

BRIDGERULE

WATER FIASCO ! ?



Dear Readers,

May I firstly wish everyone a Happy New Year.

I would particularly like to thank Rose Hitchings for her continued contribution to The Buzz and to those volunteers who regularly delivering it through your door. Of course this village resource can only survive with adequate sponsorship and I thank everyone for their continued support.

The Environment Agency has been working for a number of weeks by the river which has left many of us far from convinced that the village flood problem is a thing of the past.

I hope you will be pleased to hear that Johnny Cowling is coming to our hall again. Please keep 9th October free.

Sadly we still do not know when our Post Office Outreach Service will commence but we will keep you posted on the situation.

Please remember that if you have anything you would like reported in the next issue of The Buzz I would like it by 20th February.

Sheila Cholwill - Editor

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A REMARKABLE YEAR

We bid farewell to a remarkable year in Bridgerule,
 A year with a wonderful spirit of goodwill flowing through.
 Folks drawn close by hobbies in our sparkling hall,
 A shining tribute to hard work, thoughtful planning, to benefit all.
 For with great enthusiasm folk have responded,
 Making village life feel friendly, warm and bonded.
 The Hall. a lasting legacy for future families following on,
 A lovely venue for weddings, meetings, dance and song.

In 2014 the Hall held a beautiful poignant War Commemoration,
 To honour and remember with respect those lost generations,
 Of incredibly brave men who gave their lives,
 For King and Country that others might survive.
 We shared a lovely thought provoking event,
 To help folk realise what it meant,
 To live in those dark days of war,
 The sacrifice made to keep the enemy from our shore.
 Whilst Bude Metric Brass played old wartime tunes,
 A delicious Cream Tea completed a most memorable afternoon.

And to Tavistock our kind Rector now moving on,
 So to Bridgerule the Rev Christopher Penn we welcome.
 For should a dear village loved one pass away,
 The valued presence of the Rector bringing solace to the solemn day.
 And with joyous days of christenings and wedding bells,
 To know with God's blessing all is well,
 For our ancient Church and little old chapel,
 Make these treasured days so special.

And in Bridgerule how many fortunate are we,
 To live in priceless peace and harmony,
 Where kindness and goodwill hold sway,
 To allow us to appreciate each precious given day.
 So now with hopes of fulfilment of many plans and dreams,
 With anticipation we enter our New Year, 2015.

Marie Field.

The Editor thanks Marie for her contributions to The Buzz

BRIDGERULE INTERNATIONAL FOLK DANCE GROUP

meet at
BRIDGERULE VILLAGE HALL
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If you would like to join us for an afternoon of dance and fun, please come along, you will be very welcome.

More information please contact Mike Allison 01288 381764

NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH NOTES

Welcome to 2015. I hope this year is as crime free as last year. I know we had a few things happen. Anyway be positive, lock yours up, check no one is taking your neighbour's stuff away - If they are dial phone 999 (does anyone "dial" now a days?) and report it.

Do not be taken in by anyone wanting any of your private/bank details—it's a scam. Unfortunately some folks have lost thousands of pounds by believing these scam calls. Also if it seems too good to be true - it probably is. It's all been said before - but it doesn't make it any the less true.

A few addresses etc., [www.hoax-slayer](http://www.hoax-slayer.com) (for scams and hoaxes)

The Trading Standards 08454 040506 The Silver Line - 08004 708090 or www.thesilverline.org.uk. The last two being a helpline for older people.

(I don't know how many years under your belt that means!)



John McDougall 01288 381237
Neighbourhood Watch Bridgerule
Area Co-ordinator

What's that Sergei?

Who's the Funny Man?



Sheila's Mentions:

Birthday Wishes to:-

- Betty Ingram** for the 4th January.
- Gary Abbott** for the 14th January.
- Joan Marshall** for the 24th January.
- Mrs Kate James 94 on the 6th February.**
- We wish you well after your recent fall.
- Ron Abbott** for the 8th February.
- Paul Cholwill** for the 13th February.
- Tony Wallis** for the 16th February.
- Harry Hillier-Cholwill** for the 24th February.

Our good wishes go to **John and Jean Hammond** who have recently moved to Hoo in Rochester.

Our thoughts are with **Donald, son and step-son of Sarah and Barry Williams.** We all wish him a speedy recovery.

We also hope that **Christine Gee** will soon be fit and well again.

