

THE STONE & ECCLESHALL Gazette

JANUARY / FEBRUARY 2026

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CONTENTS



NEWS

- Campaign to save the Railway Inn
- Stone Carnival Week 2026
- More new homes planned in Eccleshall
- Locals honoured with MBEs and BEMs
- Conservation work has started at All Saints' Church
- New books out this month from Stone Authors

IN PICTURES

- Stone Alzheimer's Club Christmas Party
- Stone Stroke Club Christmas Party
- Stone Lions Club – Lions At Work And Play
- Stone's Armistice Day and Remembrance Sunday
- Stone Flower Club News
- Arthur Berry Masterpieces Come to Light



HERITAGE

- Royalty Visit Stone By Philip Leason MBE
Royal visits from Richard II to King Charles.
- The Parish of Standon and Cotes Heath By Chris Copp of Staffordshire Archives & Heritage

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GETTING IN TOUCH

PUBLISHER - Dan Mitchell

ACCOUNTS - Angela Downing

EMAIL STONEGAZETTE@OUTLOOK.COM

TELEPHONE 07514 967 890

Website www.stonegazette.com

ECCLESHALL NEWS

peterwjones@btinternet.com

Photography in association with
Martin Robinson

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Wishing You A Happy & Healthy New Year

Welcome and Happy New Year.

I hope you all had a good Christmas, and a nice break over the holidays. Mine was going well up until Boxing Day, when I came down with the flu. I spent the next 5 days asleep or coughing, so not the best way to end the year.

There's plenty being happening since we last spoke, starting with a campaign to save the Railway Inn pub at Norton Bridge. Campaigners are aiming to purchase the pub, and retain and run it as a community asset, the group have recently gained some national press coverage too.

Stone Carnival have released the details of their Carnival Week for 2026, and promise us nine days of colour, community and celebration in the heart of Stone.

Bellway Strategic Land has submitted an outline planning application for up to 140 new homes in Eccleshall. The proposals would include 40 per cent affordable housing, new public open space, connectivity to the town and the wider countryside, and a children's playground, though some Eccleshall residents feel enough is enough already.

Conservation work has got underway at All Saints' Church Sandon as part of their National Lottery Heritage Fund Project. Throughout November and December scaffolding has been erected and work has begun on repairing, conserving and removing various historic elements of the church.

Stone residents turned out in force again for the towns Armistice Day and Remembrance Sunday parades, Stone must have one of the biggest crowds in

the Midlands, if not the country, when it comes to Remembrance Sunday.

There's new books out this month from Stone Authors Mark Shelton (*Somebody Cycling*), and Tim Ward (*One Small World*) and also (*Top Secret West Midlands*) by Michael Layton QPM & Androulla Christou-Layton.

There's lots of local events coming up, in Eccleshall, Hospice Bingo and Baps is returning in February, and the Eccleshall Historical Talks Society have talks in January and February.

Stone Chrysanthemum and Dahlia Society's Gardening Club invite you to their meetings and The Daleian Singers are to perform a Charity concert at Keele University Chapel, and there's upcoming concerts too from Stone Choral Society.

If you feel you need to dust off the cobwebs a little, and stretch your legs and lungs, why not give Stone Ramblers Walk of the Month a go, from Sandon to Gayton it takes in some beautiful scenery, on a crisp winters day it's guaranteed to banish any blues.

Oulton village hall host a Fashion Show in January and a Valentines rock n roll night in February.

If you love to grab a bargain, Walton Community Centre have started a new Table Top & Car Boot Sale, taking place fortnightly on Sundays from 830am to 1130am.

And finally, an evening of Victorian Theatre featuring TRULY Jack the Ripper is coming to St Dom's Social Club, now that sounds like fun!

All the best until next time, and wishing you a happy & healthy New Year.

Dan Mitchell 04/01/26

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The Railway Inn Steering group pose outside the historic pub with their Save our Pub banner (photo courtesy of the Express and Star)

Campaign to save the Railway Inn, Norton Bridge gains momentum

Our campaign to purchase the Railway Inn, Norton Bridge as a community pub has received local and national press coverage but now is the time to Pledge support to continue.

As reported in the September /October edition of the Stone and Eccleshall Gazette, a meeting was held to gauge the interest in purchasing the historic Railway Inn, Norton Bridge as a community pub. At a packed meeting held at St Luke's Norton Bridge there was unanimous agreement to try and buy the pub and run it for the community and the Railway Inn Steering Group was formed to take on the task. Since then we have been on a steep learning curve and at the time of writing the campaign has gained the attention of the national news networks and local press. See

https://www.bbc.co.uk/search?q=norton+bridge&d=HOMEPAGE_PS

Our vision is to operate the pub as a community hub that provides more services than a traditional pub and supports local businesses and the local community. We want to make the most of the long railway history and be a place that is warm and welcoming to all and serves a good pint!

Community pubs are owned and run democratically by members of the community and we will need to raise capital to make an offer to buy the pub. To do this we are in the process of establishing a Community Benefit Society and issue shares. Our shares will be £1 each, with a minimum purchase of 250.

To ensure that we would be able to raise sufficient finance our next step is to ask members of the community to make funding Pledges. Pledges are non-binding expressions of interest in buying shares and will tell us if we are likely to raise enough capital to make an offer on the pub. We will be holding a meeting in the New Year, on 14th January, to give an update on progress and to explain the pledge and share offer and to give more information on our business plan, including the tax advantages that come with Community Benefit Society shares.

The meeting will be held on the **14th January** at St Luke's Church Hall, Norton Bridge, starting at 7.00 pm.

Our target is to raise £250,000 which we hope will secure the pub for the future.



We are also crowdfunding to raise funds associated with setting up the Community Benefit Society and continuing our campaign.

Our crowdfunding page will remain open for those who may want to donate but do not want to buy shares. Donations can be made by scanning the QR code below, by visiting our website or going to: <https://www.gofundme.com/f/the-railway-inn-community-pub-norton-bridge-fundraiser>



gofundme

The Railway Inn was one of a dying breed of old traditional pubs that had retained much of its character. It could be again – and more. **This is a once in a generation chance to save it**, but we need the active support of local people and all those who value traditional pubs, to support our campaign, consider pledging to buy shares in the pub or donating to our GoFundMe page. So much of our heritage has already been lost, so let's save this small part for the future. Your support is much appreciated. To find out more or to contact us, follow us on social media or go to <https://railwayinn.org/>, or sign up to our contact list via the website.

**UPDATE AND PLEDGE CAMPAIGN
LAUNCH**

**7.00 pm, 14TH JANUARY, 2026
ST LUKE'S CHURCH HALL,
NORTON BRIDGE, ST15 0PD**



Stone Lions Club – At Work And Play

Most people in Stone will be used to seeing members of Stone Lions Club (CIO) out and about in town. Their yellow tabards make it easy to spot them when they are picking up litter, collecting used spectacles and hearing aids for re-use or recycling or helping out at community events such as street parties and at Lights Switch-On Night.



You may have been a lucky winner of one of their Christmas Hampers or successful on the Lions Tombola at the Stone Christmas Market. Or have you been a grateful recipient of one of their Mobility Aids either for long-term use or in a sudden emergency, attended one of their PSA Nights at the Stone House Hotel or received financial or practical help when needed. There is no doubt that Lions are a valuable part of our community, offering a much-appreciated service when needed.

What you may not have realised is that, as well as the valuable service projects undertaken, this group of community minded individuals also believe that having fun and socialising with each other is a valuable part of being a Lion,



with Christmas time being no exception! December 5th saw members and guests celebrate together with an evening at Stone Golf Club, where all were able to relax and enjoy a delicious meal together. Lion President Dave Handley is proud to lead this enthusiastic Pride of Lions but is also aware that the club would be able to do so much more with a few more members. *"There is no doubt that Stone Lions will continue to play a vital part in Stone for as long as we are able, but we must bear in mind that most of our members have given great service to the club for many years and the things we were able to do easily 20 years ago are becoming more difficult as time goes by. With just a few more members, we would be able to do so much more and we are always happy to meet like-minded people with a sense of commitment to the community."*



"Our membership is open to all regardless of gender, religion, political views or ethnic background and it would be great to attract a few younger members who could make us more aware of what is needed by families today. Tell us about your ideas and maybe, by working together, we can achieve amazing results."

So, if your New Years Resolution is to get out more, make new friends, enrich your social life and experience the happiness gained by making a difference in the lives of others, why not give Lions a call on 0345 8338478 for an informal, no pressure chat. By helping improve the life of someone else, your own life could also be changed for the better.



Peace Poster Winner at Walton



Peace Poster Winner at Christchurch



Gazette

NEWS IN BRIEF

St Michael's Nursery

The school nursery at St Michael's CE (VC) First School, Stone is open from 8.50am to 3.30pm during term time.

We accept children from their 3rd birthday, and have funded places available for 3 and 4 year olds.

To arrange a visit to see all that we have to offer your child please call our school office on 01785 334930.

New Rector at St Michael & St Wulfad's

Happy New Year, we start with good news that we have a new Rector!

The Rev. Robert Icke will be joining us in late January 2026. He is currently the Incumbent of the Latchford Benefice in the Diocese of Chester.

The Collation Service will be on **28th January at 7.30pm**. All are welcome.

Stone Lions PSA Event – Please Save the Date

Stone Lions Club (CIO) will be holding their Annual PSA Testing event on **Tuesday 28th April 2026** with appointments being made available for booking mid-March.

Men who have already attended a previous event will be contacted by the Graham Fulford Trust and invited to book their appointment however, for those attending for the first time, full details of the process will be published in the next issue of The Gazette.



'Orange the World' with The Inner Wheel Club of Stone

The Inner Wheel Club of Stone supported the United Nations project 'Orange the World' on November 25th.

They walked through Stone handing out leaflets explaining that the project was to raise awareness of violence towards Women and Children.

The members of the general public encountered during the walk were glad that the public were being made aware of this issue.

The Members had previously made a collection of useful items, all with an orange theme. These items were delivered to Stone Community Hub to help bolster the Food Bank stocks.

Inner Wheel was founded in Manchester in 1924.

Clubs meet regularly and have a full and varied programme through which friendships form and flourish. Visiting other clubs and joining in their activities broadens the opportunity to make new friends. Inner Wheel clubs have an outstanding record of service to the community.

For more information please visit <https://innerwheel.co.uk/district-21/>

Photo From Martin Robinson

1000 Years 1000 Voices

Conservation work has started at All Saints' Church Sandon as part of their National Lottery Heritage Fund Project.

Throughout November and December scaffolding has been erected and work has begun on repairing, conserving and removing various historic elements of the church.

One of the most delicate operations was to remove the historic 17th century Stuart Royal Coat of Arms from the north wall. It took six people to carefully take the weight of the painting and frame so it can be taken to the conservator's workshop to be cleaned and repaired.

Specialist work is also taking place on the stained glass windows, the ceiling plaster work and Tudor wall paintings and monuments.

As part of the Heritage Fund project, the church will be **Celebrating 1000 years of its history in 2026 with a series of FREE events.**

To kick off the celebrations, the first event is a 1000 year History Quiz at Sandon Parish Room on **Friday 23 January at 7.30pm**. Book as a team of 6 or make up a team on the night. Prizes for winning teams. Teas and coffees will be available. To get your FREE tickets ring Pam on 07778 190082.

The church is very grateful to the Greyhound Inn in Burston who will be providing the use of a room for a monthly Poppy Knit & Natter group starting on **29th January 1.30 till 3pm**, and continuing on the **4th Thursday of each month.**

The aim is to produce 1000 knitted poppies in time for Remembrance Day 2026. The Wool Boutique in Stone has kindly donated wool for the project and the Poppy knitting pattern can be found on the church website www.sandonallsaints.com. For further details contact Annie on 07791 097502

On **Saturday 21st February**, people are invited to drop into the Parish Room in Sandon 10am-4pm for a "Down Memory Lane" event, to share their memories of the local area and the church; perhaps bring a photo or an object from the past. There will also be launch the Church Time Capsule project on the same day.



Getting a closer inspection



Carefully removing the coat of arms in December



Coming up in 2026

June onwards in the church grounds - A celebration of nature: a butterfly and moth trail - if your group/organisation would like to take part please contact keystoneheritage.info@gmail.com

Saturday 1st August 10am-4pm - Sandon All Saints through time re-enactment event in the church grounds.

Saturday 12th September - The Military Wives Choir

Explore Our Heritage at www.sandonallsaints.com Or find and like us on Facebook : Sandon All Saints'

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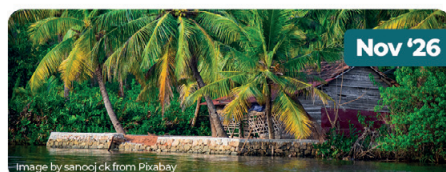
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Oct '26

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Nov '26

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Walk & Discover



Jun '26

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Ramble through stunning mountain landscapes and traditional villages.



Jul '26

Manx: Walking the Wild Isle

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European Treasures



Sep '26

Lake Garda & Northern Italy

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Oct '26

Romania & Enchanting Transylvania

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Sail in Style



Oct '26

Autumn Escape: Andalusia & Portugal

Discover historic cities, golden beaches, vibrant culture and stunning landscapes.



Nov '26

Treasures of the Eastern Med

Explore ancient ruins, idyllic beaches, and charming island villages in Greece & Turkey.

Closer to Home



Mar '26

Potters Five Lakes Retreat - Essex

Enjoy an all-inclusive break with comfortable hotel, great food, and activities.



May '26

Gems of Galway & Connemara

Discover the rugged beauty, traditional music, and friendly towns of the Irish Coast.



Oct '26

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We Will Remember Them - Stone's Armistice Day and Remembrance Sunday

Remembrance Sunday fell on 9th November this year and Stone Town Council invited members of the public to join Town Councillors, and members of ex-Service Organisations, in remembering those who gave their lives for us at its Remembrance and Armistice commemorations.

The Annual Parade, together with Services of Remembrance at the War Memorial in Granville Square and later at the Parish Church of St. Michael and St. Wulfad, took place on Sunday 9 November.

At 10.15 a.m. Parade Personnel assembled at the bottom of the High Street, and then at 10.35 a.m. the Parade, led by Stone Scout & Guide Band, proceeded along the High Street to the

War Memorial, where Florence Brass War Memorial, where Florence Brass Band played.

At 11.00 a.m. the huge crowds fell silent for Two Minutes Silence, which was followed by a Service of Remembrance.

Then many groups and organisations took their turn to lay wreaths at the War Memorial in Granville Square.

At the conclusion of the Service, the Parade proceeded down to the Parish Church of St. Michael and St. Wulfad via High Street and Church Street led by Stone Scout & Guide Band, where the Colour and Standard Bearers lined up at the entrance to the Church, and presented their Colours, welcoming the Parade.

Earlier during the morning at 9.30 a.m., a Service of Remembrance was held at the Walton War Memorial, Walton.



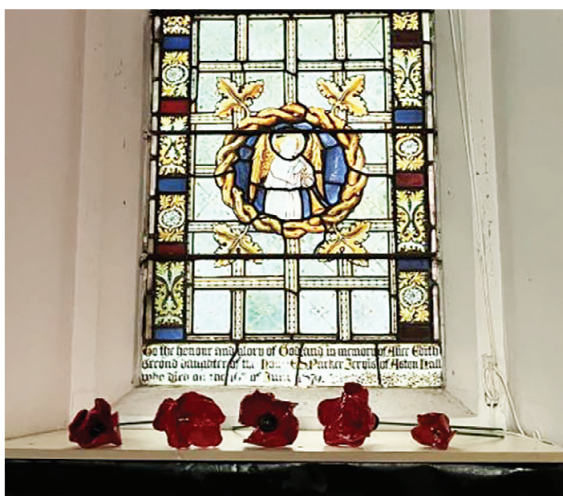
Armistice Day 11-11-11

A short ceremony was held at the War Memorial in Granville Square at 11.00am on Tuesday 11th November, to mark Armistice Day.

Again a two minute silence was observed by all those in attendance.

Photos by Martin Robinson





News from St Michael and St Wulfad, Stone and St Saviour, Aston

At the going down of the sun, and in the morning we will remember them.

At the service on Remembrance Sunday, at St Saviour's church they laid a wreath under the Memorial in the church when the names of those from Aston, whose lives had been lost in the two World Wars were read out: Arthur Heeley, Henry Akroyd Ridgway, George Smith, Daniel Warrillow, Albert Edward Brain, Frank Buckley, Bertie Alec William Addison Ellis, John Thomas Plant and James Frederick Ryder.

The service this year was a service of Matins led by Berwyn whilst the Rev'd Preb Michael Harding preached the sermon and blessed the Operation Christmas Child boxes.



All Souls at St Michael's

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity - 18th to the 25th January 2026

It is hoped that on **Wednesday 21st January at 12 noon** at St Saviour's there will be a short united service followed by a simple lunch with soup and bread cheese.

This event is an opportunity to meet our fellow Christians; to prayerfully reflect on our diversity, and to share a meal together.

And then on **Wednesday 28th January at 7.30pm** at St Michael & St Wulfad's - Collation and Institution of the Rev'd Robert Icke as the Rector of Stone, St Michael & St Wulfad with Aston, St Saviour.

We are delighted to welcome Robert and his wife Deborah to Stone and Aston, please pray for them and their family as they make the move from Thatchford.

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Gazette

Eccleshall

NEWS IN BRIEF

Hospice Bingo

The next Katharine House Hospice Eccleshall Support Group event is Bingo and Baps at the Community Centre, Shaw's Lane, Eccleshall is on **Friday 27th February**. Doors open at 7pm. Eyes down at 8pm

Historical Talk

The Eccleshall Historical Talks Society programme of talks for the early months of 2026 has been set and begins with **January 12th** when a talk on Salt making in the Stafford/Trent valley is the topic.

In February the topic is the Dickin Medal - the Animal VC. The talks take place in the Holy Trinity parish room Mondays starting at 7.30pm. and always **on the 2nd Monday of the month**.

Community Interest Talks

The Eccleshall Library, on the High Street, holds monthly sessions of interest, and the first two months of the year start with Eccleshall Fire Service, who will be giving a talk on Fire Safety in the home and on **Thursday 15th January**.

