



Ramsbury and Axford Village Diary

January 2021



May we have items for the February diary before 10 January. They may be left at the Post Office or sent to diary@ramsbury.org

Nature Notes by Peter Marren

The plants we associate most with Christmas, apart from Christmas trees, are the three evergreens: holly, ivy and mistletoe. There is plenty of holly and ivy in the village, but the only mistletoe I knew was on an old apple tree on the path to Littlecote. It has since died, and the mistletoe with it. From certain angles it looked as though the mistletoe was growing on the branch of a neighbouring oak, which would be a rare sight indeed (for oak is full of tannins that deter parasites like mistletoe).

Holly and ivy are of course Christmas symbols. They grow green and strong at the darkest time of year which suggested unearthly power. Decking the halls with holly, with its promise of hope and rebirth, probably goes back to prehistoric times. Christianity found other symbols to work on: the berry as red as any blood, its spiny leaves a reminder of the crown of thorns (holly is called Christ's Thorn in Scandinavia and Germany) and its bark, as bitter as any gall. Holly trees, like us, are either male or female (I'm not getting into the Trans debate here!). This is why not every holly produces red berries; and a brilliant red too, shining out, as Kenneth Allsop wrote, 'like a lamp at the winter solstice'.

Ivy is green and decorative, and grows in spiral turns around a trunk or branch. That is why its Latin name is *helix* – it grows round and around and ever upwards, like a plant engineer. Its berries are black and many have fallen or been eaten by Christmas, but ivy's sickly-smelling flowers are an important source of nectar for insects in autumn. Looking rather desperately for Christmas symbolism, they found it in the way ivy clings to other plants as we cling to hope and support in the deity. Growing the way it does, ivy is also handy for wreaths. It was also once hung on tavern doors, for ivy is sacred to Bacchus, the god of wine.

As for mistletoe, the kissing business seems to go back a long way. The clue lies in the shape: an equal pairing of leaves joined at the base – married as it were. Perhaps the sticky white berries could be said to be babies. That, together with mistletoe's mysterious ability to grow in mid-winter, high up on a bare branch, suggests a powerful life-force. I suppose that, by kissing under the mistletoe, one hopes to imbibe a little of that mystery power. Or maybe it's just an excuse. Happy Christmas!

Bird Notes by Paul Swan

Following Peter's lead, let's think about the Holly, Ivy and Mistletoe and how important they are for birds. Holly provides dense cover for birds and excellent nesting opportunities, but its real benefit at this time of year is in the berries. Blackbirds, redwings and fieldfares love these berries, whilst the mistle thrush is famed for vigorously guarding a holly bush to prevent other birds sharing the feast.

Ivy also provides good cover and nesting opportunities, but again it is the berries that are so important at the moment. Gram for gram, ivy berries contain as many calories as a Mars bar! These berries are loved by blackbirds, song thrushes, mistle thrushes, redwings and blackcaps.

Mistletoe berries are sticky, which is clearly a bit frustrating for birds. After eating them they can be seen wiping their beaks on other trees, inadvertently sowing more mistletoe plants. The mistle thrush is, of course, one of the birds that eat mistletoe berries, as is the waxwing. However the busiest consumer is the blackcap. Interestingly, as we attract a growing number of blackcaps wintering with us, they are responsible for an increase in the amount of mistletoe in Southern England.

There have been some special sightings in the last month. A number of people have reported seeing a great white egret. Initially it was seen beyond the Manor, then in a village garden with a stream and finally beyond Seven Bridges. It must be the same bird that has slowly moved east. These birds are almost twice the size of the little egret, but if seen at a distance can be easily confused. If it is possible to see the feet, they are black and not yellow. For most of the year the bill of the larger bird is yellow, rather than black.

There are still only a few of these birds reported every year, so a very special visitor.

Other treats have been regular sightings of fieldfare and redwings, goldfinch, goldcrest, long tailed tits and a lovely nuthatch.

