

NEWSLETTER

Puriton

Winter 2024



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CHAIRMAN'S REPORT



Simon Langley
Parish Council
Chairman

Firstly can I wish all of you a very merry Christmas and Happy New year and look forward to seeing you at the Christmas tree light up. We'll have a new tree planted from now on to grow and decorate as time goes by.

Traffic chaos is set to cause some difficulties. Agratas should have the works on the A39 Bath Road completed by 15th November.

The A39 Puriton Hill from the layby entrance to the top of the hill, at the junction with Hillside, will be one-way in

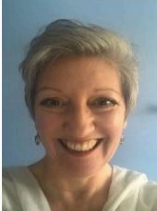
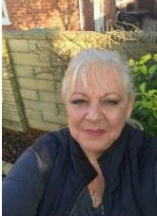
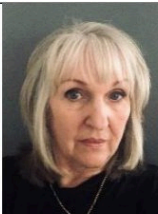
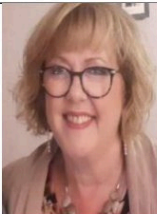
the Street direction from 15th November until 19th December. Then all restrictions will be lifted until 11th January 2025. Then from 9th February 2025, work will be taking place on the A39 from the bottom of Puriton Hill to the traffic lights at 'Silver Fish' junction (where you turn right for Bridgwater and left for Street). We have been assured that access to and from Junction 23 will be maintained.

This plan is a revised version, and I hope it is clear enough for those not on social media. Diversions will be in place.

We communicate with Gravity, Agratas and Somerset Council as much as possible and understand the frustrations felt by many during these massive changes around our community. Please be assured we, member's of the Parish Council, live here too and we want the best for the community.

A festive poster for the Puriton Christmas Tree Lights Switch On event. The background is dark green with white snowflakes. At the top, a string of colorful Christmas lights (red, orange, yellow, green) hangs across. A yellow banner in the top left corner reads "All donations to church funds". Below this, a red banner says "Sunday 1st December from 5pm". The main title "Puriton Christmas Tree Lights Switch On" is in large white letters. Below the title, it says "Festive tunes & carols around the tree from the Burnham & Highbridge Band". A yellow banner in the center says "Mulled wine & mince pies for a small donation". At the bottom, a red banner reads "With thanks to Puriton Parish Council & St Michael and All Angels Church". The poster is decorated with two large green Christmas trees, yellow stars, red and white candy canes, and a cup of mulled wine with cinnamon sticks and orange slices.

PURITON PARISH COUNCIL

Simon Langley Simonlangley.ppc@gmx.com Tel:01278 638007		Judith Fletcher judithfletcherppc@gmx.com Tel:07717 831082	
Sandra Tizzard sandratppc@gmail.com Tel:01278 685093		John Lunn johnlunnppc@gmail.com Tel: 01278 324321	
Barrie Crow barrie.crowppc@gmail.com		Julie Coleman juliecppc@gmail.com	
Dawn Saunders dawnsaundersppc@gmail.com		Vanda Crow Vanda.crowppc@gmail.com	
Jackie Maher Jackiem.ppc@gmail.com		Sally Diaz clerk@puritonparishcouncil.org	

Court Farm Butchers

Family butchers run by Stuart and Jenny

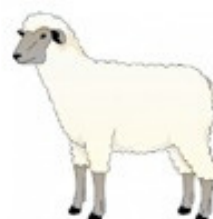
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For more info, please contact Kim on 07419 842834

Please note that photos and or videos may be taken at this event and used for online promotional activities. Puriton Village Hall Registered charity number: 1203628

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Brightening up Sundays

We are looking for Volunteer Hosts and Drivers in and around Puriton to help at our monthly tea parties for people aged 75+ who are experiencing loneliness.

If you or anyone you know might be interested in getting involved, visit www.reengage.org.uk or send me a message and I'll help you with the application.

**Janet Rowland, volunteer
area coordinator**

Tel: 07905 910083

This newsletter, while it is strictly non-political, serves as a forum for information and debate and for the views of the people of Puriton, Downend and Dunball.

