pm
Sunday 9.00am and 10.30am
Holy Days of Obligation 8.00am and 8.00pm
Tuesday-Saturday 9.30am

Confessions
Saturday 10.00am
and by appointment

Baptisms By appointment

Last month Ruth wrote about the parish pilgrimage to Rome and Assisi. We are all familiar with the story of St Francis of Assisi and his love and friendship for the birds and animals of the forest but most people do not know that he also started the tradition of the Christmas crib.

In 1223 Francis wished to celebrate Christmas in Greccio which had become a favourite place of prayer for him. He asked John Velita a prominent nobleman of this region to put a manger filled with hay in one of the caves in the mountains and to bring an ox and ass, so that he could feel the poverty that the Redeemer endured from His birth in Bethlehem. On Christmas night they would meet and pray together there. However many people, hearing what was happening flocked to the cave, so there were many farmers, shepherds and villagers there. It is said that one of them placed a child or small figure in the manger. During the Mass celebration Francis explained to them the Gospel recalling the miracle of the Incarnation. Being in the cold cave made it easier for them to recall the events of the first Christmas night.

In 1228, two years after Francis' death, the Chapel of the Creche was built on the site of that first Christmas crib, and it still houses the original cave whose walls were later decorated with beautiful frescoes by the fourteenth century school of Giotto. Great celebrations now take place there every year. Greccio's contribution to our celebration of Christmas has been acknowledged throughout the world and in the new church built in 1959 there are cribs from many countries on display. Greccio is twinned with Bethlehem but what a cruel irony that the birthplace of Christ, the Prince of Peace, is in the centre of such turmoil and is hardly now able to celebrate this great event.

Eileen Quinn

Christmas Readings and Carols at St Therese's Church
Wednesday 21st December at 7.30pm. Coffee and mince pies in the Parish Centre afterwards. All are welcome.

CHRISTIAN MEDITATION

Meditation in the Christian tradition is also known as contemplative prayer. As Christians, our lives are called to prayer. We are in relationship with our God through Jesus in prayer. But what does that mean? In our busy worlds when do we spend time in the presence of our Lord? In His presence... just being? Jesus tells us in Matthew 6 v 6

"go into your private room, shut the door, and pray to your Father who is there in the secret place"

We need to listen, as well as talk to Him.

When are we quiet enough to hear?

"Be still and know that I am God" says the Psalmist.

When are we still? This is the gift of meditation. A time when we can sit in His presence in silence and stillness. A time when we ask for nothing and expect nothing. When we spend time in silent prayer, we take a journey to our hearts; we journey to our centre where He awaits us. On this journey we will discover who He wants us to be. Our true selves. The self that was made in His image. Everything we need is within. St Augustine says *"He bids you return to him, to that place within, where peace abides, peace that is never disturbed; to that place from which love never departs..."*

The gift of silence and stillness is where we take refuge. Where we can say; *"my rock and my stronghold"* (Psalm 30). Silence isn't easy. Our busy minds bustle in on the quiet. We let go of all our thoughts. We let them pass overhead like clouds floating by, as we take refuge in the cave of our hearts.

Elijah looked for God in the earthquake, wind and fire but he found that whilst in his cave God came to him in the still small voice of calm. Silent prayer doesn't replace other prayer but it is the missing part. When we become still within, prayer and the sacraments take on new meaning. Through Him with Him and in Him we are transformed in love.

Sit upright, comfortable relaxed and alert.

Close your eyes gently; be aware of your breathing.

Let all the tensions slip away as you relax each part of your body.

Take a prayer word such as Maranatha ("come Lord Jesus" in Aramaic) and repeat interiorly and slowly.

This is the discipline of the prayer.

When thoughts distract you return faithfully to your prayer-word from beginning to end of your silence.

Sit for 25 minutes morning and evening.

We begin in faith and end in Love. The Contemplative Prayer Group meets at St Therese of Lisieux Church in Stansted every Tuesday evening at 8.00pm. All are very welcome. If you would like more details please contact Amanda Moss on 816205.



SOCIETY OF FRIENDS

Quaker Meeting House, Chapel Hill

Clerk Mrs Anthea Lee
24 Lea Close
Bishop's Stortford
Tel : 01279 656707

Meeting Sunday, 11.00am

Thoughts on the celebration of Christmas

Writing about Christmas in early November gives one a different perspective than nearer the time when we are surrounded by the displays and all the trappings that go with a modern Christmas. It seems strange that we celebrate the birth of a humble child in an old stable 2000 years ago with all the materialism that goes with celebrations now. The simplicity of the message of that distant birth sits uneasily with an affluent society. There are so many paradoxes in the representation of Christianity: magnificently beautiful cathedrals and elaborate rituals filled with genuine spirituality and yet proclaiming a faith inspired by someone who rejected grandeur and outward trappings.

St Francis is a saint that most of us hold very dear and I have been lucky enough to go to Assisi twice. There the paradoxes are particularly striking: the richly beautiful basilica, the walls covered with Giotto paintings, has an atmosphere where the spirituality is almost tangible and yet St Francis' own little chapel in the lower town (now with a large and not very beautiful cathedral built over it) is simplicity itself and filled with the power of love.

In our 'Quaker Faith and Practice', which is very concerned with simplicity, we are nevertheless warned "to guard against undervaluing the material expressions of spiritual things" and that "there are innumerable 'means of grace' by which God is revealed and communicated". So even amongst all the materialism of a modern Christmas there can still be love and glimmers of Christ's vision of a better world.

Katharine Hurford



Visit to the Church of the Cherubim and Seraphim
One Sunday last month, at the beginning of One World Week, nine of us from the Stansted churches set off to Birmingham for the day to visit our friends in the Cherubim and Seraphim Church, a black evangelical church in inner city Birmingham. This is an annual exchange whereby we visit one year and they come to us the next. The connection came originally through Tony Bundock, then a curate at St John's, and has been maintained in all the 18 years since the first visit.

We arrived in time for welcome refreshments before the early afternoon service. There then followed a wonderful and very lively two hours of singing, chanting, prayers, and personal testimony, which also included a sermon delivered by David Morson. The congregation, both men and women, were all dressed in white robes, with white hats for the ladies, and pink capes for the choir. I'm afraid we were nothing like as spectacular, but did our best with light clothes, sunhats and headscarves. We were invited to join in the musical accompaniment with maracas and tambourines and some of us really managed to get into the swing of things. The Cherubim and Seraphim share the local Baptist Church, a very comfortable modern building, and the Baptist Minister also came to the service. I was particularly impressed by the openness with which people shared their faith and by their knowledge and love of the Bible. Whenever we had a Bible reading, the congregation would find and follow the passage in their own Bibles. I was lent a Bible, and it was evident that it was very well used, with almost every page containing notes and markings.

After the service we sat down in the newly built hall for a sumptuous meal with a variety of curries, rice and salads, followed by an abundance of desserts. In their generosity, our hosts also insisted on giving us boxes of more food to take home. We finally left at 6.00pm having had a wonderful time, renewing our friendship and strengthening our fellowship with the Cherubim and Seraphim, and looking forward to their visit to Stansted, which we hope to arrange in October next year.

