

The Birches



Community Matters Newsletter - January 2026

Kingsthorn, Much Birch, Little Birch, Aconbury & Wormelow



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Improved Access to Aconbury Hill

Aconbury Hill and its surrounding woodlands are now significantly more accessible, following the replacement of old stiles with modern self-closing gates. Read more on page 5.



Some of the Dolly Mixtures meeting up for a pre Christmas catch up recently at Pengethley Garden Centre

"We always have lots to chat about when we get together, never a lull in the conversation!"



Art & Craft Group, drypoint printing further details on page 7



Our on-line edition contains fascinating and locally taken astronomy photos this month. See page 8 for details. www.birches.news or www.muchbirchparish.org.uk



Much Birch Parish Council

Details of meeting held on 6/11/25

The parish council held their December ordinary Parish Council Meeting on Thursday 4th December 2025. They heard about plans for future parish walks and a map, with walk and footpath details, was being put together for display in the notice board on the wall of the Much Birch Community Hall. The parish council also discussed a plan for a councillor to help with water quality monitoring in the parish.

The next ordinary Parish Council Meeting of the Much Birch Parish Council will be held on **Thursday 8th January 2026 from 7.30pm at the Much Birch Community Hall**. All are welcome to attend. Please see notice boards and website for agendas. As always the public and press are more than welcome to attend and will have the opportunity to speak directly to their representatives. Details of forthcoming meetings are in the column to the right.

Join us at the Community Café @ Much Birch Community Hall

Saturday 10 January 2026

10:00 - 12:30

and every 2nd Saturday of the month

14 February

14 March

11 April

For more information or if you are in need of transport contact Lydia on 01981 540323 or socialfabric@hotmail.com

A local group who want to bring people together, strengthen community links and provide relaxed and fun events for all ages.

Rowing success for Lottie O'Connor

Lottie has now been at Hereford Rowing Club for 18 months. Following a successful outdoor season, winning at various regattas around the country with team mates Emily Jones and Lola Wyatt, Lottie once again attended the British indoor Championships in Birmingham. Cheered on by club members, her Mum and Dad and brother Harry, she once again brought home a gold medal. The race was over 500 metres, she won by an emphatic four and a half seconds, with girls from the Faroe Islands taking silver and bronze medals. Well done Lottie we are all very proud of you!

Much Birch Parish Council

Councilors

Cllr Alison Cook (Chair) Jasmine Cottage, Wrigglebrook Lane, Kingsthorpe, Hereford, HR2 8AW, email: thecooks@wyenet.co.uk Tel. 01981 540703

Cllr Roisin Burge The Old Hall, Barrack Hill, Little Birch HR2 8AX email: roisinburge@hotmail.com Tel. 01981 540724

Cllr Chris Pickering-Grey 4 Court Farm Barns, Much Birch HR2 8HT email: chris@pickering-grey.uk Tel. 07712 813218

Cllr Michael Agyeman Little Willow, Wrigglebrook, Kingsthorpe, Hereford, HR2 8AU email: magyeman92@gmail.com Tel. 01981 540840

Cllr David Irwin email: David.Irwin13@btinternet.com Tel. 07766 135068

Cllr Steve Turner The Underhills, Hollybush Lane, Much Birch, Hereford, HR2 8HX, Tel. 07768 206296 email: turnersofcrossways@btinternet.com

Parish Council Clerk: Mrs Alison Wright email: muchbirchclerk@gmail.com

Much Birch Footpath Officer: email: MBfootpaths@btinternet.com Tel. 07766 135068

Dates for the forthcoming meetings:

08/01/26, 05/02/26, 05/03/26, 02/04/26, 07/05/26, 04/06/26, 02/07/26, 03/09/26, 01/10/26, 05/11/26, 03/12/26
All are in Much Birch Community Hall from 7.30pm.

Full minutes of the meetings can be found on the Parish Council website: www.muchbirchparish.org.uk
You can also find us on X (formerly known as Twitter) at <https://twitter.com/MuchBirchPC> and Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/Much.Birch.Parish>

The Birches Community Quiz



Friday 6th March

7.30pm



Much Birch Community Hall

Teams of four are invited to take part, the cost of entry will be £12 per team to include refreshments.