The views expressed by individuals and published in this newsletter are not the views of the Parish Council, nor does the Parish Council necessarily share or endorse such views. However, unattributed articles are generally meant to be for the information and the entertainment of the public and as such are largely authoritative.

The Editorial Group reserves the right to accept, reject or edit any material submitted for publication. Any items containing discriminatory material relating to race, colour, creed, gender or age, whether implied or explicit, will be rejected outright.

Local businesses are invited to advertise in the newsletter - please contact Sally Diaz, Clerk to the Parish Council, for details - clerk@puritonparishcouncil.org

Puriton WI

Our WI has had a very successful 2024 and has seen a good increase in members and attendance. We have a wide range of women in our group, and have seen many join us in recent years, but also many who have been members for years.

Recent meetings have included making snowmen cake-toppers for Christmas cakes, a local speaker talking about local nature, a demonstration and sampling of Lebanese cookery, a talk about the Taunton Stop Line during WWII, hearing one man's experience of guide dogs, and much more. We have many subgroups such as a book group, film club, a lunchtime meal club, an evening meal club, and a skittles team. We also run Cuppa @ the Clist which is open to the whole community.

Coming up in 2025 we look forward to hearing about Saving Lives at Sea, cupcake decorating, and Greek dancing. Our 2025-26 programme is being planned to continue to give a variety of meetings, all in the name of fun, friendship and education. We meet at 7.30pm on the first Tuesday of the month at Puriton Village Hall.

All women are welcome. For more information contact puriton.wi@gmail.com or look us up on Facebook – Puriton and District WI.



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**Chris
Gulliford
Village
Ranger**

RANGER'S RAMBLINGS

Hi all,

Early September felt a tad like autumn! A sprinkle a rain, not a lot, enough to get some in the water butts.

Saw a skein of geese, sure sign we're heading to cooler weather. Planted a row of cabbage, onions and radish, taken down some of the flower baskets and cleaned them up for next year. An odd season on the veggie garden, beans out early but marrows and courgettes a no go. Sunflowers also didn't want to grow.

Third week in September and wow no need to water, wow what a deluge, over Dunball, spotted all the summer visitors flitting around, sure sign they're off home. Put some food on the lawn after scarifying it, green as green could be. Not seen many butterflies this year think I am not the only one, the butterfly survey was not good.

Goodness where is the year going? Saw the fair arrive then carnival then the c word (Christmas)!

I was strimming path up Frederick Road. Why Frederick Road? Salt Road would have been more appropriate, more to come on that in the future, doing an article on the salt works there.

Near end of October mild, wet and all a mess. The silt on path from Rye to Middle St was shovelled up,

Noticed broad beans growing and recommend planting in November and December not October as the signs of global warming seem to be more evident. We made our final trip to the caravan and put it to bed till spring.

We decked up for Halloween, 55 sweets soon vanished to the 55 visitors. Thanks to the Parish Council for a new mower, works well and I will look after it as I did with the other one and it lasted 6 years not bad!

Well, may I wish you a merry Christmas and a happy new year and look forward to another busy year next year,

All the best Chris G.

GRAVITY NEWS

As we move into Autumn, activity at the Gravity site will continue to accelerate. This is Gravity (TIG) continues to support the delivery of the advanced battery manufacturing facility, site infrastructure and wider campus amenities.

Summer saw Sir Robert McAlpine (SRM) appointed by Agratas for the construction of the first major building on site - Building One.

Gravity site works

- Site preparation for Agratas will continue, including material import and management.
- Work to recycle site material will continue.
- TIG contractors will be monitoring the new landscaping on Enterprise Way and replacing, as necessary, to ensure completion as soon as possible.
- Ground works and foundation construction (piling) continues for Agratas's first building on site.
- Work is well underway to open the new main entrance to site directly from the Woolavington Road roundabout, reducing the proportion of construction vehicles utilising Woolavington Road.
- Environmental monitoring equipment to report on noise and air conditions has been installed. Data from this equipment will be reported to the Council governance groups, once fully established.
- The formal completion and adoption of Enterprise Way by Somerset Council is expected after snagging has been completed by the contractor.