Then on **Thursday 19th February** Sally McMahon will be providing an update on the work of the Midlands Air Ambulance.

The talks are from 2pm until 4pm on the third Thursday of each month in the upstairs room of the library.

A ticket costing £1 is available from the library reception desk and will be required as entry is limited. Tickets will be available from the first Thursday of each month for the lecture in that month.

The ticket price includes coffee / tea and biscuit. Some speakers who are representing a charity may bring collection box along for voluntary donations.

Ecclian Calendar

The 2026 Eccleshall Calendar produced each year by the Ecclian Society is available at £5 from the Eccleshall pharmacy, Perry of Eccleshall, Fletchers Garden Centre, Bookers, Spencer the Jeweller and Lodeys.

Open Gardens

The Eccleshall Open Garden 2026 will take place on **Saturday 20th June and Sunday 21st June** this year.

If you live in Eccleshall and would like to be involved by opening your garden or helping with the organisation in anyway then please contact Anne Sargeant, Luke Sargeant and Gill Bertram 07817 930857 email: ecceshallopengardens@gmail.com

Women's Institute

The history of glass is the subject of the talk being given by John Turnock at the club's meeting in the Holy Trinity parish room on **Thursday 8th January**.

A Woman's Aid speaker will be the guest at the **February meeting on the 12th**.

Trinity Men's Fellowship

The annual general meeting of the club will be held on **Friday 30th January** in the Holy Trinity parish room starting at 2pm.

Eccleshall Guide 2026

The 28th edition of the Eccleshall Guide will be distributed to Eccleshall homes door to door during the month of January and will be available to collect from the High Street library and other venues.

The publishers wish to thank the advertisers for their support in making the Guide once again a free publication.



Stone Scribblers Get Out And About

Having visited the Longest Yarn 1 last year, without any idea in advance of what we would find, this year we were prepared for the route circling Stoke Minster as we admired the creative craftwork and attention to detail within the huge achievement of The Longest Yarn 2.

Dioramas crafted in wool - knitted, crocheted, embroidered - illustrated aspects of World War II in Britain. Beautifully made, clearly illustrating life on the home front: blackouts, bombers, evacuation of school children and gas masks, rations, the Home Guard, Fire Watching and the aftermath of the Blitz in various parts of the country. The celebrations when it was all over - street parties, dancing at the Ritz, Buckingham Palace were all portrayed and many more. It was an impressive summing up of the war effort keeping a civilian population safe, fed, well preoccupied and working together. It illustrated the sort of community we would like to see again today as everyone back then was needed to play their part in the war effort.

A short walk from here gave an opportunity to see the special exhibition of the British Ceramics Biennial 2025 at the Spode Museum. We started off at the Vintage Tea Room with a simple lunch and drinks. Tea drinkers were served with Spode teapots and teacups which made it feel like a special occasion.



and speaking a different message - looked a little deserted in such a huge area where bustling industry had once reigned.

Some works were hard to comprehend and needed explanation. As a former archaeology enthusiast who had worked on ancient pottery shards to piece together for a light on history, there seemed to be multiple shards of discarded clays re-imagined into new forms and functions within new creations on display. We hoped that the component parts of the Spode site would evolve similarly into the kind of place to spark new innovation and put a beating heart back into the centre of Stoke on Trent.

There were history films of the ceramics process, information about the willow pattern history on the way to exhibition areas displaying contemporary art forms and interactive areas. A pre-booked school party were joyously pounding and thumping in one gallery with a mound of clay to work with. The spaces within the Spode Factory were cavernous and new sculptures and artworks - all completely original

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'Discos for Grown Ups' party returns to The Kings Hall on Saturday 31st January

The UK's biggest and original Disco Party...Disco For Grown Ups returns to the Kings Hall, Stoke..and this time it's our incredible DAY-TIME disco!

Dance off those January blues and let's celebrate the start of 2026 (*and the end of dry January!*) with an incredible DAY-TIME boogie!

Gather your friends for an amazing afternoon dancing to all your favourite classics from the 70s 80s AND the 90s! Dance the day away from 2pm to 6.30pm and be back home nice and early! No late night taxi queues or next day hangovers - back in time for tea, telly and a take-away!

We love bringing Discos for Grown Ups to Stoke - this is our first show of 2026 and our 8th DISCO at the Kings Hall since 2022 - we can't wait!

Expect confetti showers, our amazing stage dancers, incredible light and laser show and THREE decades of the BEST ever music to boogie to!

PLUS... the incredible 'Disco Diva' Maria will be joining us to sing some disco classics LIVE!

It's fun, fab and feel-good afternoon of dancing with people your own age to the BEST ever 70s disco and soul, 80s pop and 90s dance floor classics!

Boogie of your favourite 70s, 80s and 90s dancefloor hits from Donna Summer, Human League, Earth Wind and Fire, Chic, Black Box, Sister Sledge, Odyssey, Chaka Khan, ABBA, Madonna, Robin S, Erasure, Bee Gees, Candi Staton, Faithless and many more...

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Saturday 31st January STOKE ON TRENT – King's Hall. Starts at 2.00pm

Tickets available from - <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/day-time-disco-for-grown-ups-70s-80s-and-90s-disco-party-stoke-kings-hall-tickets-1975839569340>



New Year Honours for Staffordshire

Leaders of their professions, and pillars of the community are among the Staffordshire residents recognised in His Majesty the King's New Year's Honours List.

Residents have been honoured with MBEs and BEMs for their services to diversity in sport, higher education, public health, local communities and to charity.

Martin Murray, Acting Leader of Staffordshire County Council, said: *"The commitment, generosity and expertise of Staffordshire's residents are some of the reasons why this county is the beating heart of the country."*

"On behalf of us all I thank those honoured today by the King for their long contribution to their professions or their communities."

Prof Liz Barnes CBE, HM Lord-Lieutenant of Staffordshire, said: *"Staffordshire thrives because of the contribution and impact that so many people make to their local communities or more broadly to their specialisms in work where they go above and beyond, positively influencing the work and lives of others."*

"I am always humbled by what individuals can achieve through dedicated service and support. Congratulations to all those recipients of Honours in Staffordshire, I am so pleased to see them recognised in this way by His Majesty."

Residents of Staffordshire who have received an honour include:

MBE for Kerry Davis, of Fradley, for services to Association Football and to diversity in sport;

MBE for Paul Kevin Hegarty, of Lichfield, a trustee of the Licensed Trade Charity, for charitable service to the hospitality sector;

MBE for Dr Catherine Louise Taylor-Weetman, of Whittington, consultant in dental public health for the Shropshire and Staffordshire Dental Local Professional Network, for services to dentistry;

BEM for Susan Jane Bohanan, of Stafford, Special Constabulary co-ordinator at Staffordshire Police, for services to the community in Staffordshire;

BEM for Philip John Charles, of Abbots Bromley, parish councillor and village stalwart, for services to the community in Abbots Bromley;

BEM for Russell David Clark, of Keele, Head of the Language Centre at the University of Keele, for services to Higher Education;

BEM for Joan Catherine Fairley, of Hints, Tamworth, for services to the community in Sutton Coldfield;

BEM for Richard Graham Hill, of Barlaston, for services to charity in Staffordshire;

BEM for Charles Frederick Hodges, of Kinver, for services to the community in Enville, particularly for his commitment to St Mary's bell tower.

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Scouts
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Give me an email or call and we can find a role that suits you.

From Daisy Edwards

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dlv@stonedistrictscouts.onmicrosoft.com





Stone Carnival Week 2026

Nine Days of Colour, Community and Celebration in the Heart of Stone

Stone is set to come alive from **30 May to 7 June 2026** as Stone Carnival Week returns with its biggest and most vibrant programme yet — a dynamic, week-long celebration packed with entertainment, tradition and community spirit for all ages.

From the spectacle of the Carnival Parade and the excitement of the funfair at Westbridge Park, to live music, food, family activities, arts and crafts, and interactive events across the town, Stone Carnival Week 2026 promises something for everyone - families, friends, and festivalgoers alike.

The Stone Carnival Committee has been working tirelessly to enhance favourite events such as the Parade, Two Wheel Tuesday, and the Westbridge funfair, while introducing exciting additions including football tournaments, a tractor run, and a meaningful Remembrance Walk in support of local causes.

Supporting Local Causes

All profits raised during Stone Carnival Week 2026 will be reinvested into future Carnival events and donated to three chosen good causes:

- Katharine House Hospice
- The Green Bus Service
- Chuckles Productions



Event Schedule Highlights

Saturday 30 May

- Children's Football Tournament
 - Old Alleynes FC, Stone
 - Elvis Tribute Evening
 - St Dominic's Social Club

Sunday 31 May

- Children's Football Tournament
 - Old Alleynes FC, Stone
 - Tractor Run
- George and Dragon Public House

Tuesday 2 June

- Two Wheel Tuesday
- Stone Town Centre

Wednesday 3 June

- Mediumship Evening
- Crown Wharf



Thursday 4 June

- Walking Treasure Hunt
- Around Stone Town Centre

Friday 5 June

- Feast Food Carnival Edition
- Stone Cricket Club

Saturday 6 June

- Carnival Parade & Day of Activities
- Westbridge Park
- Katherine House Remembrance Walk
- Westbridge Park

Sunday 7 June

- Day of Activities – Westbridge Park

Call for Local Business Sponsors

Local businesses are invited to sponsor Stone Carnival Week 2026 — a fantastic opportunity to support the community while gaining exposure to thousands of attendees throughout the week.

Sponsorship enquiries: sponsorship@stonecarnival.org

Volunteers Needed

Stone Carnival Week relies on the incredible support of volunteers. Whether you'd like to help organise events, marshal activities such as the dog derby and steeplechase, or assist with the parade, your help will make a real difference.

Volunteer enquiries: marketing@stonecarnival.org

About Stone Carnival Week

Stone Carnival Week is an annual celebration that brings the community together through entertainment, culture and shared experiences. It showcases the very best of Stone while fostering community pride and supporting local causes.

For full details and updates, visit www.stonecarnival.org
General enquiries: info@stonecarnival.org

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Timetable info

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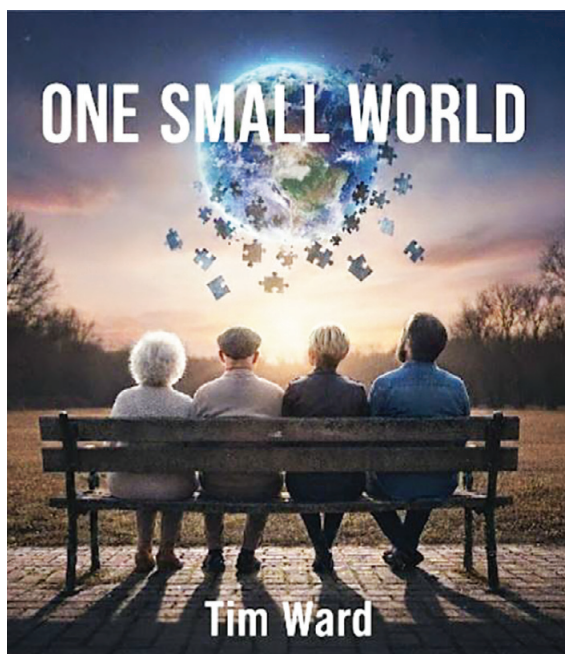
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'Realise that everything connects to everything else'

Local Author Tim releases his final book in the trilogy

A project which started when a Stone resident was staring out of his window during the COVID lockdown observing the behaviour of neighbours now concludes with the publication of the third and final book in Tim Ward's crime fiction trilogy.

Murder, fraud, secrets and retribution unfold over the three volumes *'One Small Town'* (2023), *'Bloodgroup'* (2024) and now to end the story *'One Small World'* which has recently been published.

All three titles are available exclusively from Amazon Books as paperbacks and/or ebook downloads.

Of the final volume Tim told the Gazette *'Prepare to meet an arsonist, a serial killer and a librarian. But which one of them is the scariest?'*

Meanwhile Nemesis catches up with certain individuals who thought they could get away with anything. And we learn how resourceful and dangerous elderly ladies can be.

My final instalment brings together events and characters from the previous books.



I encourage the residents of Stone and Eccleshall to keep staring out of their windows. You never know what it might lead to!



Stone in Bloom Volunteers Group Blossoms Bigger Than Ever!

If you've recently driven along the A34 and wondered why it's looking noticeably less like a wind-tunnel for takeaway cartons, you can thank two of Alleyn's High School's students, Nellie and Isla.

The pair, currently working toward their Silver Duke of Edinburgh Award, were spotted taking an early morning, well-earned break, proof that even the most dedicated litter-pickers need to stop now and then for a well-earned rest.

The girls have been quietly transforming some of Stone's busiest roads, keeping under the radar, without any recognition for almost two years with the help of Streetscene who are always glad to lend a hand by collecting their litter bags which are sometimes so heavy the girls are glad of their help.

The girls have found some very interesting items on their litter picks, and it must be seen to be believed what people will chuck out onto the A34 rather than going to the recycling tip in Stone.

Our Town Council Maintenance Manager Mick Plant has been demonstrating that ladders are not just for Christmas trees and lights but also the annual cleaning of the war memorial. This is a job that requires equal parts elbow grease, balance, and the ability not to be distracted by advice from ground level.

Not to be outdone, the ever-enthusiastic Stone in Bloom volunteers have been hard at work on the Anchor Bed and surrounding areas. After a morning of pruning, sweeping, and the occasional debate about whether a particular plant is "wildflower" or "weed with ambition" they proudly posed with their signature green bags of collected garden waste. These are, as always, left for the Street Scene operatives our unsung heroes who routinely go above and beyond their expected workload to lend a hand. If there were medals for community spirit, they'd need a bigger trophy cabinet.

Our other good-news is that Rebekah the narrowboat, which sits on the canal bridge as Stone's unofficial mascot welcoming everyone to Stone is getting a makeover. Another community-minded resident has taken on the renovation, ensuring Rebekah continues to be one of the town's most charming landmarks rather than a future archaeological mystery.

With Stone in Bloom now having grown into a much larger wonderfully energetic group, the team is gearing up to cover even more areas of the town. If you've



ever fancied joining in, whether you're a seasoned gardener, a casual litter-picker, or simply someone who enjoys a good natter while holding a bin bag, you're more than welcome.



In our next article, we'll be sharing contact details and dates with new and existing members for our upcoming group meetings in and around Stone. Until then, keep an eye out for our volunteers and maybe give them a wave. *They're the ones making the town looking so smart.*

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Helen Peach and Clare Irving from Hitachi Energy, with Sandie McQueen on the right

Celebrations All Round

The annual Stone Alzheimer's Club Christmas Party is always a time for celebration and this year the Club was honoured to welcome Stone Town Council Mayor, Jason Metters and Stone Town Council Deputy Mayor, Andrew Best and together they spent the morning with members and volunteers enjoying and taking part in the festive fun.

This popular annual event was very well attended and after tea and biscuits there was dancing to the amazing Diamonds, a fabulous free raffle and then more dancing before members sat down for a lovely buffet lunch that had been organised by the volunteers.

Lead volunteer, Sandie McQueen told the Gazette: "The Stone Alzheimer's Club Christmas Party is one of the highlights of our year. I think this year we have had more members attending the party than ever before.

It's such a joyous and fun occasion that our members really look forward to. I have to thank all of the volunteers who have all worked so hard to make this party such a success."

She went on to say: "From our experience, celebrations like this are really important both for our members and carers in that positive memories are created, especially as the Club is now closed for a couple of weeks over Christmas."

Stone Alzheimer's Club receives no grant funding for running and operating the Club and, as such, relies on donations to keep it open for fifty weeks a year. Whilst the Club is fortunate to have received some grant funding for its Better Lives Project over the last year or so, those funds could not be used for keeping the Club open so two recent donations have been particularly welcome.

Visitors Helen Peach and Clare Irving from Hitachi Energy, a local Stone-based company, called in and made a substantial donation to the Club. They had the opportunity to meet and chat to members, carers and volunteers and, like most visitors, ended up joining in the dancing and entertainment. In addition, the Club also received a cheque from the Asda Foundation, Better Together Fund to, again, support the Club's ongoing activities and help support the Christmas Party.

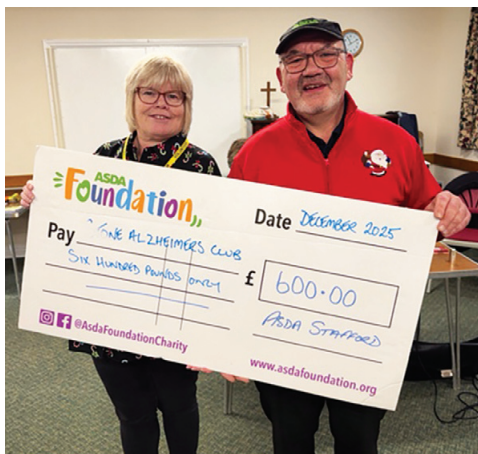
Fund raiser and volunteer, Lindsay Riley said: "It's wonderful that local businesses are helping the Club. Along with 2024/5 funding from Co-op Local Causes, two recent donations from Hitachi Energy and the Asda Foundation along with the many other donations we have received over the year means that we will be able to continue with physiotherapy and hair dressing for members well into 2026 as well as having secured funding towards our operating costs for part of next year."

She went on to say: "This funding will enable the club to continue to develop and grow which is particularly important as the Club has seen a sizeable increase in members joining over the last year."

Stone Alzheimer's Club will be closed over the Christmas period and reopens in the New Year. If you would like to support the Club or just come along and say hello, please get in touch.

The club meets at Christ Church Centre, Christ Church Way, Stone ST15 8ZB every Thursday for fifty weeks a year and is open between 10 and 12.

You can contact the club by telephone on: 07375 748733 or by email on: stone_alzheimersclub@btinternet.com



The Club also receive a cheque from the Asda Foundation



Stone Town Council Mayor, Cllr. Jason Metters seen here enjoying the show



Diane and George



Some of the raffle prizes



Stone Town Council Mayor, Jason Metters and Stone Town Council Deputy Mayor, Andrew Best get to meet Santa



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The illustrative masterplan for Bellway's proposals for the land south of Stone Road, Eccleshall. Image from Bellway

Plans submitted for up to 140 new homes in Eccleshall

Bellway Strategic Land has submitted an outline planning application for up to 140 new homes in Eccleshall. The new development is proposed for a 17-acre site to the south of Stone Road, on the eastern edge of the settlement.

