

REPORT FROM THE CHAIRMAN:

Chairman Cllr. Bridget Veitch

It gives me great pleasure to see the days lengthening, the spring flowers blooming and everything looking so cheerful. I hope you are taking delight in it all too, and we must express our thanks to Cranbrook in Bloom and all the Cranbrook and Sissinghurst gardeners for all their hard work planting the bulbs and making the gardens, baskets and planters so colourful.

I am sure that you will be pleased to hear that, due to their hard work, our Parish Clerks have achieved a Quality Award for our Parish Council. This comes with a logo that can be displayed on our website and all our documentation. It demonstrates to everyone that we have an excellently run Parish Office. The reviewers were particularly pleased with our website, the Action Plans, the Councillors Cards and the Committees Terms of Reference. We are the only Parish Council in the Tunbridge Wells Borough to have attained this award. Our congratulations go to our Clerks.

We have recently made changes to our website, and I recommend that you visit it. The Councillor Cards provide information on all our parish councillors, and the minutes of the various meetings are held there for your interest and information.

The Appledore section of the Swattenden centre continues to have 30-40 young men, aged 16-18. They are very grateful for all the support that the councillors and local community have given these vulnerable children. This support includes everything from football matches against local schools to volunteers providing English classes and baking cakes. Thanks to everyone for their help.

There will be changes to the Civic Amenity vehicle service in the new financial year, probably in April or May. Tunbridge Wells Borough Council has determined that the provision of this service is a discretionary service, and therefore it could be abandoned to save money. After many hours of discussion the decision is that the service will continue, but on a reduced basis, if the Parish Council pays towards it. As the Parish Council considers this an essential service, we have, albeit reluctantly, agreed to pay it. It will be a reduced service, with the refuse lorry visiting Cranbrook once a fortnight and Sissinghurst once a month. Household and garden refuse will be collected on alternate visits.

One of our Parish Councillors resigned in January, due to other commitments. This is not an unusual occurrence in Parish Councils, and normally potential replacements are found as the result of due process and advertising, and the Parish Council then decides whom to co-opt via ballot. This time a request for a By-election was submitted, accompanied by the required number (10) of names and signatures of electors.

As a result there will be a By-election on Thursday 17 March. Unfortunately, the cost of this unexpected By-election is required to be borne by the Parish Council (and therefore you all as ratepayers), and is estimated to be at least £3,000, and more likely to be £5,000 or more.

Many of you will have recently received a flyer about a loan poll. This was circulated anonymously and privately and the authors clearly did not want their names to be associated with it. It contains both inaccurate information and speculation in order to raise concerns amongst our parishioners. It was not circulated by the Parish Council.

Correct information is that:

- The Brick Kiln/Corn Hall Farm development planning applications have not yet been submitted
- The Parish Council is not under pressure to build the shell of the Community Centre
- The Parish Council will be using a qualified project manager for the project
- The loan poll/survey sheets will be numbered and opened in the presence of senior representations of two firms of local solicitors
- The Parish Council will not apply for a loan without the agreement of the ratepayers. Successful fund raising will reduce the loan amount requested.

When the planning application for the Community Centre was submitted in January 2015, we had hoped that construction would start later that year. It was prudent therefore to budget for the upfront costs prior to fund raising and we set aside £40,000 for this purpose. We also agreed to provide £10,000 to St Georges Institute, Sissinghurst, for its renovation and extension. It is not true that the increase in the precept was totally due to this.

The rates the Public Works Loan Board quoted on 25 February 2016 for a fixed rate loan over 50 years of £2,000,000 were 3.38%. That would mean an increase in a Band D precept of £0.33 per week, or if the £40,000 already in the precept is included in the calculation, £0.64 per week. As the number of ratepayers in the parish is certain to increase over the next 50 years, the amount needed from an individual ratepayer is likely to reduce year on year.

The Parish Council firmly believes that the community wants a Community Centre, and one that is a single building in the centre of Cranbrook, and continues to work towards achieving this.

All the Parish Council meetings, and the Committee meetings are advertised and open to the public to attend. The minutes of these meetings are available on the website, and from the Parish Office, together with supporting information. Nothing is hidden. If anyone has any questions, or would like to discuss any aspect further, please direct them to the Parish Office, and we will respond to all contact.

Community Centre Committee Report

The committee has not met since September as the impending decisions were important and needed to be discussed by the Parish Council as a whole.

There have been two Extraordinary meetings of the Parish Council dedicated to discussions and decisions on the Community Centre project. The minutes of these are available on the website. There was public attendance at these meetings, and the public were given their opportunity to share their views with the Parish Council before any decisions were taken.

The size of the Community Centre has been reduced by approximately 14% on guidance from the planners at Tunbridge Wells Borough Council.

The planning application that will include the whole of the Cranbrook Engineering site, Wilkes Field, and the Community Centre, is due to be submitted to Tunbridge Wells Borough Council in March. The plans will be then available for anyone to access via the Tunbridge Wells Borough Council website, and comments can be submitted. It is the intention of the Parish Council, in conjunction with Amsbury Developments, to display the submitted plans in the Vestry Hall on a Friday and Saturday, so that anyone can come and see them, ask questions, make comments. The plans would then be transferred to the Weald Information Centre for any further viewings. The provisional date for this event is Friday 8 April and Saturday 9 April, but this may change if the planning application is not submitted by then.