If you want to bring your own drinks, glasses will be provided. (Proceeds to local charities).

Please get in touch with Carole if you are interested in taking part either by email at carole.chichester@btinternet.com or by telephone 01981 540095 or 07503 581724

LITTLE BIRCH VILLAGE HALL

PUSS IN BOOTS

Pantomime

23, 24 & 31 Jan

Last few tickets available
Adults £10, Children £5
contact Tonya on 01981 540898

Jobs for the garden in January

I hope you have all enjoyed the festive period and are ready for another gardening year.

I have found, over many years, that you have to be patient as lawns and ground are wet and the latter cold as well. I have been told by one of our long standing local residents that a relative of his used to say "don't get on the veg patch til it's dry enough to walk on in your carpet slippers" - a bit extreme but refraining from walking on wet soil preserves the soil structure. If you have raised beds or have adopted 'no dig' principles then some work can start. A few jobs can be done outside and also in the greenhouse or even on a window sill or the airing cupboard.

- In the event of snow, shake it off tree branches and shrubs.
- Cut back foliage on helibores so the flowers aren't obscured.
- Dead head pot displays typically pansies and violas.
- Open greenhouse doors on mild sunny days.
- Plant bare root trees, shrubs and fruit bushes.
- Prune established gooseberries, red/white currants.
- Sow onion seeds for the over 9 ounce class if you intend entering horticultural shows. This will require a propagator or a warm window sill.
- Cover a few rhubarb crowns with a large receptacle to 'force' an early crop.
- Sow a few summer brassicas (cabbage 'greyhound' or 'hispi', calabrese (broccoli) 'iron man' and cauliflower 'all the year round' or 'Orkney') and salad leaves. Sow just a few of each of brassicas in small seed trays or cells (in a propagator or on a warm window sill) and once germinated and large enough to handle transplant into pots.
- Tomatoes and cucumbers seeds can be started off in individual pots (propagator or window sill). Cucumbers seeds and seedlings need to be watered from the bottom and just kept moist at this time of year otherwise they will rot off.
- Keep the bird feeders topped up and also provide fresh water.
- Check stored apples, pears, onions and potatoes. Potatoes may start to grow spouts so it is worth spending some time rubbing them off otherwise the potatoes will go soft.

Derek Scrivens



Gardening Club News



Forthcoming Events

Quiz Night on Wednesday 28th January ?

We're delighted to invite you to our Gardening Club Quiz Night on Wednesday 28 January, from 7:00–9:00pm at Little Birch Village Hall. It promises to be a fun evening of friendly competition, garden-themed questions, and plenty of laughs.

- 1) Do you already have a complete team of 4? If yes, please provide your team name and the names of all team members. If you are entering as 1–3 people, we will match you with other members to form full teams.
- 2) Entry Fee: £10 per team/£2.50 per team member, payable by bank transfer or on the night Please make your transfer to: ktlbgardening club, 56657807 sort code: 23-05-80 Include "Quiz + Your Name" as the payment reference.

To help us organise the teams let us know on ktlbgardeningclub@gmail.com

If you have any questions, feel free to get in touch.

We look forward to seeing you there for a great night of quizzing and community fun.

February 25th 2026:

Growing vegetables and getting the most from your efforts : A talk by Marion Stainton

Marion will be giving us tips ready to start planning for the Annual Show in September! Members free: visitors £5

Advance Notice: AGM – March 25th 2026

Gardening club is usually held on the last Wednesday of each month, 7.30pm at Little Birch Village Hall, with a few date changes for special events and trips. New members and visitors are always welcome.

Contact email: ktlbgardeningclub@gmail.com

The Jolly Gardener

TheJollyGardener2502@gmail.com

Kyle - 07850921889



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Thursday 22 January - A REAL PAIN 15

Mismatched cousins reunite for a tour through Poland to honour their beloved grandmother, but their old tensions resurface against the backdrop of their family history.