The proposals would include 40 per cent affordable housing, new public open space, connectivity to the town and the wider countryside, and a children's playground.

The project would deliver a biodiversity net gain of more than 10 per cent through the creation of new wildlife habitats and Bellway would make financial contributions to fund improvements in local services and infrastructure.

Sarah Jones, Bellway Strategic Land and Planning Manager for the Central region, said: "This outline planning application sets out our intention to deliver a sustainable and attractive development on the edge of Eccleshall.

The new neighbourhood would provide much-needed new homes, including a significant number of affordable properties.

A landscape-led approach has underpinned the design of the site ensuring that existing natural features of value – such as a group of mature, high-quality trees within the southwestern corner of the site – will be retained.

To deliver a biodiversity net gain, mitigation measures will be provided, likely to include a new planting programme within areas of open space, the provision of bird and bat boxes, and the creation of log piles and hedgehog gaps.

The public right of way that crosses the centre of the site will be retained, while new footpaths and cycleways will connect pedestrians and cyclists with the green open space and the wider network.

Our project team engaged with Eccleshall Parish Council, presenting the emerging proposals at a briefing in May 2025. A wider website-based public consultation was also undertaken in September 2025. The responses were analysed and where possible our proposals have included elements to address comments, in particular with regard to landscaping, woodland and footpaths.

Bellway has also made a commitment to enter into a legal agreement to provide financial contributions where appropriate if the planning authority considers this necessary. The development would also bring economic benefits to the area through the creation of jobs, support for local businesses, and increased spending within the local economy."

The outline plans were submitted to Stafford Borough Council in November 2025. Detailed plans for the homes will be brought forward at a future date, subject to outline planning approval.

More information about Bellway Strategic Land can be found at <https://www.bellwaystrategicland.co.uk/>



Santa Calls In At Aston Beavers

To finish the Autumn Term, Aston and Little Stoke Beaver Scouts held their Christmas Party at Aston Village Hall on December 16th.

The highlight was a visit from Santa, who arrived with a huge bag of presents.

All of the Beavers must have been on

Santa's "good" list!

Santa is pictured holding the Certificate celebrating the £780 raised for Children in Need.

(Well done to you all, on such a fantastic amount raised!)



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— Service user's family, Stone branch

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Stroke Club Members Celebrate Christmas In Style

For all members and volunteers of Stone and District Stroke Club, the emphasis at their weekly meetings is to get together, support each other and to have fun, and the Christmas season provides plenty of opportunities to make sure this happens! Preparations start in mid-November when members and volunteers get in touch with their artistic side to create Christmas Tree ornaments to decorate their tree, which will be displayed at the annual festival in St Michael and St Wulfad's Church in Stone.



The club has taken part in this event for many years; members always enjoy their pre-Christmas visit to view and admire all of the trees on display and are very grateful to the volunteers at the Church who make this possible.

A trip out to Bridgemere Garden Centre on 3rd December for lunch and a spot of retail therapy was another highlight, greatly enjoyed by members, their partners and volunteers alike. The staff at Bridgemere always go the extra mile to make sure everyone has a good time, serving a delicious lunch with lots of extra touches - this year, Father Christmas made a very unexpected appearance!

Our thanks go to Councillor Philip Leason, former Mayor of Stone, for nominating Stroke Club as one of his charities last year - his kind donation provided the funds to make the whole day possible.



And we must not forget the Christmas party, which was held at our regular meeting place of Little Stoke Cricket Club on 10th December. There was an abundance of beautiful food supplied by Frances at The Secret Kitchen and first-class entertainment provided in the morning by the St Michaels School choir when the children were, as always, a delight to watch with the tempo in the afternoon being raised by the CK Community Choir whose enthusiasm and sense of fun soon had everyone joining in with the singing and actions. Our thanks go to the Rotary Club of Stone and District for their kind donation towards this event.

As we approach the end of another successful year, members and volunteers would also like to thank all those who help make Stroke Club such a happy place. We are very grateful to the Little Stoke Cricket Club who provide our meeting place and to the amazing drivers of the Community Bus who are always so helpful. Without the support of these organisations it would not be possible for us to continue to do what we do.

Stroke Club offers an opportunity for members to socialise with others in a relaxed setting and if you or a friend or relative are experiencing the feeling of isolation that often occurs after a Stroke or TIA, we may be able to help. As one member was overheard to say, "Who would have thought that having a Stroke could lead to so much fun!"

Stroke Club meets weekly on a Wednesday morning and always offers a very warm welcome to new members. If you would like to know more, please call Jan (07790 078627) or Chris (01785 812027) and they will be pleased to answer any questions.



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Coffee Break Story

By Stone Scribblers Creative Writing Group

Bear rescue

Tom rolled his eyes. He had been on the train for half an hour, and his head was beginning to ache. Just his luck to be sitting opposite a boisterous toddler.

'Wish there was a baby-free carriage,' he muttered, to no one in particular. He closed his eyes and tried to zone out, until a cold chip hit him square on the nose. The toddler laughed and threw another.

'Sorry,' apologised the baby's mum, but her eyes said, 'I heard that.'

Tom felt a slight pang of guilt until the toddler began screaming 'Barney! I want Barney!'

'Shhh, here he is.' His mum tucked an old bear into the baby's arms. It was soon covered in tears and snot but at least the child had stopped crying and his eyes closed. Then her phone rang.

'I'm on the train... Mmm... next stop ... only five minutes to change ... leg it to platform six... see you tonight ... love you, bye.' She gathered her bags, pulled on a yellow bobble hat and scooped up the baby.

'Here we go Dylan,' she said, and 'enjoy your peace and quiet,' flung over her shoulder at Tom. The train doors slid open, she got off, and Tom spotted a soggy bear on the floor.

'Hey!' he shouted, 'you've dropped Barney.' She didn't hear. He stood at the doors waving Barney, as people pushed past him. 'Dylan's mum, you've dropped your teddy.' The train doors began to beep and Tom's heart pounded. What should he do? Tom looked at Barney and Barney looked at Tom.

'Oh sod it,' he jumped off the train.

He had five minutes to find Barney's family. He scoured the platform and spotted a yellow bobble hat bouncing towards the bridge. He gave chase and caught up.

'You dropped .. oh sorry.' Wrong bobble hat. Then he heard a familiar wail, loud as a jackhammer.

'Barney! I want Barney!'

He saw them on the opposite platform. They had already crossed the bridge. Tom headed to the stairs but his way was blocked by a worker pushing a cleaning trolley. Tom twirled the cart around and danced past,

'Oi, mind me brushes!'

He took the stairs two at a time. The station clock told him time was running out and he didn't want to be saddled with an orphaned bear.

'The next train arriving at platform six will be the...' This was it. The final sprint. Tom could see the train pulling onto the platform, he saw a yellow bobble hat and a baby with arms outstretched towards him shouting 'Barney!'. He bounded down the last few steps, leapt over a suitcase and two rucksacks, and arrived at the train doors just as mother and child were stepping on. Tom thrust Barney into Dylan's arms and the doors slid shut.

He bent over, panting, as the train pulled out of the station and as Tom straightened up, he laughed to see a soggy teddy waving goodbye.

by Marina Tavenner

Stone Scribblers meet at the **Borehole Pub on Mount Road**, Stone on the **second and fourth Tuesday of each month between 11am and 1pm**, you can also find them at www.facebook.com/StoneScribblers



Stone Dance Studio Raises £1,364 For BBC Children In Need

Stone dance studio Rooftop Studios has raised an impressive £1,364 for BBC Children in Need following two weeks of energetic fundraising activities.

Pupils and families at Rooftop Studios threw themselves into the fun with pyjama dance classes, bring-a-friend sessions, raffles, cake stalls, a special visit from Pudsey Bear, and by taking part in The Performers Project annual Tapathon.

Studio Director Laura Keeling said she was delighted with the result:

"Children in Need is always a highlight of our year, and we're incredibly proud of the enthusiasm and generosity shown by our dancers and their families."

The atmosphere in the studio has been

fantastic — full of kindness, creativity and community spirit. We're so grateful to everyone who took part and helped us raise such an amazing amount."

Special thanks were given to Miss Verity, who organised the Tapathon, as well as the studio's dedicated student helpers - Sophie, Izzy, Libby, Emilie and Jake - and to Will, who helped bring Pudsey Bear along to join the celebrations.

To find out more about Rooftop Studios' range of dance and performing arts classes - including RAD Ballet, Tap, Modern, Jazz, Musical Theatre, Street Dance and more - visit their website at www.rooftopstudios.co.uk



CU@4 - at St. Michael's Church

The theme of the October service was the life of St Francis.

The PowerPoint presentation by Dennis included biographical details of the saint's early life which led to a dramatic change of life style and the founding of the Franciscan order.

Then the children enjoyed craft activities which reflected the care St Francis showed for all God's creatures. First, they assembled bird feeders made out of recycled drink cartons. Then they bravely put their hands into a bowl of gungy bird food and pressed this into the spaces around fir cones.

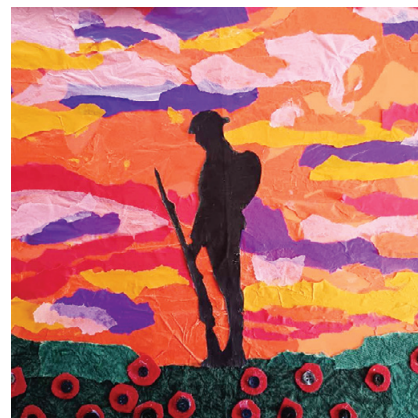
They also made 'caterpillars' from Cheerios threaded on to pipe cleaners. Finally, they coloured in a drawing of St Francis and stuck on pictures of animals, birds etc.

In November we focussed on Remembrance' as it was a week after the special services had taken place.

Dennis gave a PowerPoint presentation on what the different colour poppies mean. Then the children enjoyed decorating paper plates to illustrate this; the traditional red one for those people

who gave their lives during conflicts, purple for animals who were caught up in the fighting; horses, dogs and pigeons and white which symbolises peace.

Finally they completed a group "Remembrance" display of a lone soldier at sunset..



CU@4 takes place on the **third Sunday of each month** at St. Michael's Church, Stone, all are welcome.

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Limited Spaces Released for Exclusive 'Wicked' Workshop with West End Dancer Myles Newland

Stone performing arts school Rooftop Studios is excited to announce that a limited number of places have been released to non-students for a special 'Wicked' dance workshop with acclaimed performer Myles Newland on **Saturday 18th January**.

Myles appears in the new hit movie *Wicked: For Good* and will be bringing West End magic to Stone as he teaches choreography inspired by the musical, alongside hosting a Q&A session giving young performers a unique opportunity to hear insights from the professional industry.

In addition to his work with *Wicked*, Myles' impressive career includes credits such as assistant choreographer for Kylie Minogue, work on the creative team for Celebrity Cruise Line, and performances for Eurovision, Jax Jones, Jessie J, Katy Perry, Kim Petras, the MTV EMAs, Netflix, Pixie Lott, the Queen's Platinum Jubilee, *Rocketman*, *Todrick Hall*, and *Westlife*.

Workshops will run in age groups - 12pm-2pm for ages 7-10 and 2:30pm-4:30pm for ages 11-18

Rooftop Studios' Claire Simpson told the Gazette: "Having a performers of Myles' calibre join us for workshops is something that really sets Rooftop Studios apart from other performing arts academies."



All of our teachers are professional performers in their own right and we have fantastic industry links. This represents an incredible opportunity for young dancers in the area, and we're thrilled to be able to offer a small number of places to non-students so more young people can experience this level of professional training."

Limited spaces are available at £25 per child - to book your place, email: info@rooftopstudios.co.uk



Master Saddler Provides Traditional Craft and Sustainability in Eccleshall

Award winning Master Saddler Kate Hardt is opening a new public-facing traditional saddler's workshop at Fletchers Garden Village, Eccleshall, offering a sustainable alternative to today's throwaway culture.

Using time-honoured techniques, Kate repairs and restores everything from side saddles, saddlery and bridles to handbags and belts, giving cherished items new life and keeping traditional skills alive. In addition to repair services, Kate also sells hand-made saddlery, dog collars and leads, belts, gloves and more. Every piece of leatherwork sold in her shop is made in the UK, reflecting her commitment to our UK craftsmanship and sustainability.

Kate told the Gazette, "Every town had a public-facing traditional saddler's workshop at one time. Customers could just pop in with repairs and to have things

made. I started as an apprentice in the 80's in a workshop exactly like this in Uttoxeter. I now don't know of any in Staffordshire or surrounding counties. I am trying to turn the clock back and bring one back to Eccleshall. London House in the High Street was a saddlers and harness makers many years ago. I will be just down the road."

Kate's official opening week took place during Fletchers Garden Village's late night Christmas opening on Thursday the 4th December.

Kate invites customers to pop in and say hello and explore her range of British-made leather goods, made-to-measure belts, dog collars and leads etc.

Kate will also be offering where possible a 'repair and make while you wait' service while customers browse the garden centre and other shops or have a lovely lunch at the Orangery restaurant.



Staffordshire Men to Sing for Prostate Cancer Research

Two Oulton men, John Haine and Andy Burdon will be joining around 75 others to perform a concert at Keele University Chapel on **24th January 2026**.

The Daleian Singers set themselves a challenge to train 40 non-singers in 10 weeks up to a standard to sing in public. Demand was so that they increased the target to 100.

The aim is to raise £10,000 for Prostate Cancer Research UK from ticket sales and

donations, and they are well on the way to achieving that amount.

Please check the website www.mensing.co.uk where you can watch videos of their progress, buy concert tickets or just donate to this very worthwhile cause.

For more information about The Daleian Singers please visit www.daleiansingers.org.uk



Many Hands Make Light Work!

St John's 'Open the Book Team' enact Bible Stories each week for the children of Manor Hill First School, and wished to give each child a Christmas Card from the Church.

There are 197 children so the team enlisted the help of Church members to

write the cards after Morning Worship over Coffee and Biscuits.

There were plenty of volunteers (no coffee was spilt!) and the cards were written and put into envelopes while everyone chatted and enjoyed working together in such a good cause.



Beavers Sponsored Silence for BBC Children in Need

Their parents said it couldn't be done - but Aston and Little Stoke Beaver Scouts did their bit for Children in Need by holding a sponsored silence at their HQ, Aston Village Hall.

On November 11th, from 6.15pm to 7.00pm, the nineteen beavers, aged 6-8, did not utter a word.

They bought along reading books, colouring books and quiet games to while away the time.

They raised the amazing amount of £745.00, **Well done all!**

The photo shows the beavers and leaders after the challenge.

Can You Fix Things? The Repair & Care Café wants to hear from you



PROPOSED REPAIR CAFÉ

FOR COLWICH & THE HAYWOODS

to run monthly/bi-monthly from Spring 2026

- ➡ Can you Fix Things?
- ➡ Do you have time on your hands to give back to the community?
- ➡ Do you have skills in :
 - IT, electrics, electronics, woodwork, metalwork, soft textiles
- ➡ Or are you a good organiser?

We want to hear from you

Please contact **Ingrid Wagner 07717036213**
Stephen Moore 07843960519

to chat & for more details

Thankyou!



Stephen Moore and Ingrid Wagner are on the lookout for people who can fix things. Things like the iron that won't heat up, the floor fan that stops fanning, the turntable that's not making music anymore, the shelf that won't stand up. All in garages or attics waiting to be fixed, with owners who don't know how or who to go to.

And that's where people who can fix things come in. You may have recently retired, been made redundant, have time on your hands and a whole bag of skills & tools going begging and/or even a man/woman shed at home. You may have worked in IT, electrics, electronics, woodwork or metalwork, soft textiles or even know how to fix clocks. You could become a repairer at a monthly or bi-monthly Repair & Care Cafe right on your doorstep in South Staffordshire. And won't all those people with things to fix be glad to see you!

"We're hoping to start up in the community of Colwich and the Haywoods in Spring 2026," says Ingrid. "You'll be able to see broken items mended, have a cup of tea and cake while you wait and make new friends. And for our team of repairers, it will be a reason to get out of bed in the morning, grab your bag of tools and make a difference to your community."

"The idea of waste not, want not isn't new," adds Stephen, "but it's needed more than ever now. We want to help stop a throwaway society, encourage people to consume less new and to reuse, repurpose and recycle unwanted products. It's building a circular economy that's sustainable rather than the 'take, make, use, waste' model."

For more information and/or a chat on becoming a repairer or part of the organising team, contact Ingrid Wagner on 07717036213 or Stephen Moore on 07843 960519.

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New Year Resolutions? Why not make Stone u3a one of yours?

It's that time of year when we all sit down and think of resolutions for the new year, but why do we do it?

From as long ago as 2000bc the Babylonian farmers used to make promises at the beginning of the new year to repay debts, return borrowed items and to be better people.

Later on, the Romans named the first month of the year after Janus, the two headed god. It was said that Janus looked forward to new beginnings at the same time looking backwards for reflection and resolution.

The Romans made new year promises to have good behaviour for the year ahead. In the Middle Ages Knights would renew their vow to chivalry at this time of year, to maintain their knightly values.

By the 17th Century New Years resolutions had become what we know today.

What are your resolutions for 2026, to keep your mind active, to get out and about more, to learn something new? Well, Stone (Staffs) & District u3a can help! We have over 50 different groups offering everything you need. From Strolling and sports groups to keep you active, Languages and Talking Books to exercise your mind, Games to feed your competitive tendencies and Arts, Craft and discussion groups for companionship and hobbies.



You're bound to make friends and learn something new. Membership of Stone & District u3a costs just £50 per year for as many groups as you can fit in. That's an amazing bargain of less than £1 a week.

Membership is open to all adults who are no longer in full-time employment. Groups are held in various locations in and around Stone. You can see the full range of activities at www.stone.u3a.org.uk

Oulton Village Hall

Valentine Rock n' Roll Night

Dance to Top Rock Band 'Back-to-Back'



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"Cycling Nobody" Mark Shelton on his two wheeled travels

'Somebody Cycling' New book by local author

'Somebody Cycling' by Mark Shelton is an account of a life in cycling, rooted firmly in the Staffordshire countryside. Mark grew up in Staffordshire and has spent most of his life here, now living in Walk Mill, near Eccleshall. He calls himself a "Cycling Nobody", and the book is not about intrepid adventures, or feats of extreme endurance. As Mark says, the book is "as much about the Somebody as it is about the Cycling", and it explores the place that cycling occupies in his life through memories going back over five decades.