Ruth Rawlinson



CTS are pleased to announce that the traditional Stansted Christmas Concert will take place at St Mary's Church on Saturday 17th December at 4.00pm. Please make every effort to support this community seasonal event of carols and readings. We are very fortunate to have Andrew Bruce of Bishop's Stortford College as choir master for this year. Andrew wishes to invite anyone who would like to be involved with the choir to come along to rehearsals at St John's Church on Wednesday 7th December, Wednesday 14th December and Friday 16th December between 8.00pm and 9.00pm.

There is no entrance charge for the concert, but any donations on the day will be divided between the Churches' Conservation Trust and the Motor Neurone Disease Association. We look forward to seeing you there.


Our Village Carol Singing which takes place on Thursday 22nd December and Friday 23rd December will also be in aid of the Motor Neurone Disease Association. All are welcome to take part. See the *What's On* page for further details.

David Morson, Chair



Bentfield School PTA
Christmas Fair

Saturday 3rd December
from 2 pm

Santa's Grotto ~ Raffle
Tombolas ~ Crafts
Plants ~ Cakes
Entertainment 



FUN MUSIC QUIZ
with LIVE MUSIC by

'CHARITY' 

7 for 7.30 pm Sat 3rd December
United Reformed Church Hall

Tickets £5 inc ploughman's
Bring your own drink & glass

 813977 or 814059

All Proceeds to Operation Christmas Child



MORGAN SZYMANSKI

Guitar

3 pm Sun 4th December
St John's Church

includes music by Tarrega, Albeniz,
Manuel M Ponce & Alec Roth
Tickets £10 adults, £3 children
from Nockolds, Bishop's Stortford;
Stansted Carpets; Options, Elsenham;
Sonia Levy 815282, or at the door

VILLAGE EVENTS

December

1	Thu	Bookstart
		Local History Society
3	Sat	Christmas Fair
		Music Quiz with 'Charity'
4	Sun	Village Music Club
		Afternoon Tea (after service)
5	Mon	Shalom Group
7	Wed	Mountfitchet Seniors
		Garden Club Quiz & Party
8	Thu	WI
9	Fri	Huw Johnson Concert
		Conservative Supper
10	Sat	Windmill Gift Sale
		Lib Dem Ploughmans
		Green waste, metal & wood
16	Fri	Christmas Fair
17	Sat	Celebration of Christmas
19	Mon	Shalom party
21	Wed	Mountfitchet Seniors
		Christmas Readings & Carols
22	Thu	Carol Singing
23	Fri	Carol Singing
24	Sat	Green waste, metal & wood

Library 2.15 - 3 pm
Day Centre 8 pm
Bentfield School 2 pm
U R C Hall 7.00 for 7.30 pm
St John's Church 3 pm
United Reformed Ch 3.30 - 5 pm
7 Blythwood Gardens 8 pm
Day Centre 2 - 4 pm
Day Centre 8 pm
St John's Hall 7.45 pm
St Mary's School 7 for 7.30 pm
Day Centre 7.30 pm
outside Savages 9 am - 12 noon
Day Centre noon - 2 pm
Lower Street car park 9 am - 3 pm
St Mary's School 3.15 - 6 pm
St Mary's Church 4 pm
7 Blythwood Gardens 8 pm
Day Centre 2 - 4 pm
St Theresa's Church 7.30 pm
Outside St John's Church 7.30 pm
Cambridge Rd/Croasdaile 7.30 pm
Lower Street car park 9 am - 3 pm

January

5	Thu	Bookstart
		Local History Society
7	Sat	Green waste, metal & wood
12	Thu	WI

Library 2.15 - 3 pm
Day Centre 8 pm
Lower Street car park 9 am - 3 pm
St John's Hall 7.45 pm

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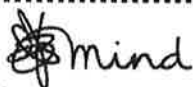
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DAYS OF THE WEEK

7. FRIDAY

Roman dies Veneris - the day of Venus, Goddess of Love.

French Vendredi, Old High German Friatag, Old Frisian Freitag.

Old English Frigesdaeg, the day of Freya, from Norse Freyjasdagr.

In Saxon Freyja, wife of Odin and leader of the Valkyries.

Freya, from whom we get our Friday, was one of the Scandinavian fertility deities and sister of Freyr, the god of male fertility. Her image would be carried around the fields to ensure a good harvest. In Greek mythology her equivalent was Aphrodite.



Good Friday - why buns? The significance of the cross is obvious but it seems the offering of 'bouns' or sacred cakes of flour and honey with two 'horns' was made to ancient gods. Another pagan custom taken over? A loaf baked on Good Friday should be hung on the ceiling for good luck and a protection from illness. It would dry out and never go mouldy. At The Widow's Son Public House, Bromley-by-Bow, Tower Hamlets, a tradition has kept going to this day and is apparently a condition of the lease. A widow living on the site was expecting her sailor son home for Easter and saved a bun for him but he never returned. When the public house was built there in about 1848 the landlord carried on saving a bun every year and a sailor is asked to put it in a net hanging from the ceiling. It is said that a priest at St Albans Abbey, Herts, gave buns to the poor on Good Friday in AD1361 and so began the tradition here.



On Good Friday the Dunstable Downs and Pascombe Pit Orange Rolling takes place. Believed to be symbolic of the stone being rolled away from the door of Christ's tomb. If so, why on Good Friday and not Easter Sunday?

Friday is a special day to Muslims, said to be when Adam was created. In the Roman Catholic Church it is a day of general abstinence and, in particular of, meat.

Friday Harbour, San Juan Island, Washington State, USA, is approximately mid-way between the mainland and Canadian Vancouver Island.

The Devizes to Westminster Canoe Races start on Good Friday; about 125 miles with 77 locks, weirs, tidal waters and attacks by swans. Some do it non-stop and other races take place over the weekend. What an endurance test!



Peggy Honour



Huw Johnson Club

Our firework party went with a swing and everybody enjoyed the lovely food provided by Hannah to warm us up when we went indoors. Thank you Hannah, Chris and Joanne for the use of your garden and your hospitality.

We now have to concentrate on our concert and we are all learning the words of our songs and carols. Do come along and support our members as they do love a good audience. We do not charge an entrance fee but there will be a raffle and a donation box to cover expenses. Make a note of the date: **9th December at St Mary's School, St John's Road.** Doors open at 7.00pm for 7.30pm start. Mince pies and a drink provided.

Once again I make a plea for another driver or two. Each week I have to ring up Martin and say "Okay you can come" or "Sorry - not this week". You will only drive one way (Saffron Walden to Stansted or Stansted to Saffron Walden) once a month. Will someone make Martin happy? Come and have a chat with me if you think you could help. I promise not to exert any pressure if you then decide your answer is no.

It's good to end on a cheerful note. The King's Arms in Lower Street made a great effort during the summer and autumn, with a sponsored bike ride, disco, buffet and raffle. Later on they ran an Indian buffet (thanks to The Bombay Butler), a massive raffle, and ended with the ceremonial shaving of landlord Gary's moustache - a picture of which you may have seen in last month's 'Link'. The result of this grand effort was almost £1,000 for club funds. It's so encouraging to have such public-spirited people in Stansted. Thank you Stefanie, Gary and all who supported these events.