Bridgerule Poppy Appeal

Audrey Bewes wishes to thank **Julie, Rose, Amanda and Pam** for their time and effort in collecting for the recent Village Poppy Appeal.

The total collected for **Bridgerule was £500.** The total collections for Holsworthy and the surrounding parishes was £10,077.

BRIDGERULE COFFEE CLUB

I am pleased to report and I hope some of you are too that Audrey and myself will be going to run our Village Coffee Club from now on. We both feel it is important that the Club should continue and so we propose that the next one will be on **TUESDAY JANUARY 20TH 2015 AT 10:30am.** We look forward to seeing the 'regulars' and hope that we can encourage new members, remembering this is a Village Coffee Club for all. We have a few new ideas and maybe you have too!

We sincerely thank Alec and Pat for leading the Coffee Club over the last two years and for the help they received from Barry and Sarah.

NHS BLOOD DONORS

PARK HOUSE CENTRE—IVOR POTTER HALL BUDE

Thursday 8th January 2015 - 13:00 to 15:15 & 16:45 to 19:00



CHAPEL REMEMBRANCE SERVICE

On Sunday, November 9th the Service of Remembrance at Bridgerule Methodist Chapel was led by Mrs Elizabeth Squire. Whilst the 2 minute silence was being observed, the congregation reflected not only on those from Bridgerule who made the ultimate sacrifice during World War 1 and World War 2 but on those who have to live with the consequences of more recent conflicts including Ireland, the Falklands, Iraq and Afghanistan. Our thoughts are with them all.

BRIDGERULE METHODIST CHAPEL

SERVICES FOR JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2015

4th January 2015	Mr J Guy	11.00am
11th January	Covenant Service at Bodmin Street 11.00am	
18th January	Mrs S Risdon	11.00am
25th January	Rev N Street - Sac	11.00am
1st February	Mr B Cleave	11.00am
8th February	Mr I Gilkinson	11.00am
15th February	Mrs E Squire	11.00am
22nd February	Mr T Sillifant	11.00am

FROM A CONCERNED RESIDENT

Dear Sheila,

As promised I am writing this on behalf of concerned residents. The Road from Little Bridge Meadow to Jewells Cross Service Station has now become busy owing to Bridgerule Residents

travelling to the Service Station for Papers, Milk etc, etc, those that walk (including Dog walkers) which is quite a few are now faced with SPEEDING MOTORISTS, White Van Drivers, Taxis and dare I say it

Ladies either going or coming from School Runs. I myself only just the other day had to jump on to the Grass Verge as a Van and a Car were converging from opposite directions, I have also noticed that very often a Taxi comes down and ALWAYS at MORE than 30 mph so someone from the village is either being picked up or dropped off. I hope that this Article will prompt some people to curb their speed and also REMIND Van and Taxi Drivers to take more care before there is a Tragic Accident.

Many thanks

V E PICKETT

Carol Singing around the village

On the two Wednesdays in the run up to Christmas some stalwart beings went round the village and sang carols. They were collecting for the Chapel, Church and School. The first week was very wet but we met outside the Village Christmas Tree and stoically carried on and were rewarded with Hot Chocolate and mince pies at the school hall afterwards.

Thank you so much to F.O.B.S. (Friends of Bridgerule School) for organising that.

The following week the weather was better and we sang for a lot longer in the Littlebridge and Southfields area. . We sang a special carol to Pat and Phil Hodges who were unable to come this time and also enjoyed sweets and mulled wine from kindly people on the way round.

The grand total of £192 was collected and the School, Church and Chapel have been given £64 each - thank you all you lovely generous villagers for supporting us!.

Once again Grandad's little 'dears' are a top priority for Christmas.



To keep up production this year Grandad Colin has had to call in the help of extra staff! Son Paul and his wife Stacey have been helping to make Santa's little helpers. Even 6 year old granddaughter, Ella has been painting red noses in order that demand can be met.

After carving over 160 heads, cutting over 160 bodies, 640+ legs and 320+ antlers these very individual reindeer have raised **over £2300** which will be donated to the family's favourite charity, Little Harbour Children's Hospice at St Austell.

Not only are Colin's reindeer proving popular in Devon and Cornwall but it seems that they are now going nationwide! Christmas presents this year in the form of reindeer have travelled to homes in Shrewsbury, London, Bristol, Hertfordshire and Dorchester. Two even attended a wedding in Wales!