Works will then start on the Village Enhancement Scheme (VES), which includes a pedestrian and cycle path connecting Puriton and Woolavington and traffic calming measures.

- Following meetings with local stakeholders, National Grid will soon be communicating with local residents to introduce plans to build a new substation on the Gravity site. They are a key enabler to provide the necessary infrastructure for the whole of Gravity.

Other Matters

- Gravity welcomes David Oakhill as its Director of Planning and Economic Development.
- Ground investigations will continue throughout the autumn months.

Enquiries - the respective teams will continue to support and respond to enquiries.



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FROM THE CLERK'S DESK



Sally Diaz
Parish Clerk

Welcome to the winter issue of the Puriton Newsletter!

As we hurtle toward Christmas there are lovely events taking place in the village to celebrate this time of year.

We have the outdoor Christmas lights competition where the Council will anonymously judge the displays to win gift cards. Judging will be done by 18th December. Christmas Tree lights switch on with mulled wine, mince pies and the Burnham and Highbridge band on 1st December from 5pm. Hot chocolate is available as well. This year we have had a tree donated by Mike Newell. The tree will be planted and will stay on the green to flourish and grow. Many thanks to Mike for this addition and for planting it and a huge thank you to Rod Fitzgerald who has donated a tree for many years.

The Village Hall will be holding their Christmas fayre on 7th December. The church will be holding services during December.

The arson attack which took place last year at the Sports Centre went to court, the individuals involved have been ordered to pay £100 each in compensation. A token payment considering the bench that was destroyed cost over £900 and the repairs to the patio cost £660.

Do you read your Parish Newsletter, or does it go straight in the recycle bin?

The cost to produce 4 issues per year is over £3000 which is only part funded by our advertisers, the rest comes from our precept. Do you read your issue? We enjoy creating our newsletter and will continue to produce it.

The volunteers who deliver to each house in Puriton give their time in all weathers to ensure residents receive a copy.

We need your feedback!.

Email me your thoughts to clerk@puritonparishcouncil.org

Parking continues to be an issue in the village with many vehicles being parked near junctions or obscuring visibility. Middle Street, Pool Close and Anchorage Court seem to be the worst affected. Please park responsibly, no one wants a collision or an injury,

Enjoy the festivities however you celebrate them!



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If you would like to book your child a place or require further information please call or email us.

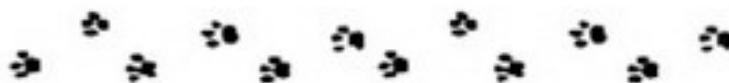


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DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

30th November Karaoke Night Puriton Village Hall 7pm
puritonvillagehall@gmail.com

1st December Puriton Christmas Tree Lights Switch On Triangle at Rye from 5pm with the Burnham and Highbridge band, mulled wine, hot chocolate and mince pies.

7th December Village Hall Christmas Fayre: Puriton Village Hall 3-6pm

14th + 15th December Willow Youth Theatre Showcase: Puriton Village Hall, contact: Heidi 07828 111667

Christmas Lights competition Judging will take place by 18th December

19th December Community Carol Service at the Church 6.30pm

24th December Crib and Christingle Service at the Church 4pm

25th December Family Communion Service at the Church 9.30am

REGULAR EVENTS

Clist Church Hall

Guides First Saturday every month, noon-3pm. puritonbrownowl@gmail.com

Coffee Stop Tuesdays 10.30am.

Puriton Patchwork and Quilting Group Tuesdays 7pm. For information please call Yvonne Pearce on 07711 009425.

Bell ringing at the church tower every Monday at 7.30pm. Norman 684050

Cuppa @ The Clist 1st and 3rd Thursdays 2pm. Janet 684027

Puriton Afternoon/Over 60 Club Every 2nd and 4th Thursday, from 2.00-4.00. All welcome Dot 07849 740774 .