Marion Johnson

STANSTED LIBRARY

The Essex Library Service now offers an on-line service for, among other things, Encyclopaedia Britannica in its entirety, plus The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography and The Times newspaper facsimiles from 1785 to 1985. All you need is a current library card.

Stansted Library operates its Bookstart on the first Tuesday of the month from 2.15pm to 2.45 pm. Just the thing for toddlers rising five.



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Nature Notes

Until this year I had only once seen a sparrowhawk perch in the garden and only rarely flying overhead, but this last spring and summer at least two of these birds of prey have been frequent visitors, and people have reported them taking garden birds in Stansted and also the surrounding area. Their impact on our local bird population has been dramatic and in the gardens in my area there is a noticeable reduction in the numbers of robins, chaffinches, greenfinches, sparrows, blackbirds, thrushes, house martins, blue tits and great tits.

Over the years we have seen a succession of predators. Cats, crows, squirrels, jays and magpies all took their toll in turn but a balance in the garden bird population was always achieved. For a while some local cats terrorised the small birds until a pair of crows nested nearby. They saw off the cats and squirrels in no uncertain manner but also any nest near the top of a bush was easy prey for them. The crows moved on to be replaced by magpies. These patrolled the bushes screeching to frighten the birds into revealing their nest sites, whereupon eggs and young would be gobbled up. I have seen a magpie apparently waiting until a pigeon had laid an egg before chasing it off and tucking in. But then I have also seen a crow unhurriedly devouring the contents of a magpie's nest almost unconcerned by the parents' attacks. When the magpies were numerous the birds started to nest closer and closer to the house. In the end blackbirds, chaffinches, pigeons and collared doves nested within two feet of where we had to pass each day and they raised their broods successfully. Generally all these predators attacked the eggs or the young birds. The sparrowhawks, however, would take adult birds and the loss of one nesting parent probably resulted in the loss of the whole brood. This could explain how they have made such an impact.

So why have the sparrowhawks decided to hunt in the gardens this year? The RSPB monitors bird populations and has recorded nationwide a large fall in numbers of farmland birds over the last decade or so. Paradoxically this has coincided with an increase in predatory birds, the theory being that as farmland birds have to struggle to find food, they have to fly further afield and are thus more exposed and make easier prey. From observation while walking or driving locally the sparrowhawks do seem to be more common in recent years.

Other factors may have a bearing on their increase. Until a generation or so ago gamekeepers would shoot everything that

might threaten nesting game birds, including sparrowhawks. John Wilkins, the gamekeeper mentioned last month, would probably have festooned his hut in Durrells Wood with shot weasels, stoats, squirrels, jays, magpies, crows and all birds of prey. The gamekeeper's 'larder' in Hazelend Wood had all his quarry hung on wires strung between two trees. Bird-nesting young boys also took their toll; I can remember climbing up to a crow's nest and, instead of finding crow's eggs, there were wonderful cream coloured eggs with rich brown markings. The sparrowhawks had taken over the crow's nest for their own use. Coinciding with the demise of gamekeepers and the outlawing of egg collecting, the increased use of pesticides on crops introduced poisons into the food chain, which ended up in the larger predators, once again keeping their numbers down. I believe that nowadays chemicals used are more bird friendly. It could be that just when the sparrowhawks had a clear run, their food supply dwindled in the countryside and they have turned to the gardens.

When kestrels and sparrowhawks are raising their young, if they find a ready food supply they tend to hunt non-stop, building up a stock of food in the nest. Some 230 years ago the Rev'd Gilbert White, in his *Natural History of Selbourne*, recorded how a sparrowhawk started to take young chickens one after another. They caught the **culprit** by stringing a net across its attack route. It was reported this year that a pair of kestrels nesting on Yarmouth Racecourse grandstand had taken up to possibly 300 chicks from the nearby tern colony, threatening to wipe it out. I watched a kestrel swoop in and take a partridge chick from a brood of about ten straying a few feet from their mother. Within minutes the kestrel was back for a second helping but other birds saw it coming and raised the alarm, whereupon the hen partridge flew up to meet it head on and save her chicks. One wonders why hundreds of terns could not do the same thing.

In the garden here it is noticeable that the birds have started flocking together more than they used to, in fact just like some farmland birds do in the winter. The picture shows a sparrowhawk having caught what looks like a fully grown woodcock, so pigeons should be suitable prey also. Perhaps now that our garden birds are wising up, the sparrowhawks will do some good and concentrate on the pigeons which for some reason have been proliferating.



Felix

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**School News**

You may have heard sirens coming from the direction of the school this month. The local firemen, with their big red fire engine, visited both our Reception and Nursery classes. What a great time the children had – especially using the gigantic hose!!

As part of British Film Week several classes went to the cinema. Reception and Classes 1 and 2 went to see Laura's Star and the following day Classes 5 and 6 saw Herbie: Fully Loaded. All classes travelled to Bishop's Stortford and back by train.

Class 1 enjoyed a lovely day at Saffron Walden Museum using their senses to explore the museum and find things they liked.

We were very fortunate to have a visit from the Young Shakespeare Company who entertained Years 4, 5 and 6 with a workshop based around Twelfth Night. This was a wonderful experience for the children and was thoroughly enjoyed. Keeping to the literary theme, we held a Book Fair where the children and parents could browse through and buy a wide variety of children's literature. At the end of the week there was a whole school assembly where the children, and staff, dressed up as a book character. It was a very colourful occasion with some lovely costumes.

We are now in the exciting run down to Christmas with lots of activities planned for December including a Glitter Morning for Nursery and Reception, a Christmas Craft day for the rest of the school and, of course, Christmas dinners, parties and the staff Pantomime. There will also be productions from both Foundation Stage and KS1, but more about these next time!

Our school offers both a Breakfast Club (from 7.45am), and an After School Kids' Club (until 6.00pm). We also have our wonderful Messy Play. This is great fun, and runs in the Nursery on Mondays from 1.30pm to 3.00pm. It is open to children 18 months and older. If you are interested contact the school or just turn up! If you are interested in either a Nursery or Reception place in September 2006, and would like to visit the school, please give us a ring and we would be very pleased to arrange one for you.

PTA News

It has been a busy term for the PTA too! The Music Quiz in October was another great evening. We are (once again!) enormously grateful to Rebecca Carter, Quiz Mistress extraordinaire, for enabling us to have so much fun making money. We would also like to express our thanks to St Mary's School PTFA for lending us a Barclays Bank employee so that we could benefit from their matching scheme. Thanks to Nicky Kelly's willingness to give up her own time to help us, the profits from this year's event are being matched by the bank, giving us a fantastic £1200 to spend in school. The school disco and sale of plants and spring bulbs supplied by a local nursery between them added nearly another £300 to PTA funds.