Tickets £5 (£4 under 16s)

Refreshments including hot dogs and ice cream available from 7pm

Next screening:

Thursday 12 February - FILM TBC

Tickets available in advance or on the door (cash or card payments accepted) - for further info or to book tickets please email muchbirchflicks@hotmail.com or call 01981 540097

For further information about films and screenings visit www.artsalive.co.uk

Footpaths: Improved Access to Aconbury Hill

We're pleased to share that Aconbury Hill and its surrounding woodlands are now significantly more accessible, following the replacement of seven old stiles with modern self-closing gates. This improvement enhances ease of access for walkers of all ages and abilities.

The upgrade was made possible through the collaborative efforts of Duchy foresters and dedicated local volunteers, with generous funding support from Herefordshire Council.

Our thanks go to everyone involved in making this valuable enhancement a reality.

Your footpath officers.

Little Birch & Aconbury

Chris Fowler

Much Birch and Kingsthorpe:

David Irwin



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Or email lucymason@hotmail.com
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Call our Support Line:

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Or text:

07786 203 130

Local Information

Little Birch Parish Councilors

- Cllr Steve Coles
- Cllr Tom Palfrey
- Cllr Chris Atkinson
- Cllr Nick Deacon
- Cllr Kate Dillon

Polly Smith (Parish Council Clerk)

✉ ibpcclerk@gmail.com

🌐 www.littlebirchparishcouncil.org

Footpath Officers



For any queries about footpaths contact:

Little Birch & Aconbury

Chris Fowler

📞 07931 292998

Email ✉ chrisfowler1@hotmail.co.uk

Much Birch and Kingsthorpe:

David Irwin

📞 07766 135068

Email ✉ david.irwin13@btinternet.com

Photography Group



We're a friendly local group with a common interest in photography.

Come and join us. Next meeting on Feb 28

10am-12pm at Fayreview Kingsthorpe

Contact Sally Nichol

07803 032928 or 01981 540001

sally.nichol@btinternet.com

Table Tennis



Come and join us to play on the 1st Tuesday of the month!

Little Birch Village Hall 7pm to 9pm

Only £3 which includes refreshments!

Contact Sally Nichol
07803 032928 or 01981 540001
sally.nichol@btinternet.com

Little Birch Village Hall Committee

- Lesley Chapman (Chair)
- John Ellis-Braithwaite (Treasurer)
- Cathy Ellis-Braithwaite (Secretary)
- Linda Maden (Hall bookings)
- Kate Dillon (Parish Council Rep)
- Geoff Nichol (Maintenance)
- Iris Lloyd (Gardening Club)
- Rick Hampton (Committee member)
- Jane Bolam (Drama group)
- Sam Davies (Committee member)
- Tonya Barnett (Drama Group)

The Birches Newsletter Editor:

John Ellis-Braithwaite

Email ✉ editorial@birchesnews.org.uk

Local Social Media Groups

Find out more in these groups:



Facebook

Much Birch Parish Group

Little Birch Parish Group

King's Thorn & Little Birch Gardening Club



Instagram

King's Thorn Little Birch Gardening Club

Art and Craft Space



Have an art and craft afternoon away from the hustle and bustle of life every Thursday at Little Birch Village Hall!

1.30pm to 3.30pm January only

Otherwise 2pm to 4pm

Bring your WIP or PhD in whatever art and craft you are working on – or start something new!

Only £3 which includes refreshments!

Contact Sally Nichol

07803 032928 or 01981 540001

sally.nichol@btinternet.com

Jigsaw puzzle! For Christmas this year I had a jigsaw puzzle and I'm feeling very proud of myself. It only took me a week to complete and it says 2 to 3 years on the box!

Church Services in January



Sunday 4th, Epiphany

9.15 a.m. at Much Dewchurch – Holy Communion

11.00 a.m. at Little Birch – Holy Communion

Sunday 11th, Baptism of Christ

9.15 a.m. at Much Birch – Holy Communion

11.00 a.m. at Little Birch – Morning Worship

Sunday 19th, Second Sunday after Epiphany

9.15 a.m. at Much Birch – Morning Worship

11.00 a.m. at Little Birch – Holy Communion in Traditional Language

Sunday 25th, Conversion of St. Paul

9.15 a.m. at Llandinabo – Holy Communion in Traditional Language

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Epiphany – a forgotten feast!