I hope that you will take the opportunity to view these plans, and that you will be pleased with the results.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

POLICY & RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT:

Chairman Cllr. Peter Goodchild

Der spring is sprung Der grass is riz. I wonder where dem boidies is.
Der little boids is on der wing, Ain't dat absoid? Der little wings is on de boid!

These lyrics are believed to have been penned anonymously? If you think otherwise... offer your suggestions to our learned parish clerks! But my point for raising this little poem is to remind us all, yes, springtime is arriving! With all the colour and freshness, sunshine and warmth (?) God has given us the beauty of springtime! Oh Hip Hip! Horaay or Hallelujah...! Or to borrow a line or two from Mr Wordsworth on daffodils: *“ten thousand I saw at a glance... What wealth the show to me had brought... And then my heart with pleasure fills, And dances with the daffodils!”*

As I write the blue sky is making me look beyond February. My heart is in springtime! And believe me, there are notes of pleasure amidst the gloom of grey. Let me share some points.

Just in the last few weeks the parish of Cranbrook and Sissinghurst has been awarded the much sought after **“Quality Award Status”** by the Regional Accreditation panel! Now this is no mean feat, as you will understand when you realise that ‘we’ are the only parish to acquire this in the whole of The Royal Borough! Hearty thanks and congratulations to our two worthy clerks who have been so hard working to obtain this prestigious award. The panel was unanimous. The criterion was satisfied, and integral to this application was the quality of the website, detailed action plans and the various committees’ terms of reference. So, beyond the detailed minutiae of the panel’s investigation, we end up with a status unequalled in the borough. Check that!

We come down to earth with a thud to mention ‘litter’. Probably most residents of the parish spend more time picking litter up than they do spreading it around. Keep it up! We are winning. With the Queen’s 90th Birthday celebrations taking place this year, the “Clean for the Queen” campaign is sweeping through the county. In June there’s a Tea Party in Sissinghurst, there’s a special 2016 Garden Safari, and a beacon will be lit on St’ Dunstan’s Tower. But prior to that, it will be a clean for the Queen in early March, but let’s keep it going through the months on this year! We do all benefit from our combined efforts!

Whilst on this ‘rubbish’ subject you may have heard there are on-going discussions about the civic amenity refuse vehicles’ visits to Cranbrook and Sissinghurst? We are fighting to keep them rolling, but cutbacks are happening at so many levels. One answer is to produce less rubbish... hmm? You would be right if you say: “Easier said than done for many”, but perhaps helpful to bear in mind. Meanwhile, you can be sure that your Parish Councillors are doing all they can to retain this service in the “quality” corner of the Borough!

For the historians among us, a question: “What connection has Ilkley Moor in Yorkshire with Cranbrook in Kent? On the 13th May 2016 there will be an unveiling of a brass plaque on White Wells Bath House, on Ilkley Moor in Yorkshire, joining our two towns in perpetuity! The lyrics of the famous anthem “On Ilkley Moor Baht’tat”, were put to music composed by Cranbrook resident Thomas Clarke, who wrote (1805) the tune “Cranbrook” used for several hymns including ‘O for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer’s praise’ and Christmas carol ‘While shepherds watched’. So now we celebrate our Yorkshire joining by this thread and we agreed to send a contribution towards the cost of this plaque, affirming a friendship link into the future. So next you visit the Moors, it will be “Ey up mate” or “Tarra” ‘til next time ☺

Let me conclude this brief report with a couple of issues:

The Chairman will cover this matter but suffice to say that the much- longed-for Community Centre is nudging closer to reality. We're all eager to see a bespoke 'centre' for Cranbrook rising from the ground. It's been a long wait for some of us and with so many hurdles to jump, it can get tiring. Our noble chairman is doing a totally admirable work with good expertise. Her latest achievement is the comprehensive business plan gratefully welcomed by the parish council, particularly this committee which I chair.

Secondly may I express, on behalf of this committee, the very good and often unseen work done by so many of you as parishioners, residents, families and individuals who all contribute to make Cranbrook what it is today! We head towards the spring, with a spring in our step, looking for growth, new life, new creations and harmony of spirit in our diversity.

Thanks to all who care and give and live for the community of Cranbrook and Sissinghurst parish!

THE BUDGETS FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR 2016/17

Every year starting in October the various committees draw up and agree a budget for their committee for the following financial year. These budgets are then put before the Policy and Resources Development Committee in December where they are agreed for final adoption by the Full Council in early January. From these the Council sets a 'precept' (the amount to be collected from our parishioners with which to run our services.