Our Sparkler Party was on Friday 4th November. After what seemed like endless rain during the week we were, in the end, very lucky with the weather. It did not rain on our parade and it was just cold enough for the wonderful home-made soup to be very welcome. After enjoying their sparklers in the safety area, the children had a lovely time eating doughnuts on a string and trying to see who could get the wettest in the apple bobbing bucket! The glow sticks, scary masks, dare boxes, bat the rat and slime making were also big hits.

Christmas is coming, the goose is getting fat, and Bentfield Christmas Fair is on Saturday 3rd December from 2.00pm–4.30pm! Do come along and enjoy the fun! Try your luck in the raffle and tombolas – there are also homemade cakes, and plants and crafts to buy for Christmas. Enjoy a mince pie and a cup of tea while the choir entertains you with carols by the Christmas tree. For the children there are pocket money toys, second hand toys, face painting, a craft activity, sweet and toy tombolas and, of course, a chance to make an early visit to Santa in his magical grotto! There will be lots of great games, including the furiously competitive Scalextric Challenge – we are never quite sure whether we run this for the benefit of the children or their dads! After their success last year, each class will again be organising and running its own stall. Watch out for the return of Class 1's irresistible chocolate tombola! We look forward to seeing you on Saturday. Have a merry Christmas and a peaceful and happy New Year.

Ali Thompson
Bentfield School PTA

**STANSTED
FUN RUN**

STANSTED

11.00am Sunday 2nd July 2006

Yes it's official – the date for next year's Fun Run & Walk has been set for 2nd July. Many thanks to those of you who contacted me with dates – I am not aware that we are clashing with any other village events – so please book the date in your diary! More details in the Spring.

In the meantime, a reminder that we are still collecting deskjet and toner cartridges for recycling. Although the price that we receive for each cartridge is very small compared to a few years ago, we feel that the project is worthwhile continuing because it is 'environmentally friendly'. Cartridges can be left in my porch, or I can collect.

Marion Dyer
7 Blythwood Gardens. Tel 814059.
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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

As Secretary of the Stansted Branch of the Royal British Legion I would like to reply to our Rector's very long, and I find confusing, letter in November 'Link'.

Firstly it should be made clear that it is not just a 'small group of people' who find it incomprehensible that there should be a memorial to Dr Sally Ilett placed in Stansted's War Memorial Garden. It seems from the response I have received from many people that there are many residents who feel the same as the Committee of the RBL.

Whilst this 'Garden' was given to the Church over 90 years ago it surely does not give the Rector or PCC the right to trample underfoot the wishes and sensitivities of a large number of the residents of Stansted.

Let us face the facts. Dr Ilett committed a criminal offence and sadly died of an overdose of heroin as well as other drugs and alcohol. She had already lost her licence to practise at that time. In spite of this the Reverend Spurr seems to suggest that she is as much entitled to a memorial in the 'Garden' as those who died in the Two World Wars. There are very many people who would disagree with him. Those whose names appear on the War Memorial as well as all those we remember each time we walk through the 'Garden' died and suffered so that we can enjoy the freedom that is ours today. Perhaps our Rector should remember the words of Jesus when he proclaimed "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven". I hope he will agree that from this we can be sure that they are all now at peace.

Whilst I know very little of Sally Ilett as a doctor, she no doubt had many admirers during her 12 years at our surgery but we hardly think that this qualifies her for a memorial in our War Memorial Garden. There will be some people who are desperate for a memorial for her, so be it, but why should it be placed in the middle of the 'Garden', a few feet from the Village War Memorial? Surely there are many other sites to which it could be moved thereby saving the upset which has been caused to so many people.

This concludes the correspondence. Ed.

Harold Thistle

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SNIPPETS

Having had the benefit of advance viewing, I wish to endorse Felix's Nature Notes in this issue. The reduction in numbers of garden birds in one year has been catastrophic. Carrion crows are now rivalling pigeons as our most numerous local species. A wider variation in size and more generous distribution of nest-boxes may help the situation in the short term. In the longer period crows may, as Felix suggests, eat more pigeons eggs and themselves become victims of cyclical decline. Sparrowhawks too, like peregrines, may find pigeons to their liking. Nevertheless, for the coming season the prospects are not brilliant. The survivors are likely to need human help.

*

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On a happier note, congratulations are due to Rapid Rescue and the team at St. Theresa's Church for their bumper Quiz on 19th November. The hall was heaving while the atmosphere and the range of raffle prizes were outstanding. This lesser-known charity (currently engaged with the Pakistan earthquake) benefitted by over £5000 from the quiz and a charity walk.

Ed.

CALMING YOUR PET

I hope all your pets survived Bonfire night. It was certainly a busy time for us. We had great success this year using a combination of herbal and homeopathic treatments in conjunction with the dog pheromone spray that helps to reduce general levels of anxiety. We try not to give out sedatives routinely any more as studies have shown that animals that are sedated are still terrified but just unable to do anything about it, and this has the effect of reinforcing the fear response, so it is worse the next time. We try to use a combination of approaches including behavioural advice and there is a type of Valium that can be prescribed if necessary. (For the dog, not the owner!)

I have to say my dog is also terrified of fireworks and this year I followed all the advice on our leaflet we have available at the surgery. I shut the curtains, turned up the TV and made him a nice comfortable den behind the sofa that he could escape to and feel secure in. He seemed to cope with about three bangs and then disappeared into the kitchen. I followed immediately, of course, but looking round couldn't see him anywhere. It was then I heard a chink of bottles and looking down spied two small brown legs sticking out of the wine rack. I know of people turning to drink in times of stress, but he obviously thought that imitating a bottle of wine was the closest he was going to get! We're all looking forward to New Year to see what he'll get up to next.

The most recent development at the surgery this month is that we are now able to provide acupuncture for animals. I have completed my training and already have several patients. Veterinary acupuncture is probably over 2000 years old and has been developed from observations by veterinarians in ancient China. These people noticed that digital pressure applied to certain points on an animal's body, relieved pain or reduced signs of ill health. It was later discovered that a better effect was produced if these points were stimulated by inserting needles. Veterinary acupuncture was practised widely until the early part of the 19th century when interest in it died out due to the advances in other aspects of veterinary medicine such as the discovery of antibiotics. However interest in acupuncture has grown again and it is becoming much more widely available; it has also become much more accepted due to the discovery of endorphins in the early 1970s which led to the scientific explanation of how it works.

Acupuncture can be used as a treatment for many conditions. It is particularly useful for the treatment of musculoskeletal conditions such as arthritis, slipped discs, back pain of all kinds, hip dysplasia, joint pain and partial paralysis, but it is also useful in the treatment of conditions such as skin allergies, COPD in horses, gastro-intestinal complaints and epilepsy. While acupuncture is not a 'cure-all', it can certainly be very useful in a variety of situations and can also be used safely alongside conventional techniques or drugs. If you are interested in finding out more, please contact me at the surgery. I did offer to demonstrate on Sally, but she was suddenly very busy putting the drug order away ... Hmmm!