Although he claims not to have done anything particularly out of the ordinary on a bike, some of the episodes here look pretty hard work for most of us: entering races, riding 200 km in a day; riding through the Alps and the Pyrenees, completing an Ironman triathlon, not to mention cycling up Mow Cop.

But discovering physical capabilities is only one part of this examination of his relationship with cycling, both on-road and off, and the book is full of entertaining tales and anecdotes of all kinds, such as a stay in an Irish B&B run by kids and a long-distance challenge ride on a bike dating from 1935.

His accounts of rides in the Alps include riding in hail and lightning, and being rescued by a police van, as well as exhilarating descents and challenges overcome. Other memories include crossing the Humber Bridge in a force eight gale, and being held up by Tower Bridge lifting at 2.00 a.m.

Some of these tales, such as those involving cats, crayfish, and young boys playing on a Caribbean beach, have only a very slight connection with cycling, but then it is intended to be "as much about the Somebody as it is about the Cycling".

Companionship is one of the themes of the book, with lifelong friendships forged by cycle-touring for weeks on the road together, and sustained by the shared memories of the places visited, eccentric characters met along the way, the stuff that didn't go so well, and the banter.

Locations in the UK, Ireland, France, Italy and other parts of mainland Europe add a lot of colour (and there's a wealth of photos), but the book begins and ends in Staffordshire, starting with him at the age of eight, stealing out of the house while parents were asleep to do a fifteen-mile ride with his brother. There is local interest throughout, and we're left with the picture of Mark and his wife Sarah, now in their sixties, continuing to enjoy Staffordshire and Shropshire roads on their tandem; their history of cycling together is also an important part of the book.

This is entertaining and readable, and not only for the enthusiast. It could be an ideal gift for anyone who turns a pedal from time to time, and who loves to explore the Staffordshire countryside

The book can be found on Amazon by searching 'Somebody Cycling' and is on sale for £12.95.





20th Birthday Celebrations for Rainbows!

1st Walton Rainbows recently celebrated their 20th birthday with a party; games, cakes and singing were the order of the day.

Paula Holdcroft a founding member of 1st Walton Rainbows and who attended the birthday celebrations, commented "It was an honour to be invited by 1st Walton Rainbows to a party to celebrate their 20th birthday. It was great to meet the Rainbows and reminisce with Girlguiding leaders about happy times and how and why the unit had first been set up over 25 years ago.

I had been asked by a friend Tawny Owl, Dot Hudson, over a cuppa, if I would be willing to help set up a Rainbow unit. There was method in her madness as two local Brownie units needed members. So with little persuasion I decided to give it a go

and the unit was set up as 1st Westbridge Rainbows.

The unit went from strength to strength and in no time at all we had 15 Rainbows following an exciting programme and most importantly having lots of fun along the way.

Twenty years ago, the unit moved up to Manorhill First School and the name changed to 1st Walton Rainbows".

Jane West, Rainbow Leader, added, "it was lovely to celebrate our birthday with ex-leaders and helpers of Walton Rainbows and to have Mrs Harris, Headteacher of Manorhill First School and Site Manager, Mr Cosby present at the party too. 1st Walton Rainbows continues to go from strength to strength and we look forward to another twenty happy years of Rainbows having fun!"



Say It With Flowers

At the end of a fun packed, 10 Pin Bowling session, 3rd Stone Guides surprised their Leader, Steph with flowers and a congratulations card on achieving her Girlguiding Leadership Qualification.

Steph is the latest member of Stone Division Girlguiding to gain the Qualification.

Jane West, fellow guide Leader, said, "I've known Steph since her daughter was in Rainbows and it has been wonderful to see Steph's journey from a supportive parent, to coming along as an extra pair of hands to then embarking on her leadership qualification.

Stone Division would love to hear from you, if you would like to consider volunteering with local Girlguiding. Please register your interest online at

www.girlguiding.org.uk

Steph was asked why she had decided to volunteer with Girlguiding and she said, "after many years of my daughter being a member of Girlguiding I decided to help with her guide unit when they needed an extra pair of hands.

What I thought would only be a short term help out has now led to over 3 years of supporting 3rd Stone guides and a Ranger unit and now gaining my Leadership Qualification.

Girlguiding has given so much to my daughter as a member and to myself as a person.

I am also enjoying seeing and supporting girls to achieve their potential. This has all been possible with volunteering with Girlguiding."

BEGINNER FRIENDLY FUN FITNESS CLASSES...!



MONDAY

9:30-10:15 **STRONG** (weights class) Stone
18:20-19:10 **Clubbercise** Stone
19:30-20:20 **Pilates**: All Levels Stone

TUESDAY

9:30-10:30 **Pilates**: All Levels Stone
13:30-14:45 **Seated Exercise & Social** Stone
18:20-19:10 **Fitness Pilates** Stone

WEDNESDAY

18:20-19:05 **Combat Assassin Fitness** Stone

THURSDAY

18:30-19:20 **Clubbercise** Stafford

FRIDAY

9:30-10:15 **STRONG** (weights class) Stone
11:30-12:45 **Seated Exercise & Social** Stafford

SATURDAY

10:30-11:20 **Fitness Pilates** Stone

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Tuesday

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5:45-7:15 Beginners+Social Stafford

Wednesday

12.15-1.15 Absolute Beginners Stone
13.30-3 Beginners+Social Stone
5:30-7 Absolute Beginners+Social Stafford

Thursday

10-11 Absolute Beginners Stafford
11.15-12.15 High Beginners/Impr. Stafford

Saturday (monthly)

Workshops & Socials - see website

For more info call TRISH: 07711 115462
www.discolinedancing.com



Christmas Tree Festival in Holy Trinity Church

Eccleshall Festive Activities

The Eccleshall parish has a tradition of filling the town centre with activities that provide festive events for everyone.

Holy Trinity Church staged its annual Christmas tree fair on Thursday 27th to Sunday 30th November, this time with over 70 decorated lit Christmas trees.

The trees were decorated by local groups, businesses and organisations with a perfect way to start the season with the Trinity Men's Fellowship group provided four days of tombola raising funds for the church and prizes for the visitors.

The High Street was alight with a lantern parade in time for the crossroads tree light switch on at 5pm on Sunday 30th November. Accompanied by carol singing. The tree adorned with baubles decorated by the children of Bishop Lonsdale Primary Academy was lit up for the season.

The Staffordshire Young Farmers Club staged a spectacular tractor parade around the farming communities drawing crowds of supporters and admirers of the various types and sizes of tractors in the parade which passed through many of the small towns and villages on Sunday 7th December. Estimates of just how many vehicles ranged between 50 and 70.



Father Christmas on the Eccleshall Rotary Club's Sleigh stopped at the Holy Trinity Lych Gate at 3.45pm listening to the children's Christmas wishes.

The annual Christingle Family Service took place in the Holy Trinity Church at 4pm on Sunday 14th December when each child received a Christingle orange.

St Chad's church held a Carol Service at the beautiful historic church at Slindon.

Carols around the Christmas tree took place starting at the town centre crossroads at 7pm on Monday 22nd December. Armed with warmed clothing and lanterns and equipped with carol sheets members of the public gathered and began the tradition singing of carols accompanied by the brass band.

The troupe moved off along the High Street stopping every so often singing as they went until they reached the Holy Trinity Church when they paused for a cup of hot punch and a mince pie in the church. The evening ended with music from the brass band and carol singing at around 8pm.



Local Schools Support Peace Poster Competition

Stone Lions Club (CIO) have taken part in the Lions Clubs International Peace Poster competition for many years, keenly supported by pupils from Christchurch Academy and were delighted when Walton Priory School also expressed a wish to take part this year.

This annual competition invites youngsters aged between 11 and 13 years old to produce a poster depicting their own interpretation of Peace, this year following a theme of "Together as One".

Both schools submitted work of a very high standard and visitors to Stone Library in November were treated to the

impressive display of artwork on display.

The posters were all judged and a winner from each school was selected, a very difficult decision for the judges, and named as Millie Farrington from Walton Priory and Theodore Kirkham from Christchurch Academy.

The winning posters then went on to the regional final and were highly commended by the judges.

Stone Lions Youth Officer Lion Glenys Sanders expressed the thanks of all members of the club to the staff at Stone Library for their enthusiasm and cooperation in displaying the posters, and to both schools for encouraging pupils to take part in the competition.



Ukunauts Fund Raiser For DougieMac

On the 15th of November the audience at Swynnerton Village Hall were treated to a program of rock covers with a sprinkling of traditional shanties and folk songs at a fundraiser on behalf of Douglas MacMillan Hospice given by The Ukunauts.

The group members, who come from Stone, Swynnerton and Trentham, played two hours of somewhat unexpected versions of well-known songs on ukuleles and bass guitar by artists ranging from Buddy Holly to Adele.

The core members are of a more mature generation but are ably supported by a guest female singer who, despite her tender years, has a surprisingly strong voice and went down a storm.

The appreciative audience, fortified by bring your own food and drink, raised £1100 for the hospice from admission fees and a raffle.

The whole event was enabled by various Swynnerton residents who set up the hall and cleared up afterwards.



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**Dr Cath,
Homeowner**



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Happy New Year From The Stone Ramblers!

Happy New Year from the Stone Ramblers. As usual we have been busy, never let it be said that the Ramblers are boring! This year we have had several holidays including Whitby, the Elan Valley, the Shropshire Hills and Castleton. We also celebrated 30 years together with a wonderful event at the Boar Inn in Moddershall. More holidays are booked for this year including Shropshire (again because we love it!), Alnmouth and Holmfirth. Our New Year Lunch is planned later this month, which gives us the opportunity to have a really good catch up together.

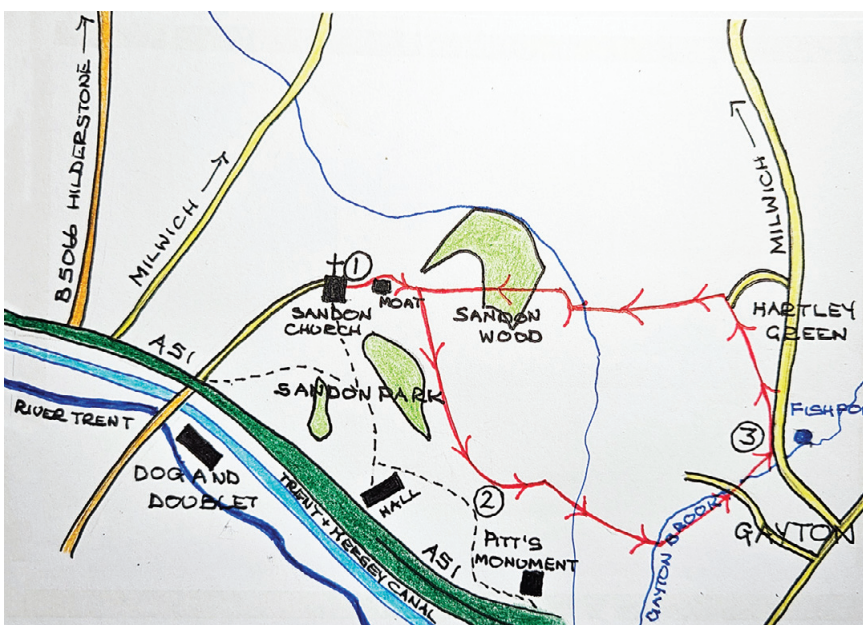
Please have a look at our Facebook page, Stone Ramblers and website www.stoneramblers.org, where you will find lots of information, including our forthcoming walks. We welcome new members to join us as guests for 2 to 3 walks and only ask that you wear strong footwear, that you don't mind getting muddy, bring some wet weather gear and that you bring something to eat and drink. If you wish to walk with us regularly and we really hope that you do, you will be expected to become a member of the Ramblers, which opens so many new opportunities.

Pitt the Younger who gave him a Cabinet seat in his government.

Reaching the brow of the hill, keeping the folly on



Walk of the Month Sandon to Gayton



It's January, and I'm sure that many of you have made a New Year Resolution. If it is to get fit or fitter, this month's walk is ideal at 4 miles long, around the beautiful Sandon Estate.

There are 15 stiles and many points of interest and no hazards that can't be avoided by wearing sensible footwear. Free parking is available at Sandon Church and refreshments available at the Dog and Doublet in Sandon.

1. From Sandon Church, descend to the black and white house. Cross the cattle grid to follow a stony track which climbs gently. Near the top, shortly before the stone house on the left, turn right over a stile. Head for the gap between the trees facing, on the high ground, passing through it until a folly tower comes into sight.

This folly was the top floor of the water tower at Trentham Hall built around 1840 and demolished 1926. The 4th Earl of Harrowby bought the top piece for £100 and erected it at Sandon.

Pitts Column nearby, was erected by Harrowby in 1806 in memory of

the left and the wood about 100 yards to the right, continue straight ahead towards the left of a small group of conifers on the horizon. Bear slightly left, down towards a track and a five-barred gate with a stile to its left.

2. Crossing the stile, continue straight on over the next stile. After a few yards, cross a small brick/stone bridge over a stream and turn right, following the track down the middle of the field for about 200 yards and looking out for the stiles/footbridge in the line of trees to the left. Cross the second, more obvious, of these stiles and notice an intermittent hedge in front and pass through the largest gap in it and turn half right. Keeping the tree enclosed pond on the left, pass through a gate. Continuing ahead with the hedge on the left as far as the next stile in the left-hand corner of the field. Cross the stile and the footbridge now visible slightly to the right. From the foot-bridge, keep the stream on the left, following it upstream for several minutes. Gayton village and Church are to the right. The way ahead narrows between the stream (*on the left*) and a hedge/fence (*on the right*). Continue through the metal gate/stile and cross the footbridge over the stream to a track and the next stile, across this track. After this, another stile can be seen, looking diagonally right across the field. This leads to a surfaced road. Turn left up the quiet lane, past a large house on our left (*dated 1925*) just before a fork in the road.

3. Brook Farm is on our right and climb gently. Where the lane bends sharply right (*Hartley Green Farm*), a finger post directs you through the gate on the left. With the hedge on the left, take the broad track ahead to a stile. Crossing it, with the pond on the right, continue to another stile, tucked away in the right hand corner of the next field. Crossing this, the next stile is only a few yards to the left.

Keeping the fence and line of trees on the left, descend to a stile, then cross a footbridge over a stream, ignoring the stile ahead, and turn half-right. Aim for the five-barred gate, entering the wood at this point. Continue on the track straight ahead into the heart of the wood. Where it forks, go left and at the next way-marked post turn right. The track climbs gently to a Y junction. Fork left, continuing to climb to a five-barred gate/stile leading out of the wood.

Keeping the fence on the left, continue climbing to the crest of the hill, going through the metal farm gate ahead. Then descend through the next field to a stile/five-barred gate. Pass Stone House Farm on the right and at this point rejoin the track leading to the start of our walk.

Once again, this walk is taken from our 'Stone Circles' book, available via our website or from our regular market stalls at the Stone Farmers' Markets. We should make you aware that changes can occur to footpaths, so please let us know if you spot any that we have missed.

Finally, it is with great sadness that we must report the passing of one of our main Walk Leaders and Committee Members; Pam Bradley.

Pam was amazing and will be missed by so many of us. Our thoughts and condolences go out to her many friends and her family.

Penny Meakin

Chair, Stone Ramblers

'Make friends & try something new in 2026..!'

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Weekly Timetable of Events

Mon	<p>STRONG Fitness - beginners welcome</p> <p>Gentle Exercise U3A</p> <p>Talking Books U3A</p> <p>Sweaty Mama (fitness class - mums & babies)</p> <p>Craft U3A (monthly 2nd Mon)</p> <p>U3A Meeting (monthly 1st Mon)</p> <p>Slimming World</p> <p>Clubbercise Dance Fitness - beginners welcome</p> <p>Pilates: All Levels</p>	<p>9.30-10.15am</p> <p>10-11am</p> <p>10.30-12.30pm</p> <p>1-1.45pm</p> <p>2-4pm</p> <p>1.30-4pm</p> <p>6-7.30pm</p> <p>6.20-7.10pm</p> <p>7.30-8.20pm</p>
Tues	<p>Pilates: All Levels</p> <p>Family History U3A (fortnightly)</p> <p>Disco Line Dancing: High Beginners & Improvers</p> <p>Gentle Seated Exercise to Music & Social</p> <p>Sequence Dancing</p> <p>Cryptic Crosswords U3A (1st & 3rd Tues)</p> <p>Papercraft U3A (fortnightly 2nd & 4th Tues)</p> <p>Weight Watchers</p> <p>Fitness Pilates - All Levels</p> <p>Pregnancy Loss Support (bi-monthly)</p> <p>Rock Choir</p>	<p>9.30-10.30am</p> <p>10.30-12.30pm</p> <p>11-12 noon</p> <p>1.30-2.45pm</p> <p>2-4pm</p> <p>2-4pm</p> <p>2-4pm</p> <p>6-7pm</p> <p>6.20-7.10pm</p> <p>6.30-8.30pm</p> <p>8-9.30pm</p>
Weds	<p>Guitar U3A</p> <p>Knit, Crochet & Chat</p> <p>Disco Line Dancing: Absolute Beginners</p> <p>Disco Line Dancing: Beginners & Social</p> <p>Conexus Tuition Stafford & Stone</p> <p>Combat Assassin Fitness - beginners welcome</p> <p>Yoga: All Abilities</p>	<p>10.30-12.30pm</p> <p>10.30-12.30pm</p> <p>12.15-1.15pm</p> <p>1.30-3pm</p> <p>4-6pm</p> <p>6.20-7.05pm</p> <p>6.30-7.30pm</p>
Thurs	<p>Happy Feet</p> <p>Italian (Continuation) U3A</p> <p>Private Booking</p> <p>Indoor Bowls U3A</p> <p>Relaxation Session U3A</p> <p>Pregnancy Loss Support (bi-monthly)</p> <p>Sound Bath: Deep Relaxation Session (Monthly)</p> <p>GPC Meeting (3rd Thurs monthly)</p> <p>Pilates for Cyclists: Beginners</p> <p>Flower Club (last Thurs monthly)</p>	<p>10-11am</p> <p>10-11.30am</p> <p>10.15-11.45am</p> <p>1-3pm</p> <p>2.30-3.30pm</p> <p>6.30-8.30pm</p> <p>7-8pm</p> <p>7-8pm</p> <p>7.30-8.30pm</p> <p>7.30-9.30pm</p>
Fri	<p>STRONG Fitness - beginners welcome</p> <p>Singing for Fun U3A (fortnightly)</p> <p>Dressmaking & Needlecraft U3A (fortnightly)</p> <p>Taekwondo</p> <p>BINGO - Community & Social Group</p>	<p>9.30-10.15am</p> <p>1.30-3pm</p> <p>2-4pm</p> <p>7-8.30pm</p> <p>7.30-9.30pm</p>
Sat	<p>Slimming World</p> <p>Overeaters Anonymous</p> <p>Fitness Pilates: All Levels</p> <p>Child of Mine Playgroup (last Sat monthly)</p> <p>Line Dancing Tutorials & Socials</p>	<p>8.30-10am</p> <p>9.15-10.15am</p> <p>10.30-11.20am</p> <p>2-4pm</p> <p>Various</p>
Sun	<p>Table Top Sale/Car Boot (fortnightly Sept-April)</p> <p>St Johns Church - Weekly Service</p> <p>St Johns Church - Monthly Service (last Sun)</p> <p>Sound Bath: Deep Relaxation Session (Monthly)</p>	<p>8.30-11.30am</p> <p>10.30-11.30am</p> <p>6.30-7.30pm</p> <p>6.30-7.30pm</p>

It was a successful & happy end to 2025 at Walton Community Centre!