The family are quite proud to have received a hand written letter from The Chief Executive and co-founder of Children's Hospice Southwest, Eddy Farwell, thanking them for their continued support that they give to the charity. He in fact has purchased 3 reindeer and has named each of them. Quite a few have named their purchases it seems – Colin being a favourite! We apologise to anyone who hasn't received their Rudolph but as you can see granddad has been a tad bit busy. We are hoping that he will begin production again in 2015 and all we can say is get your orders in as soon as possible.

The family give a huge thank you to everyone for purchasing something a little different for Christmas and supporting a wonderful charity at the same time.

HARRY CLEARLY ENJOYING HIS CHRISTENING!



Harry Paul Hillier-Cholwill was christened recently at St Bridget's Church by The Rev Chris Hardwick. This being the last christening before Rev Hardwick begins his new appointment.

Clearly Harry took the christening in his stride as he was watched by members of his family, godparents and some friends. The invited guests then were welcomed for refreshments at the village hall where Harry really enjoyed his christening cake!! (pictures are available to prove it)

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ST. BRIDGET'S CHURCH SERVICE TIMES

January	4th	Morning Prayer	11.00am	Mary Aicheler
	11th	Eucharist	11.00am	Rev. Scott.
	18th	Plough Sunday Pancrasweek	10.30am	Rev. Hodgetts.
	25th	Benefice Service	10.30am	Arch Deacon.
February	1st	Family Service	11.00am	
	8th	Eucharist	11.00am	Rev. Scott.
	15th	Morning Prayer	11.00am	Mary Aicheler.
	18th	Ash Wednesday	7.30pm	
	22nd	Eucharist	11.00am	Rev. Hodgetts.

Christmas Concert

A lovely Christmas concert was held in the village hall on 12th December. To a packed hall the Minstrel Singers from Canworthy Water and Bude Metric Brass entertained us all to a really festive and jolly concert. The audience participation was a real fun time with The Twelve days of Christmas quite something to behold!!! Best of all though was the singing of Silent Night by the ladies in just candlelight - really magical!

Chairman Keith Roberts kept the whole thing moving with his very funny jokes and anecdotes. The raffle was very well supported and the whole event raised £409 towards the village hall refurbishment fund. Thank you to all those generous people who gave such delicious food and/ or raffle prizes, without you we don't know what we would have done. Particular mention to Kay who made 140 absolutely lovely pasties which everybody really enjoyed - thank you so much.

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A STUNNING SENIOR MOMENT



A self-important college freshman walking along the beach took it upon himself to explain to a senior citizen resting on the steps why it was impossible for the older generation to understand his generation. "You grew up in a different world, actually an almost primitive one" the student said loud enough for others to hear. "The young people of today grew up with television, jet planes, space travel, man walking on the moon. We have nuclear energy, ships and cell phones, computers with light speed....and many more." After a brief silence, the senior citizen responded as follows.

"You're right son. We didn't have those things when we were young....so we invented them. Now, you arrogant little [redacted] what are you doing for the next generation? The applause was amazing!"

ONLINE LOST PROPERTY REPORTING SERVICE ACCREDITED BY UK

There is a new, quick and easy way of reporting lost property online.

The ReportMyloss website allows people to log their lost item using an online form, which will register the item on a Police Approved, National Database.

Police all over the UK will be able to view the database, which is available from the 3rd November 2014.

For more information visit: www.reportmyloss.com “



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The editor was asked recently if she would write a report on our new community choir for “Together” a quarterly magazine for the Bude and Holsworthy Methodist Circuit.

A Church Council Meeting was about to take place and friends were being encouraged to attend. One such friend, Liz James, rang me to tender her apologies but asked as to what we would be discussing at the meeting. Our numbers attending our services like some other chapels has fallen in recent times and I mentioned we needed to try and focus on some new ideas. This led to Liz saying “how about a singing group” and this is where the subject ended.

The meeting took place and at the appropriate time I mentioned the conversation I had had earlier with Liz. Encouragingly the ladies at the meeting seemed to take the idea on board immediately. We needed someone to lead us and the name of the person we thought would be good was Victor Bickle from Stratton. Vic had formed a musical group with some of our children some years before which at the time our children really enjoyed and when last preaching at Bridgerule we remembered that he had remarked how well he thought we had sung at his service.