Ilse Pedler,
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A reminder that the young international guitarist, **Morgan Szymanski** will be performing in St John's Church, **next Sunday, 4th December at 3.00pm**. Born in Mexico City in 1979, Morgan studied at the Royal College of Music and the Conservatorium van Amsterdam, graduating in 2004 with first class honours. His programme in Stansted will include works by Tarrega, Albeniz, Manuel M Ponce and a new work by Alec Roth. We quote from a recent write up in the London Evening Standard following one of his London concerts ... "To judge from the whoops and whistles that greeted him Morgan Szymanski already has a fan club. He made light of Alberto Ginastera's 1976 Sonata, an enjoyable period piece, demanding a virtual anthology of extended techniques ... In Carlo Domeniconi's Koyunbaba, the density of sound was as near to symphonic as the unamplified guitar gets..." This is high praise indeed and we are looking forward to this very talented young man's visit.

Tickets for the concert are £10 (children £3) available from Stansted Carpets, Nockolds, Bishop's Stortford, Options, Elsenham, Sonia Levy 815282 or at the door.

January 2006 will be the Tenth Anniversary of the Club's inauguration and we shall be making the occasion of international pianist Bernard Roberts' visit on the afternoon of Sunday 29th January somewhat special! Some may recall that Bernard has been to the Club before and his playing and interpretation is an absolute delight to the ear. At 4.00pm on the previous day, Saturday 28th January, Bernard will be holding a Piano Masterclass, supported by Stansted Stort Valley Rotary, for invited young piano students. To watch the master at work putting pupils through their paces is quite an education, and exciting to see. The fourth and final concert of the season will be at 7.30pm on Saturday 25th March 2006 and will feature The Coull String Quartet.

Alan Corbishley

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Those of us who live, work and travel to and fro in the Stansted area will be all too aware of the impact which the airport is having on our lives, not just because of the noise and air pollution which is ever present, but also because of the increased traffic on our roads which generally hampers our journeys.

It is well known that Stansted has a greater number of parking spaces per passenger than any other airport in the world, and in their displays and the interim forecasts which BAA have recently presented, they appear to have paid little heed to the Surface Access requirements which their current and proposed growth in passenger throughput will require. Indeed, recent surveys have shown that the percentage of passengers and employees who use public transport to travel to the airport is woefully small and it is hardly surprising. The low cost airlines have attracted people from all over the country and unless you travel via central London it is almost impossible to reach the airport by train. Couple this with the fact that the Stansted Express shares the general, unreliable commuter services to the City and it leaves the car as the only feasible means of reaching the airport for the majority of passengers.

We in Essex are all aware that the airport is here to stay but when added to the impact of the housing development in the area, the 2012 Olympics, not to mention the Thames Gateway Development and the growth in road transport, which passes through the county on the motorway network, we have a daunting prospect. In order to address this, Essex County Council are exploring new measures to manage the airport's transport impact. This includes such things as demand management for airport trips through some form of toll on users, together with new freight management systems and innovative ways of financing and delivering the necessary infrastructure programme, which is essential if the nature of this area is to be maintained.

Ray Gooding, County Councillor, Stansted Division
01279 813103 cllr.ray.gooding@essexcc.gov.uk



Bringing the Council closer to you

At our last full Council meeting we adopted a new constitution. This will come into effect on 14th December. Such documents are often dry and have little interest outside those immediately involved. This constitution is, however, different. It reduces the number of policy committees from five to three. This will have the effect of modernising the Council decision making processes and making them more efficient. The constitution also sets up three Area Panels. It is envisaged that their first meeting will be in January. Stansted will be in the South West Area Panel which includes Clavering, Takeley, Manuden, Hatfield Heath and the Hallingburies. The Area Panel will be responsible for:

- Scrutinising the provision of services within the area
- Determining local priorities for service delivery
- Determination of the destination of grants with a purely area based connection
- Making decisions on traffic regulation orders and road safety issues

What does all this mean? Effective Area Panels will be a means for Uttlesford to get closer to its citizens and to provide better services. They will not meet in the Council Offices in Saffron Walden but in local village halls and day centres. Surveys show that councils are often seen as 'remote and unresponsive.' Home Office surveys show that only a minority of people felt that they had any influence over the decisions affecting their local area. A successful area dimension will help to rectify this. There will be an opportunity for members of the public to put their concerns and questions to councillors.

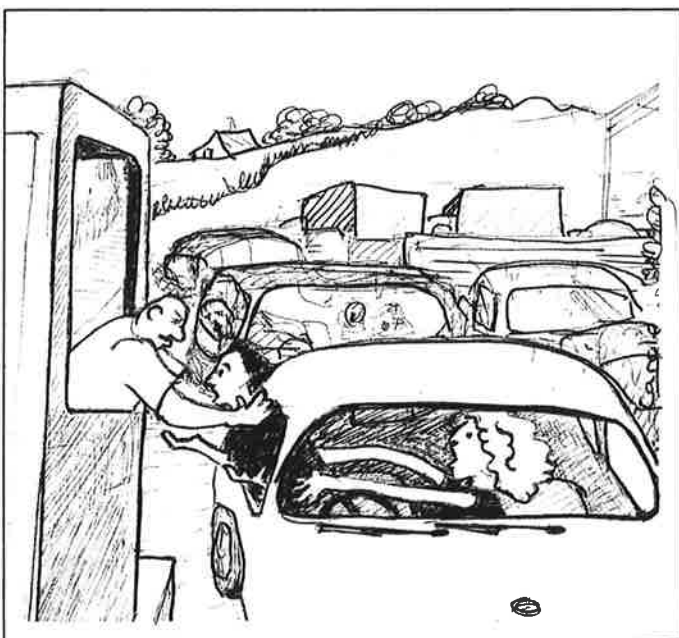
Changes to Concessionary Fares

The current system provides concessionary half fare bus passes to older people (ie over 60), disabled people and people who are not permitted to drive for medical reasons. The new system, which will be introduced by April 2006, provides free travel to those already outlined plus a nominated carer for people with disabilities. Currently 2,500 residents take advantage of concessionary fares, which is a small proportion of those eligible. The new scheme will be run on a county basis, which means that there will be free bus travel within Essex. As Stansted is on the county border, free bus travel will be of limited value to those travelling to Bishop's Stortford. Negotiations are being held with East Herts Council to deal with cross border anomalies. If you believe you are eligible for free bus travel and wish to take advantage of the new scheme please contact Denise Thoday at Uttlesford on 01799 510608.

Cllr Geoffrey Sell
Tel: 815925 cllr.sell@uttlesford.gov.uk

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MOUNTFITCHET GARDEN CLUB

Fun with Flowers

Jean Crane entertained and educated us with her spectacular flower arrangements of autumn colour accompanied by hints on how to care for them. She started with a tip – how to soak Oasis; float it on water and it will take 90 seconds to sink naturally. Leave it longer or give it a push and it will disintegrate. Her first arrangement started with abelia, a shrub which has small leaves year round and in autumn small pale pink flowers followed by reddish bracts. To this she added hardy fuchsia, seed heads of stinking iris, viburnum leaves, which had turned to red and yellow, and finished with five red carnations.