RAINFALL

November rain measured 86.7 mm, 3.41ins. This was just below the average of 95.5 mm, 3.8 ins. Rain fell on 18 days but several were only about 1 mm. Working on the farm, dull days like this were described as “wet days without any rain”!

Midway Stores

The shop will be open until 9pm on Christmas Eve, closed on Christmas day (only) then open normal hours throughout the holiday period including New Year’s day.

Message from the Parish Council

January and February will probably be pretty bleak. We have got this far and hopefully the end is in sight. Social distancing and face coverings will continue to be important but please think of neighbours who may be alone. A phone call or a few words over the garden fence can make a big difference. If you are facing financial hardship, the Parish Council may be able to help or to advise about agencies that can help in the short term. Any information will be dealt with in strict confidence.

We would like to say a huge thank you to all the volunteers who have helped with shopping, deliveries, lifts etc in the last year, to the Post Office, Midway Stores and Ramsbury Surgery for giving such wonderful service and Ramsbury Estates for putting up the Christmas lights - it is all really appreciated.

Last but not least, thank YOU ALL- the residents who have worn masks, maintained social distance and kept safe. We are not out of the woods yet but let’s look forward to the summer when we can but hope that things will better.

Recreation Centre 200 Club

The results for December are: £100 to Paul Taylor, £50 each to Tim Pope, Dido Meinhertzagen, Lynne Coplestone, Si Smith and £25 each to Mike McNeilage, Sue Crozier, Amelia Tester, Tony Hopgood, Victoria Compton and Margaret Mitson.

I apologize that I am behind with delivering the prizes – I have been lame for several weeks! I will make sure all outstanding prizes are delivered by Christmas.

A Happy Christmas to all our members and thanks for your continued support

The club costs £60 a year to join. Funds are split 50/50 between prizes and the Recreation Centre. To join, contact Ian Smith on 07977 473975 or oldtiff@hotmail.co.uk

Whitton Team Services

Sunday 20 December Carols in the Churchyard at Holy Cross at 3pm on - please wear masks if you are able and keep yourself and others safely distanced! Carol sheets will be provided.

We are hosting (website: www.Whittonteam.org.uk and Facebook: @WhittonTeamNews) a recorded 'make your own' Christingle service online from midday on 23 December. Packs available for collection from Holy Cross porch between 10am and 12 on the mornings of 23 and 24 December (just add an orange!)

You can register for tickets to our Christmas Eve Midnight Communion (11pm start) and Christmas

Day Family Service (9:30am) which will be followed by an opportunity for Holy Communion. Details online or contact treasurer@whittonteam.org.uk by email - this is so that we can be sure to seat you all safely.

For January, subject to any further changes (see church notices and online for any updates).

Sunday 31 January Candlemas Christingle service at St Michael's Axford and at All Saints Froxfield at 4pm

Weekly 10am Team Holy Communion (modern language – CW) services at Holy Cross, Ramsbury (3rd, 17th and 24th January) and St Michael's Aldbourne (10th and 31st January). These services will be at 10am, followed each Sunday by a virtual Zoom service online at 11.30am. To join us on Zoom, use the following details: ID 948 3407 2630 PASSCODE 343860. You can also join the Zoom service by telephone: dial 0203 481 5240 or 0208 080 6591 and enter the meeting details above when asked.

There will be Team Holy Communion (traditional language - BCP) service at 8am in St Michael's Aldbourne (3rd and 24th January), Holy Cross Ramsbury (10th and 31st January) and in St Mary's Chilton Foliat (17th January).

There will also be a Thursday morning 10am Holy Communion (modern language - CW) service in Holy Cross every week.

Please observe all of the Covid safety measures when attending church in person.

If you would like to be kept informed of all our news and notices by email, let us know by sending an email to: pcc@whittonteam.org.uk

The Aldbourne and Ramsbury Methodist Church Services

Sunday 3 January 10.30am Service led by local Preacher at Aldbourne.

Sunday 10 January 10.30am Service led by local Preacher at Aldbourne.