The next morning I rang Vic and put the proposition to him. His answer was that he felt quite honoured to be asked and within a few minutes he said “choose a night to meet; I will select a few pieces to sing and see you there”! We wanted this to be a choir open to our community and so I requested that although I would like us to meet in the chapel I did not want anyone to feel intimidated by this. I also thought it good if the choice of songs sung could be ours on occasions. Vic totally agreed and he has encouraged that.

Monday nights were chosen and on the first night I did think - I wonder how many will turn up. Well it was 10 and "the choir" was born. News quickly travelled and 8 weeks later 'the choir' has become The Tamarside Singers and we now have 23 members -20 ladies and 3 gentlemen. We are backed by 2 Acoustic guitars and a bass guitar.

We are now practising for our very first concert – based around Christmas and due to be held at our Chapel on Sunday 7th December at 7.00pm. Tickets are £3 and money raised will be given to Little Harbour Children's Hospice in St. Austell which I regularly volunteer at. Although we will be singing some traditional carols we will be singing other Christmas upbeat pieces.

Monday has become a favourite evening for quite a few of us. We used to finish at 9.00pm but we are finding that the time is going so quickly we can still be singing at 9.30pm and then ending up discussing what we have sung over a cup of tea or coffee.

What started out as a telephone conversation, with a little effort has grown into something very positive and enjoyable and comes very highly recommended.

Sheila Cholwill

Bridgerule Methodist Chapel

The Tamarside Singers 1st Christmas Concert was a sell out and £400 has been sent to Little Harbour Children's Hospice in St Austell. They are also singing for a member of the choir, whose wedding reception is being held in Bude just after Christmas!

They Walk among Us!

A guy bought a new fridge for his house. To get rid of his old fridge, which was still working, he put it in his front yard and hung a sign on it saying "Free to a good home , You want it, you take it".

For three days the fridge sat there without anyone looking twice. He eventually decided that people were too mistrustful of this deal. So he changed the sign to read: 'Fridge for sale £20.'

The next day someone stole it!

One of our readers of The Buzz has received the following Christmas and would like to share it:



I'm a little fir tree living all alone.

Every year you lift me and take me to your home.

And put me in a bucket and cover me with bling.

I also have my own bright light shining from within.

I'm here to bring you joy this time of year.

And ...by the way...let me make this clear.

The paper this is written on came from all my mates.

So everyone one around can really celebrate

The birth of the Christ Child, many years ago.

Jesus was a carpenter...wow...wouldn't you know.

What a coincidence, paper, trees and wood.

All linked together.... Just so you could

Wish everybodyA Happy Christmas Day

And may your dreams come true...then, as you pray

For a prosperous NEW YEAR with health and happiness

Remember to say thank you... for you too are blessed.

You have your own light shining from within.

Keep it burning brightly, never let him dim.

Take me to the recycling when the 12 days are up

So you can have more cards from the paper pulp.

Next year, at Christmas, when you take a tree from the ground.

We are in this together... what goes around, comes around.

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SEPTEMBER 1996 - BRIDGERULE UNDER 12 FOOTBALL CLUB



BRIDGERULE MANAGERS: Bridgerule Under-12 squad line up before their 3-2 defeat of Bratton Clovelly in the Kingsley Youth League. Back row from left, W Frost, D Yelland, S McCardie, G Snowden, M Norrington, J Neep, G Short, K Edwards manager; front, A Youlden, L Morris, Z Gardener, T Frost, M Snowden, G Snowden, A Snowden, D Youlden, R Bowden and R Palmer. The scorers were G Short, T Frost and R Bowden.

Picture: Richard Tappin, Pyworthy.

BRIDGERULE LADIES SKITTLES

We would like more ladies to join us.

Willing to play on most Thursday evenings during the winter months.

If you are interested please contact either Audrey on 381402 or Angela 381437.



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Spotlight on Heather Darwin.....

Never one to let the grass grow under her feet after selling her company in 2012, Heather Darwin now looks after a few acres locally. She breeds sheep for the freezer, Ruby Devon cattle for selling and for beef. Animals have always been close to her heart and, after moving to Bridgerule in 2007, she learned that relatives in the 1800's were sheep farmers in Marwood, near Barnstaple. She also mentors people starting a business, studies homeopathy and hosts animal health courses - see sparklinghealthforanimals.weebly.com.