There were lots of lovely **festive events** throughout December. Many groups held fantastic **Christmas Parties, Mumbles Nursery put on their Nativity Performance & the St Johns Church Carol Service** brought people together to celebrate the end of another great year.

The centre is looking forward to putting on more social events & adding more activities / groups to their busy timetable for 2026.

Keep an eye on their Facebook page for updates:

[www.facebook.com/](https://www.facebook.com/WaltonCommunityCentreStone)

WaltonCommunityCentreStone

Walton Community Centre prides itself on being a place where people get a **friendly welcome** & are able to meet new people from the local area.

If you're looking for a **room to hire** for your group or event get in touch with them for availability!

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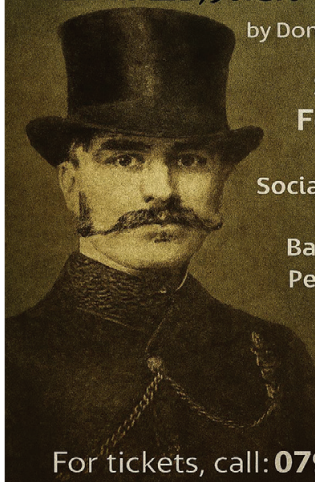
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Featuring **'TRULY, Jack the Ripper?'**
by Don't Go Into The Cellar



**Saturday 21st
February 2026**

St Dominic's
Social Centre, Stone,
ST15 8EW

Bar opens: 6:00pm

Performance begins:
7:30pm

TICKETS: £18

For tickets, call:
07976 611543

For tickets, call: **07976 611543**

Step into the shadowy streets of Victorian London for a captivating night of drama and mystery

We're delighted to welcome acclaimed theatre company Don't Go Into The Cellar for their gripping one-man show *TRULY, Jack the Ripper?*

Written and performed by Jonathan Goodwin, and devised with Gary Archer, this performance blends historical storytelling, theatrical flair, and spine-tingling suspense to explore one of history's most enduring enigmas.

Whether you're a fan of gothic theatre, true crime, or simply seeking a memorable evening out, this event promises to entertain and intrigue. Proceeds after deductions will go to St Michael's Church.



Library Collage Café

In November group members made decorations for St Michael's Church Christmas Tree Festival.

We used the sort of materials most likely to have been available during wartime such as scrap paper, oddments of ribbon, wool, string, fabric and buttons. Doves, rainbows, church windows, hearts and candles represented peace, hope, faith, love and joy.

Our Bible reading was Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 with its references to 'time' including time to laugh, mourn, dance, embrace, for war and peace. December's theme was 'a favourite Christmas Carol'.

The next Collage Café will be at Stone Library on Thursday 8th January from 10.00am till 12.00 noon, and then 12th February and 12th March.

All materials are provided free of charge and there are refreshments. For further information please contact Jill on 07491 311832. Everyone is welcome.

Dashing Through The Park...

More than 200 Dougie Mac supporters turned Hanley Park red on Saturday (December 6) when they dressed in Santa suits and took part in the charity's first ever Santa Dash.

People of all ages braved the cold to run and walk either a 2km or 5km course to raise vital funds which will allow the charity to care for adults, young adults and children in Stoke-on-Trent and North Staffordshire with a life-limiting illness, along with providing support for their families when they need it most.

As well as fundraising for Dougie Mac, supporters enjoyed plenty of festive cheer with face painting and seasonal music.

Deborah Vickers, Head of Business and Events Fundraising at Dougie Mac, said: "It was a truly festive occasion and wonderful to see so many friends and families taking part in our first ever Santa



Dash as Hanley Park was turned into a sea of red!

Thank you to everyone who took part. Your fundraising will help to support local families facing life-limiting illnesses."

The event was kindly sponsored by StairBox.

Gold Rush: Realise the True Value of Your Gold at Auction

With gold prices remaining strong and demand for quality jewellery high, Staffordshire auction house Cuttlestones is encouraging locals to take a fresh look at forgotten treasures tucked away in drawers and jewellery boxes.

The Penkridge sale room's recent Winter Antiques Auction demonstrated just how buoyant the market is. Gold jewellery performed exceptionally well, with a 9ct gold charm bracelet adorned with 20 charms achieving £1,700; a hallmarked 9ct graduating double Albert chain with T-bar and medallion fob selling for £1,200; and an 18ct gold manual wind pocket watch also fetching £1,200.

These impressive performances sit alongside strong prices from earlier sales, such as a 9ct rose gold Albert chain mounted with sovereigns that achieved £1,900; a Georgian gold intaglio ring selling for £900; an art deco sapphire and diamond ring realising £1,300 and a Royal Navy divers' watch selling for £1,400.

These results prove that selling gold at auction can far exceed scrap value. Rather than being weighed in by the gram, items are assessed for craftsmanship, age, rarity and desirability - factors that can significantly elevate their value under the hammer. From inherited rings and broken chains to vintage charms and pocket watches, now is a great time to discover their true worth.

Cuttlestones values and takes in gold and jewellery daily by appointment. To book a free, no-obligation valuation at their Penkridge or Stafford sale rooms, call 01785 714905, email valuations@cuttlestones.co.uk, or send photos via WhatsApp to 07949 603872.



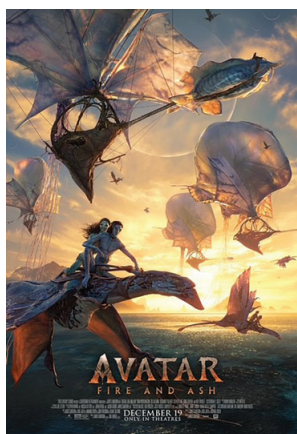
This 9ct gold charm bracelet, with 20 charms, sold for £1,700 – way above its scrap value



Thanks go to Gazette reader Kath Adams for sending in this stunning sunset photo, Kath said "It was taken on my phone around 6pm on Wednesday 22nd October, as I approached Aston Marina. It looks like the church is on fire."

REVIEWS MOVIE

by Joe Jenkinson



Avatar: Fire and Ash

Director: James Cameron
Starring: Sam Worthington, Zoë Saldana, Stephen Lang

Avatar: Fire and Ash is a visually extravagant but emotionally empty experience.

It's ultimately another reminder that technological advancement alone cannot compensate for shallow storytelling, thin characterisation, and a franchise that seems to exist purely because it can, not because it has anything new to say.

Rating: JJ Rating 2/5

Wake Up Dead Man

Director: Rian Johnson
Starring: Daniel Craig, Josh Brolin, Glen Close

While Wake Up Dead Man thankfully dials back some of director Rian Johnson's more grating auteurial self-indulgence seen in Glass Onion, the third Knives Out entry still feels oddly unremarkable, especially when held up against the sharp ingenuity of the first film.

Despite Johnson's continued slickness with dialogue and staging, I never fully found myself absorbed in the whodunnit mystery, perhaps a side effect of its Netflix-polished slickness. Competent, polished, but ultimately forgettable.

JJ Rating 3/5



Tinsel Town

Director: Chris Foggini
Starring: Kiefer Sutherland, Rebel Wilson, Derek Jacobi

I went into Tinsel Town fully aware that I was signing up for a modest, British-helmed comedy dumped straight onto streaming, but even with tempered expectations, the result is shockingly awkward and off-putting.

The film feels cobbled together with little sense of rhythm, confidence, or comedic instinct, leaving scenes to land with a thud more often than not.

JJ Rating 2/5

CU@4 at St. Michael's

Looking for a fun and engaging way to worship together as a family? Join us for our all-age worship service at St. Michael's Church, Stone.

CU@4 takes place on the third Sunday of each month.

Each session has a different theme with children's games and craft activities for all ages. Refreshments are provided.

The next CU@4 is 4.00pm till 5.00pm on Sunday 18th January, 15th February and 15th March.

Come along and enjoy a relaxed, welcoming environment where you can connect, learn, and grow in faith together. We can't wait to see you there!



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National Trust Staffordshire Centre Talks

After Edward Holmes talk on the Art of Origami on January 13th, the Staffordshire Centre's programme of talks at Walton Village Hall in Stafford continues on February 10th.

There is no need to book in advance, just turn up at the door and pay as you go in. However, it would help the organisers if you book your place(s) on our website <https://www.ntstafford.org.uk/> go to Events-Talks-Book a Talk.

All talks start at 2.30 pm and you do not have to be a member of the Centre to attend. Admission is £4.50 for non-members of the Centre and talks are followed by tea and biscuits.



Sweet Soul Music February 10th A Talk by Nigel Holmes

This talk, with musical interludes, takes its title from Arthur Conley's 1967 song of that name, where he pays homage to the blues and soul artists of that era; Lou Rawls, Sam and Dave, Wilson Pickett, Otis Redding and James Brown.

However, the story didn't stop there; let's not forget the likes of Aretha Franklin, Stevie Wonder and many more. In the UK, rare Tamla Motown records along with imported recordings from little known US artists, formed the basis of the Northern Soul movement.

So, "if you like good music", then we feel sure that you'll enjoy this talk.



Stories Of Shugborough March 10th A Talk by Keith Alldritt

Apart from being a member of the Staffordshire Centre, Keith is a volunteer at Shugborough and will tell the stories behind the paintings in the smallest, most visited space in the mansion - The Veranda Passage - but also the most overlooked. Learn about an audacious horse racing gamble, capturing a treasure ship, the difficulties of being the Post Master General, and famous visitors.

See why the watercolours - recently conserved thanks to funding from Staffordshire Centre - are important to show the history and development of the estate, especially in the 1700s, including Thomas Anson's most impressive structure which no longer exists!

To keep up with our future events, watch out for us in these pages or check out our Events page at <https://www.ntstafford.org.uk/>

Who's Afraid of Bats?

Is there an animal you hate? The writer of this report isn't charmed by hyenas, but Sir David Attenborough has done sterling work in showing us that every beast is an integral part of Nature's rich tapestry, and deserves its place.

Bats. The nightmare - completely unjustified - of many people. "They get in your hair" No. Bats aren't interested in your hair, but in feeding on the insects which inhabit the air around us.

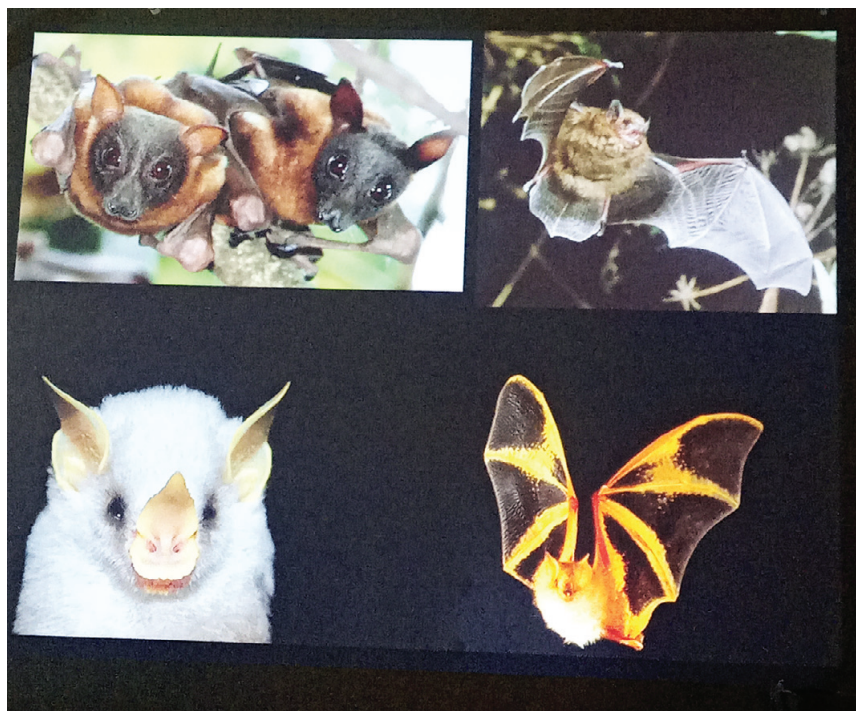
This was one of the many bat facts presented, in the most amusing and instructive way, by Kevin Reynolds, to Aston-by-Stone W.I. at our recent meeting. Bats, like us, are mammals. Yes, they have wings, but these are modified arms, making them the only mammals capable of sustained flight. That would be handy, wouldn't it!

Bats are the stuff of superstition and myth, linked to Dracula (thank you, Mr. Stoker!) and completely misrepresented.

Here in the U.K. we have 18 species of bats, none of which would like to suck your blood, and world-wide there are 1500 species. They feed mainly on insects, fruit, and even on fish, taking the latter just as an osprey does. Some eat



Meet Batman - A.K.A. Kevin Reynolds



scorpions and frogs. Vampire bats exist only in Central and South America, and cattle blood is their first preference.

There are large bats and small ones. Here in the U.K., they are generally small, and some are tiny. You may not have heard a bat, but they SHOUT, albeit at a high frequency, to find their way and their prey by echo-location.

One of the most fascinating facts about bats is that when they send out their shout, they dislocate their ear bones, then re-connect them to receive the echo - up to 2,000 times per minute!

Kevin Reynolds could have spoken, and we could have listened, much longer, but tea and home-made cakes awaited, and social time to discuss this meeting and look at the clever entries in the competition to make a bat in any medium.

In December we went out for a celebratory Christmas meal, but **meetings resume on January 14th**, with a Members' Night, when the

long-awaited production by ABSOP (Aston-by-Stone Occasional Players) will take place.

We meet at 7.30 p.m. at Aston-by-Stone Village Hall on the second Wednesday of the month, and visitors are always welcome.

A Very Happy New Year to all, and we look forward to meeting you in 2026, Ladies.

If you would like to know more, please contact us at 01785615662, or at astonbbystonewi.secretary@gmail.com.





Hayley Coles pictured at Stafford library

National recognition for Staffordshire libraries' work with communities

Staffordshire's library service has been named as one of the best in the country for working with its communities. Just as the Staffordshire County Council is inviting residents to help shape the future of its 43 libraries, Arts Council England has included the authority's library service in a national guide to best practise in working with the local community.

Selection criteria include how services evolve to support local and national priorities, use data and community feedback to meet local needs, and develop staff and volunteers.

Hayley Coles, Staffordshire County Council's Cabinet Member for Communities and Culture, said:

"I'm delighted our library service should receive national recognition for how well it works with residents."

Staffordshire's combination of 27 community managed libraries and 16 run directly by the county council has been a great success in recent years, with libraries evolving into community hubs, and this Arts Council England recognition is proof of that.

We're proud of all our service's achievements, and the innovation shown by our community partners.

Now we want to see how we can go further—making libraries places where people come not just to read, but to meet, learn, create, and grow."

The Arts Council England Libraries Development Framework recognises a library service's commitment to ongoing development, ensuring alignment with local and national policies, continuous innovation, and demonstration of best practice.

The current consultation ran until 5 January and also includes feedback on the mobile library service.



Fashion Show and Sale

There will be a Fashion Show and Sale, by SOS Charity Fashion Shows at 7.30pm on **Saturday 31st January** at Oulton Village Hall, ST15 8UJ.

Entry is just £5.00 including a glass of Prosecco. To Reserve a seat - contact Julie Stokoe on 07977 531113.



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Stone Mayor and Consort Jason Metters and Sarah Goodall

Stone Flower Club News

November brought the conclusion of what has been an exciting year in The Stone Flower Club year. Where we held the Christmas Demonstration by Leanne Williams from Welshpool who has been to the club previously. Members and visitors along with Stone Mayor and Consort Jason Metters and Sarah Goodall were treated to a spectacular display of flowers along with festive refreshments.

Again, there was a good attendance of visitors to the club. This year has seen an increase to visitor numbers where several have decided to become members after thoroughly enjoying the relaxing evenings. Councillor Metters gave a short address at the end of the evening and said how they had thoroughly enjoyed the evening, also he couldn't believe we had been providing an important space for the people of Stone for over 60 years.

Also, in November the Club provided Christmas Wreath making workshops for the Upper House at Barlaston. A very full-on day with 2 separate workshops but some wonderful creations were made by those attending.

The Club resumes again on the 29th January at 7.30 pm with the annual AGM followed by a short in house demonstration. Although only members can vote at the meeting anyone can attend.

The following months programme in **February demonstration is by Peggy Leslie** from Stone and Pam Owen from Stafford, 2 of the club committee members.

March sees the return of Alison Suffolk a very talented demonstrator.