Welcome to 2026! I want to touch on Epiphany, which is celebrated on 6th January, but is often moved to the second Sunday after Christmas! It's date is the 12th day of Christmas, again we Christians taking over a Pagan festival! And looking for a Bible story to attach, we added the visit of the Magi to Jesus and Mary.

There are a couple of points to the story to think about. Firstly, we don't know how many Magi there are. We assume 3 because there are three gifts, but the gifts are symbols, not just gifts that would be nice in the nursery! Gold, frankincense, and myrrh all have meanings that the first hearers, back in the 1st Century, would have instinctively understood. Gold – wealth, frankincense – worship and myrrh- funeral, so a nice bit of foreshadowing in the story you can find in Matthew chapter 2.

Secondly, where is Joseph? When the Magi enter the house, they find Mary and Jesus, but no Joseph! Was he back at work? No, because we are still in Bethlehem and haven't returned to Nazareth yet! But he may have been helping out his family or even down the local tavern!

And that is what makes this story so intriguing! There are unanswered questions that leave us thinking about the story and pondering how God works in strange and mysterious ways!

My final thought is about dreams. At the end of the story, the Magi head back to their home country (Persia?), not via Jerusalem but "by another road". And they are told this in a dream. And for those who knew their Hebrew Bible, a lot of the people who heard Matthew's Gospel, that would have rung a whole host of bells, from Joseph in Egypt to Jacob and his ladder!

With every blessing for a peaceful and prosperous New Year,

Revd Mark.

Much Birch Old Charities

This charity was created over 100 years ago to be of benefit to those living in the parish of Much Birch. The objectives of the charity are to help children, young adults or the elderly with a one-off grant.

In order to request an application form please contact Rev Mark Johnson - email: revmark100@yahoo.co.uk

Art & Craft Group learn about drypoint printing

On a Thursday afternoon in late November 2025, some members of the Art & Craft Group were let loose with a very sharp tool, acetate and ink ... and a local artist. Between them, they created some outstanding pieces of art in a medium that they had never tackled before.

With the guiding hand of local artist, Adrienne Craddock, Adrienne showed us how to create pieces of art using the technique of drypoint printing (a technique used by the likes of Picasso). Using a very sharp tool to etch an image onto acetate, which was then covered in ink and then carefully removed to show the tints, tones and shades of the colour used (we used black, other colours where available!). Finally, the finished images were then placed through a hand driven printing press and finally our hard work was revealed onto specially prepared paper. OMG how excited were we

Throughout the etching process and inky mess (which, by the way, was fabulous ... I so wanted to put my inky hands on faces yes, I'm a child at heart!!), everyone had an amazing time; showing their individual skills in their respective art & craft, which were brought together in this technique; a technique I've now discovered is 100s of years old.

If anything, has taught us ok me ... it is through the process of creating something, using a new skill or craft, that shows us that the fundamentals of art & craft are similar in whatever medium you are using. It's the fact that you have had a go, that makes the difference. You don't know, until you have tried it, how exhilarating learning something new can be.

I knit (not brilliantly), crochet (that is a loose term), modern calligraphy (badly) (some members are doing traditional), drawing (O level - that dates me!), colouring (getting better-ish), paint furniture (ain't going to sell it). I'm no expert. I do it, because I need a creative outlet. Other members of the Art & Craft Group draw, paint and colour (in different mediums), knit (by hand and machine) & crochet (can that be done by machine!!!), sew by hand and machine; there are many other art & craft skills in our villages that could be shared. From what I'm aware of, we have weaving/ spinning and whittling ... I'm up to learning a new skill.

You may have an art & craft skill that you practice. Are you willing to share some tips? The Art & Craft Group at Little Birch Village Hall are always up for learning a new technique. For example, earlier in the year we had funds available to subsidise a workshop near Monmouth and we all created some amazing ceramic birds - we just forgot to tell you all about it!!!