Other Activities/Services Hunny Bears (age 2-school age) 8am-6pm. Lorraine Toms 683512

Slimming World Thursday 9.30am at the 37 Club. 07875 466864

Talking Cafe Every Wednesday 11am-1pm, Bitham Walk, Woolavington

**Please contact Sally Diaz the clerk to
add articles, dates for the diary, photos
or things taking place in the village on
clerk@puritonparishcouncil.org**

REGULAR EVENTS

Village Hall:

WI 1st Tuesday 7.30pm. Vicci 07877042363

Bingo every Monday 7.30pm. Jacky 07980052519

Puriton Players every Thursday eve. Alan Scott 07734357981

Rainbows, Brownies and Guides Rainbows every Tuesday (term time) 5pm-6pm, Brownies every Tuesday (term time) 6pm-7.30pm. Email Denise puritonbrownowl@gmail.com

Pilates every Thursday 6-7pm contact Hugh thegyminstructor@googlemail.com

Yoga every Thursday 7-8pm contact Hugh thegyminstructor@googlemail.com

Sports Centre

Puriton Gold Archery Club, Tuesdays at 7pm. marktottle@gmail.com

Coastal Archers Wednesday 6:30-8:30pm (winter only) Robin robinglongbowsrus@btinternet.com

Burnham Company of Archers Sundays 10am-1pm. adam@17may.co.uk

Puriton Bowling Club all day, every day. Derek Clarke 01278 683882

Sydenham ABC Boxing Club Every Thursday at 6.30pm. Robert 07950909247

Little Kickers Tuesday 9.30-10.30. Andy aparkinson@littlekickers.co.uk

Puriton Happy Tots (parent-led baby/toddler group) Fridays (term time only) at 10.30-12.00. Charlie 07446 672838

Zumba Mad Thursdays at 6:30-7:30pm. Madeleine 07974 555391

Funk Fit Tuesdays 18:00-19:00 (not 2nd Tuesday of every month). Madeleine 07974 555391

Dance Fit Wednesdays at 9:30-10:30. Karen 07770 886475

Pilates Wednesdays at 18:00-19:00. Gemma gemmapilatessomerset@gmail.com

Imagine Dance (children's dance) Mondays 5.30-8.30 text Imogen on 07951 998643

Victoria Park Rangers (juniors football) Saturday. Jason 07786 851710

Willow Youth Theatre Friday evenings (term time only). Heidi 07828 111667

Parish Council meet second Tuesday of every month at 7pm. Upstairs. Sally clerk@puritonparishcouncil.org

Why not book your party in the Function Room (fully equipped kitchen included) or the ground floor sports hall? For all Sports Centre bookings, please email: puritonplayingfields@gmail.com

AGRATAS

Over the Autumn we've made great progress on the build of our cell manufacturing facility that is set to be the biggest in the country.

From 2026, our facility will produce world-class batteries, initially for JLR's electric vehicles, our anchor customer, helping to decarbonise the UK's automotive sector and create thousands of high-value jobs in the area.

On site progress

Recent work has mainly focused on the foundations but in the coming months we will begin building the frame structure for building one. As construction ramps up, there will be an increase in vehicle movements on Enterprise Way. We've recently opened a new entrance to the site, so the majority of vehicles will now enter the site directly from Enterprise Way.

Fund payments

We are delighted to announce we have paid the Recreation and Community Fund (for the Parish Council to spend on things like facilities) and Village Project Fund (for projects) directly to the Parish Councils. We look forward to seeing this money being used for the full benefit of the local community.

Workforce and skills

One of our top priorities has been developing our plans to upskill and reskill the area, so local people are well placed to make the most of the opportunities on offer in years to come. We're working closely with the College, the Council and local schools on everything from adult education courses to school inspiration programmes and will be announcing details of these throughout 2025.

Supply chain opportunities

Another focus for us has been to make sure opportunities in the supply chain are made available for local businesses. These opportunities will come in phases, beginning in the construction sector. In October, we held a supplier day in Bridgwater with Sir Robert McAlpine, our construction partner, engaging with over 300 businesses and we're planning follow-up activities in the new year.