Her second arrangement was based on chopped back shrub twigs which had lost their leaves, straight and about 18" long. Her container was made of a new material for flower arrangers, designer lead, available only by mail order, heavy, but pliable. Into a tray fitted with an Oasis block were pushed short twigs of bay and euonymus, then the bare shrub twigs up which were twined ivy leaves. It was finished off with long stemmed roses of varying height, from which most of the lower leaves had been removed to help the water reach the rose heads.



We were advised to water regularly with ice cubes. The third arrangement, simple and low, was started with a squash hollowed out to take and drain the Oasis, completed with hosta leaves, skimmia, lily flowers, carnations and finally with dried stems of hypericum, sprayed with gold paint and threaded with berries such as cotoneaster or pyracantha and bent to make a small arch. An evening of ideas for us all!

Speakers for Next Year

The chairman of the meeting invited members to make suggestions for next year to be given to the chairman, David Loynds, by the next meeting (the Christmas Party).

Seed Catalogues

These were available to members and should be returned by the Christmas Party. The bigger the joint order, the bigger the discount!

Christmas Party

The next meeting, on Wednesday 7th December at 8.00pm, will be our Party and Quiz. Members were reminded there will be a glass of wine and asked to make a contribution of food to be shared. Visitors are welcome so if you are thinking of joining the Garden Club why not come along and meet us and enjoy a glass of wine and a mince pie? Entrance fee for visitors is 75p, which as a Christmas present, will include membership of the Garden Club until the AGM in April.

There will be no meeting in January. On 1st February Andrew Tokely will be talking about 'Something Old, Something New' and the competition will be 'A Pot Plant in Bloom'.



Sally Stockman

The Helen Rollason HEAL Cancer Charity

The new name for HEAL

With effect from 5th September, the name of the Herts Essex And London Cancer Charity, known to all our supporters as HEAL, was changed to The Helen Rollason HEAL Cancer Charity. This step was taken solely to incorporate the name of the late BBC Sports Journalist, who was closely involved with the original charity until her death in 1999. The new name is the only change, the charity's aims remain as before.

As the year draws to a close it is time to reflect on the fundraising activities of the local group, none of which would have been possible without the generous support of the people of Stansted. In February we had our Quiz Night, on what was probably the coldest night of the winter, in April we participated in the village coffee morning at the Day Centre. July saw the sixth annual Stansted Open Gardens, and in September Ash Valley Golf Club hosted our second Charity Golf day.

October was a busy month with another coffee morning, at the home of Sandra and Keith Ayres, and the last event of the year, briefly mentioned in last month's 'Link', a concert given by St. Edmundsbury Male Voice Choir, ably supported by the local group 'Summer Wine'.

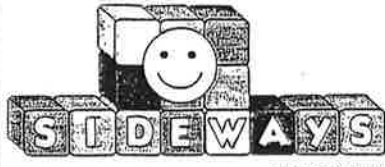
This latter event was a new departure for us, and we were uncertain of the level of support. We need not have worried; 'House Full' signs would have been appropriate at the United Reformed Church if we had thought to make some! The audience were treated to an evening of first class entertainment, with more than one person voting it the best thing that had happened in Stansted for years! Needless to say we are trying to arrange a return visit from the Choir, (and 'Summer Wine' please). Next time we will try to obtain a larger venue.

Although the above mentioned events were those organised by the local group of the charity, we must not forget the many individual donations, large and small which have been received throughout the year. Whilst it is not possible to name every one, and indeed not all benefactors would wish to be named, special thanks are due to Jan and John of the Rose and Crown and their customers, generous supporters since the group was founded in 1996.

At the end of the year it is gratifying to record that the local group has been able to send over £7000 to the main charity in Chelmsford. It is the intention of the group that all funds raised are earmarked for a local Cancer Care Centre to be run by the charity, for which a suitable location is currently being sought.

If you would like further information on the work of the charity, please feel free to contact the Head Office on 01245 513350, or on the website: www.helenrollason.org.uk

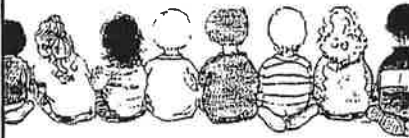
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Around this time of year, many parents spend time looking around schools, with the aim of deciding on the best place for their child as they embark on primary education – and part of my job is to show them around our school, to give a better understanding of what life in St Mary's is like!

Parents have widely varying concerns and questions, but there are several common themes, one of which is how we deal with bullying. It is understandable that many parents should have this concern, given some of the tragic cases we have all heard about in the press, and for some parents, their concerns may spring from their own childhood experiences.

In St Mary's we obviously take bullying incidents seriously and resolve them as quickly as possible, but I would say that it is actually our proactive approach to the development of positive relationships that is more important. We set the tone at the start of each school year with Friendship Week, when children can say what they value about each other and carry out role play in different situations, practising appropriate assertiveness and useful communication skills, to use with other children and the adults in the school. In the last two years, we have also worked at increasing the feeling of togetherness in each class through an African drumming circle workshop. A noisy way of celebrating teamwork! We expect our older children to take a lead in anti-bullying strategies and equip them for this through the Personal Social and Health Education in which they participate, particularly through our annual Year 6 residential trip. Their visit to Norfolk in October involved lots of fun, but challenging activities which developed their teamwork and co-operation skills.

The Crunchy Munch Club (our Breakfast Club) was set up with many aims in mind: one of the objectives was to increase the interaction between children of different age ranges. On joining the children for breakfast any morning, this is immediately obvious and some friendships have developed that may not have done so otherwise.

All of our staff are involved in the pastoral care of children and realise its huge importance and one of our Teaching Assistants works in a purely pastoral role for part of each week, with individual children as the need arises and by setting up small groups to improve social interaction between children if necessary. Our most recent addition to school life, being coordinated by the pastoral TA, has been weekly TEAM (Together Everyone Achieves More) Talk groups. These are being run by our oldest children and involve children of all ages in the school, discussing relevant issues in a family-type group of between five and seven children. In the few weeks these have been running, children have talked about: themselves and their interests, activities for the playground, lunchtime manners and about good listening. The skills

required to run the groups are considerable but so are the rewards: there have been exciting moments when Year 6 children have shared with their classmates about the first time one of the younger children in the group contributed something to the group. In all of these activities, our aim is not just to improve the relationships, which our children

develop in our school, but to enable them to be confident in developing positive relationships throughout their school careers and their lives.

Wendy Wood, Headteacher

STOP PRESS Congratulations to Wendy Wood who, against background views of St Mary's Primary School, appeared on SKY News on the morning of Thursday 17th November to give an excellent account of the tasks and the resulting onerous working life that has to be endured by today's primary school headteachers. *Editor*



Hello again!

This Autumn term is really racing by; it only seems yesterday when we said goodbye to our big boys and girls and welcomed the new little ones joining us. We have been really busy making books about ourselves called 'All About Me'. The children were encouraged to bring in photos of themselves as babies and as toddlers, members of their families, favourite toys and books. For bonfire night we made a giant bonfire picture and smaller firework pictures by rolling marbles in paint which were on display in St John's Church Hall. We also celebrated Divali, the Hindu festival of lights.