Looking at the budget gives you an overview of the Parish Council services we provide and our responsibilities. For 2016/2017 we have budgeted for the following expenditure (in approximate terms):

	£'s
ADMINISTRATION	18,000
INSURANCE	10,000
SALARIES & PENSIONS	77,000
COMMUNITY FACILITIES	40,000
STREET LIGHTING	18,000
RECREATION & SPORTS GROUNDS	40,000
CAR PARKS (including money put aside for future major repairs)	50,000
BURIAL GROUNDS, CHURCHYARD & WAR MEMORIALS	32,000
VESTRY HALL, COTTAGE & WEALD INFORMATION CENTRE	22,400
GRANTS FOR COMMUNITY LED PROJECTS	7,000
TOURISM & COMMUNITY ENHANCEMENT	1,000
PLANNING APPEALS & PRESERVATION	2,000
VANDALISM & CONTINGENCY	3,000
EARMARKED FOR FUTURE PROJECTS	14,000
NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN	5,000
CIVIC AMENITY VEHICLE & TRAVELLER INCURSIONS	<u>3,000</u>
	342,400

From this, for the financial year beginning 1st April 2016, we have set a precept of £304,200 which results in a Cranbrook and Sissinghurst band D property paying £2.35 a week. Last year (2015/16) the precept was £288,100 thus a band D is currently paying £2.28.

You will notice that the budget includes £40,000 towards the design and planning for the Community Centre, this is the same figure as already included for this year (2015/16), so there is no extra cost to the council tax payer in year 2016/17.

We think that it is important to make a start on producing a Neighbourhood Plan so that the Parish has some control on future development, and to this end we have added £5,000 to the precept.

Other additions are an extra £2,000 towards TWBC's costs for retaining the Saturday morning refuse lorry and £1,000 payment to enable TWBC to make enforcement orders against traveller incursions in the future and enable them to get them 'moved on' as happened last year.

We are now having to pay full business rates on the Tanyard and Regal car parks of over £20,000 per year which was allowed for in our original budgeting. The difference between our planned expenditure of £342,400 and our precept of £304,200 is accounted for by income from hiring out the Vestry Hall and Council Chamber; burial ground fees; allotment and sports ground rents and bank interest. We also have income from the Tomlin Murton Playing Fields Trust in the form of the rent from Angley Cottage.

We use our general reserves where necessary and have earmarked reserves put aside for planned projects.

If you have any questions on the budgets or precept please contact me or our Chairman via the Parish Office.

The financial results for the year ending 31st March 2016 will be reported at the Annual Parish meeting to be held in Sissinghurst on 20th April. We would love to see you there.

BURIAL GROUNDS AND PROPERTIES:

Chairman Cllr. Brian Clifford



Golford Chapel Opening Times 2016

The Chapel will be open every Wednesday from Wednesday 6th April until Wednesday 26th October. Opening times are 10am until 4pm on each day unless stated otherwise. The Chapel will also be open on the days shown below, but are liable to change if circumstances arise throughout the course of the year.

Mothering Sunday		Sunday 6 th March
Easter Weekend:		
	Good Friday	Friday 25 th March
	Easter Saturday	Saturday 26 th March
	Easter Day	Sunday 27 th March
	Easter Monday	Monday 28 th March
Mayday Holiday		Monday 2 nd May
Spring Bank Holiday		Monday 30 th May
Father's Day		Sunday 19 th June
Summer Bank Holiday		Monday 29 th August
Armistice Day		Friday 11 th November
Remembrance Sunday		Sunday 13 th November
Christmas:		
	Christmas Eve	Saturday 24 th December
	Christmas Day	Sunday 25 th December
	Boxing Day	Monday 26 th December
New Year's Day		Sunday 1 st January 2017

It is sometimes possible for private viewings of the chapel if prior arrangements are made. For further details and all other enquiries please ring the **Parish Office 01580 713112**

ECONOMIC & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT:

Chairman Cllr. Graham Holmes

We were very sorry to lose Bradley Franks following his decision to stand down as a Parish Councillor and thank him for the contribution he made to this Committee. In addition, we have missed the influence of Cllr. Brian Clifford during his recent illness, but were delighted to receive news that he was on the mend. Losing two members over recent months has had an effect on the progress we were hoping to make on our designated projects, but with the prospect of an election looming, I am hopeful that the successful candidate may want to join us to replace Bradley.

The Parish Council has always given its support to the Cranbrook Business Association and its reduced influence of late has been particularly worrying. We have continued to have a dialogue with the Association and were pleased to learn that it intends to hold an open meeting to explore what the future may hold and how it might again help promote the Town. By the time you read these notes more details will have been issued, including a notice on our website. The meeting has been scheduled for the evening of the 22nd March, in the Vestry Hall.

The Transport Accessibility Group continues to campaign for improvements to rural bus services in this area and your Parish Council is represented at its meetings. Although it is too early to provide specifics, the developers of the new housing site in Hawkhurst have intimated that they may put funding forward under a Section 106 Agreement to provide additional buses in the morning and evening on the No.5 service with particular emphasis on journeys between Hawkhurst and Staplehurst Station. This will, of course, be of interest to residents in Cranbrook and Sissinghurst.