Power connection

We need to connect our new facility to the National Grid for power. The work needed to support this involves some roadworks on Puriton Hill. This is essential work that needs to be carried out and we're aware it may cause some disruptions. We also know that there are other roadworks taking place to support separate major projects such as the Dunball roundabout and Celebration Mile, and we've been working with Somerset Council to coordinate our works where possible - details of all roadworks happening in the area can be found on their website. We thank you for bearing with us while these temporary works take place.

Contact us

Please email us at communityuk@agratas.net or you can keep up to date on our build progress by visiting our website, following us on LinkedIn and connecting to our WhatsApp Channel.

We are looking forward to sharing future progress with you in the new year, and wish you a very Merry Christmas from all the Agratas team.

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LEST WE FORGET...

WILLIAM HENRY GEEN

Memorialised in Puriton Church and on the Cross on the Village Triangle. The surname has been incorrectly recorded as 'Green' instead of 'Geen' on the Cross.

This seems to be partly due to incorrect military records, in both surnames, that have been cross referenced.

William was born in 1881 in Bridgwater , Somerset.

Records show on the 27 November 1881 he was baptised at the Parish Church, Bridgwater.

His parents were John & Elizabeth Geen of Northgate, Bridgwater. John was a 'Coal Carrier' and William was one of nine children.

On the 22nd December 1906 he was Married at the Parish Church, Bridgwater. The Marriage Certificate gives the details William Henry Geen (age 25) Batchelor Occupation - Packer

Residence - Northgate, Bridgwater.

Son of John Geen, - Labourer, deceased (1848 -1903 buried 24/9/1903, Bridgwater St Mary)

To Ria (Maria) Annie Telling (age 23) Spinster, Residence - Northgate Daughter of Frederick Telling -labourer & Sarah Telling of Evergreen Cottage, Witnesses - William George Sweeting and Elizabeth Sweeting.

The 1911 census shows William and Ria living at Railway Cottages, (No 5) Dunball. William was then working as a Dock Labourer.

William was consigned to the Devonshire Regiment in WWI in the 10th Battalion, serving firstly in France before the battalion became part of the British Salonika Force which was in action in the Thessaloniki Region of Greece.

Tragically many more succumbed to illness than were killed in action. It is likely that William was one of these as his records just show that he 'Died' rather than 'Killed in Action'.

William is commemorated on the Doiran Memorial which stands on a prominent hilltop overlooking the Dojran Lake. Ria didn't remarry and returned to live near her birthplace in Gloucestershire, passing away in 1966.

The DOIRAN MEMORIAL stands roughly in the centre of the line occupied for two years by the Allies in Macedonia, but close to the western end, which was held by Commonwealth forces. It marks the scene of the fierce fighting of 1917-1918, which caused the majority of the Commonwealth battle casualties. From October 1915 to the end of November 1918, the British Salonika Force suffered some 2,800 deaths in action, 1,400 from wounds and 4,200 from sickness.

The campaign afforded few successes for the Allies, and none of any importance until the last two months.

The action of the Commonwealth force was hampered throughout by widespread and unavoidable sickness and by continual diplomatic and personal differences with neutrals or Allies. On one front there was a wide malarial river valley and on the other, difficult mountain ranges, and many of the roads and railways it required had to be specially constructed. The memorial serves the dual purpose of Battle Memorial of the British Salonika Force (for which a large sum of money was subscribed by the officers and men of that force), and place of commemoration for more than 2,000 Commonwealth servicemen who died in Macedonia and whose graves are not known. The memorial was designed by Sir Robert Lorimer with sculpture by Walter Gilbert.

It was unveiled by Sir George Macdonogh on 25 September 1926. The memorial stands near DOIRAN MILITARY CEMETERY. The cemetery (originally known as Colonial Hill Cemetery No.2) was formed at the end of 1916 as a cemetery for the Doiran front. The graves are almost entirely those of officers and men of the 22nd and 26th Divisions and largely reflect the fighting of April and May 1917 (the attacks on the Petit-Couronne), and 18-19 September 1918 (the attacks on Pip Ridge and the Grand-Couronne). In October and November 1918, after the final advance, a few burials were added by the 25th Casualty Clearing Station.