You don't need to be perfect in your chosen art or craft. The fact that you are interested and work on your chosen art/craft is enough. We are hoping that in 2026 we will be in a position to showcase different arts & crafts to our members.

Our first weekly catch-up will be on Thursday 8 January 2026 from 1.30pm to 3.30pm (a new time until late February). £3 per person will cover the hire of the Hall, refreshments and biscuits - occasionally cake!!.

Keep up with our arty and crafty news and inspiration on Instagram: the_birches_art_and_craft_group or on Facebook The Birches Art & Craft Group.

Again, we would like to thank Adrienne for introducing us to drypoint printing. Her background knowledge, skill and patience in guiding us to understand and learn from her were truly inspiring and amazing.

More information of Adrienne's work can be found at <https://adriennecraddock.com/>

Joanna Eggerton

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Contact Linda Maden
on 07849 637242
www.birches.news/lvh

Coffee & Books at LB Village Hall

Held in the morning of the first Thursday and
third Saturday of the month



(Except on New Years Day)



Book of the month

The book I would like to highlight for January is :

"This is going to hurt" by Adam Kay. The subtitle is "Secret diaries of a Junior Doctor", so I think that tells you what it is about.

When the book was first published, it caused a sensation, so if you didn't read it then, now is the time to catch up. It seems especially relevant today, given the current dispute between the resident doctors and the government.

The book is hilarious and heart-breaking in equal measure. The Guardian said: "So funny and important, it should be given out on prescription."

A word of warning - if you object to strong language, or graphic medical scenes, then don't read this book!

Jennifer

Short Mat Bowls at Little Dewchurch Village Hall

7pm to 9pm Every Tuesday except week 3 when on a Thursday. First 3 weeks free trial, then £5 a session, includes tea and biscuits.

Friendly and fun activity for the winter months!
Contact John Caton: 01981 540415



Twinkle, twinkle little star: Graham Hotchen

After posting a few astronomy pictures on the Little Birch Facebook page recently, all taken from my garden in Kingsthorn, I thought I'd write a short article to keep you entertained and interested over the holidays.

Let's start with a really nice thought. Hopefully, you have all been told at some point, or maybe even believe of yourself, that you are made of stardust! Yes, it's true - every atom in your body and in fact everything around us, from the earth, the oceans, to every plant and animal, is a by product of stars that have long ago exploded into a supernova and disappeared.

As stars progress through their lives they produce vast quantities all of the chemical elements that we now know. The only elements created from "big bang" were hydrogen, helium and a smattering of lithium. When stars finally fade or explode as supernova, they blast vast quantities of all of the different elements that we know and we're made of, into space. These slowly (and we're talking over millions of years) clump together under gravity to form planets and maybe even create another new born stars. The Orion Nebula is just one of these giant gas and dust areas called "star nurseries". So there you are, no matter how bad a day you might be having, remember you are made of stardust! So where do we fit in? This is where things get mind boggling. The "big bang" which happened 13.8 billion years ago wasn't just a big explosion into empty space - it was space and time itself being created and expanding at densities, speeds and temperatures far beyond our words and imagination. Language is such an inadequate medium for astronomy - it can really only be expressed mathematically (and maybe poetically!). But long strings of galaxies, called "filaments", eventually formed and then groups of galaxies into "clusters" and then to individual galaxies such as ours. Our galaxy is only one of an estimated 100 - 200 billion galaxies (that's actually a very, very low estimate based on current technology). And each galaxy could contain as many as 100 billion stars (I'll leave you to do the math of how many stars that is!). It's becoming increasingly evident that most stars do, in fact, have several planets orbiting them, just like our own solar system. Planets have already been discovered made out of pure diamond (which is only another form of graphite).

Our own galaxy is a typical example being a flat spiral shape with main four spiral arms going around, shaped like an old catherine reel firework. Our sun (which is only a very average, medium sized star) is about two thirds along one of the arms, just off a small spur. It's taken a huge amounts of data collected over decades by satellites and radio observatories and a corresponding huge amount of computing power, to model our galaxy (the Milky Way). Not only does the Earth orbit around the sun, but our whole galaxy rotates too, taking about 225 million years to do so. It's probably a step too far for this short note to tell you that the whole galaxies are moving at vast speeds too. There is a cosmic ballet going on which we remain blissfully unaware! It is interesting that an estimated two thirds of galaxies spin one way (clockwise to our understanding) and the others spin the other way.