The Council is also represented on the Cranbrook Tourism Group. The Group are about to publish a new leaflet that has been designed to provide visitors who are coming to the area, with ideas on what to do and where to go. Discussions have also taken place with the Borough Council and it is hoped that the leaflet will appear within the tourism section of their website, making it available to download.

Finally, a plea to those interested in volunteering. We have some really interesting visitor attractions in the Parish, but they need volunteers to help keep them running. With more help, it might be possible for them to open more frequently and for longer periods. The Union Windmill and Cranbrook Museum are deserving of more support. Please remember that even if you can only commit for one day per week, your help will still be very welcome. Cranbrook in Bloom are also keen on recruiting more volunteers to help give our Town a splash of colour. All these organisations have their own websites, so please have a look if you are interested.

ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT:

Chairman Cllr. Francis Rook

I have been racking my brains as to what to write about as everything seems to be running relatively smoothly.

Up to now the decision not to grit the car parks has proved a prudent one as the gritters would have been out about ten times already saving about £3,000. This is because the trigger for the gritters is in the evening when the temperature falls below 3 degrees centigrade but that is not when there is a lot of car movements in the car parks and by 9 am the temperature has risen to a point to negate any need of grit. However, I will be the first to admit that the winter is not over yet and I will be made to eat my words.

There is still the problem of litter and dog fouling as probably there always will be, although I remember my time in Singapore where there is a culture of cleanliness and such a thing as dropping litter was beyond the pale and totally abhorrent to them. Mind you so was long hair and if it were over your eyebrows or shirt collar you were marched off to the barbers!

The long awaited decision on the cessation of the refuse vehicle has been reached and the revised service is as follows. Sissinghurst will have it alternate months for general waste and alternate months for garden waste whilst Cranbrook will have it once a month for general waste and once a month for garden waste. This will cost the Parish Council £407 a year for Sissinghurst and £814 a year for Cranbrook.

Cllr. Veitch and I met with two waste removal contractors to investigate whether it would be a cheaper and more viable option to fund it ourselves rather than the borough council but the costs were prohibitive and not worth pursuing.

I am sure you are aware that this is the Queen's 90th birthday year and to mark this occasion there will be a litter pick on **SUNDAY 6th MARCH AT 10AM FOR A 'CLEAN UP FOR THE QUEEN.'** We will meet by the Recycling Bins where litter pickers will be provided with plastic bags etc. Please come along if just for an hour to show your love of the town in which we are privileged to live.

PLANNING & PRESERVATION MANAGEMENT:

Chairman Cllr. Alison Bunyan

The Gladman Appeal. In January this year the public enquiry was held at the Town Hall in Tunbridge Wells. Several councillors and interested residents attended. I read the letter prepared for us by our Planning Consultant and was then asked questions. I am so glad that I was not one of the officers as even the questions asked of me were nerve wracking – would I use the wrong word or phrase which could be misconstrued and used against our case? I hope I didn't. We will soon hear the inspector's decision – certainly in the next month but probably not before this gets printed. The general consensus was that it is likely to go our way – just. Fingers crossed.

On the subject of new housing, the Borough is to start a new consultation to identify bits of land for building the next tranche of houses up to 2033. This consultation will be called Strategic Housing and Employment Land Assessment – (SHELA). We have not been notified of the start date of the consultation as yet. If it follows the same pattern as the previous one, people will be invited to identify areas of land belonging to themselves or anyone else for inclusion in the assessment – we will try to keep you informed.

MORE PARISH NEWS

CRANBROOK VOLUNTARY CAR SERVICE

AN URGENT APPEAL FOR DRIVERS

This service is available to transport people who are unable to drive or use public transport to attend appointments to local hospitals, doctors, opticians, dentists or clinics.

If you can spare an hour or two occasionally (you are always free to say no if it is inconvenient) we would love to hear from you. Fuel expenses will be covered.

To find out more please contact:
Dave Campbell on 01580 714373 or
Evelyn Fishenden on 01580 713386

SPEED WATCH

I recently spent some time assisting the volunteers of Sissinghurst Speed Watch.

For those unfamiliar with Speed Watch, it is the name given to community schemes to reduce excessive speeds on roads without penalising drivers. Local residents monitor traffic using a speed indication device and drivers seen speeding can be sent a letter of advice, about the impact their actions can have on local communities and reminding them to slow down.

On the day that I was involved, what was particularly striking was that many of the drivers I stopped were actually local residents. It is quite possible that these were some of the very same people who in the past have voiced concerns over traffic safety near their homes and raises the issue that perhaps more local residents should be taking responsibility for themselves and their roads.

The dangers of speeding are well known, not only for those travelling in vehicles, but also to pedestrians who may be trying to cross the road, particularly children and other vulnerable people such as the elderly. It is also worth remembering that many parts of Sissinghurst are unlit, so please remember that it is particularly important to watch your speeds in the winter months, when visibility can be poor and surfaces icy and slippery.

Kind Regards

RS

PS 11782 Ross **SHEARING**
CSU Supervisor
Extension: 02-5021
Mobile: 07989992199

Cranbrook WI

Cranbrook WI meet on the first Tuesday of each month at the Sixth Form Centre at Cranbrook School. The meeting starts at 7.30 pm until 9.30 pm and all age groups are welcome.