After the Armistice, graves were brought into the cemetery from the battlefields and from some small burial grounds,

the most important of which was Strumnitza British Military Cemetery, north-west of Doiran, made by the 40th Casualty Clearing Station in October and November 1918. The cemetery now contains 1,338 Commonwealth burials of the First World War, 449 of them unidentified. There are also 45 Greek and one French war graves.

S Tizzard



CONTACT

GET IN TOUCH

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FOOTPATHS



**Kerry
Chaplin**

This is my final piece for the Newsletter so I'll complete the full set of descriptions of our Parish rights of way by describing the last five on the list!

Our footpaths are managed by the Rights of Way Service at Somerset Council. You can find an interactive map under 'More Information then Explore Somerset' via

www.somerset.gov.uk/waste-planning-and-land/public-rights-of-way All 18 of Puriton Parish path numbers start with BW28.

You will find descriptions of other paths in previous issues of the Puriton Newsletter throughout 2023 and 2024. This time I'm going to talk about paths numbered 14 onwards

BW28/14 is the path that runs from Middle Street to Rye. From the Middle Street end, it starts just past the row of four cottages on your left, if you have gone along the road with the Post Office on your right. It is a handy way to cut off the corners and you'll see a short Y connection to Court Grove on the right, before eventually emerging opposite the grass triangle on Rye and a pathway into the churchyard. In ancient Europe, all roads led to Rome. In Puriton, all paths will take you to the church, one way or another!

This is a well-trodden path, known and used by many villagers.

BW28/15 is not so well known. It starts (or finishes – depending on your direction of travel) at a junction with BW28/5 and BW28/7 (described in the Summer 2024 Newsletter) on the west side of the railway pedestrian crossing and goes down Station Road, Dunball, to the junction with the A38 dual carriageway. If you are brave enough to cross this busy road on foot, you can then continue on to path BW28/10 (described in the Autumn 2024 edition), through the dockyards and on to the River Parrett bank.

BW28/16 is defined as a Restricted Byway and starts by Northmead House on Rye and continues only until the second field gate.

The definition of a Restricted Byway allows walkers, horses and bicycles to use this drove but beyond the second gate there is no public right of way. People do carry on and walk past the second gate and the solar panels, but just be aware there is no right to do so.

BW28/17 goes from opposite 38 Woolavington Road down to Purewell and then on to Middle Street next to No. 1 Culverhay Close. There are some steps on this one, at the junction with Purewell, so it may not be suitable for everyone, but it is a handy short cut.

FOOTPATHS

Here I would just mention that there is another footpath at the top end of Culverhay Close which comes out on Woolavington Road, next-door-but-one to our lovely Book Shed facility, but this is not marked on the maps as an official public footpath so has no number.

Last but not least is the footbridge over the motorway numbered BW28/UN. This is defined as a Bridleway so, again, you can take your horse or your bike, but not a carriage! This bridge was no doubt built as a replacement for the western end of BW28/13 (Churchfield Drove described in Autumn 2024 edition) which was cut in two by the creation of the M5. It goes between the end of Riverton Road, just past the Village Hall and comes out on Pawlett Road, giving pedestrian access to Pawlett, Downend, and the bus routes between Taunton and Burnham-on-Sea on the A38.

I hope you have enjoyed the virtual trips along the footpaths of Puriton Parish, and maybe you have tried walking along some you hadn't previously known about. If you fancy some fresh air without going far, you can devise your own routes, linking up many of these paths and keeping away from the traffic. There are also several other short paths and pedestrian links in the village, connecting groups of housing, so, go on, get out there and explore, especially if you're new to the area.

Thanks to Kerry for her reports on our local footpaths!

Work Opportunity

Puriton Sports Centre are seeking an experienced bookkeeper able to prepare monthly accounts and an annual return for the Charity Commission. This is a self-employed position offered in exchange for a modest monthly honorarium.

If you are interested, please contact the committee on puritonplayingfields@gmail.com, or phone 07717831082.

Christmas in Church -You are warmly invited to

Community Carol Service

Thursday 19th December at
6.30pm. **Crib and Christingle Service**

Christmas Eve at 4.00pm.

Christmas Day,

Family Communion Service at
9.30am.