Ed: To read more and see Graham's excellent astronomical photographs go to page 13 of the on line edition
www.birches.news or www.muchbirchparish.org.uk

Link to free introductory lectures starting on January 26
<https://www.kasonline.org/amastro.html>

Parish Walk, tracing the footsteps of history



On a beautiful late November afternoon 24 people and 3 dogs met at the Axe and Cleaver pub car park. We walked over newly installed stiles down to Llanwarne pass some fields still growing purple sprouting. At Turkey Tump we walked down to the old church for a photo. We with such a big group it was possible to move around the group and chat about our experiences in the various local footpaths. After circling the large field to complete my "lollipop" route, we had gained permission from Richard of Donathan farm to cut up to the A4348 and make our way back to the Axe and Cleaver. We finished off as it was getting dark and drizzling back at my house for tea and mince pies.

It was fantastic to have so many people and do a different route for a change.

The date of our next walk is still to be firmed up but should be in the early new year.

David Irwin
Footpath officer for Much Birch and Kingsthorpe

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Seniors Pilates is at Little Dewchurch Village Hall Mondays 11.15am to 12.15pm

Join Alison Allan for Pilates – sessions are taught as small group classes and as individual 1:1 sessions. Pilates is a great way to keep your body feeling agile and energised, The movements focus on posture, alignment, core strength balance and flexibility.



Tai Chi Movements for Wellbeing

tmw is at Little Dewchurch Village Hall Thursdays 10.45am to 11.45pm

Join Alison Allan for Tai Chi movements for well being. A beautifully flowing and carefully selected sequence of movements designed to enhance and promote our physical and emotional wellbeing. The movements, which have origins in Tai Chi, Chi Kung and meditation are simplified and can be performed standing or seated making it accessible to everyone.

Book Now for Pilates or tmw:

07947 011707 www.perfectbalance.life
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Your Safer Neighbourhood Team (SNT) is a group of local police officers and staff dedicated to serving your community. The team is made up of police officers, special constables, police community support officers and volunteers, supported by additional officers and staff from the wider area.

We work closely with local authorities, community leaders and residents to decide our policing priorities for your area. This helps us to find useful, long-term solutions to local problems, while maintaining our wider focus on preventing and reducing crime, protecting the vulnerable and providing reassurance across Herefordshire, Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin and Worcestershire.

How to contact our local policing team:

Team email: herefordsouthside.snt@westmercia.police.uk

- Safer Neighbourhood Officer:
PC 21260 Martin Gillett Mobile: 07970 544262
- Safer Neighbourhood Officer:
PC 21946 Jack Davies Mobile: 07817 158224
- Safer Neighbourhood Officer:
PC 2347 Lyn Johnson Mobile: 07773 048377
- Safer Neighbourhood Officer:
PC 22088 Dan Ovel Mobile: 07929 721340
- Safer Neighbourhood Officer:
PC 21198 Brian Gossen Mobile: 07973 846336
- Police Community Support Officer:
PCSO 6324 Carol Marsh Mobile: 07890 524667
- Police Community Support Officer:
PCSO 40259 Hayley Warne Mobile: 07773 052560
- Police Community Support Officer:
PCSO 40272 Lewis Thomas Mobile: 07773 051508

They are happy to receive calls from Members of The Public but please do not use these to report crimes and/or incidents. For more information on reporting a crime/incident please go to www.westmercia.police.uk and select 'Report' or call 999 (Emergency) / 101 (Non-Emergency).

Rosemary Rigby is celebrating her 90th

Rosemary has done a great deal for the community for the past sixty years. She was a founder member of the Ross Action Committee in 1966 and president for many years, fundraising for a minibus to enable the elderly to go on trips. For thirty years Rosemary was an area manager for the Royal National Institute for the Blind and she is perhaps best known locally for her creation of the Violette Szabo museum, which celebrates the life of this courageous member of the wartime resistance.