During the rest of this term, we will be walking around the village collecting leaves and looking at the trees and bushes, crunching in the leaves. We will be leaf printing and using all the glorious autumnal colours in our paintings. Autumn is a great time of year for making apple pies; so we will be talking about fruits and berries and, of course, warning the children of the dangers of poisonous berries – telling them that they are strictly for the birds in wintertime! As the blustery weather comes upon us we will be making pictures by blowing paints and also making kites to fly.

By the time you read this, we will have started our Christmas activities - making cards, tree decorations, calendars and crackers for all the family to enjoy! We will have a trip to Little Legs on 8th December as a Christmas treat just before our party on 9th with a visit from Santa himself! Our final week before Christmas will be a free play activity week. The simple nativity play will be on the last day of term, 16th December at 11.00am. Everyone is welcome for coffee and mince pies as well as a festive raffle!

Sideways Pre-School nursery has a vacancy for a qualified member of staff for two days a week. If anyone with a level 3 DPP diploma or equivalent is interested, please phone 816600 during nursery hours or 813828 after that to discuss the position.

If you would like your child to join our happy band, looking for flexible days and paying only for the days you attend, then please call in any morning or phone on 816600 for more details. We look forward to welcoming you! Term restarts on Monday 9th January 2006. Have a lovely Christmas and a safe and Happy New Year.

Auntie Helen and the team



Airport Communities unite in call for Government action on Night Flights

MPs and council leaders from across the region have called on the Government to rethink its proposals to allow night flights quotas at Stansted to increase by 41 percent over current levels in the next seven years. They were joined by dozens more Parliamentarians and community leaders from across the political spectrum to address more than 400 people who attended a rally against the Government's plans for slackening night flight restrictions at London's three main airports. Conservative Shadow Transport Secretary Alan Duncan MP and Liberal Democrat Transport Spokesman Tom Brake MP also played an active role in the proceedings which took place in Central Hall, Westminster in October.

The rally was organised by Stop Stansted Expansion in conjunction with community campaigners at Heathrow and Gatwick to add to the pressure on the Government at a time when it is considering the results of its recent consultation into night flying restrictions at the three airports. Brooks Newmark, Mark Prisk and Tim Yeo were among local MPs and Peers who were present, expressing serious concern about the Government's failure to bear down on night noise as promised in the 2003 Air Transport White Paper. Cllr Gerard McEwen, Vice Chairman of Essex County Council, and Cllr Mark Gayler, Leader of Uttlesford District Council were just two of the many council leaders who addressed the overflowing hall. The blatant disregard for the well-being of those living under flight paths who suffer from the effects of overflying at night in order to pander to the interests of the aviation industry was repeated time and time again.

Stop Stansted Expansion Deputy Chairman Norman Mead brought the evening to a close with a warning to the Government and the Department for Transport to listen more closely to those who are so badly affected by night flights. "When you take the path of deceit and betrayal, you are taking advantage of the goodwill of ordinary law abiding people and you are treading on dangerous ground. It is not too late for the Government to start behaving responsibly on the night flights issue and I urge it to do so even at this late stage." "Local communities around airports have suffered long enough. Our patience is wearing thin," he continued. "We need to start seeing across-the-board reductions in the number of night flights – and we need to start seeing that now."

Examining Panel to be told that Regional Plan is unsound and unsustainable

The culmination of months of work by a team of specialists from SSE was brought to bear in early November at the Examination of the draft East of England Plan at the Examination in Public being held in Ely. SSE welcomes the Plan's exclusion of a second runway at Stansted, but opposes its proposals for the full use of the existing runway. Chairman Peter Sanders, made a powerful case against the fundamental flaws which underlie the plan, arguing against

the full use of the existing runway and resisting pressure from BAA to introduce provision for a second runway.

The main premise of the SSE argument is that the plan is unsound in the context of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and in terms of government guidance. The plan is unrealistic because insufficient government funding has been promised for the infrastructure provision that would be required for its implementation, putting extreme pressure on an already overburdened road and rail structure within the region. Furthermore, the plan is unsustainable since it fails to take adequate account of the Sustainability Appraisal Report which was commissioned by the authors of the draft plan, the East of England Regional Assembly (EERA). In particular, the report stated that the full use of the existing runway was environmentally unsustainable. The plan also attaches more importance to economic than to environmental considerations, failing to set stringent and demanding environmental targets as well as the targets for increased housing and jobs.

Before his appearance at the Examination in Public, Peter Sanders commented: "While the Government has set a target of reducing UK carbon emissions from sources other than aviation by 60% by 2050, during the same period carbon emissions from aviation are forecast to increase more than eightfold. The proposed expansion of Stansted airport is completely inconsistent with Government policy on global warming and BAA should be required to calculate the increase in carbon emissions arising, not just from the expansion of the airport, but from all the developments to which this expansion would give rise."

The evidence presented on 8th and 9th November forms part of Matter 1D on protection of the environment and use of natural resources, focusing on the fact that the Plan does not take an appropriate strategic approach to the protection of the environment. SSE will repeat the finding of EERA's Sustainability Appraisal Report that the proposed expansion at Stansted to the full use of the existing runway would be unsustainable. It also spelt out the implications in terms of noise, air pollution, health, housing, transport and urbanisation generally. The representations made by SSE are the first of three areas on which SSE has been called to give evidence. In parallel, SSE has made written submissions on the vision, objectives and parameters of the strategy as well as matters relating to economic growth and participation, social exclusion and quality of life. The group has also been called to speak on 6th December on the regional transport strategy and on 16th February on Stansted and the M11 corridor.

Register Your Views

I thought that readers of The LINK might be interested to know that Uttlesford District Council is conducting a poll online asking "What are your feelings on the proposals for expansion at Stansted Airport, would it be good for Uttlesford?" If you'd like to vote, go to:

www.uttlesford.gov.uk/quickpolls/default1.htm

Carol Barbone, SSE Campaign Director 07775 523091
SSE Campaign Office 01279 870558

STONEY COMMON RE-VISITED

Having described The Grippers past and present in the previous two issues we now turn our attention to the nearby residential area known as Stoney Common.

These views date from the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries.

The upper one is of Stoney Common when it was tree-lined and had an open drainage ditch and of course no cars to impede progress.

The lower one is largely of West Road but also illustrates the shop.



The Stoney Common community had two loci in those days - the Mission Room (demolished last year) and The Shop. The latter became Reeves Cash Stores and ultimately passed to Mrs. Ruth Wickens after the war, when it became known as Ruth's Stores - a true corner shop. In the 40's and early 50's there was another "retail outlet" in West Road which operated out of a front room. One present resident can remember buying penny Oxo there which he and his friends ate whilst perched in the Stoney Common trees. Just out of sight beyond the trees and opposite the Mission Room was a bowling green owned by Rochfords Nurseries for the benefit of its many employees. The houses in both roads appear much the same today. The Stoney Common ones built by the Nurseries were occupied by its staff. The residents formed a close-knit community, partly due to benevolent oversight by Mr. Edmund Cawkell the owner but also because of its separation by fields and feeling neither of Birchanger nor Stansted (the Mountfitchet Estate had yet to come) it developed an insularity which led some of its residents to call it "Little Russia". The demarcation with Stansted was the Black Bridge and the young of the two strayed into each others territories at their peril, except when tobogganning time on Grippers led to differences being settled by snowballs. The Mission Room was erected by Miss Chester and described by Margaret Silvester in our April 2003 issue. In recent years parish boundaries have moved and Stoney Common is now in Stansted.