BOXING DAY PASTIES

A quick easy and a great way of using leftovers.

Makes 4 large, or cut smaller rounds of pastry for 6 smaller pasties.

PASTRY

125g chilled and cubed butter

125g lard cubed

500g plain flour (plus extra for rolling out)

1 egg beaten

Chilled water

Ready made also works well.

Rub lard and butter into the flour until it looks like breadcrumbs.

Make a well in centre, add beaten egg plus enough chilled water to make a firm dough.

Cut into 4 (or 6 if you want smaller pasties) then chill for 10 minutes.

Heat oven to 190c (180c if fan oven) Gas 5-6. I bake them on greaseproof paper on a flat baking tray.

FILLING - 'leftovers' from Christmas dinner-turkey or other cooked meat sausages, stuffing, roast potatoes and any other veg you have.

Chop into pieces and mix adding some finely chopped onions if you like. Mix together well, adding a little gravy (if you have any leftover) if not you can dot a little butter over filling once it's on the pastry round so the filling isn't dry. Pinch of salt and pepper to your own taste.

Shape pastry, roll out to approx 23cm circles (or just an inch larger than a tea plate) - add the filling in the centre (if you like cranberry sauce you can add amongst filling 'dotting' it around) - don't overfill or pastry will split.

Leave enough space around edges to seal. Brush edges with either beaten egg or milk. Now carefully fold over and seal by pinching pastry together.

Brush with beaten egg or milk, cut slits in middle to let out steam.

(If you have bits of pastry left over you can decorate cutting holly leaves or Christmas trees etc - place on top brushing with egg or milk)

Bake for 15-20 minutes or until pastry is golden and crisp. The filling is already cooked so they don't take long.

Jackie Maher



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WELCOMING WILDLIFE THIS SPRING

Jamie Kingscott-Edmunds



A Somerset spectacle

As Winter sets in, you might notice a few more birds visiting your garden. With temperatures dropping, daylight waning, and the berries that would naturally see them through the Winter lost to the hedge cutter, they come to us seeking food and shelter. Wrens and robins feed side by side, and blue tits band together with their larger cousins to make the most of our burgeoning bird feeders.

Out on the Levels, that same seasonal change can be seen in other species. It's not uncommon at this time of year to see fields full of swans, grazing on grasses now that aquatic plants have died back. On our remaining wetlands, you'll see flocks of waders and wintering ducks, who come down to visit from Scandinavia. Then, there are the starlings.

By late Autumn, these handsome little birds, with their sleek iridescent and star-speckled plumage, can be seen forming feeding flocks that float from field to field, or sitting side by side on telegraph wires. They are a social species, and come nightfall, they all head to the wetland heart of the Levels.

The Avalon marshes are a great example of a habitat we once had much more of. Once heavily degraded by peat extraction, the efforts of organisations like the RSPB have made these restored reedbeds a refuge for lots of species.

Sure enough, every night throughout the winter, the starlings show their appreciation as literally millions of them gather to roost among the reeds.

Before they settle down for the night, they put on a show that draws crowds of people there too. Clouds of starlings swoop and swirl, shifting shapes across the sky, in a dance known as a murmuration. We're not totally sure why they do this; perhaps to deter predators, maybe for fun, or possibly just to put on a show - they always have an audience.

This isn't a spectacle unique to Somerset, but I reckon our birds do it best. At Shapwick Heath, more than 6 million starlings formed the largest murmuration recorded in the UK. As darkness descends, so do the birds, huddling together to keep one another warm through those long winter nights, safe among the reeds.

It really is a sight - and sound - to behold, and I'd thoroughly recommend it. Though they do use different sites, Ham Wall and Shapwick Heath are usually a safe bet. Get yourself there half an hour before sunset, and with a bit of luck, you'll be in for quite a show.



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carlbarrett2007@hotmail.co.uk

Talking Cafe



Bitham Walk Hall
Woolavington, TA7 8JQ

When?

Every Wednesday



11am - 1pm



somerset village &
community agents
part of CCS



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- adult social care
- children's services
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<https://somersetagents.org/talking-cafes/>



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