“Hold a Fish and Chip Supper to help spinal cord injured people rebuild lives after injury”

Great British Fish and Chip Supper – Friday 20th May 2016

Want to eat Fish and Chips, while raising money for charity? Hold a fish and chip supper on Friday 20th May 2016 whilst raising awareness of spinal cord injury and supporting SIA’s vital services.

You can hold a fish and chip supper in your own home, at work or hold a larger supper at your local community centre.

SIA will provide a fundraising pack containing hints and tips, recipes, invitations and donation envelopes. By inviting 8 friends and asking them to donate an additional £5.00 means you will raise at least £40.00 from your supper but we will also give you additional fundraising ideas to raise even more money for SIA. Just £50 could contribute towards the support from our Peer Support Service for one hour, in a district general hospital or Major Trauma Centre.

In 2016 we want to make the batter matter and raise £40,000 from everyone holding suppers. Last year we raised £12,000 from the suppers.

The money raised from the suppers will help the Spinal Injuries Association offer support to individuals who become paralysed and their families, from the moment a spinal injury occurs, and for the rest of their lives by providing services and publications which enable and encourage paralysed people to rebuild lives after spinal cord injury.

Every year in the UK over 1,000 people experience a spinal cord injury and there are an estimated 40,000 spinal cord injured people in the UK alone.

Community Fundraising Manager, Elizabeth Wright, says, “The Fish and Chip Supper is a wonderful opportunity for a great evening with friends and family. We are also encouraging people who work to hold a Fish and Chip Lunch in their work places to raise even more funds. You may be even a local community group wanting to run a fun evening with your group.

For more information or request a fundraising pack call Elizabeth Wright on 0845 071 4350 or email fundraising@siafishandchips.co.uk or visit www.siafishandchips.co.uk

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

MARCH

Saturday 12 th	Quiz Night – Sissinghurst School 7.30pm onwards – tickets in advance from school office.
Monday 14 th	Messy Church – Vestry Hall – 3.30pm – 5.30pm
Thursday 17 th	Cranbrook Ward by election – Vestry Hall 7am to 10pm
Friday 18 th	Cranbrook U3A – Vestry Hall 2.30pm
Saturday 19 th	Kitsch & Stitch Craft Fair – Vestry Hall 10am to 3pm
Saturday 19 th	Choral Society - Music for Easter– St. Dunstans 7.30pm
Monday 21 st	CranARA, Vestry Hall 2.15pm
Saturday 26 th	Cranbrook Farmers’ Market, Vestry Hall 9.30am to 1pm

APRIL

Monday 11 th	Messy Church – Vestry Hall – 3.30pm – 5.30pm
Friday 15 th	Cranbrook U3A – Vestry Hall 2.30pm
Monday 18 th	CranARA – Vestry Hall – 2.15pm
Wednesday 20 th	Annual Parish Meeting – Parish Room, Sissinghurst 7.30 pm
Saturday 23 rd	Cranbrook Farmers’ Market, Vestry Hall 9.30am to 1pm
Saturday 23 rd	Rotary Club Charity Race Night – Vestry Hall 7pm

MAY

Thursday 5 th	Borough & Police Crime Commissioner Elections – Vestry Hall 7am – 10pm
Monday 9 th	Messy Church – Vestry Hall – 3.30pm – 5.30pm
Monday 16 th	CranARA – Vestry Hall – 2.15pm
Friday 20 th	Cranbrook U3A – Vestry Hall 2.30pm
Saturday 28 th	Cranbrook Farmers’ Market – Vestry Hall – 9.30am – 1pm

JUNE

Sunday 12 th	Garden Safari
Saturday 11 th	Kitsch & Stitch Craft Fair – Vestry Hall 10am to 3pm
Monday 13 th	Messy Church – Vestry Hall – 3.30pm – 5.30pm
Friday 17 th	Cranbrook U3A – Vestry Hall 2.30pm
Sunday 19 th	Cranbrook Family Fun Day
Thursday 23 rd	EU referendum
Saturday 25 th	Cranbrook Farmers’ Market – Vestry Hall – 9.30am – 1pm

Age Concern Free Hearing Aid Service for all Ages.

Age Concern Cranbrook is pleased to offer a free hearing aid service for the whole local community. Free hearing aid batteries and new tubing supplied and fitted. This service is provided every Thursday 9.45am – 11.15am at Evernden House, Rope Walk, Cranbrook.

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL/KENT COUNTY CONSTABULARY
RURAL PARTNERSHIP

Emergency Services – Police, Fire & Ambulance Service – 999 (or 112)

For calls where Life and Property are in danger. When a crime is being committed. When there is a Road Traffic Collision and there is serious injury.

Crime Stoppers- 0800 555111

If you have any information about any crime. Calls are free and totally anonymous and you could be eligible for an award.