Although not a country girl, Heather was brought up in the country in Sussex and spent the summer holidays helping her aunt and uncle on their farm with the milking, chickens, hay-making, hop-picking and general farm work. This was where she learned to drive tractors and cars at a very early age.

The family moved to Seaford in Sussex where Heather with her brother and father went to watch Hot Rod racing at nearby circuits. One day a new formula was announced – Banger Racing. Father, brother and friends all said 'why don't you have a go, Heather?' - so she did at the age of 17. The cars were free MOT failures and all that was required was a safety harness, the glass and interior stripped out and a gallon of petrol left in the tank. She raced for six seasons, on and off, ending with the banger championships in Wimbledon. Cars raced were the collectors' cars of today – MG Magnettes, Humber Hawks, Austin Cambridges, Standard 10s and so on.

After working/partying in Holland for a year, Heather returned home to find a job with a motor racing team – taking a receptionist job in the motel nearest to the Goodwood race circuit where the teams tested their cars. This led to employment by a Formula Ford race hire company - everything from administration to driving the race car transporter around the UK. Having seen others driving the Formula Fords, Heather found herself a sponsor who provided training, a transporter, a car, mechanics and all necessities to contest the 1975 and 1976 Brush Fusegear championship. At the time there were four women in single seater racing – Heather, another girl in Scotland also racing Formula Ford, Lella Lombardi in F1 and Davina Galica in Formula Atlantic.

In 1976 the opportunity arose to become Operations Director of her sponsor's air-taxi business, so Heather gave up racing. The company operated three twin-engined six-seater aircraft flying throughout Europe and the UK and Heather's role ranged from promoting the company, to finding pilots to fly the aircraft, to dealing with the Civil Aviation Authority and making sure aircraft came out of maintenance on time.

She married Christopher Darwin who had joined the company from the Royal Navy and flying Buccaneers from HMS Ark Royal. The two of them then ran the company and obtained a half share in it. The company soon operated six aircraft and was sold when Christopher joined Laker Airways at Gatwick in 1978. Before moving to Sussex Heather gained her Private Pilot's Licence, training at Netherthorpe, which has the shortest licensed runway in the UK. Every landing was quite a challenge, especially on the first solo flight.

In Sussex Heather started breeding, showing and selling Jacob sheep at a time when they were on the endangered list of the Rare Breeds Society. Several firsts and reserve champion wins at shows such as the South of England and the Bath and West were achieved.

In 1987 Heather started an international aviation recruitment agency for aircraft maintenance personnel. This covered everything to do with maintenance - from the maintenance director through all the workshops, planning, design etc. – and included all aircraft types – airliners, business jets and helicopters. It expanded every year and soon employed over 100 contract engineers at any one time. Heather's travels took her to Kazakhstan, China, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Abu Dhabi, Dubai, USA, Europe and occasionally the UK. Hers was the first overseas company to be contracted by Garuda Airways in Indonesia to assist the company with a heavy maintenance check.

A week after the Berlin Wall came down, Heather went to Hungary to negotiate with a government company to build a four-bay Boeing 747 hangar on a military airfield. Mrs Thatcher helped by putting a word in for Heather's company with the Hungarian prime minister to change the status of the airfield from military to civilian. Alas, the 1992 Gulf War and recession hit - the backers and first client for the facility pulled out. However, a training school was established for Hungarian maintenance personnel to obtain Civil Aviation Authority licences.

Besides running the business, Heather had some time for other activities. She and Christopher took up historic rallying during the 1990s in a Mark 1 Ford Cortina (with him navigating); besides other shorter events they competed in the Le Jog (Land's End to John O'Groats) winter rally five times, crashing once and winning the class twice.

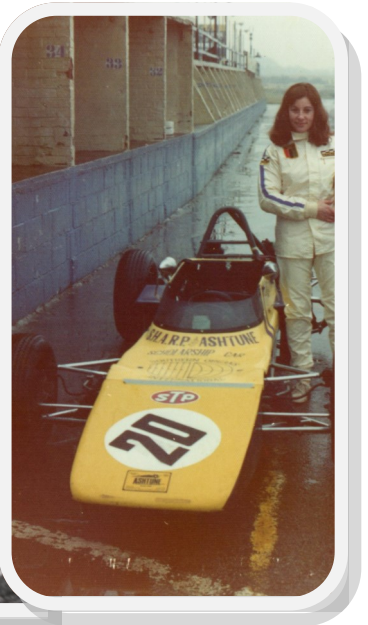
She also completed a freefall skydiving course in Florida.