Then in April is very popular demonstrator Jane Pugh who has been several times before to the club each time has been amazing.

Anyone wanting to attend one of the club nights is made to feel welcome it's a safe space where you can come and relax while enjoying the beauty of flowers.

We meet on the last Thursday of the month apart from August and December at Walton Community Centre, Whitemill Lane, Stone ST15 0EQ the doors open at 6.45pm and demonstrations start at 7.30pm





A Handful of Songs 2026 Celebrating 50 Years of Girlguiding Talent

Girlguiding members from across Stone and surrounding villages are preparing to raise the curtain on a spectacular milestone event: the 50th year of A Handful of Songs, the much-loved biannual show that has been delighting audiences since 1975.

Our journey began one winter's night at 1st Barlaston Guides, when Maureen Recine, then Guide Captain, and her Guides decided to put on a show for the local senior citizens. That first performance took place from 11th to 13th January 1975 in Barlaston Parish Rooms, with a marquee in the car park serving as a makeshift changing room and a covered walkway leading into the venue. Despite the freezing temperatures, the girls' enthusiasm shone through - and A Handful of Songs was born.



Since then, the show has grown into a vibrant celebration of music, dance, and comedy, involving Brownies, Guides, Rangers and Young Leaders from across the local area. Held every two years, it has become a cherished tradition in the Girlguiding calendar.

The 2026 show will take place at the Rep Theatre in Stoke-on-Trent from **Tuesday 31st March to Saturday 4th April 2026**, promising a dazzling showcase of talent and teamwork. It is our hope that as many previous cast members as possible will put the date in the diary and join us for a performance. We will be featuring items from all the decades so lots of memories to be relived.

The show continues to be produced by Maureen, whose dedication and passion have guided A Handful of Songs from its humble beginnings to its 50th spectacular performance.

"This show is more than just a performance," says Maureen. "It's a celebration of friendship, teamwork, and the incredible creativity of our Girlguiding members. We're so proud to be marking 50 years of A Handful of Songs, and we can't wait to welcome a new generation of performers to the stage."

Follow us on Facebook (A Handful of Songs) for updates and behind-the-scenes sneak peeks as we count down to this golden celebration!



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Scouts Special Christmas Post

Once again, the Eccleshall Scouts post helped the people of Eccleshall with the cost of delivering their Christmas cards to the community of Eccleshall at Christmas with their very special 50p delivery within the 30mph boundary.

Led by leader Tony Eveleigh scouts and family helpers delivered cards to homes within the 30mph boundary of the parish as they have done for many years.

Our photos above shows two of the volunteer scouts Stewart Campbell and Felicity Rowlands, part of the team covering the shift on Saturday 6th December, and Tony Eveleigh.

The scouts were delivering cards on three Saturdays 29th November, 6th and 13th December with the 50ps going into scout funds.

Forgotten Arthur Berry Masterpieces Come to Light in Centenary Rediscovery

Following a major public appeal in late summer, Barewall Art Gallery in Burslem has successfully rediscovered and catalogued a remarkable collection of 'lost' artworks by celebrated Potteries artist, playwright and poet Arthur Berry.

Several original Berry paintings and drawings have now been identified, authenticated, and documented as part of the Arthur Berry 100 centenary programme – made possible thanks to support from The National Lottery Heritage Fund and National Lottery players.

The rediscovered artworks – many unseen for decades – were formally returned to their owners at Barewall Art Gallery on Friday 7th November, marking a significant milestone in preserving Berry's creative legacy.

Among those reunited with their Berry pieces included:

Simon Manby – Sculptor and Manchester Academy of Fine Arts member, formerly Lecturer in Sculpture at Burslem School of Art alongside Arthur Berry.

Works: *Nude* (1980), *Well-Matched Couple* (1992) Purchased at Foxlowe Gallery, Leek, 2016



Simon Manby

Steven Granville – Retired Actor

Works: *Albert Woolwork* (1986), *Rev Ivan Cheekle* (1984)

Gifted by Berry after Granville played both characters in two of his plays at the New Vic Theatre: *Sweet Bird of Card Street* and *St George of Scotia Road*



Steven Granville

Steve Shaw – Businessman

Works: *Pitt Street* (1985), *Landscape* (1957) – *Landscape* is the earliest artwork discoveries from this recent public appeal. *Man Playing Piano* (1978).



Steve Shaw

Pam Abell – Textile Artist who knew Berry

Work: *Evening Tree* (1988) *Father Clive Barcham with his son, Joe Barcham*

Work: *The Railings*, 1978



Pam Abell

Amanda Bromley – Director of Barewall and Art Gallery. Work: *The End House* (1970)

Stephen Granville said: "The paintings depict characters I had the privilege of embodying in Arthur Berry's plays. Arthur was utterly mesmerising and inspiring – a force of creativity who brought the world of the Potteries to life through both words and images."

Having worked with him and performed his roles on stage, it's deeply moving to see his paintings come and take their rightful place in the record. Each piece feels like a conversation with the man himself."

Amanda Bromley, Director of Barewall Art Gallery, added: "The response to our appeal has been incredible. We've seen paintings that haven't been viewed publicly for over 40 years, and each one tells its own story about Arthur Berry's connection to place, people and everyday life in the Potteries."

This project has not only brought these works back into the light but also helped us preserve them digitally for future generations."

The End House

Barewall Art Gallery has been appointed as the recent custodian of *The End House*, an oil painting by Arthur Berry, which is now being handed over to the Potteries Museum & Art Gallery. The work has been bequeathed to the museum by William Carr BA, a friend of local art teacher Harry Smith, Harry Smith was a local artist who opened the Pentagon Gallery and welcomes Arthur Berry to exhibit in the early 1970s.

The End House is believed to be one of a triptych of three paintings, and Barewall is appealing for information from anyone who may own or know the whereabouts of the other two works in this series.

Dr Samantha Howard, Curator of Arts of the Potteries Museum & Art Gallery said: "the new acquisition is a terrific contribution to our holdings of Berry's artworks and *The End House* is a great example of Berry's enduring interest in exploring the familiar world around us."

The cataloguing and documentation of Berry's works form part of the creation of an official Arthur Berry Digital Archive and Catalogue Raisonné, ensuring his paintings, plays and poetry continue to inspire and inform audiences long beyond the centenary year.



5. Clive Barcham (right) with son Joe Barcham (left) *The Railings*

Lost Art Work Appeal Continues

Barewall Art Gallery continues to welcome further discoveries. Anyone who owns or has information about *The End House* triptych or any other Berry's artworks – particularly pieces sold or gifted before 2012 – is encouraged to get in touch. For more information or to arrange an appointment, please contact Amanda Bromley: Email: shop@barewall.co.uk, telephone: 07932 717718.

A Sense of Place Exhibition extended until 8th February,

The acclaimed summer exhibition has been extended to February 2026, offering visitors a rare opportunity to experience a deeply personal journey through the world of Arthur Berry.

Set amidst the dulcet tones of Berry's own voice, the exhibition explores the evocative places and landscapes that inspired his paintings, poems, and plays. Through unseen archive photographs, immersive sound recordings, and extracts from his writings, *A Sense of Place* brings to life the people and streets that shaped Berry's creative legacy. Hosted at the Barewall Studio, adjacent to Barewall Art Gallery in Market Place, Burslem, the exhibition also features a curated selection of works and items available for purchase, including exclusive pieces from the Arthur Berry Estate. **The exhibition is free to attend from Tuesday to Saturday, 11am to 3pm until 8th February 2026.**



New Year Crochet?

In early winter, we were busy making crochet decorations for our tree at the Eccleshall Christmas Tree Festival. (see above)

We were very proud of the result (these fairy lights are especially clever) and received lots of compliments. Thank you to everyone who contributed and to those who visited. All the trees were beautiful, and the church was packed with people.



If you would like to learn how to crochet or wish to improve your skills this year, do join us at one of our friendly classes or come to a Marquetry meeting for "crochet and chat."

We have Beginners classes at Eagle House from **12.30pm to 3.30pm every month, on a Monday or Tuesday.**

We also meet on the **second Friday of each month at Eccleshall Library from 12.30pm to 3.30pm.** Usually these are Improver classes but occasionally crochet & chat.

On the first and third Wednesday of each month, some of us join the Staffordshire Marquetry Group.

Please contact Christine Smith on 07946 535035 or christines1386@gmail.com for more information and to book a place in a class. Also see our Crochet in Eccleshall Facebook page.

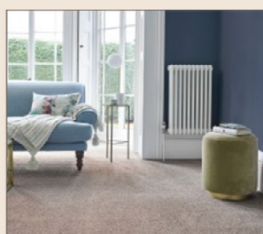
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Busy Times For Stone Choral Society

Christmas has come all too quickly, and Stone Choral Society has had a busy time and been in a new venue for its Autumn and Christmas Concerts. The choir has loved being in the heart of Stone in the Crown Wharf Theatre. They have been really welcoming and helpful in supporting us in every way. We are very grateful to them all from backstage; lighting and sound to the volunteers who support the audience in finding their seats and ensuring they are comfortable.

On Saturday 1st November the choir sang a work "Stone Circles" originally written for our 30th anniversary. The work chronicles the history of Stone in a musical way that oscillates between upbeat tunes with lyrics that chart the town's history and the plainchant of the Catholic Church linking the Stone's long association with the Dominican Sisters who live and work in the area. The work explores Stone's rich history, community resilience and local spirit from the 18th to 20th century.

It is divided into seven circles; the final one links to the formation and early history of Stone Choral Society making this unique piece very personal to the choir. It was composed by Patrick Larley who was the choral leader from 1996 until 2000 and the lyrics were written by Roger Savage who is still a current member. The work was accompanied by Jennifer Hames on the piano; our regular and accomplished accompanist and by Acceler8 Brass Band. The soloists for the evening included the lyricist Roger Savage, a small semi chorus of five of our own sopranos who took on the role of the local Dominican nuns with their clear and evocative plainchant lines. Martha Sykes also joined us as the main soprano soloist. The audience, choir and band particularly loved performing this piece as their inaugural concert in the heart of Stone under the expert conducting of our choral director Harriet Johnson, who is Stone born local talent.

On Thursday 11th December in a sellout concert Stone Choral Society and Acceler8 Brass Band joined forces again for their Annual Christmas Concert. The evening was an uplifting start to the season. Glitter balls accompanied several of the items including the final Snow Waltz (*Schneewalzer*) with choir, band and audience participation. The evening comprised a mix of carols old and new; several included audience participation which happened with great gusto and spirit. There were many new carols and new settings of carols including Bob Chilcott's version of The First Nowell and Becky McGlade's What Child is This. Some items were the choir alone accompanied by Jennifer Hames on the piano; others had the band accompanying them. The evening was a perfect mix with some great festive numbers from the band including a wonderful version of O Holy Night with Emily Bravermann on the euphonium. Hal Walker conducts the band and has a repartee that delights the audience as he introduces their items.

The concert also included Stone's Stuart Johnson's inaugural arrangement of his piece Snow Journey for the brass band alongside the choir; a fast and joyous piece as the concert neared its conclusion.

Tuesday 16th December saw the choral society singing around the piano in the Crown Wharf Pub this is an established annual event now enjoyed by us all and the customers in the pub. We hope that you might have been there too singing along or at least toe tapping to your favourite carols with a festive drink in hand.

Harriet Johnson is a great director and she is a not only a very able musician and vocal expert but is a trained speech therapist; her knowledge of the voice and its working is superb. If you feel that you would like to see and experience for yourself then why don't you join us on Saturday 31st January 2026 for our Brahms Requiem Workshop Day. This will be held at St Dominic's Priory Hall on Station Rd in Stone. The Brahms Requiem is a sublime work and one of the first Requiems to deviate from using the Catholic Mass Words as its text; it is also sung in German and not Latin. Our workshop days our great fun and the cakes are amazing too if that is the deal breaker.

Please look out for our spring concert too which will be a performance of Brahms' German Requiem; this will be on **Saturday 25th April 2026** and it will be in the apt and beautiful setting of Holy Trinity Church in Eccleshall. If you are keen follower and want to know the summer concert date it is **Saturday 4th July 2026**; this is always a lighter concert and features a more eclectic range of musical items and this time we will join with The Daleians (*a local male voice choir*); Harriet is also their musical director.

Alternatively, if you would just like to join us, please email info@stonechoral.org.uk; **we meet on Thursday evenings from 7.30pm to 9.30pm in Walton First School, Walton, Stone.**

Our first rehearsal is 8th January 2026.

With thanks to Martin Robinson for his photographs and commitment to our Choral Society.



Stone Choral Society practicing their "Stone Circles" concert



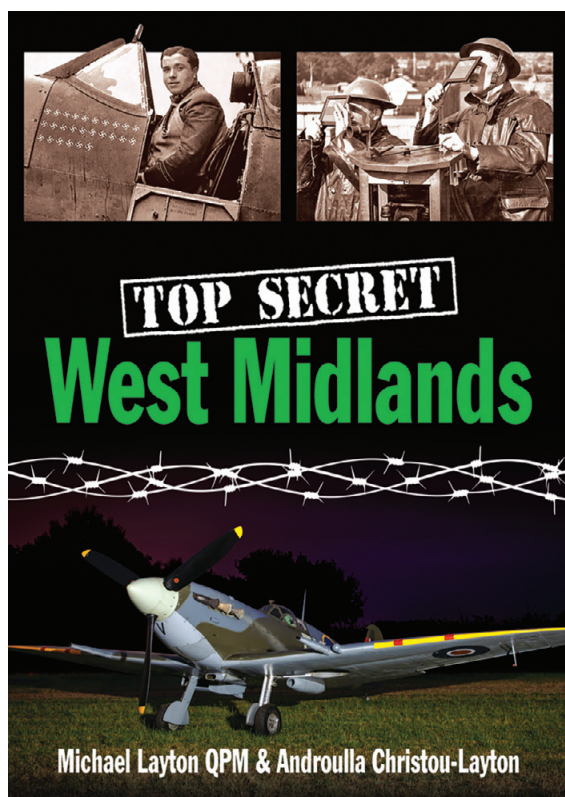
Stone Choral Society performing "Stone Circles"



A sellout concert Stone Choral Society and Acceler8 Brass Band joined forces again for their Annual Christmas Concert



Bringing in the Spirit of Christmas - Carol Singing at Crown Wharf on 16.12.25



Top Secret West Midlands

The West Midlands region is situated at the very heart of England and incorporates six counties: Herefordshire, Shropshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire, West Midlands, and Worcestershire.

During the Second World War and the so-called 'Cold War' period that followed, this area played a key role in the war effort and in keeping the nation safe.

Top Secret West Midlands reveals the many secretive aspects of life during these conflicts, and tributes are paid to the professional members of the Armed Services, the volunteers, and the members of the community who lived or served within these six counties.



Building upon the success of *Top Secret Worcestershire* and *Top Secret Warwickshire*, this book contains 'top secret' accounts, little-known facts, and tantalisingly unsolved mysteries. Packed with historical images and recollections from a generation whose memories must be preserved, *Top Secret West Midlands* seeks to inform future generations of the sacrifices that were made.



Top Secret West Midlands, by Michael Layton QPM & Androulla Christou-Layton, is priced at £15.95 and has 298 pages, including 178 B&W Photos.

It's available from Brewin Books Ltd Tel: 01527 854228 or visit www.brewinbooks.com

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Supported lodgings host Lynne with Chloe

Campaign to find families who can give young people stability and independence

People interested in providing stability and independence for a young person leaving care are being encouraged to become a supported lodgings host.

Being a host means opening your home to a young person aged 16 to 20, offering a safe and nurturing environment where they can build independence and learn essential life skills.

Hosts guide young people in practical tasks like cooking, cleaning and managing money, while also encouraging their education or training as they prepare for adulthood.

Lynne became a supported lodgings host when her own children had left home and is now encouraging other people to come forward.

Lynne said: *"I've been well matched with the young people who live with me. That was an important part of the process."*

To be a host you don't need a background of working with young people, you need to have time for them and be able to support them but not feel you are going to overpower them. It's about them getting their own independence skills, not about you being their carer.

And you are never on your own. As a host, the team are there to support you if you need it."

Staffordshire County Council was highlighting the need for more hosts as part of the first-ever National Supported Lodgings Week, which was from 9 to 16 November.

Nicholas Lakin, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People at Staffordshire County Council, said: *"All sorts of people from all walks of life can become a host and our latest campaign is hoping to encourage more local families to consider joining us."*

People who want to host simply need to have a spare bedroom, good communication skills and want to support local young people. If this sounds like you and you're looking to make a real difference then please get in touch with the team and start the process."

Anyone interested in becoming a supported lodgings host with Staffordshire County Council can find out more on the Supported Lodgings webpage or by calling 0800 169 2061.



Sue Spruce and Elaine Trohear of Adoption Matters alongside Andrew from John Pass Jewellers

John Pass Jewellers and Newcastle-under-Lyme School team up to give Adoption Matters families a truly magical Polar Express adventure

On Saturday 15 November, adopter families from Stoke-on-Trent based children's charity, Adoption Matters, embarked on a magical Polar Express journey from Froghall Station, along the Churnet Valley Railway in Staffordshire, all made possible through the generosity of John Pass Jewellers and Newcastle-under-Lyme School.

The jewellers partnered with the school, which is based in the Staffordshire area, to raise the funds for 64 complimentary tickets to be gifted to the children's charity.

Families enjoyed what is described as a 'festive polar extravaganza' true to The Polar Express book and movie.

Making the event extra special, Adoption Matters families were allocated their very own carriage.

Annie O'Neill, Adoption Matters Fundraising and Relationship Manager, told the Gazette: *"A massive thank you goes out to John Pass Jewellers and Newcastle-under-Lyme School for providing us with this opportunity."*

We are so grateful to have been able offer this to our families for the second-year running and, as an adopter myself, I know first-hand how comforting events surrounded by other adoptive families can be."

Andrew Pass, from John Pass Jewellers, said: *"It is heart-warming to be able to give back and put a smile on the faces of families – it is just fantastic."*

Annie continued: *"Our corporate partners are very important to us - their support enables us to offer more support to*



A photo from The Polar Express event

families and additional amazing fun events just like this.

We love to talk about our work and the incredible families we support, so if you or your company would like to speak to us or discuss a corporate partnership then please do get in touch."