Sunday 17 January 10.30am Covenant Service together led by Revd Stephen Skinner at Sunday 24 January 10.30am service led by local Preacher at Aldbourne.

Sunday 31 January 10.30am service led by Revd Stephen Skinner at Aldbourne.

Message from Julie Coe, Church Steward

At the time of writing (7 December) our Methodist Church in Aldbourne is open for worship. What a year it has been and the future remains uncertain. As always our services will be available online if you are unable to attend Church. Please contact me or Revd Stephen Skinner for details of online services. As we look forward 2021 we have new hopes of the vaccine and say thank you to all the scientists involved. Bless them all. Good News.

The churches together have raised a grand total of £2,000. The community of Ramsbury & Aldbourne has been busy making face masks and selling them in our local shops. Well done all. The proceeds will be divided between the churches. So if you are in need of a new face mask, keep your eyes peeled.

The Methodist Church at Aldbourne is now known as The Aldbourne and Ramsbury Methodist Church. All are welcome here. Government guidelines are in place to keep all safe.

Coffee Centre - We sadly cannot meet for coffee at the moment but when spring arrives we can look forward to meeting again. If you need a puzzle or have one to swap, give me a call on 521085. In the meantime, keep well & keep safe.

Even though Christmas will be different this year, take time in making this Christmas a special time to share and take time out for prayer. God is always there when we need him.

Blessings for the New Year.

Ramsbury Flyer

The Ramsbury Flyer is back but operating a restricted service to Hungerford Tesco. Wednesday only – maximum with 5 return passengers, leaving The Pond, Aldbourne at 10am, The Square, Ramsbury 10.16am. Strictly by booking in advance. To book please call Janet on 01672 520682/07584 253117. Surgery Transport continues every Tuesday and Thursday.

The Ramsbury Flyer AGM

Thursday 21 January at 7.30pm. Owing to COVID-19, the AGM will be held virtually in order to comply with restrictions. If you would like to attend virtually please email

secretary@ramsburyflyer.org by 14 January when access information will be provided.

Any ideas, comments and suggestions about the Ramsbury Flyer are welcome but should be provided by 14 January latest.

Ramsbury Flyer Volunteers Needed

We are also looking for new people to join our Committee, as drivers or to help with the cleaning of the bus (once or twice a year).

If you have some time to offer and would like more information, please email the secretary for more details.

LINK

Link is operating for lifts to medical appointments, shopping etc Please ring 520111

Charity Shop

The Charity Shop is open as long as regulations allow. Please support us by buying and donating. The organisations which benefit from the proceeds (Scouts, Bowls Club, Holy Cross, Lunch Club, Recreation Centre, British Legion, Ravensbury Players, WI) have all had fund raising curtailed or halted for most of 2020 so the contributions from the Charity Shop are more important than usual.

Allotments

Spring cannot be far away-can it? There are single beds (5m x 1.5m) available £10 per annum. Ideal for beginners or those with limited time but big enough to grow salad crops, beans, peas etc and a few flowers What's not to like? Contact Denise Edwards on 07867921878 allotments@ramsbury.org for more details. See website www.ramsburyallotments.co.uk for plant sales and useful hints.

Ramsbury Primary School PTA

Kerry Edwards has stepped down as chair for Ramsbury Primary School PTA. The new chair is Laura Cooper.

Calsterandco@gmail.com 07818 507 719

Corona Pub Quiz Teams' Prospect Hospice Donation

The weekly Corona Pub Quiz Teams' Prospect Hospice Donation, made through the Big Give, was £1,160.

Action for the River Kennet

A brand new children's book 'Henry Hedgehog's Riverside Adventures' written and illustrated by Caroline Mills is available for a donation in support of Action for the River Kennet.

You can order a copy of Henry Hedgehog's Riverside Adventures from Action for the River Kennet's website. All proceeds will go to ARK to continue supporting their work conserving and protecting the River Kennet. www.riverkennet.org email: mia@riverkennet.org

Thanks

My thanks to Peter Marren who guest edited the December Diary.

***Edited by John Herbertson
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