Between 2004 and 2006 Heather took part in the Fun Cup endurance circuit racing series; the car was a Beetle lookalike single seater – a space frame chassis, plastic body and VW Golf engine. Races lasted generally 4 hours, with pit stops every 40 minutes; the car was shared with two other drivers – Christopher supervised the pits. The final race of the last season was the European championship, eight hours at Jarama, Madrid. The team qualified 34th out of 55 starters and finished 6th, first British private team. It was a good time to stop.

Since 2001 both Heather and Christopher have been involved running charity events at motor circuits – about five per year. Drivers bring their own cars and drive them at speed on the circuit, but always with regard to other cars and following the circuit rules; these are not races.

Heather still keeps up her driving skills, providing tuition for newcomers who wish to join in the 'Fun with a Purpose' – which living in Bridgerule is now.

The editor wishes to thank Heather most sincerely for her Spotlight and can report that she is still a busy lady.



Operation Fardel - Frauds in Devon & Cornwall

Devon and Cornwall Police have received reports relating to a professionally run national scam. This has led to vulnerable people, who are often elderly, being ruthlessly defrauded out of thousands of pounds. There have been a considerable number of victims nationwide, including many in the Devon and Cornwall area. The average age of victim appears to be 70 years old, with losses ranging between £4000 - £100 000+.

The offender(s) modus operandi is to call unsuspecting victims purporting to be an official body, such as the police or bank. At present the common theme is for the caller to claim to be a Metropolitan police detective. The offender(s) then convince the victim that there has been some form of fraudulent activity with their bank account. They sometimes claim to have someone in police custody who was found with the victims bank details, or that their account has, or is being used, to withdraw substantial sums of money. The caller requests bank account details, PIN numbers and other details as a matter of urgency to prevent further substantial losses.

The caller often invites the victim to hang up the phone and call their bank or local police to confirm events. What the victim is unaware of is that the caller has maintained an open phone line, so on re-dialling the victim is actually connected to and conversing with the same offender(s) throughout the whole process. Once having attained all bank details the caller eventually tries to convince the victim to package their bank cards, seal them in an envelope and wait for a courier to arrive and collect. On occasion the caller also convinces the victim to visit their bank and withdraw substantial sums of cash from their accounts and await further instructions; usually involving a courier as described. The offender(s) sound professional, use decoding electronic devices as part of the process and even have automated messages and background music if on hold; it is a sophisticated and well planned operation which gives the impression of being genuine.

Please can members of your council be aware of this scam and enquire into any behaviour seeming to relate to it. If anyone believes a member of the public is in the process of being defrauded or has been the victim of this type of incident, please contact Devon and Cornwall Police on 101 immediately.

Hopefully together we can prevent many people falling victim to this terrible crime, which is having a massively detrimental effect on the most vulnerable people in our community. Thank you for your co-operation.



HEDLEY WOOD CHRISTMAS FAIR

On Saturday November 8th and Sunday November 9th the annual Christmas Fair was held at Hedley Wood Caravan Park, with stalls to suit all tastes. Roast lunches were very much enjoyed by many of the visitors and the excellent attendance meant that a donation was able to be made to help continue the work of Dementia UK.



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Wednesday January 21st 2015
Wednesday 18th February 2015

LAST CAROL SERVICE FOR PRESENT MINISTER AND VICAR



Members and friends of both St Bridget's and the Methodist Chapel enjoyed a recent Carol Service conducted by the Rev. John Henry. Special readings were given by some of the congregation and Rev John Henry accompanied a chosen carol on his guitar.

This was the last joint service at Bridgerule for Rev. Chris Hardwick as he and his family are moving to take up an appointment in Tavistock. Rev John Henry will also be leaving The Bude and Holsworthy Methodist Circuit as Superintendent to take up another appointment later in the year in On behalf of readers of The Buzz we send both them and their families our very best wishes.

A business card for 'The Cabin Massage and Beauty'. The card has a light beige background with decorative borders on the left and right sides featuring stylized green and brown leaves. At the top center is a logo consisting of three green leaves. Below the logo, the text 'The Cabin Massage and Beauty' is written in a cursive font, enclosed in a decorative frame. Underneath this, the phone number 'Call: 07772712227' is printed. Further down, the text 'Relax, Unwind & Rejuvenate...' is written in a bold, sans-serif font. Below that, the address 'at Hedley Wood Caravan & Camping Park, Bridgerule, EX22 7ED' is printed. At the bottom, the website 'http://thecabinmassageandbeauty.weebly.com' is listed.