To find out more about Adoption Matters, please visit their website at www.adoptionmatters.org

Rooftop Studios launches Aerial Hoop & Silks - a first for Stone

Rooftop Studios is excited to announce the launch of its brand-new Aerial Hoop and Silks classes, arriving in January 2026 - making it the only dance school in Stone to offer this increasingly in-demand performance discipline. The class will also be running at the studio's fast-growing Leek branch.

Aerial training has become an essential skill within the professional dance and performing arts industry, with performers expected to demonstrate versatility, upper-body strength, and aerial technique for stage and screen work. Rooftop Studios' new programme ensures students stay ahead of the curve, boosting both their technical ability and future employability.

The classes will also offer structured accredited exams from age 4, with higher-grade students able to achieve valuable UCAS points, supporting

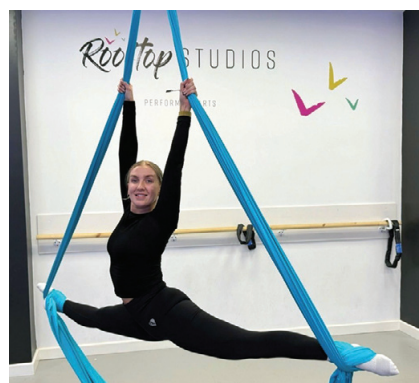
applications for university and performing arts colleges.

Studio Director Laura Keeling said: *"We are thrilled to bring Aerial Hoop & Silks to Stone. This is a huge milestone for the studio and an incredible opportunity for our dancers."*

Aerial is a highly sought-after skill in the industry, and offering it here means our students can train to a professional level without having to travel outside the area."

We're proud to be the first to deliver it locally and can't wait to see our students take their training to new heights."

For more information or to register your interest in Aerial Hoop & Silks at Rooftop Studios' Stone and Leek branches, visit their website at www.rooftopstudios.co.uk or you can email info@rooftopstudios.co.uk



Rooftop Studios' teacher Antonia Bennet showcasing some aerial moves



Rail Updates January 2026 - looking forward to Great British Railways

What do people in Stone want to see in their train service at Stone Station in the coming year? Of course, any improvements won't come from Santa, but through a dialogue with management of various train companies.

Jon Heal of North Staffs Rail Promotion Group informs rail users, "The service we have at Stone is branded London Northwestern Railway, but has been operated by the parent company, West Midlands Trains. From February 1st, control of the service is being taken over by the government and WMT will be no more." In the short term, we may see no difference, but clearly we may need to talk to other people if we want improvements.

Eventually the service will become part of Great British Railways whose patriotic red, white and blue branding has just been announced.

NSRPG now have good contacts with London Northwestern, and Stakeholder Manager Geoff Grant regularly attends meetings to share current plans and problems with the rail user group.

So as we move into a new year, and possibly a new era, NSRPG are asking for local rail users to come forward with their priorities. Jon Heal continues, "Many local rail users have been very upset that the service here no longer goes on to Birmingham, and journeys further than Stafford need a brisk change of platform."

At the start of the change to the service, with a couple of trains just shuttling up and down between Crewe and Stafford, some passengers had commented that at least the shorter route had less disruption and cancellations were the exception.

Sadly, recent months have seen more frequent cancellations. On some occasions this has been shortage of staff, either drivers or conductors. At other times, we are told that some trains with faults elsewhere have been replaced by taking trains away from our route. LNWR tell us that our usual trains are more reliable than the brand new ones!

The impression given is that if issues arise the train company's default response is to downgrade the LNWR service through Stone.

Any comments are welcome and NSRPG will pass them on to the train company. There may be other matters too. Many people are concerned about easier access to the far platform and the challenge of boarding safely on the near platform. We also hope to see the Station getting a fresh coat of paint soon, though probably not in GBR red, white and blue!

The next NSRPG meeting will be on a Thursday 29th January at 6.30pm at the Quaker Meeting House in Miller Street, Newcastle. Any comments to jhnorthstaffsrail@hotmail.co.uk

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Christmas At Stone and District Probus Club

Stone and District Probus Club held their Christmas Luncheon, on 1st December at The Upper House in Barlaston. The guest speaker was Kevin Reynolds, and his topic was 'Have Yourself a Wild Christmas'.

Kevin gave a fascinating talk about

plants and animals associated with our Christmas celebrations.

To find out more about Stone and District Probus Club, please contact secretary Simon Cornes on 07960 811637 or visit www.stoneprobus.org.uk

Eccleshall Christmas Tree Lights

The town centre trees were funded by the Eccleshall Parish Council who would like to thank the Ecclesian Society who erected the 72 small trees and also checked the brackets and lights, and removed them at the appropriate time.

The Parish Council would also like to thank Woods Christmas Tree Farm at Solihull supplied and delivered the trees, A.S Electrical Services for installing the lights on the large trees and Traction Equipment for the cherry pickets.

A big thank you also to Spencer the jeweller of Eccleshall who donated the 20-foot tree at the Stone Road cross road. The decorations of the crossroads tree were made once again by the children at the Bishop Lonsdale Academy.

Royalty Visit Stone

By Philip Leason MBE

Last month I mentioned the railway crossing at Stone Railway Station that led from Field House, the home of Richard Pearce, the Company Secretary of the North Staffordshire Railway. A reader sent me a copy of a interesting photograph taken in 1929 showing the crossing and Field House, which is displayed here.

Again last month I mentioned that the Prince of Wales, later Edward VIII had visited Stone in 1924. This prompted a reader to email to ask about other Royal visits to the town.

To some people history is boring and dead. On the contrary there are is always something new being discovered. One such topic was discovered in 2015 by James Wright professional archaeologist and author while undertaking some research for a book found a reference to Richard II (1367-1400) visited Stone in 1387. Prior to this no one was aware of the King's visit. Writing in 2021 James stated: "Richard had a very high and mighty personality. He was the first monarch to insist on being called "Majesty" and was the sort of person that insisted that anyone whom he looked at had to prostrate themselves on the ground before him.

He was, unsurprisingly, deeply unpopular with his contemporaries. He had already annoyed the Mortimer family by pinching their inheritance, he sacked his chancellor, there were dark rumours of his involvement in the murder of an archbishop and he also supported his half brother after the latter murdered a knight.

In the autumn of 1386 both lords and parliament struck back. Richard was compelled to follow the guidance of 14 barons who would meet monthly in Westminster. In a fit of pique Richard set off on a tour of the land to ensure that he was never at Westminster. Real mature behaviour!

It was this tour that brought Richard to the midlands in the summer of 1387. He was in Lichfield on 29-30 June, Stafford on 3 July and moved to Stone on 4 July. He presumably stayed at the (now lost) priory as it was the only building of sufficient status in the town at the time. By 7 July he had shifted over to Heighley Castle near Madeley.

Richard continued to be a very problematic ruler until 1399 when he was deposed by his cousin, Henry of Bolingbroke. He was imprisoned at Pontefract Castle where he probably starved to death in early 1400."

As well as writing books James is a fascinating speaker and I understand that he is going to give a talk at the Heritage Centre later this year and I will make sure that Gazette readers are aware of the date.

One of the features in the churchyard of St. Michael and St. Wulfad's church is the table tomb of William Crompton (died 1603) and his wife Jane (died 1627) with their figures on the top. William had purchased the priory lands and out of interest received a gold ring in the will of Thomas Alleyne the founder of the Grammar School. The tomb was originally located in the chancel of the old priory church and was damaged by falling masonry when the building collapsed. Around the sides of the tomb are the shields of the couples 14 children. The fifth shield on the north side is that for Thomas who was born in 1580 and who is the link to the next Royal visitor to Stone

During the English Civil War (1642-1651) Thomas was a Puritan and opposed King Charles I's perceived Catholic-leaning, and advocated simpler worship and parliamentary power. Despite this he refused to raise forces in Staffordshire when ordered to do so by Parliament in September 1642. Although his eldest son became a leading member of the Parliamentary Committee in Stafford he still refused to raise forces.

It perhaps comes as a surprise given Thomas was a Puritan that in May 1645, King Charles I stayed for two nights with Thomas, no doubt as an uninvited guest at Stone Park, prior to the Battle of Naseby (14th June 1645).

The diary of one of the King's Officers, Captain Richard Symonds it states: "Thursday May 22 - We marched from Drayton to Stone in the County of Stafford. His majesty lay at Mr Crompton's home, a sweet place in a fine park. He a rebel.

Friday: the army rested
Saturday 24: We marched to Uttoxeter"

(Stone Park was located on Red Hill with two lodges to it - one in the town (Park Lodge) and one off the Uttoxeter road - Aston Lodge)



King Edward passing through Granville Square on 21st November 1907

Moving on and in December 1745 during the Jacobite Rebellion, Prince William Augustus, Duke of Cumberland, the third and youngest son of George II stayed in Stone. He had been charged to prevent Bonnie Prince Charlie from reaching London to claim the English throne. It was known that the Prince was at Leek and would be marching south and so in November the Duke had his troops encamped in Stone and prepare for battle. The majority of the troops were encamped on Stonefield which was then a large stretch of land from where Margaret Street is today, almost to Meaford and from Oulton Cross n and Old Road westward to the River Trent. The artillery were mounted on the Motley Pits and dug ditches and created mounds on which to erect their cannons. In addition to the troops camped on Stonefield others were billeted at various locations in the town and at Meaford and Darlaston.

One account of Cumberland's army stated that it consisted of approximately 13,000 troops and so we can only imagine the fear this caused to the residents of the town.

Swynfen Jervis (the father of John Jervis -later Earl St. Vincent) lived at Meaford Hall and had a bed prepared for the Duke there, however he preferred to stay in the town near to his troops. The Duke was a large man and apparently found beds either too small or uncomfortable and so he slept on straw on the floor of "a small room at Mr. Hinckley's." The build later became known as "Cumberland House" and is today of course a doctor's surgery.

Apparently the Prince had discovered that Cumberland was waiting for him at Stone and so he left Leek and marched on to Derby. Discovering this by the 4th December the Duke and his troops left the town.

Being on the one of the country's main road it is obvious over the century's Royalty would have passed through the town and also when visiting the homes of the aristocracy such as the Duke of Sutherland at Trentham. However nothing specially is recorded.



The crowd disperses after the King had passed through



Stone Railway station and Field House in 1929

The next Royal visit that is recorded and even photographs exist of it was on 21st November 1907 when King Edward VIII passed through Stone in his car (see other page). The King was on his way to attend a house party given by the Earl of Shrewsbury at Alton Towers.

The whole town was decorated with flags and bunting and as the King's car passed through Granville Square a group of school children sang the National Anthem accompanied by the volunteer band.

One of the buildings which the King would have passed as he left the town was the Bridge Inn and it is said that due to this following a refurbishment the owners decided to change the name to Langtry's, after Lille Langtry (the Jersey Lilly) with whom the King had an affair with when Prince of Wales. The pub was later reverted back to its old name.

The next Royal visit was when Edward, Prince of Wales visited the town on 13th June, 1924 to inspect the war memorial in Granville Square. The Prince had been staying with the Earl of Harrowby at Sandon Hall and was on his way to the Potteries.

According to a newspaper report: *"The town had been decorated and beflagged in a manner befitting the occasion. The employees were allowed an hour and a half off duty, and during this time the shops were closed. Long before the time fixed for the arrival, High Street, from the Lichfield Road entrance to Granville Square, was packed with people, and the crowd became thicker as the time of arrival drew near."*

A raised platform had been erected in front of the war memorial on which the Prince was to meet the Chairman of the Urban District

Council and councillors, etc. and inspect the memorial. The square was filled with Cadets from Alleyne's Grammar School, the Territorials, Boy Scouts, Girl Guides and Brownies and school children.

The massed buglers of St. Michael's Scouts and Grammar School Cadets sounded the Royal Salute as the Prince's car arrived in the High Street. The ex-service men formed a guard of honour and the school children sang *"God Bless the Prince of Wales"* as the car arrived in the square.

The Prince spent time talking to the various officials and apparently he *"examined the memorial with obvious interest."* At the conclusion of the visit *"The Prince stepped into his car, amidst the waving of flags and more hearty cheers from the crowds of people, followed by the singing of the National Anthem. The Prince, from the kindness of heart, drove out of the town via North Street in order that the invalids of St. Mary's Home might see him pass."*



Princess Royal opening the Nat West Data Centre June 1991

In 1977 the late Queen Elizabeth II celebrated her Silver Jubilee and various events were held which were attended by members of the Royal family. The present King, as Prince of Wales attended various functions in the south of the county and was travelling along the A34 through Stone by car to attend other functions in the north. Seeing a small crowd at Walton waiting to see him pass by he had the car stop, got out and spoke to them for a few minutes before travelling on.

There have been other occasions when members of the Royal family have travelled along the A34 at Walton, including in 1973 when Princess Margaret passed through after visiting Yarlet School.

In June 1991 the Princess Royal officially opened the Natwest Bank Data Centre on the Walton Industrial estate. Her Royal Highness toured the building and planted a Tibetan Cherry Tree to commemorate the visit. The building has since been demolished and a large controversial warehouse occupies the site. Sadly the tree planted by the Princess Royal has also been removed.

The final Royal visit occurred on 19th July, 2019 when the King, as Prince of Wales visited the Wool Packaging Company Ltd. - Woolcool, at Tungsten Park, off Opal Way on the Walton Industrial Estate.

The company manufacture sustainable high performance 100% wool insulated packaging, that keeps things colder for longer and were celebrating their tenth anniversary. The Prince was particularly interested as the product is totally compostable. At the conclusion of his visit (which apparently went on longer than scheduled due to his interest) he unveiled a commemorative plaque.

I hope that this article has brought back memories to some readers and been of interest to others.

Please help us to keep the heritage of Stone alive for generations to come.

If you have any photographs relating to the anything mentioned here please contact Staffordshire Past Track at Staffordshire Archives & Heritage, Staffordshire History Centre, Eastgate Street, Stafford ST16 2LZ. Telephone: 01785 278379, email past.track@staffordshire.gov.uk or visit www.staffspasttrack.org.uk

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Princess Royal planting the tree



Plaque unveiled by the King as Prince of Wales on his visit to Woolcool

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Philip Leason

Gazette Motoring

Just like *The Classics*, the BMW Touring has stood the test of time....

Syd Taylor gets his hands on the new **BMW 330e M Sport Touring**

When BMW sets its sights on snaffling a slice of the market, the car that results is so virtuous in every respect that motorists would be unwise not to pay obeisance to them - or so Jane Austen might have written had she been a 2025 motoring correspondent.

For those of us whose eyes glaze over when struggling to read a traffic sign and wouldn't know a conditional clause from a migraine, let's put it simply? Respect to BMW for coming up trumps!

The latest 330e M Sport Touring plug-in hybrid certainly stacks up the superlatives. There's an old adage which tells us that 'If it ain't broke, don't fix it'. In my view this applies most particularly to the Touring (or estate car). A sensible concept if ever there was one.



Many novelty-seeking nomads, having had their heads turned by crossovers, now realise what they have missed. To put simply, if practical motoring is your aim, a 'Touring' will take you far along the road to perfection.

One which portrays serious potential towards being one of the best there is, is the...from £49,130 ... 330e M Sport Touring. (£61,913 when all the 'make life even more wonderful' packs have been added - like comfort plus pack, the visibility pack, the tech pack and the 'magic motoring pack' with see-through glass, blow-up tyres, electric



lights etc. Only joking!). So well equipped, it has sat nav, air con, cruise control, power seats, sun roof and every adjunct to comfort and convenience you can think of...the list goes on. This latest model has a huge panoramic touch screen to control most functions but, thankfully, the rotary control on the centre console remains. It is high-on ergonomically perfect.

Such excellence really means that rivals to this functional family/business touring designed to sweep away the blues, have little chance. And sweep away the blues it does. It's the magic broomstick with magic right down to its rubber souls - it's that nice to drive. And that's its forte.

Simply put, it is aristocratic in its demeanour, performance and overall presence, exuding quality with confident ease. Take for instance the excellent ride and the silence of the cabin. One feels instantly at home



in an oasis of calm. I felt so relaxed that I was convinced that this BMW would even bring a smile to the face of a Yorkshire poet caught in a 'force eight' high on a Pennine ridge. Heathcliff would have considered the car a 'belter' - perfect for his wandering ways.

With such a good blend of practicality and performance the 3 Series Touring is at the top level of this market niche. It's as elegant as a dapper dandy with the cut and thrust of a rampaging highwayman. The motto is not so much 'stand and deliver' as 'deliver outstanding'.

Beneath the bonnet the 4 cylinder in-line 2.0 litre petrol engine combines with the electric motor and is capable of delivering 292PS. It's a plug-in hybrid so you can swap into electric mode when you want



to. Electric only range is realistically around 50 miles - ideal for stop-start city driving and emitting no noxious nastiness. Stay on electric forever and you could claim a million mpg as the petrol goes stale. But this is a 'drivers car'. Enjoy it and realistically average consumption is around 40 mpg.

Few cars will deliver you and your payload with such dash and panache. It's a sublime motorway cruiser and when twisty roads beckon it comes alive as you select 'sport' mode and enjoy wagging the paddles controlling the seamless 8 speed automatic gearbox. Add in supremely responsive handling - due in part to traditional rear wheel drive - and you're treated to a confidence-inspiring combination of grunt and deportment. Smooth and responsive as a sinuous dancer with enough straight-line momentum to startle an astronaut. (*Lunatics have told me that top speed is around 150mph*).

There is no doubt that given the carrying capacity, it truly represents twenty first century space travel. This is not any old estate. This one belongs to the Baron and Baroness of Bravado who - in the politest way - sweep past 'the petit traffickers who curtsy to them and do them reverence'. (*As that well-known car pundit William Shakespeare wrote*). For readers untutored in *The Classics*, that is to say that driving such a car puts much of the competition in the shade. Who would buy a C Class Mercedes when you can have one of these?

With excellent road manners, comfort and space for anything, I'm pleased to report that the BMW 330e M Sport Touring gives a thoroughly good driving experience that keeps you feeling as fresh as a daisy and fragrant as a bottle of Action Man aftershave.



Almost half of UK drivers risk damaging their car with defrosting habits

Almost half of motorists risk damaging their car when clearing ice from their windscreen while a third (34%) could face a fine due to their winter morning habits, according to research from eBay, the UK's number one online marketplace for vehicle parts & accessories.