Despite new building there is still something that says this corner is different and part of its history lives on. The impending "Rochford development" promises to be the greatest change of all. The Link would welcome recollections from those who knew it as it was and perhaps some present day impressions.

Derek Honour



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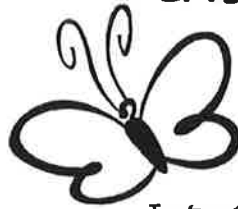
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At our November meeting we were pleased to welcome an old friend, Wally Wright, President of the Bishop's Stortford Local History Society and one who has an encyclopaedic knowledge of our local area. His subject was the long history of the Stort Navigation and he had gathered a fascinating collection of slides showing the waterway in use in its heyday.

Built by two sponsors, Sir George Duckett and Thomas Adelaide, in 1766 it was designed to serve towns and villages in the Stort Valley and to convey their goods economically to market. It carried many products but mainly was a link between the maltings and the brewers in London, at one time exceeding the combined output from their competitors, Ware and Hertford. Although traffic fluctuated at all times, by 1900 the maltings were in decline and consequently the navigation suffered. In 1911 William Gilbey, the then owner, sold it to the Lee Navigation. Following a period of renovation the waterway continued in use for another 30 years, although by this time the railways were providing irresistible competition.

Wally explained the difference between a canal, which was a purpose-built waterway, and a navigation, which was a river deepened, widened and straightened to carry traffic. It has locks like a canal to cope with differences in levels and we were shown what those on the Stort looked like when they were in regular use. He described the lives of the bargee and his horse-minder before the days of engines, and the families who shared them. They became a self-contained clan which was separate from their neighbours on either side of the waterway and with whom they were not always popular! Barges were not easy to navigate and many specialist skills were developed. Loading and unloading required many men and even the cranes were operated by hand – some of these exist even today, together with other evidence of past generations. In particular, buildings remain, although these have been adapted for use in a modern age, often in the form of luxury flats. The waterway itself is now mainly used for leisure purposes and it is hoped that it will form an important and attractive part of Bishop's Stortford's new development currently in hand.

We greatly enjoyed Wally's talk and look forward to inviting him again to hear about another aspect of local life. However, at our next meeting on 1st December we shall be looking at more recent and dramatic history when we welcome Ian Valentine to tell us of the Poles at Audley End House in WW2 and the Special Operations Executive. We shall also be welcoming the members of Manuden Local History Society for this, our Christmas meeting. Hope you can join us.

Ian Seavers

The spring course next year is to be led by Susan Brice and her subject is 'The future for Two Historic Essex Estates in the 21st Century'. The course will show how to research the historical background, topography, geology, design and social importance of historical designed landscapes in Essex, Easton Lodge, Little Easton and Marks Hall Estate, Coggeshall, will be compared and contrasted to show the constraints and opportunities available at the present time.

The course will again be held at 8.00pm in the Day Centre on ten Monday evenings starting on 16th January. Enrolment on the first evening is at 7.30pm. The full fee for the ten weeks is £33, concessions £23.50. Please contact me for further information.

Harold Thistle 813250



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Our next ploughman's lunches will be on Saturday 10th December, and Saturday 14th January 2006, 12 noon to 2.00pm at the Stansted Day Centre. All are welcome.

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If a careless lighted fag ash drops
We'd have need for a smoke alarm.

And, a green box filled with cartons
Smelly soap powder, sweet and spicy pies
Chocolate boxes, honeyed cereals
Makes a breeding ground for flies.

There's a green one, gaudy plastics
Milk, fruit juice, cleaning fluid bottles
What a sight, looks just like squalor does
And we live with these every day.

Are these red ones in the pipeline?
Maybe they're for the empty tins of spam
Dogs and cats meals, coca cola cans
All those supermarket picture packs.

Coloured bags too, filled with old clothes
Doggy blankets, never mind the fleas
We'll be experts like the Oxfams
Getting no time for ourselves.

Every two weeks different boxes
Are moved out for recycling
And are refilled very quickly then
That we hardly notice that they've gone.

And, recycling solves some problems
Saves trees, heals our damaged atmospheres
But we'll soon not need our dustbins
As they're lighter than they've been before.

Thanks to councils for solutions
Putting shelves up by our gable walls
Little boxes will be welcomed there
They won't bother us, not at all.

Emma Tant,
Norman Court



STANSTED LUNCH CLUB

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I thought that a Stansted Lunch Club Newsletter might be quite fun, so ...
... and the lunchtime news

The forty-ninth lunch was held on 30th November at The Stansted Centre, by kind invitation of Heather Andrews of Weston Business Centres Ltd, which generously subsidised the lunch. I was extremely impressed with the conference and office facilities with full back up and support. Contacts - Heather Andrews 874100, and Alastair Richardson 07850 295109.

Stansted Lunch Club – eight years on the landscape

Fifty-seven members of the Stansted Lunch Club sat down at the Old Bell, Stansted on 28th September 2005 for their 48th lunch since the Club began some eight years ago. Long standing member Liz Lake of Liz Lake Associates, the well respected local firm of landscape architects and urban designers, sponsored the lunch and provided the wine. Using illustrations, Liz demonstrated the importance of landscape architecture and urban design in the protection of rural and urban areas; in the creation of visually attractive industrial and commercial sites; in the disguise of major community infrastructure works, such as roads, sewage works and the like; in the repair of land devastated by nature's anger or man's thoughtlessness and insensitivity. Not only must landscape architecture seek to create appropriately located and attractive sites, but it must also be mindful of the importance of minimising the impact of development on natural plants and wildlife. Commenting afterwards Liz Lake said "We are delighted with the outcome and if the only thing 57 people remember is that we are not gardeners, my job will have been worthwhile!"

Winning ways

It was very pleasing to learn that Peter Calver's 'LostCousins' was a finalist in the Harlow Business Awards in the Business Innovation, and Best Use of e-Business categories (the only two for which it was entered).

Rather more prestigious though, are the e-Commerce awards, which are sponsored by the DTI and judged regionally. For anyone in the Stansted area this means the East of England (Essex, Suffolk, Norfolk, Herts, Beds, and Cambs). Once again LostCousins was a finalist in both categories that it entered: Best Customer Care Online, and Best Use of Teleworking. Had LostCousins won the regional heat it would have been in the National finals with a chance of a £50,000 prize! Next year it will have its first revenues and (hopefully) profits too - so it will be in with an even better chance of actually winning something. And perhaps Peter will sponsor our lunchtime drinks again!!
Contact: Peter Calver 817876

Future lunches - Wednesdays

25th January - Sponsor: City & Country Residential
29th March - Sponsor: KUA Consulting

Alastair Richardson,
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