Looking for your First World War ancestors.

By Christopher Darwin November 2014

My brother, sister and I recently went to Belgium for a weekend to see where our grandfather – our mother's father - had been killed exactly 100 years earlier. This short article may be useful for a reader intending to see where an ancestor died, and may be buried – many casualties, including our grandfather, have no known grave and are among the thousands of names on the Menin Gate memorial at Ypres.

My grandfather L.S.Coke was born in 1878 and, after serving in the Warwickshire Regiment in Egypt, he joined the newly formed Irish Guards in 1901. He left the Army when he married in 1908 and became a Reserve. He returned to his regiment when war broke out in August 1914 and arrived at the front line in France on 18th September as part of the 1st Battalion's reinforcements after four weeks of campaign. The Irish Guards moved into Belgium at the beginning of October – this was still warfare of movement, before trench warfare became established. L.S.Coke was killed during the first battle of Ypres at Klein Zillebeke, a hamlet a few miles south east of Ypres, on 31st October 1914 - a critical day when the Germans nearly broke through our lines. Besides the Commonwealth War Graves Commission website, plenty of other information is available on the internet. It is important that the entry into Google is correctly presented, so put the whole name in inverted commas (eg "Lieutenant L.S. Coke"); this will make Google search only for entries corresponding to the whole phrase inside the inverted commas. Try it with or without the rank and regiment, with and without the full Christian names. Two phrases can be inserted at the same time, eg "LS Coke" + "Irish Guards".

Bear in mind that the information gained is not necessarily correct – and the errors may be repeated; Wikipedia relies on information fed into it. An official regimental history is more valid than an amateur website and the history of the Irish Guards was particularly useful in our case.

We had acquired a map of Belgium and France overprinted with the frontline and its main variations over the four years, and a large-scale map of the Ypres area from a friend who runs battlefield tours.

These were particularly useful – but nothing can beat actually being on the ground rather than just visualizing it from the map. The three of us travelled by car using the Tunnel (£120 return, very easy handling) and drove to Ypres (less than 2 hours from Calais). The **Kasteelhof 't Hooghe** hotel was just outside the town on the Menin Road; this had been part of the front line for most of the war. Like nearly all buildings in the area, it had been flattened during 1914-18 and rebuilt afterwards – the hotel had been the stables of a chateau that was never rebuilt; there was still evidence of trenches in the garden. On the Friday evening we attended the Last Post ceremony at the Menin Gate memorial – simple, respectful, and moving.

On the Saturday morning we were collected by a local guide, Erwin Ureel, a retired Belgian soldier with wide knowledge; four hours with him were a sound investment. He explained the background to the war as well as the campaign around Ypres and showed us where the Irish Guards had been during October 1914. Finally, we were taken to the area where L.S. Coke had been killed; he had been ‘buried in the farm’ - his grave would have been blown to bits over the next four years. Erwin photographed the three of us near the likeliest spot.

On the Sunday we spent a long time at the museum at Zonnebeke, four miles north east of Ypres and recommended by Erwin. The displays were well presented and included the aims of individual campaigns and what was actually achieved. In the grounds reconstructed trenches showed their development throughout the war. We also visited several of the smaller cemeteries during the weekend – so many of the headstones were without names and inscribed ‘A soldier of the Great War, known unto God’. We returned to England on the Sunday afternoon.

Our main reaction after this short tour was that we should have made this visit long ago. Our mother was five years old when her father was killed; growing up as a young child during that war with her grieving mother must have been a very difficult start in life. She never spoke about her father or his death – and we did not ask. Most of us fail to talk to our parents and learn about our family’s past history; then suddenly it is too late.

After returning home I printed from the internet a map of the Ypres area and also a map of our home area on the same scale. The war happened in a very small space mainly east of the town – the Ypres Salient – and, considering the huge numbers of casualties, the comparison with familiar territory was rather shocking.

If you have an ancestor or relation who died on the Western Front do consider a little expedition. If you need more information about Ypres in particular, feel free to contact me on c.darwin@virgin.net or 01288 381265.

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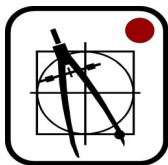
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