Following the UK's first winter cold-snap with vehicles frosting up across the country, eBay's research revealed one in five (19%) motorists have admitted to using boiling water from a kettle despite the fact it can crack the glass. Almost a third (30%) said they used their wipers to clear ice, which could damage the wiper blades and electric motor.

While the data found the most common ways drivers use to clear their windscreen was ice scrapers (32%) and de-icer spray (26%), it also revealed the more unusual methods including bank cards, CDs, CD cases, a paint scraper, cold water, and even the hot water bottle 'trick' made viral through social media.

As well as risking damage to their car, drivers could be fined for how they defrost their car. Nearly one in five (19%) were unaware that it was illegal to drive their vehicles without fully defrosted windows. This can result in a £60 fine and three points on your license according to rule 229 in the Highway Code.

Some motorists (18%) also said they were comfortable leaving their car running to fully defrost their car, with 15% aiming to make the most of their busy morning while the vehicle runs outside. This is also technically illegal under rule 123 in the Highway Code and can result in a fine of up-to £80.

The attitude to clearing all car windows differs across the generations, with just over half (52%) of Gen-Z motorists saying they would fully defrost all windows before setting off on their journey, compared with over four of five (85%) Boomers.

The top tool for clearing frost differed across car owners. Renault drivers were the top ice scraper supporters with 90% of them choosing it as their preferred method, while Škoda owners were the top users of de-icer (88%). Meanwhile, Lexus drivers were the main users (56%) of a windscreen cover.

Abir Tewari, UK Director of Commercial Operations, Parts & Accessories at eBay, said: "Following the first cold snap of the season, we're seeing motorists use a range of methods to clear their windscreens - some more effective and safer than others."

It's vital drivers prepare their vehicles properly for challenging winter conditions. That's why eBay offers a wide selection of tried, tested and safe solutions to make cold mornings simpler and safer."

This winter, eBay is offering customers up to 20% off winter vehicle essentials until 20 February 2026, including ice scrapers, de-icer, windscreen covers and more.



More details can be found here: <https://www.ebay.co.uk/e/motors/m-deals-winter-essentials>

According to eBay sales data from October 2024 to October 2025, drivers appear to begin preparing for the cold mornings from November, with defroster (second), ice scraper (fourth and sixth), windscreen cover (seventh) appearing in the top 10 best-selling items for the month.

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BMW iX3 named Top Gear's 2026 Car of the Year

The all-new BMW iX3 has been crowned Top Gear Magazine's 2026 Car of the Year. The prestigious accolade was presented to the first Neue Klasse model at the publication's annual awards ceremony, which celebrates the best cars launched over the past twelve months.

The BMW iX3 impressed judges with its all-new design, class-leading driving dynamics and the multitude of innovations it ushers for the brand. Handing over the trophy, Paul Horrell, Consultant Editor of Top Gear Magazine said, "The iX3 is wholly new. Above and beneath. Bumper to bumper. Ground to cloud. It has the magic 500-mile claimed range, an entirely new interior concept, but most importantly it drives like a BMW ought to - not like a bulky EV crossover, or soulless digital first zombiemobile. BMW's cars have always strived to be at the tip of mainstream excellence - the iX3 puts them back where they belong."

The BMW iX3 once again raises the bar - setting new benchmarks in performance, range and technology while introducing a cutting-edge design language. Its advancements will shape the entire future BMW product portfolio and will be incorporated into a total of 40 new models and model updates between now and



2027, starting with the BMW i3 Saloon, which begins production in the second half of 2026.

On receiving the award, David George, CEO, BMW Group UK and Ireland said, "The launch of the new BMW iX3 represents more than just the debut of an exceptional new model - it signals the start of an exciting and transformative chapter for our brand. We are thrilled to receive the prestigious Car of the Year award for this milestone moment and would like to thank the entire Top Gear team for this special recognition."

The BMW iX3 50 xDrive is priced from £58,755 OTR and can be preordered from retailers nationwide with first customer deliveries taking place on 7 March 2026.

The Parish of Standon and Cotes Heath

By Chris Copp of Staffordshire Archives & Heritage

For this edition's selection from Staffordshire Past Track (www.staffspasttrack.org.uk) we continue our tour around the villages in the Stone and Eccleshall area, and this time we are paying Cotes Heath a visit. Previously known as Woodford Green, Cotes Heath is situated on the River Meece and until 1844 was part of Eccleshall Parish. It is now in the Parish of Standon and Cotes Heath.

There are now over 52,000 photographs, documents, maps, paintings and other images relating to Staffordshire's history and heritage on the Staffordshire Past Track website www.staffspasttrack.org.uk and more are being added all the time by staff and volunteers at Staffordshire Archives & Heritage.

If you have any photographs you'd like to contribute or any information about the images already on the website please contact the team at: Staffordshire Archives & Heritage, Staffordshire History Centre, Eastgate Street, Stafford ST16 2LZ. Telephone: 01785 278379, email past.track@staffordshire.gov.uk.

You can also keep up to date with what's new on the Staffordshire Past Track facebook page.



Cranberry, Cotes Heath, about 1910.

Cranberry is a small hamlet in the Meece valley just north of Cotes Heath. (Mr Pat Trevor)



The Post Office, Cotes Heath, 1910.

The village Post Office in Mill Meece Marsh, off the road between Cotes Heath and Standon. (Mr Robert Giles)



St. James' Church, Cotes Heath, 1915-1920.

St. James' Church was built in 1837 to designs by Andrew Capper. It was extended in 1891. This view was taken looking north along Newcastle Road. A postcard view published by E.J. Hurlstone of High Street, Eccleshall. (Jake Whitehouse Collection)



Blacksmith's Shop, Cotes Heath, 1910.

This photograph shows Tom Giles' blacksmith's shop which stood opposite the church in Cotes Heath, seen in the background, to the left. Tom Giles, farmer and blacksmith, was born in Farndon, Cheshire in 1879 and died in 1945.

Left to right: Tom Salt, Tom Giles, Connie Giles, unknown (holding the horse).

A postcard photographed and published by Harry Osbourne of Woodseaves. (Mr Robert Giles)

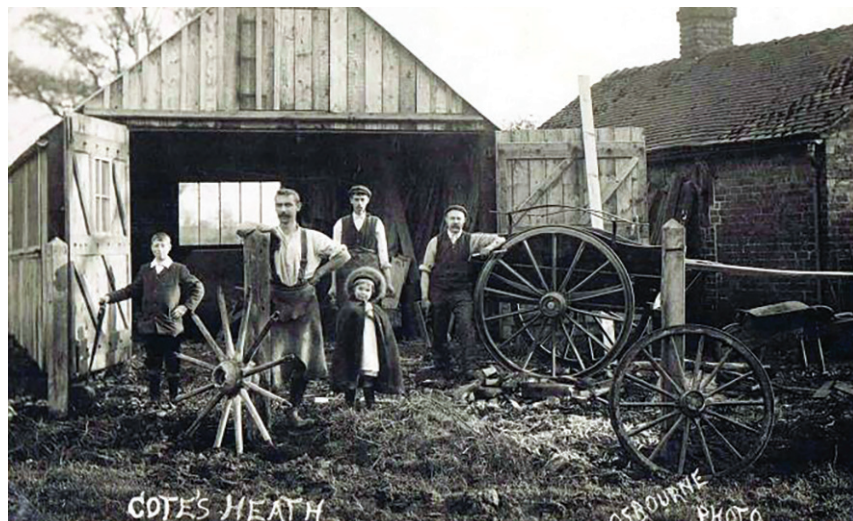


Station Road, Cotes Heath, 1915-1920.

A view looking east along Station Road at Cotes Heath from close to the railway bridge. The terrace of railway workers cottages to the right still stands.

On the left are the grounds of Cotes Hall. The road led to Standon Bridge Railway Station which opened in 1837 and was closed in 1952.

A postcard view published by E.J. Hurlstone of High Street, Eccleshall. (Jake Whitehouse Collection)



Wheelwright's shop, Cotes Heath, 1910.

Tom Giles' wheelwright's shop which was across the road from the Cotes Heath Farm, on land which eventually became part of Nelson Hall playing fields. From left to right: George Freakley, Tom Giles, Connie Giles (in front), unknown (behind), Tom Salt.

A postcard photographed and published by Harry Osbourne of Woodseaves. (Mr Robert Giles)

2025- A good year for butterflies in Eccleshall

After the very dismal year of 2024, 2025 was very much better for butterflies in Eccleshall. Butterfly Conservation state that this year has only brought numbers back to average, but in the 21 years that I have been recording in Eccleshall, the year was well above average.

The weather patterns were strange with six consecutive months, February to July 2025, having well below average rainfall. The area enjoyed some hot spells during the summer which combined with the dry spring meant that some species were seen a bit earlier than normal.

With all this preamble, one must say that there were some inconsistencies, but there is no doubt that the overall situation was good. There were no reported sightings in January and February but March, April and May just ticked over with average sightings.



Painted Lady is a total immigrant butterfly and yearly sightings vary tremendously

However, normally mid-May to mid-July are usually rather quiet periods but in 2025 butterflies suddenly sprung to life towards the end of June. This developed into July which was brilliant and my second all-time highest recording was made on 12th July.

August is often our best month but as the month progressed numbers began to decline and in September there were some good days but clearly autumn was closing in. October was typical and the last butterfly, a Red Admiral, was noted on 13th November just before the frosty nights arrived.

The traditional "garden" coloured butterflies fared well with an improvement in sightings of the Small Tortoiseshell whilst Peacock had a really good year. Red Admiral had a fairly good year and although this is mainly an immigrant butterfly, in recent years it has learnt to hibernate in the UK which means that a few are to be seen in early spring – a benefit of global warming?

The Comma in contrast had a poor year. Painted Lady is a total immigrant butterfly and yearly sightings vary tremendously, no doubt depending on weather and wind directions. This year was not a prolific one but a few were to be seen from June to late September.

The White butterflies were interesting. The Large White is also an immigrant butterfly but can also over-winter here in chrysalis form. This year was absolutely excellent for the species and unusually it outnumbered the indigenous Small White which did not have a bad year anyhow. The Green Veined White had a poor year.

The common "field" butterflies had a mixed Summer. July and August are their main flight times and this year was good for Gatekeeper and Small Skipper whilst Meadow Brown recovered somewhat after the awful 2024.



Common brimstone

However, Ringlet for some reason did very badly despite enjoying similar habitats. One could also include the Speckled Wood in this group and this year they were to be seen over a very long six-month period although the best day's sightings were unexceptional.

The first butterfly to be seen this year was a Brimstone but in Eccleshall their sightings are few and far between. The Orange Tip is a spring butterfly of which the male is more easily identified and it had the best year for four years. We have two "Blues" the most common of which is the Holly Blue which has a spring and summer brood and this year I saw a very late one on 10th October in our garden, but their numbers are always relatively low: the other is the Common Blue whose habitat was disturbed by the building of the Sancerre Grange Housing Estate.

This year the best day saw four Common Blues which was much better than 2024 when none were seen at all.

The only other butterflies seen in 2025 were Small Copper and Brown Argus. Neither had been seen in 2024 and I was delighted when one of the latter appeared in my garden on 21st July.

The few observations of the Small Copper mainly took place in the fields just East of Eccleshall.

So, all in all a pretty good year for butterflies in Eccleshall.

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Stone Chrysanthemum and Dahlia Society's Gardening Club Meetings

A couple of updates for the beginning of our programme this year -

On **March 12th** Paul Green will give a talk - Plants of the Season. Paul Green of Green's Leaves will take us on a journey through the seasons, looking at appropriate plants and their preferred conditions.

He specialises in rare and unusual plants from around the world and will bring plants to sell as well as giving a practical demonstration so that we can see plants that he recommends for the season.

Then on **April 16th** (NB Change of date because of Easter) Harriet Rycroft (who worked for many years at Whichford Pottery in Warwickshire, where she became renowned for producing season after season of the most spectacular planting and colour combinations) will inspire us with her talk - Potty Time – a Year in Pots.

Stone Chrysanthemum and Dahlia Society's Gardening Club welcomes visitors and guests to attend meetings which are usually held on the **second Thursday of the month at 7.30 prompt** at Christ Church Centre, Christchurch Way, Stone ST15 8ZB. Refreshments are available from 6.45pm.

Further details of these and future meetings can be found on <https://stonecanddgardenclub.org/>



Vikki Brooks (centre) is presented with her Contribution to sben Award by Martin Murray, Staffordshire County Council's Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Economy and Skills (left) and sben Chair Adam Whitehouse (right).

Environment Awards held at Aston Marina

Staffordshire Business & Environment Network (sben) has presented a Penkridge business leader with an accolade in recognition of her commitment to the initiative across the county.

The 'Contribution to sben Award' was presented to Vikki Brooks at the network's annual general meeting, held at Aston Marina in Stone.

Vikki, the founder of Value-Led VAs, has played a key role in supporting sben since joining the network in 2023.

Her work has included participating in promotional filming with Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, championing the network's green skills training, contributing to its online forum, and introducing new members from across the county, all while continuing to build her own business.

Vikki was presented with her award by sben Chair Adam Whitehouse, founder of TMT First Ltd.

Vikki's Values-Led VA community brings together virtual assistants, charities, and micro-businesses, helping them build meaningful connections and share expertise.

Vikki said: "I am truly honoured to receive the Contribution to sben Award.

Being part of sben has allowed me to connect with so many people and organisations across Staffordshire.

I'm proud to support a network that

champions sustainability, collaboration, and community-minded business.

I hope Values-Led VAs can continue to support others within this network and help build more resilient, values-centred businesses in Staffordshire."

Founded in 1992, sben is a free membership association dedicated to helping Staffordshire organisations achieve long-term sustainability, improve environmental performance, and seize business opportunities through innovation.

Speaking at the event, Staffordshire County Council's Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Economy and Skills, Martin Murray, said: "sben is a true success story and is fast approaching an exciting milestone with nearly 1,000 members.

"This network excels at fostering cross-sector collaboration between businesses of all sizes, charities, projects, suppliers, and education providers.

It is a unique platform that encourages essential partnerships to boost competitiveness, resilience, and profitability across our county.

sben supports the delivery of tangible projects that enhance Staffordshire's business community and our shared environment.

Members play a significant role in creating jobs and fostering future growth for a thriving Staffordshire at the beating heart of the country's economy."



Rotary Christmas Bags

The Stafford Rotary Club packed 100 special Christmas food hampers for the Salvation Army based at the Citadel in Stafford on Monday 15th December 2025.

They were distributed to families in need known to the Salvation Army and social services and schools in the Stafford area

in time for Christmas filled with food suggested by them and paid for and collected by the club.

The hampers are provided each year and paid for with funds raised by the club.

The photo shows the Rotarians, partners, and friends who packed the hampers.

SDBLSS receives King's Award for Voluntary Service

It is with great pleasure that we announce that Stafford & District Bereavement & Loss Support Service (SDBLSS) has been awarded the King's Award for Voluntary Service in recognition of our charity work in the community.

We are extremely proud to receive this accolade in recognition of the service we have been providing to adults experiencing bereavement or loss in the Stafford, Stone and the surrounding district for the last 41 years.

The Volunteers at SDBLSS offer free counselling and support to local people navigating the difficulties that bereavement or loss bring and it is a privilege to walk alongside and support those people who are going through difficult times. SDBLSS also provides support to prisoners in HMP Stafford who are experiencing loss.

We must thank the King's Award adjudicators for selecting our charity to receive this prestigious award and of course, our Volunteers, who give their time and skills freely, for their dedication, support and empathy. Also, thanks to our Trustees who manage the running of the charity and our Admin staff who support the Volunteers, Trustees and the people who contact our service for support.

SDBLSS links with universities offering student placements for students undertaking degree courses in Counselling and Psychotherapy and provide ongoing training and supervision to these students and all Volunteers involved with the service.

SDBLSS is also involved with the Circle of Friends' group which was set up over 2 years ago and co-hosted by one of our Volunteers. **The group meets every 2 weeks between 2pm and 4pm at Coop Funeral Care in Stone**, and is open to anyone experiencing a loss or feels isolated and would like to join a social group for a cuppa and chat. Co-op Funeral Care continue to support this group with both the venue and refreshments.

The Staffordshire Independent Networking Group (SING) based in Stone has supported SDBLSS for the last two years free of charge to help promote, support and fundraise for the charity including printed t-shirts for local races, printing of leaflets, donations and auction prizes.

Looking for a welcoming space where your little ones can play?

Why not come along to Jelly Tots, a vibrant toddler group that **meets every Tuesday at St Michael's Church from 9.30am till around 10.30am.**

With fun games, engaging activities, and a friendly atmosphere, Jelly Tots offers a wonderful opportunity for toddlers and their parents/carers to explore, play, and make new friends. No child is too young - come along and have a coffee and a chat.

Whether you're a parent, grandparent, or carer, all are welcome at Jelly Tots. Why not come and experience a community that's as warm and joyful as its name?



Upcoming Borough Roadworks

We're carrying out improvements and repairs across the district over the coming weeks - making a difference to communities across the borough.

The work will usually include repairs to the road, footways and kerbs and sometimes replacing manhole covers and grids, too.

Repairs are either scheduled as part of our annual programme or priorities put forward by your local county councillor. While work takes place, we do need to put temporary short-term closures in place, so we ask that you bear with us during these times.

Improvement works include:

Stafford: Bramall Lane (21 to 22 Jan), Charnley Road (29 Dec), Bertelin Road (19 to 20 Jan), Weston Road (12 to 16 Jan)

Great Bridgeford: Worston Lane (5 to 9 Jan)



Gnosall: Willey Lane, Doley Brook Lane and Hollies Brook Close (all 13 Jan), Anchor Way and The Horseshoe (12 Jan)

Stone: Lamb Lane and St Vincent Road (13 to 14 Jan), Birch Road (5 Jan)

Drain cleaning will take place in: Stafford: Park Crescent, Rowley Grove and Rowley Bank (22 Jan)

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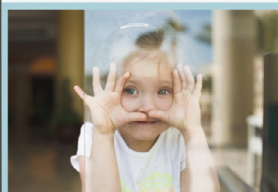
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