Police Community Support Officer – PCSO Lee Jules

Mobile 07772226048

KCC Community Warden

Cranbrook & Sissinghurst – Adam Osbourn – Mobile 07813695741

Neighbourhood Watch Area Co-Ordinator – 01622 604395

For information on setting up a Neighbourhood Watch Scheme please contact Jacqui Blake on the above number.



SOUTHERN COMFORT – Cllr. Graham Holmes

You may hopefully recall the 1990 film entitled, “Memphis Belle” – a story set around the crew of a Boeing B17 Flying Fortress who were about to embark on their 25th mission, a requirement to complete their tour of duty. Whilst much of the film was only intended to convey an impression of life as a member of a bomber crew in the U.S. 8th Air Force, the aircraft did exist and became something of a celebrity. However, it was not the only B17 to acquire the status of a lucky ship. In 1943, another B17 christened Southern Comfort by its crew, was also getting a reputation for bringing them back safely from missions. This is the story of just one mission when Southern Comfort lived up to its reputation.

The 305th Bomb Group comprised the 364th, 365th, 366th and 422nd Bomb Squadrons with each squadron operating, on average, 12 Flying Fortresses. The Group had arrived in this country on the 13th September 1942 and was allocated the newly prepared airfield at Grafton Underwood in Northamptonshire. One of the first to arrive carried the serial number 41-24617 and was quickly adorned with the name, Southern Comfort, on its nose. It was assigned to the 364th Bomb Squadron. The Group’s stay at Grafton Underwood was short and in December they moved the short distance to Chelveston, about 5 miles east of Wellingborough. Missions began straight away and were undertaken on a daily basis, weather permitting with many of the targets being enemy submarine pens, docks. Harbours, shipyards, motor works and railway marshalling yards. Southern Comfort very quickly became known as a “good steady ship”.

It was just after dawn on the 26th February 1943 that the crews of the 305th Bomb Group shuffled into the briefing room at Chelveston to await news of their target for that day. They were pleased to get inside the warm building and away from the cold, flat almost featureless landscape that typified bomber bases in this part of England. It was not long before the men stood to attention as officers entered the briefing room to disclose details of the raid. Included was the Commander of the 305th, Col. Curtis E. Le May, who would in due course rise to the rank of General of the 3rd Air Division and become one of the most influential characters of the air war against Germany. He was well respected by the men and often took to leading some of the more dangerous missions of the 305th.

As the curtain concealing the map of the route to the target was drawn back, there were groans and whistles from the crews as they saw that the primary target would be Bremen and its heavy industries supporting shipbuilding and aircraft production. It wasn’t the first time the 305th had visited Bremen and it wouldn’t be the last. The secondary target was revealed as Wilhelmshaven, which also contained shipyards and had previously been attacked on the 27th January 1943.

Reconnaissance flights had revealed that one of the dry docks contained the pocket battleship, Admiral Scheer and it was hoped that the attack might take the ship out of the war. Unfortunately, the weather conditions over the target prevented accurate bombing and so it was chosen as the secondary target for the 26th February mission.

Among those busily taking notes was the crew of 41-24617, Southern Comfort. It comprised the pilot, 1st Lt Hugh Ashcroft, his co-pilot, 2nd Lt Bill Lakey, Navigator, Lt. Bert Wells, Radio Operator, Sgt. Doug Glover, Flt.Eng. Staff Sgt. Steve Gogoyla, Bombardier, 2nd Lt. Jim Moberley and the Gunners, Staff Sgt. Ray Armstrong, Sgt. Jim Patterson, Staff Sgt. Frank Corser and Sgt. Frank Hilsabeck. They noted that the mission would last 5 hours 20 minutes and the bombing altitude was set at 24,000ft. At that height the crew noted, it would be bitterly cold with icing. On a recent mission the temperature had dropped to 45 degrees below zero, causing aircraft to leave long vapour trails in the sky helping to guide enemy fighters to the bomber stream. Crews were also warned to expect the Luftwaffe to again employ a new tactic in the shape of air to air bombs dropped by fighters on the bombers below them. The last time it had been used 8 aircraft failed to return. Anti-aircraft guns were also using a new weapon called the aerial mine which was set to burst above the aircraft and split into a number of smaller devices that would float down by small parachute.

Accompanying the 305th on this mission would be the 91st, 44th, 303rd and 306th Bomb Groups as one by one they took off from their bases at Bassingbourne, Shipdam, Molesworth and Thurleigh. A total of 76 Flying Fortresses and 17 Liberators began forming up in the East Anglian skies and then headed out over the North Sea. Aboard a B17 of the 303rd was Walter Cronkite, an American journalist who would become famous for his regular reports from the European Theatre for the benefit of the thousands of families back home in the States whose young men were in daily action over Germany. More about him later.

As the bombers approached Bremen it was becoming apparent that the weather conditions promised by the meteorologists was inaccurate as the target area was covered by cloud making bombing impossible. Southern Comfort's Radio Officer, Sgt. Doug Glover received a message from the lead aircraft that the force would divert to the secondary target of Wilhelmshaven. The Luftwaffe had not been idle and formations of Messerschmidt 109's and Focke Wulf 190's had been carrying out attacks on the 91st and 306th Bomb Group aircraft. According to the post operation combat reports, the targets had been any bombers that for one reason or another were lagging behind the main force. One of the Luftwaffe pilots to claim a victim was Hptm. Heinz Knoke of Jagdgeschwader 1. He seemed to specialize in shooting down American heavy bombers because at the end of the war he had accounted for 19 bombers out of a remarkable total of 33 allied aircraft.