To celebrate her 90th birthday on January 10th, Rosemary will be at the Pilgrim Hotel from 2.30 to 5pm and invites you to join her. She will be collecting for the Ross Action Committee, raising funds to keep the minibus running and ensuring that the elderly continue to go on trips, as a survey taken at Ross Rotary Club revealed that this is what they like to do. Over the years many local people have enjoyed trips from Ross and from Charnwood in Much Dewchurch. If you would be interested in driving the minibus it will be in the car park. You can also talk to Rosemary in the Violette Szabo suite at the Pilgrim hotel.

Defibrillator Locations

IN A LIFE THREATENING EMERGENCY CALL 999

AEDs are available to use locally in case of sudden cardiac arrest. A defibrillator is an easy to use, medical device that analyses the heart's rhythm and if needed, delivers an electrical shock (defibrillation) to help the heart establish an effective rhythm.

- **Allensmore Locks Garage**
- **Backney** on the garage wall at Market Gardens Cottage
- **Bridstow** on the outside of the village hall
- **Garway** on the wall outside the Garway Moon pub Harewood End at Harewood End Inn on outside of the pub at the back in the beer garden.
- **Little Birch** on the outside of the village hall
- **Llanwarne** on the wall by steps leading up to the village hall
- **Much Birch** on the outside of the church hall
- **Much Birch Axe & Cleaver** on the side of the pub
- **Much Dewchurch** outside Steiner School, first building after the church
- **Peterstow** at the Yew Tree pub
- **Sellack** on the outside of the parish hall (key code needed)
- **St Weonards** old BT phone box off the A466 between the church and Forge Cottage
- **Wormelow** at the Cricket Club & Carrot & Wine shop Wilton on wall at the BP garage on the roundabout

Do you have something of interest to the community which you would like to appear in the next edition of The Birches?

The deadline for the January edition is
Friday 16th January 2026

You can contact the Editor at the following email address:

editorial@birchesnews.org.uk

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Twinkle, twinkle little star by Graham Hotchen – continued from page 8

So just a few words on some pictures I've taken under our own dark Herefordshire skies in the last few weeks alone.



Andromeda – As I mentioned there are a vast number of individual galaxies, but Andromeda is our closest neighbour. It is around 2.5 million light years away and estimated to be about 1.5X the size of our galaxy. On a really clear night you can see a faint smudge in the night sky with naked eye – it is, after all, a long way away! The good news is that we are moving closer to Andromeda at around a speed of around 190 miles a second. The bad news is that it will still be several billion years before we can smile and say hello.



The Orion Nebula – again just visible as a smudge to the naked eye but easily picked up with binoculars or small telescope. It is just under the bottom of the leftmost of the three stars that make up Orion's belt. This is a beautiful area consisting of mainly hydrogen gas and dust, known as a Star Nursery where other stars and planets will eventually be born.



The Seven Sisters or, to give it the proper title The Pleiades, is just a beautiful Star Cluster. It has been recorded in many ancient texts and even mentioned in The Bible. It is easily seen with naked eye as a small cluster of bright stars but looks fantastic through binoculars or telescope or set up your mobile phone with a tripod and long exposure. From an astronomy perspective this star cluster is relatively close to us - only 440 light years away and is a group of very young, bright blue stars. There are actually several thousand stars in the cluster but seven conspicuous ones.



I captured this picture of the recent bright “super moon” on the evening of Thursday December 4 at around 8pm, in between clouds and rain. The full moon in December is always known as the Cold Moon.

If I haven't bored you to tears, please do take a few minutes to look up at the heavens and make the most of our dark Herefordshire skies. We spend so much of our lives immersed in minutiae, it is just a joy to sometimes look up, wonder and try to understand. Whether it drives you to poetry, science , telescopes, mathematics or a large glass of whisky, it doesn't matter!

If you'd like to learn more there are a series of free lectures to celebrate the 90th Birthday celebrations of the Kalamazoo Astronomical Society - brilliant for adults and children alike over January and February 26 [january 26 free lectures](#)

Have a fabulous 2026 and as we say “Dark Skies!”

Graham