As Southern Comfort approached Wilhelmshaven, the pilot, 1st.Lt. Hugh Ashcroft noted that cloud cover was estimated at six tenths with visibility of 5 to 6 miles. He also noted that the feared flak was not as intensive as expected although they still needed to be on high alert. With the bomb bay doors now open, the bombardier, 2nd.Lt. Jim Moberley, pressed the toggle switch and six bombs exited the aircraft. The navigator, Lt. Bert Wells noted in his log, "Bombs away at 11.25am". Suddenly, Southern Comfort shivered and Ashcroft knew immediately that they had suffered a damaging flak hit in the nose of the aircraft. Moberley lost no time in releasing the 4 remaining bombs and then crawled over to check the navigator who was nearest the explosion of the 20mm shell. To his amazement, Lt. Wells appeared to be uninjured despite the shell exploding only 3 inches away from his head and dented the steel helmet he was wearing. The explosion drove his head down on to the navigators table, which broke under the impact of his helmet. Wells was understandably stunned and for 20 minutes was unable to calculate the course of the aircraft. The right side waist gunner then called Ashcroft on the intercom to say, "Sir, No.3 engine has been hit and is throwing quite a bit of oil". As the oil spread over the wing a small fire erupted and the co-pilot, 2nd.Lt. Bill Lakey activated the internal fire extinguishers and thankfully, the fire went out. However the propeller of the crippled engine was windmilling (out of control) and was chewing away bits of the cowling and sparks were bouncing off the oil covered wing. At this point Ashcroft noticed that the rudder was not responding so he called up the tail gunner, Staff Sgt. Frank Hilsabeck, for a situation report. It was not good news; about four square feet of the tail had been shot away following a fighter attack and another shell from the same aircraft had burst in the fuselage, just behind the tail gunner. There was little time to appraise the damage, the B17 had lost airspeed due to the drag caused by the windmilling propeller and there was now no chance of the aircraft rejoining the formation. Ashcroft soon realised that if they were to return to England, they would have to do it alone, crippled and out of formation – meaning they would be sitting ducks. With the help of Lt. Wells, Ashcroft turned the aircraft northwards, hoping to put as much sea as possible between them and enemy fighters. When they were over the North Sea, Ashcroft announced over the intercom, "Those who want to pray, please pray!" Not long after, land was sighted although the crew could not be absolutely certain that it was England until an inquisitive RAF Mosquito spotted them and flew in close, with the pilot shaking his head at the battle damaged B17. He appeared to wave his hand in a forward direction and shortly after Ashcroft was able to make out the familiar outline of Chelveston.

Southern Comfort landed successfully, despite a gaping hole where the rudder should have been, a shattered nose section, a wing pitted with shrapnel holes and the fuselage riddled from nose to tail with flak and cannon shell holes. One by one the crew clambered out to the astonishment of those who had rushed out to the aircraft expecting to find casualties.

In the aftermath of the mission, the 8th Air Force recorded the loss of five B17's and two B24's with 73 crewmen missing in action and another 14 wounded in action. The reporter, Walter Cronkite wrote that," American Flying Fortresses have just come back from an assignment to hell ; a hell 24,000ft above the earth, a hell of burning tracer bullets and bursting gunfire, of crippled Fortresses and burning German fighter planes, of parachuting men and others not so lucky. I have just returned with a Flying Fortress crew from Wilhelmshaven. The flak was so thick you could walk on it. I was too excited to be afraid."

Southern Comfort's reputation as a lucky ship ran out on the 31st March 1943 when she crash landed at Wickham Bishops in Essex following an attack on Rotterdam. Staff Sgt. Steve Gogoyla, lost his life when he slipped out of his parachute when baling out of the stricken aircraft. It was so badly damaged that it took no further part in the war.

PARISH WARDEN:

Ivor Hatcher

Looking After Our Town

Cranbrook has gained an extremely good reputation over the past few years in its participation in South East in Bloom and more recently in Britain in Bloom. This is mainly due to the efforts of the stalwarts that make up the group Cranbrook in Bloom! Just think of what can be achieved if there were more people just giving a little time and effort.

We all live in this beautiful town and probably take it more for granted than we realise. As a resident of Cranbrook and members of the community, we are all able to share and make use of many areas of the town which include: recreation grounds, communal green spaces on the various estates, all of the public spaces that are available to us. Some may argue that the public areas are the responsibility of the Local Council Authorities, either Parish or Borough. Yes, that may be true and upkeep may be covered by funding through rates, but money only goes so far and never as far as we would like.

Organisations such as Cranbrook in Bloom and the Kent High Weald Project, (who manage the wildlife area of the Crane Valley and work very closely with Cranbrook in Bloom and the Parish Council,) do sometimes manage to obtain additional funding to help fund local projects and again, those funds only go so far!

How can you help? There are many simple ways! Parents can ensure that children know to put litter in the bins rather than just drop their rubbish on the ground. Some people very kindly 'litter pick' areas that they regularly walk. Dog walkers should ensure that they clean up behind their dogs, especially in the play areas.

When putting out bins with recyclable items, it should be done in a way that the items are not carried by the wind or the draft created by traffic which carries the plastic bottles, paper and cardboard down the road to reside in the grass verges. Recycling is very commendable but must be carried out correctly to be effective!

Even being sensible when driving vehicles can be a huge help. One of my pet hates is seeing grass verges torn up by a motorist who main concern is to get their vehicle off the highway. In some ways I can understand it. What I have witnessed though, is if a vehicle is parked correctly on the road, passing vehicles tend to slow down or even stop rather than taking a chance and speeding on through; natural road calming! It costs money to repair the verges and it could also cost a life if pedestrians have to step into the road if their path is blocked.

Hedges are cheaper to maintain on a regular basis, rather than left until they become unmanageable and need a professional to put things right at professional prices. A well-kept hedge is great for the wildlife as well as pleasing to the eye. Kent High Weald Project would be happy to advise those who are seeking help with the larger stretches of hedge. An example of their sterling work and be seen in the hedges that have been laid in the Crane Valley.

I hope that I have inspired a few more people to step up and help with the upkeep of our town. Rewards come in many ways and to me, seeing Cranbrook look as well as we can all make it, is very satisfying and makes me not only proud to be the Parish Warden but a resident of the town, also.

CRANBROOK PRIMARY SCHOOL

SENIOR CITIZENS LUNCH CLUB

Wednesdays during term time

2 course meal with tea/coffee £4.00

Book the Monday before

Phone 07894041662

THOUGHTS AND IDEAS FROM THE CLERK:

The end of last year passed in a bit of a blur. We had always thought that we had until the end of January 2016 to apply for renewal of our Foundation and Quality Status but when we contacted our Kent Association of Local Councils to confirm the dates, it was sprung on us that the application had to be with them by the first week on January. We spent three weeks solid working on our policies, uploading material onto our upgraded website, and making sure that we were complying with all current legislation. We managed to submit both the applications just before Christmas 2015 and then the nervous wait to see if the Accreditation Panel were happy that Cranbrook & Sissinghurst Parish Council met all the criteria to be awarded the Quality Status. Both Lori and I were delighted that we were successful and we now have the framed certificate proudly hanging in the Parish Office. Other local parish councils who also have the Quality Status are Marden and Headcorn, but we remain the only parish council within the Tunbridge Wells Borough which has the Quality Status.

One of the criteria that has to be met is that the Clerk must be a qualified clerk. When I first became the Clerk, I firstly undertook training called “Working with your Council” and was awarded a pass, and then went on to put in my portfolio for the Certificate in Local Council Administration which I passed in 2005. I therefore meet the criteria. My Deputy Lori has also undertaken and passed the “Working with your Council” and has just put in her portfolio for the Certificate in Local Council Administration. Good luck Lori.

You will see that I have included a poem in the Newsletter which was written by parishioner Mrs Standen about Monica Camburn. This was read out at the Christmas Coffee Morning in Evernden House and her dear friend Peter Ryan (who by the way has just celebrated his 90th birthday) has asked me to share this with you all. The Monica Camburn bench is now in situ in St. Dunstan’s Churchyard and will be appreciated by parishioners for many years to come.

It is nice to see that although we had a mild period before Christmas and the spring flowers were ahead of themselves, that there is still plenty of colour with daffodils and snowdrops and even the primroses are showing up in the verges.

Clerk: Mrs. Coral Kirkaldie
Deputy Clerk: Mrs. Lori Ham

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MONICA DAISY CAMBURN

There's a very special person who's missing here today
Every Christmas coffee morning Sherry she would bring
With mince pies, nuts and chocolates, then carols we would sing.

She came to Cranbrook Market Town many years ago
To teach the girls at Mary Sheafe's (as it was known back then)
On subjects they should know,
So they could go with confidence into the world of men.

St. Dunstan's Church (the Cathedral of the Weald) was her second home,
Which she served with devotion, and where she always kneeled.

Five and twenty years ago she launched the Thursday coffee morn,
In Major Clarke's across the road and now transferred to the House of
Evernden.

Then one day through the post there came (and much to her surprise),
An invite to a party in the garden of the Queen
So, with her good friend Peter (who was her chosen guest)
They took a taxi up the Mall dressed in their Sunday best.

Although she had a quiet voice, she held some quite strong views
And if you asked for wise advice, she never would refuse.

With Roni Summers at the helm of Age Concern, they made a perfect team,
She was a member of a crew of ladies that do many things unseen.

The day we said farewell to her, there was not an empty pew
As each was filled with friends and people that she knew.

Her resting place is by the path of St. Dunstan's Eastern wall
So if you are passing by, just stop a minute or two
And say "Hello Monica",
Because she will be smiling down on you.